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# activated

Vol 19 • Issue 8

## BAKING PRAYERS

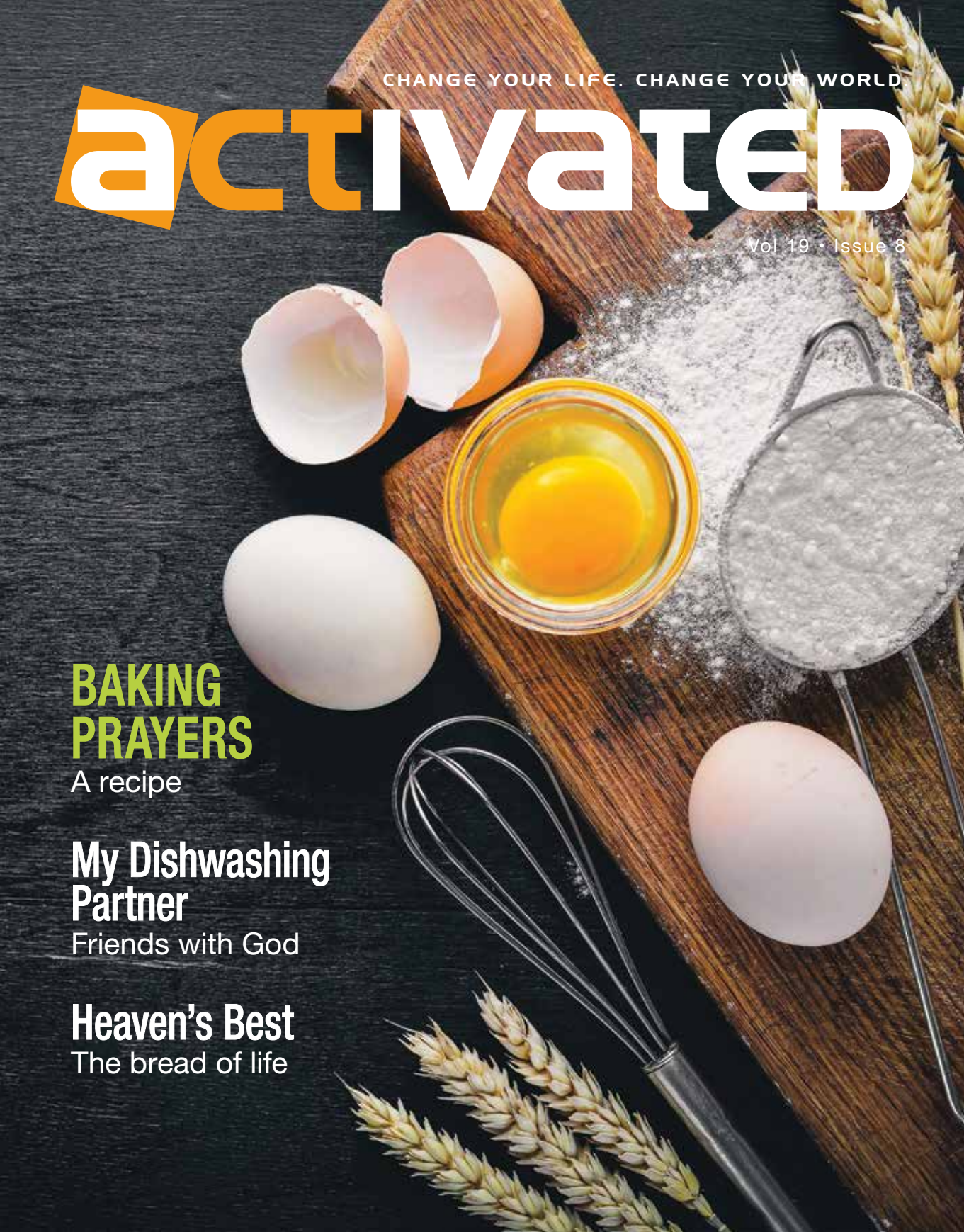
A recipe

## My Dishwashing Partner

Friends with God

## Heaven's Best

The bread of life





## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### THE CORK AND THE STEEL BAR

The Bible tells us that “the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”<sup>1</sup> But most of us have probably wondered if our prayers really make a difference, especially if we’ve been praying long and hard for a certain situation but haven’t seen the desired result.

