

PRAYER WEEK

January 7th-14th, 2024



Prayer Lessons from a
Man After God's Heart

PRAYER WEEK

David was far from perfect—in fact, he committed some very serious sins that greatly troubled his family and the nation he ruled as king. Nevertheless, God said of him, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart” (Acts 13:22 and 1 Samuel 13:14).

In spite of his failures, David had a heart for God. He wanted to build a temple to encourage his people to worship God. He trusted God when everything seemed to be going wrong, even when he was close to death. And he wrote many prayers to guide his people in approaching God.

For Prayer Week 2024, we are going to learn from David in this area of prayer, focusing on the first section (also called the first book) of the psalms he wrote: Psalms 1–41. God included these psalms in scripture as a model for us to use in prayer, a tool to teach us to pray.

Each day we will discover a new prayer lesson from the way David prayed. So set aside a specific time each day to pray and—like David—become more and more a man or woman who is “after God’s own heart.”

Rick Elzinga

January 2024

Sunday, January 7 – Singing Our Prayers

Many—if not all—of the 150 psalms were used as the song book of Israel; and in much of church history, the psalms were the song book of the church, too. Many of the psalms are prayers, so they were used as prayers sung to God.

Do you ever sing your prayers? David wrote, "I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (Ps 13:6). He also prayed this to God: "But let all who take refuge in you be glad, let them ever sing for joy" (Ps 5:11), and, "That my soul may sing praise to you and not be silent" (Ps 30:12).

See also Psalms 9:11; 18:49; 21:13; 27:6; 28:7; 30:4; 33:1–3; 40:3.

Take some time today to sing to God. Of course, we will do this in our worship services, but let's also learn to do this on our own. You might try "Great Is Their Faithfulness," "How Great Thou Art," or any of the modern or ancient songs addressed to God.

Monday, January 8 – Being Real With God

One of the refreshing aspects of the psalms is to see how real David is with God. He's not afraid to tell God what he is thinking and feeling. This is a sign of a deep relationship, and God is pleased at David's transparency, that David is not trying to impress God or to pray something he doesn't really think or feel.

Look at these prayers: "Why do you stand afar off, O Lord. Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Ps 10:1).

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps 13:1).

Even Jesus used David's words to express his agony to God: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps 22:1; Matthew 27:46).

Take some time to be real with God today. He knows your thoughts and feelings, so there's nothing to hide. If you're cheerful, tell him so. If you're discouraged, tell him so. If you don't like what he is doing in your life, tell him so. Of course, we should always be respectful—and we should always be real and transparent with God.

Jesus taught us to come to God as children. Children tend to blurt out whatever is on their minds! Come to God as a child today.

Tuesday, January 9 – Reasoning with God

Yesterday we came to God as children, expressing our thoughts and feelings. Today we come to God as adults, reasoning with him.

David models this often in his prayers. Instead of simply asking, he reasons with God, telling God why his request should be answered. For example, when he prays for deliverance, he gives a reason God should answer his prayer: "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it declare your faithfulness?" (Ps 30:9). In other words, "If I die, you will lose a worshipper!"

Here is another example: "Be gracious to me, O Lord; see my affliction from those who hate me that I may tell of your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation" (Ps 12:13–14). In other words, "Save me from those who hurt me so that I can praise you and tell others how great you are."

And many times he asks God to answer his prayers because he has lived a righteous life. (See 5:12; 7:8; 17:1–6. Those are not claims of perfection, but direction—his heart is directed toward God, and living for God, and humbly confessing his sin.)

Spend some time today preparing to pray by listing reasons God should answer the requests you want to bring to him. Then ask God for what is on your heart, but also give God reasons he should answer your prayers.

Wednesday, January 10 – Reasoning from God’s Nature

As we learn to reason with God, we can learn from David that one of the main arguments we should use for God to answer our prayers is his character.

For example, when David's life is in danger and he prays for deliverance, he prays on the basis of what God is like: "But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory and the one who lifts my head" (Ps 3:3). When he prays for rescue, he says, "Return, O Lord, rescue my soul; save me because of your lovingkindness" (Ps 6:4).

