



Making Prayer a Priority

Charles F. Stanley - In Touch Ministries



*For everything,
a season,
and in everything,
prayer.*



SEASONS OF PRAYER

A TIME TO BEGIN

There's never a bad time to take our cares to God. No matter where we are in our spiritual walk—whether in a season of distressing hardship or joyful celebration—“*in everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving [we are to let our] requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6, *emphasis added*). Our heavenly Father is always ready, willing, and waiting for us to reach out to Him, because not only does He listen, but He also wants to speak to us as well.

When we have a regular practice of prayer, we train our minds to dismiss the distractions of the world and focus instead on the sufficiency and power of God and His promises. It may feel awkward at first, as we approach His throne of grace (Heb. 4:16), and we may not know what to say, but God is kind, and in His presence we will find peace for our souls and guidance for our daily lives.

Dr. Stanley has said that his relationship with God is what gives him the most joy in life. You, too, can experience that kind of meaningful connection with your heavenly Father. To encourage you in developing a daily habit of prayer, we've compiled this booklet full of Dr. Stanley's teachings on the subject. We pray it will help you lean on God in every season of life and that you will receive the blessings of communing daily with your heavenly Father.

From your friends at
In Touch Ministries

ECCLESIASTES

3:1-8 (NKJV)

To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born,
And a time to die;

A time to plant,
And a time to pluck what is planted;

A time to kill,
And a time to heal;

A time to break down,
And a time to build up;

A time to weep,
And a time to laugh;

A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones,
And a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace,
And a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to gain,
And a time to lose;

A time to keep,
And a time to throw away;

A time to tear,
And a time to sew;


A time to keep silence,
And a time to speak;

A time to love,
And a time to hate;

A time of war,
And a time of peace.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD


In order to receive answers to prayer, we must first place our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Because God is holy, our sins have separated us from Him. But when we repent and believe that Christ died on the cross to pay our sin debt in full, we enter into a relationship with God and can then converse with Him and be certain that He hears us.

The bottom line of all prayer is that access to the Father is only available through Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). Jesus came to open the door for us so we could have a relationship with the heavenly Father and access to Him through prayer. And once we have entered into a relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ, we can confidently expect answers to our prayers according to His will and in His time. 

PUT PRAYER FIRST

Prayer is one of the most important activities in our lives because we're actually talking to the sovereign God of the universe. He understands how we feel, knows what we think, and has the power to intervene in every area of life. Our quiet time with God empowers us to face the challenges of each day. When we make prayer a priority, we reap a whole host of benefits like comfort, guidance, and confidence. But an intimate and effective prayer life never happens accidentally; we must intentionally take the following steps.

- **SCHEDULE A TIME.** It can be difficult to focus on prayer when the demands of life are knocking at your door. You may have to rise early in the morning before anyone else is awake, or stay up late at night after everyone else has fallen asleep, to have some quiet time with your heavenly Father.
- **BELIEVE THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYERS.** We can be confident that God listens to us because He never turns a deaf ear to one of His praying children. It has nothing to do with whether we feel worthy or not. We are all invited to come boldly before His throne of grace.

- **PRAY FOR OTHERS.** Sometimes God gives us a burden to intercede for someone else. Although we may not be able to help, the Lord can.
- **TRUST IN GOD'S POWER.** Jesus said that an earnest prayer of faith has the power to move a mountain (Mark 11:23). No task in harmony with God's will is impossible to perform when we believe in Him. Whatever He commands us to do, He gives us the strength and resources to accomplish. As our heavenly Father, He's protecting, supporting, and providing everything we need to obey Him.
- **PRAY FOR DIRECTION.** The Lord wants to guide us into His plan for our lives. If we'll ask Him for direction, He may not show us the entire course, but He will provide the next step. To receive further instruction, we must be willing to obey whatever He has already revealed. As we keep walking with Him, the path will gradually unfold to us.
- **PRAY WITH THE WORD.** Effective prayer is anchored in the Word of God. If we try to pray without it, our requests may not be wise. But as we consistently read the Bible, the Lord will show us how to pray wisely and according to His will. 

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A PLACE TO PRAY

As we establish a habit of prayer, we also need to pick a quiet place for prayer where we won't be interrupted. Christ went into the wilderness to be alone with His Father, but for most of us, it will probably be a room in our home. Wherever it is, it will be like an altar where we meet with God to share our concerns and have fellowship with Him.

Because Jesus lived an itinerant lifestyle, His place of prayer changed as He traveled, but prayer was always a priority in His life and should be in ours as well. Here are some of the features and benefits of having a dedicated prayer space:

- **IT'S A PRIVATE PLACE.** Jesus said to go into an inner room and close the door (Matt. 6:6). If we are really serious about finding a quiet area to be alone with the Lord in prayer, He will provide one. It may require a little creativity and adjustment on our part, but God wants to meet with each of us privately so we can develop an intimate relationship with Him.