When putting together this issue, I came across the following illustration:

In a factory, an elongated steel bar weighing 500 lb. (about 225 kg) was suspended by a chain. Near it, an average-size cork was suspended by a silk thread. “When we come back to this spot later,” a tour guide told a group of sightseers, “you will see something that is seemingly impossible. This cork will have set this steel bar in motion.”

The guide set in motion a mechanism whereby the cork tapped gently and repeatedly against the steel bar, which remained motionless. The visitors watched for a minute or two as the cork struck the iron bar with pendulum-like regularity, then they moved on. Ten minutes later, the bar was vibrating slightly, and when the tour group returned at the end of an hour, the heavy bar was swinging like the pendulum of a clock.

So the next time you feel your prayers aren’t even having a feather’s weight of effect, remember the cork. Often, people and situations don’t change overnight, even after we’ve prayed. But every prayer is like another tap of the cork against the steel bar. It may not appear to make an immediate difference, but over time we will see how God has worked in answer to our prayers.

Samuel Keating  
Executive Editor

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1. James 5:16 NIV



# LOST IN LIVERPOOL

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

“Right behind you a voice will say, ‘This is the way you should go,’ whether to the right or to the left.”  
—Isaiah 30:21 NLT

SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I have heard that God is omnipresent. I used to have a vague idea of it, like some cosmic energy, but since then, I have had some experiences that have changed that view.

When I was 18 and living in London as a student in the early 1970s, I came to know Jesus in a personal way and our relationship began to develop. I used to go for long walks to parks on my own, and it felt like someone was walking by my side and talking with me as an old friend. Instead of feeling lonely, I felt recharged.

Once, some friends from a political youth club invited me for a weekend convention in Liverpool. I

was more a follower of the hippie culture than of politics at the time, but it was a chance to visit Liverpool, and the costs were pooled, so I decided to go along.

The gathering was held in a big sports facility and included a number of speeches I’ve completely forgotten by now. I was more interested in looking up the Beatles’ old haunts, and on the last afternoon, I convinced a friend to go exploring with me.

I can still remember the clear sky and beautiful spring weather. I had a great time, but as evening began to fall, I realized I had no idea what street my hostel was located on. The houses in the area all looked alike, and the rooms we had rented were part of someone’s home, so there weren’t any signs on the street.

My friend started to get worried, but I didn’t. Instead, I felt the same presence that would go with me on my walks to the parks in London, reassuring me that everything would be all right. We had walked about 12 blocks when a small voice spoke inside of me: *Turn to the left now.* We did, and soon I saw the rest of my friends I had traveled with standing outside the front door of the house we were staying at. The Bible says: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,”<sup>1</sup> and that was certainly proven true for me at that moment.

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. Psalm 46:1



# ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

**MATTHEW CHAPTER 7**, the last chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, contains a number of succinct statements, which make important points for believers. The focus is on prayer, continued from earlier in the Sermon: not praying like the hypocrites who want to be seen by others<sup>1</sup> or like the pagans who babble on, thinking their prayers will be answered if they repeat them over and over;<sup>2</sup> but rather praying with the

understanding that our Father loves and cares for us.<sup>3</sup>

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus asked what those present would do if their child asked for bread or fish, staple foods in Palestine at the time. Of course they wouldn’t substitute a stone or serpent for the food their child was asking for! As He often did, Jesus used the “lesser to

greater” argument to make His point. If earthly parents give their children good things when they ask for them, how much more will God give to His children when they ask Him? Since God is our Father and altogether good, we can freely petition Him in prayer, in the same way a child can ask her parents for something she needs or desires.