When people are opposing him, he asks for God's help in knowing what to do. His request is based on God's character: "Remember, O Lord, your compassion and your lovingkindnesses, for they have been from of old" (Ps 25:6). And when he asks God to stop the wicked, he says God should do this because God is a righteous judge (Ps 7:9).

As you pray today, don't just ask. Instead, ask and then tell God why your request is consistent with who he is. For example, ask God to save your lost family members because God is merciful, or because God loves the world, or because God is not willing for any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Or ask God to give you wisdom for a particular situation because God is wise and generous. (If you can't find something in God's character that gives reason for him to answer your request, it's probably not the right thing to ask!)

Thursday, January 11 – Praying Out Loud

Do you usually pray silently? There's nothing wrong with that, but it appears that David often prayed out loud. For example, "I was crying to the Lord with my voice, and he answered me from his holy mountain" (Ps 3:4). Or Psalm 5:2: "Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray."

See also Psalms 18:6; 22:1; 27:7; 28:2.

Jesus also prayed out loud in at least some of his prayers. (That's how the disciples were able to record them!) Many heard his prayer from the cross when he prayed Psalm 22:1 with a loud voice. And Hebrews 5:7 states: "In the days of his flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the one able to save him from death... "

There are some advantages in praying out loud. We all struggle with our minds getting distracted during prayer. Praying out loud really helps with that problem. And try confessing your sins to God out loud. At least for me, they seem so much more real and in need of forgiveness. So, try praying today out loud!

Friday, January 12 – Lament and Confession

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn." Do you mourn in prayer? There is much to mourn about on any given day. We can—and should—mourn over our sins, over the hard situations in life, over the lost people we know, over the sad direction of our world.

David mourned because of his sin, because of the hard time he was going through, and because of the sins of others against him: "Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears. My eye has wasted away with grief... " (Ps 6:6–7).

Spend some time today confessing your sins. Good psalms to use for confession are Ps 32:1–5 or 38:1–8.

Spend some time today also grieving with God over the hard situations you face (Ps 22:1–2) or the sinful direction of our culture (Ps 12).

Saturday, January 13 – Imprecation

One aspect of David's prayers that mystifies New Testament believers is what scholars call "imprecations," where David prays judgment on the wicked. Jesus told us to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us." Yet David often prays against his enemies, asking God to punish them. It seems so different from Jesus' prayer for his enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

I am still trying to understand these imprecatory prayers and can only speak tentatively about them. But here are some thoughts:

First, the responsibility of the government is to punish evildoers (Rom 13:4). As the king, David IS the government! Therefore, he is asking for God's help in carrying out his duty when he prays for the punishment of evildoers.

Second, Romans 12 tells us not to take vengeance but to leave room for God's wrath (12:19). David is not taking wrath on those who have hurt him but is asking God to fulfill God's responsibility as a righteous judge and to punish those who deserve it.

We are not the government, and we are not to take vengeance. But we can look to God for justice rather than taking things into our own hands. Actually we can pray both prayers of mercy and judgment on those who hurt us or who are doing evil in our world. We can pray that God will forgive them, but—if they refuse to repent—that God will punish them (perhaps so that they can be redeemed!). And we

can especially pray for God's hand of judgment to come on the evil spiritual forces that motivate those who do evil.

So today take some time to pray the imprecatory psalms like 5:10 or 35:1–8, 26 or 40:14. Ask God to guide you in how to pray these prayers properly.

Sunday, January 14 – Waiting

As we finish Prayer Week, we need to come face to face with the fact that God's timing is often much different from ours. God isn't in a rush like we are. He moves at his own pace, which is always best. But that means we may have to be patient and wait for God to answer the prayers we have prayed this week.

David certainly knew about waiting on God. Psalm 37 is about waiting on God to act: "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him" (verse 7), and "Wait for the Lord and keep his way" (verse 34).