- **IT'S A HOLY PLACE.** When we habitually meet with the Lord in the same place each day, it becomes holy because it is set apart to worship and commune with Him. It becomes a visual trigger. We quickly adjust to the setting and are immediately ready to talk to the Father—because that's what happens there. Some of the greatest things He accomplishes in our lives are the result of the relationship we have with Him in that secluded place of prayer.
- **IT'S WHERE OUR BATTLES ARE FOUGHT.** Every time we go through difficult situations or conflicts with people, we should bring our concerns to our heavenly Father and engage Him in helping fight our battles. We need His guidance, assistance, and wisdom to know how to respond and what to do. There will be times when no one else can help us, but He is always there to comfort, strengthen, and encourage us.
- **IT'S WHERE WE DEAL WITH OUR SINS.** As we open His Word and our hearts before Him, we have an opportunity to confess our sins and ask Him to convict us of anything in our lives that is contrary to His desires for us. As we pray, we must give the Lord time to speak to our hearts. Sometimes He uses a passage of His Word to convict, encourage, or direct us, and at other times His Spirit communicates inaudibly with us in our hearts.
- **IT'S WHERE WE DEVELOP AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.** There are times when we pray with others or together as a family, but it's only in our private times with the Lord that we grow to know Him intimately and have the freedom to honestly and openly share our hearts with Him. This is the most important activity of our lives—communing and fellowshiping with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **IT'S WHERE WE LAY DOWN OUR BURDENS.** God daily lifts our burdens, carries our concerns, and forgives our sins when we confess them.
- **IT'S WHERE WE WEEP OVER OUR TRIALS AND HEARTACHES.** When we go into our prayer room and cry out to God, He understands and mends our broken hearts.
- **IT'S WHERE WE FORGIVE OTHERS.** The Lord not only forgives our sins but helps us battle through our hurts so we can forgive others.
- **IT'S WHERE WE ARE STRENGTHENED.** In this holy place we have the privilege of discussing every area of our lives. As we pour out our hurts, sorrows, and burdens, the Lord comes to strengthen us.

Where do you go to pray? Having a dedicated place to come before God helps us focus and prepare our hearts to hear from Him. Even when we're on the go, we can set aside a time and place to talk with God, which ought to be our greatest priority every day. 



SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER

A HYMN BY WILLIAM WALFORD

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
The joys I feel, the bliss I share,
Of those whose anxious spirits burn
With strong desires for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
Where God my Savior shows His face,
And gladly take my station there,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
May I thy consolation share,
Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height,
I view my home and take my flight:
This robe of flesh I'll drop and rise
To seize the everlasting prize;
And shout, while passing through the air,
"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"




HOW TO PRAY

Matthew 6:7-15

In Matthew 6:7, Jesus cautioned against meaningless repetition when talking to the Father. Just two verses later, He left a pattern to help us pray. However, in using this passage, which is known as the Lord's Prayer, we're often guilty of the very thing Jesus warned against: Instead of thoughtfully praying each line, we run through the words mindlessly. But if we take time to carefully examine Christ's words, we'll find the pattern that can transform our prayer life.

- **ADORATION OF THE FATHER** (Matt. 6:9). God the Father is the focus of all our prayers. We should never forget what a privilege it is to bend our knees on earth and reach almighty God in heaven.
- **SUBMISSION TO HIS WILL** (Matt. 6:10). Prayer should reflect a desire to align ourselves with God's goals and purposes, not to get Him to follow our plans.
- **PETITION GOD FOR OUR NEEDS** (Matt. 6:11). We are dependent upon the Lord, and He wants us to come to Him with our requests.
- **CONFESSION OF SINS** (Matt. 6:12). When we repent and forgive others, we maintain fellowship with God. But if we hold grudges, that fellowship is broken. God loves to answer our prayers when the lines of communication are not disrupted.
- **DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL** (Matt. 6:13). Our enemy is too strong for us, but Christ has already won the victory over him.

Jesus ended the prayer where He began—with praise to the Father for His kingdom, power, and glory (Matt. 6:13). Next time you say this prayer, concentrate on each verse. Then, following this pattern will result in a more dynamic and effective prayer life because it will be God-centered. 

DEVOTED TO PRAYER

Scripture repeatedly tells us to devote ourselves to prayer (Col. 4:2). Devotion requires that we not only set aside uninterrupted time for prayer, but that we also think seriously about what we're asking. We must give God the time and attention He deserves in order to have a growing relationship with Him. Because when we put Him first, everything else falls into its proper place.



A PRAYER FOR BLESSING

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER,

How grateful we are that You're patient with us—willing to teach us, to speak with us, and have us speak with You. You're so willing to meet each and every need we have.

For those who have never trusted You as their Savior, help them to understand that the first prayer You listen to from them is a prayer of confession, repentance, and surrender of their life to You as their Lord and Savior.

We pray the Spirit of God will seal these truths in the heart of every person who reads them today, tomorrow, and for years to come. May we begin to develop an intimate relationship with You, and listen to You speak in prayer.

We love You, we praise You, and we bless Your holy name. In Jesus' name, amen.



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