Some might say that prayer isn’t necessary, because there are plenty of people who don’t believe in God and don’t pray, yet they seem to do fine. They work and get paid, so are able to acquire what they need without any prayers. Author John Stott addressed this point when he wrote about the difference between the gifts of God as the Creator and His gifts as our Father:

We need to distinguish between his creation-gifts and his redemption-gifts. It is perfectly true that he gives gifts (harvests, babies, food, life) whether people pray or not, whether they believe or not. He gives to all life and breath.<sup>5</sup> He sends rain from heaven and fruitful seasons to all. He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good alike. He “visits” a mother when she conceives and later gives birth. None of these gifts

1. See Matthew 6:5–6.
2. See Matthew 6:7–8.
3. See Matthew 6:9–13.
4. Matthew 7:7–11 ESV
5. Matthew 5:45 ESV
6. Romans 10:12–13.
7. John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 187.
8. 2 Corinthians 12:7–9 NLT
9. Psalm 22:1–2 NLT

is dependent on whether people acknowledge their Creator or pray to him.

But God's redemption-gifts are different. God does not bestow salvation on all alike, but bestows his riches upon all who call on him. For, "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."<sup>6</sup> The same applies to post-salvation blessings, the 'good things' which Jesus says the Father gives his children. It is not material blessings that he is referring to here, but spiritual blessings—daily forgiveness, deliverance from evil, peace, the increase of faith, hope and love, in fact the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit as comprehensive blessing of God.<sup>7</sup>

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray for both kinds of gifts. Our daily bread is a creation-gift, whereas forgiveness and deliverance are redemption-gifts. We pray for forgiveness and deliverance, because these gifts are given only in answer to prayer. We're also told to pray for material needs, because it is appropriate to acknowledge our physical dependence on our Father.

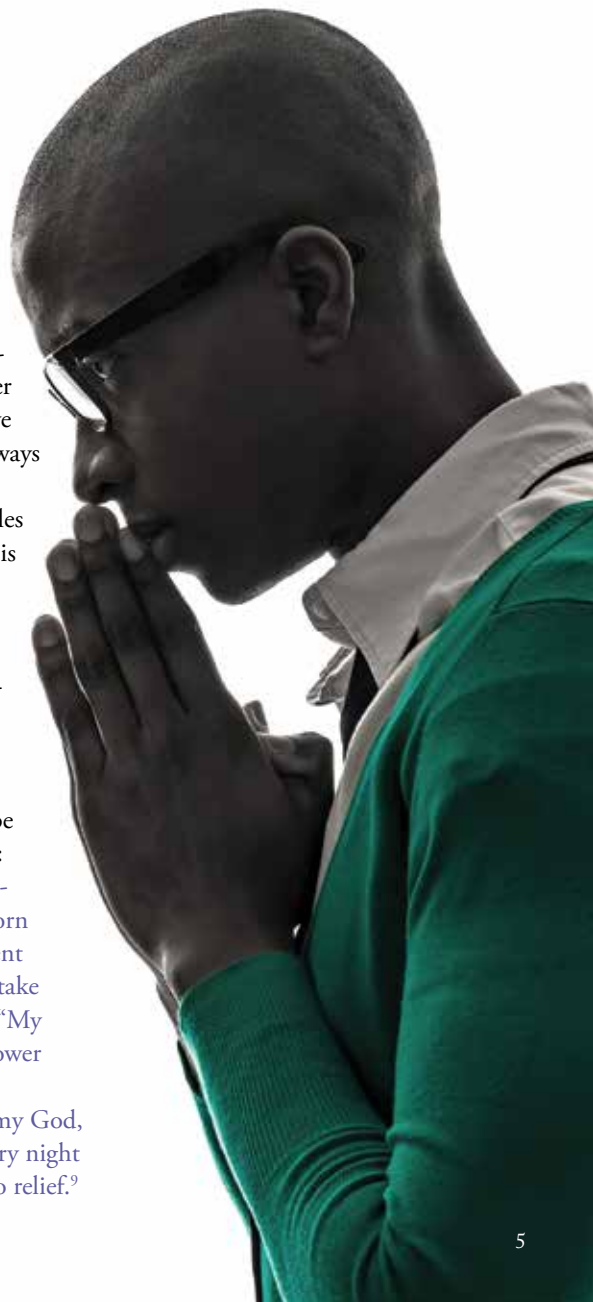
With this in mind, let's look at the first part of the passage: "Ask, and