Waiting on the Lord shows trust. It shows we are not taking matters into our own hands or looking elsewhere for the answer. Our hope is in God alone: "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you" (Ps 39:7). If we wait patiently for God to act, he will act in his right time: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined to me and heard my cry" (40:1).

In the Psalms, waiting on God is basically the same as trusting in God, hoping in God, resting in God, and looking to God. Spend some time reviewing your prayer requests over this last week, and ask God to help you wait on him and for his right timing.

Regular Ministries with a Prayer Emphasis

TOS Prayer Emphasis (Sunday 1/7, 10:45am)

Middle school and high school students will be meeting for a time of prayer and praise.

Missions-Focused Prayer (Sunday 1/7, 6:00pm)

John and Jodi Wilson will lead us in a one-hour prayer meeting focusing on our missionaries and the local outreach ministries we support as a church.

Innermission Prayer Emphasis (Monday 1/8, 6:30pm)

Middle school and high school students will be meeting Monday night for a special prayer focus during Innermission.

Awana Children's Prayer Emphasis (Wednesday 1/10, 6:15pm)

The Awana children's club will be learning about prayer Wednesday night and spending time in prayer.

Prayer for the Persecuted (Sunday 1/14, 6:00pm)

Rick will lead us in a one-hour online Zoom prayer meeting for our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are suffering for their faith. Email Rick for the link (rick@southwesthills.org).

Community Group Prayer Focus

Many of the Community Groups that meet during Prayer Week will spend extra time in prayer. If you want to become part of a Community Group, contact Stephen Haley (stephenhaley@gmail.com).

Special Prayer Week

Events/Ministries:

Prayer Gathering (Tuesday 1/9, 7:00–8:00pm)

Come and pray with us for a new teaching pastor, for our new ministry year, and for many of the needs and hurting people in our church.

Praying Like David in Song and Prayer (Friday 1/12, 7:00–8:30pm)

Jim will be leading an evening of worship as we pray and sing like David from the Psalms.

Guided Personal Prayer Retreat (Saturday 1/13, 9:00–11:00am)

Rick will be leading a two-hour Guided Personal Prayer Retreat. This is an opportunity for you to spend two relaxed hours alone with the Lord. Meet in the upper lobby at 9:00am sharp for a short orientation and to get materials to guide you in your two hours of private prayer.

Personal Prayer Time with a Leadership Team Couple:

Would you like to meet privately with one of our Leadership Team couples to pray about concerns on your heart? Let the church office know, and one of the couples will contact you to set up a time to meet and pray in person or online.



What Is Prayer Week?

We commit the first full week of every new year to focus on individual and group prayer, to learn how to pray, and to stretch ourselves in prayer, spending more time than we normally do on our knees before God.

Why Have Prayer Week?

We are making a statement to ourselves and to God that without him, we can do nothing. Through focused prayer, we are demonstrating that God is central to our very existence, and we are absolutely dependent on him. As Jesus stated, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). It is through humble, dependent prayer that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

When God's people brought him the "first fruits" of their harvest, they were making an important statement, because the "first fruits" represented the whole harvest. In other words, the whole harvest belonged to God.

By giving God the first full week of 2024 in prayer, we are making an important statement: ***This new year belongs to God!***

How to Build on Prayer Week:

During Prayer Week, be asking yourself, "Is the Holy Spirit giving me a burden or desire to move forward in my prayer life?"

If your answer is yes, here are some practical options to consider:

- Join our Prayer 120 (Acts 1:14–15) to pray for Southwest Hills people and ministries.
- Pray daily for the pastor who will speak the next Sunday. We will give you a schedule of who is preaching.
- Attend one or both of our Sunday evening prayer meetings. The first Sunday of each month we pray for missions in the upper

lobby of the church. On the second Sunday of each month we have a Zoom prayer meeting for the persecuted church.

- Read Rick's book *Growing Your Personal Prayer Life—A Very Practical Guide*. He will give you a copy if you will read the first 60 pages. Just ask!