it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." Was Jesus categorically stating that every prayer will be answered in a positive manner, and that we will always get what we pray for?

One of the basic principles of understanding Scripture is to compare what is taught in one particular verse with the teaching of Scripture in general. It's clear from reading the Bible that prayers are not always answered in the manner that the one praying requests. This can be seen in the following verses:

To keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh ... Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."<sup>8</sup>

Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.<sup>9</sup>





From these and other verses, and factoring in our own experience, it's clear that God doesn't always answer our petitions in the manner we would like Him to. Our heavenly Father isn't our "cosmic bellhop" who is there to do our every bidding, and Jesus' words shouldn't be interpreted to mean that God will grant our every wish. But even if some of our prayers aren't answered in the way we would like, we can trust that He knows what's best.

We should be thankful that God doesn't answer our every prayer by giving us exactly what we ask for. If He did, we would likely pray less, because we'd quickly see that the effects of having every prayer answered would have unforeseen and unwanted consequences. These and

other promises about answering our prayers are not pledges on God's part to give us whatever we ask, whenever we ask it, and in exactly the terms we ask. If that were the case, prayer would be an unbearable burden for us to carry.<sup>10</sup> Only our all-knowing, all-good, all-wise, and all-loving Father can know how prayers should be answered, when it is best to answer them, and if they should be answered at all.

Going back to the example of children asking their parents for things: if the child asked for a serpent instead of a fish, then the parent, out of love and concern, would *not* grant the request. The parents' greater knowledge and wisdom, as well as their love for their child, would keep them from responding to the child's specific request. Instead, they might look beyond the specific request to the fact that the child is hungry, and offer something more suitable to eat. Parents sometimes refuse or delay granting their children's requests or give them something that, while different from what they asked for, supplies their need. Our heavenly Father often does the same thing when responding to our prayers.

We're encouraged to pray—to ask, to seek, to knock—for in doing so we receive and find, and opportunities open to us. Throughout Scripture, there are numerous promises that God will answer our requests. Though it's not stated each time, the underlying foundation of these promises is an understanding that God is good, has our best interests at heart, deeply loves us, and desires for us to present our requests; and as our loving Father, He will answer our prayers according to what He knows is ultimately best.

We pray in faith, knowing that God will answer in the manner that is best for us and others overall, because of His deep love for us. We ask for our needs and desires, trusting that in His complete understanding, wisdom, and goodness, He will respond with a yes, no, or wait. Trusting that He knows best how to respond to each of our prayers, we can pray as Jesus did: "Not my will, but yours, be done."<sup>11</sup>

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■

10. See John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 187.

11. Luke 22:42 ESV



BY BONITA HELE

# HEAVEN'S BEST

I WAS FIFTEEN AND LOOKED FORWARD TO FRIDAYS, as it meant a trip to the beach. Every week during the summer, our youth group put on an impromptu performance of songs and skits on the boardwalk to share the message of God's love with those passing by.

One Friday we received a large donation of bread and pastries from a local bakery. "Let's take it to the beach," someone suggested. When we arrived and announced free loaves and pastries, a small crowd of needy and worn-looking people descended on our group. Most gratefully took what was offered, although two grumbled that their favorite variety of bread wasn't amongst those offered. They refused what we had available to give, and walked off empty-handed, still grumbling.

Later, a young woman approached. She was pushing a double stroller, filled with not only two children, but what looked to be all her earthly possessions. "I heard you were giving away

bread." Her voice sounded almost desperate, like her life might have been. A wide-eyed toddler watched silently from his carriage while a baby slept fitfully. Their clothes looked fairly new, but the things packed into every spare inch of the stroller suggested that the woman had no place to stay.

I gathered the remaining food into a bag—some muffins, a couple of loaves—and gave it to her. She didn't even look to see what was inside but thanked me profusely.

One of my friends began a conversation with the young mother. I turned to pack up but heard enough of it to understand that he gave her the location of a woman's shelter and money to get there. I was glad she had come to us, glad she was able to get a bit of help, a bit of hope. I also thought of the two who had left with nothing.

The bread of heaven is given freely to all who seek. The times I remain unsatisfied are the times I do not let it enter my heart and fill my soul.

BONITA HELE IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR IN THE U.S. AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord, but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man may be nourished. I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation of it.—George Müller (1805–1898)



# BAKING PRAYERS

BY MARIE STORY

## PRAYER OFTEN WORKS LIKE BAKING A LOAF OF BREAD:

You've got to mix the ingredients, knead the dough, proof the dough, then bake the finished loaf.

*Step one: mix the ingredients.* When baking bread, you can't just throw a bunch of random stuff in a bowl and expect to get a loaf of bread. If you expect to get something edible, you have to use specific ingredients.

God hears every type and style of prayer, and He loves to answer prayer even if we don't really know how or what to pray for. But knowing what "ingredients" usually go into prayer gives you faith that you've done your part and the rest is up to God. Here are a few important ingredients:

1) Pray in Jesus' name. In John 14:14 Jesus said, "You may ask me for anything *in my name*, and I will do it."<sup>1</sup>

2) Be definite and specific. Tell Jesus your needs and how you'd like Him to supply for you. Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."<sup>2</sup> In order to "seek" in the right places and "knock" on the right doors, it helps to know what you're after and what you're looking for.

3) Claim God's promises. When Jesus was talking to His Father, He said, "Your Word is true."<sup>3</sup> God's Word and His promises are real and authentic.

4) Have faith for the answer. James 1:6-7 says, "When you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord."<sup>4</sup>

5) Surround your prayer with praise and thanksgiving. Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."<sup>5</sup>

These are some basic ingredients of prayer, just as flour, salt, water, and yeast are the basic ingredients for bread.

*Step two: knead your dough.* Once your ingredients are mixed, it's time



1. NIV, emphasis added  
2. NIV  
3. John 17:17 NIV  
4. NIV  
5. Philippians 4:6 NIV  
6. KJV  
7. See Hebrews 10:36.  
8. NLT



to knead the dough. It can be hard work. When baking bread, you've got to roll your dough over and over, folding and compressing it for a good amount of time.

We don't always look at prayer as real work—it's often the last thing we turn to after we've worked at a problem on our own for a while—but sometimes God expects us to keep praying until we receive the answer. Luke 18:1 says, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."<sup>6</sup>

*Step three: proof the bread.* The final step in making a loaf of bread, right before it goes into the oven to be baked, is the proving or proofing period. It's when you leave the bread to rise. There's not much you can do to it at this point to make it rise any faster. You just have to walk away and trust that it's going to work. Patience is like the "proofing" of your prayer.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes the dough even has to be punched down after you've waited a while, and then you have to let it rise *again*. This too is often how prayer works. You've done your part in prayer, you've had faith, you've prayed regularly, you've been patient, yet along comes a blow that seems like a big "no" or a "wait." Faith enables you to keep trusting even when it seems that all the air has been knocked out of your prayers. Faith is like the yeast that will make your dough rise even after it's been punched down. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the substance"—the *proof* or guarantee—"of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

*Step four: bake the bread.* Once you put the bread in the oven, you have to wait some more. This can sometimes be the hardest part

of the prayer process—waiting for the answer. You can smell the bread baking—you feel that God is working—but it takes time, and the bigger your request, often the longer it takes for you to see the answer. Little bread rolls bake in minutes, whereas a full-size loaf can take nearly an hour. The delay doesn't mean that no bread is coming; it just means you've got to be patient a little longer.

Once it's in the oven, you have to *trust* that it's going to bake. You



can keep opening the oven and poking at it, but it's not going to bake any faster. Hebrews 11:6 says that when you come to God with a request you have to believe "that he rewards those who sincerely seek him."<sup>8</sup> You've just got to leave it there and wait till God's timer "dings."

Some bread takes longer to cook than others. Some bread just needs a few ingredients, while other types require a larger variety of elements. Some bread is quick to make, while others demand a longer proving process—even a day or two—before they're ready to bake. So it is with our prayers. Put your prayer ingredients together, "prove" them with your faith, and trust God for the results.

MARIE STORY LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA, WHERE SHE WORKS AS A FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR AND VOLUNTEERS AS A COUNSELOR AT A LOCAL HOMELESS SHELTER. ■

We think of prayer as a preparation for work, or a calm after having done work, whereas prayer is the essential work.—Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

Prayer at its highest is a two-way conversation, and for me the most important part is listening to God's replies.—Frank C. Laubach (1884–1970)

# TWO-MINUTE PRAYERS

BY CHRIS MIZRANY



I'VE OFTEN STRUGGLED TO MAKE TIME TO PRAY. Though my wife and I pray together each morning and before bed, I find myself neglecting that regular “talking with Jesus” throughout the day, especially when sudden things come up. I know I need to pray, but it's hard, *really* hard, to set aside “prayer time.”

Then, I read about the 2-Minute Rule.<sup>1</sup> Here's how it works.

Most of the tasks that we procrastinate on aren't actually difficult to do: it's completely possible to accomplish them—we just avoid *starting* them for some reason, mostly because we “don't have time.”

The 2-Minute Rule overcomes procrastination and laziness by making it so easy to start taking action.

There are two parts to the 2-Minute Rule...

## **PART 1: IF IT TAKES LESS THAN TWO MINUTES, THEN DO IT NOW.**

There are many things we put off that we could get done in two minutes or less. For example, washing our dishes immediately after a meal, tossing the laundry in the washing machine, taking out the garbage, cleaning up clutter, sending that email, and so on.

So, the rule says if a task takes less than two minutes to complete, do it right away. Does that apply to prayer? It sure does!

## **PART 2: WHEN YOU START A NEW HABIT, IT SHOULD TAKE LESS THAN TWO MINUTES TO DO.**

Can all of our goals be accomplished in less than two minutes?


Of course not, but *every goal can be started in two minutes or less*. Longer, desperate prayers are good, and certainly needed, but a good start is to pray even short prayers now, without delaying.

So, how does this help me to pray more? Well, instead of waiting to have a large block of “prayer time,” I'm trying to send up short prayers throughout the day—as soon as the need presents itself, if possible. The Bible promises that Jesus always hears me, so I'm acting on that truth.<sup>2</sup> And you know what? I think my prayer habit is in motion.

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1. David Allen, *Getting Things Done*

2. See 1 John 5:14–15.



# CANDLES AND PRAYERS

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

THERE ARE SOME VERSES I'VE HAD A VERY DIFFICULT TIME WITH. One of them is "Pray continually."<sup>1</sup> That verse is often on my mind, and I've learned how important it is to pray. I pray a lot, but I don't pray continually, so I've often felt guilty about not praying enough.

No matter how good my intentions are, my mind often gets caught up in other things. I shoot up a quick prayer before I drive or eat or sleep, or when I wake up. I pray when someone asks me to pray for them. I have a prayer list of things I pray for every day. I pray for people when they come to mind. But no matter how much I pray, or how long or well I pray, it's never going to be "continually."

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1. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 NIV

My daughter recently flew to Europe. It was a long flight with various connections and I really wanted to keep praying for her along the way until she arrived safely at her final destination. I found a scented candle called "Angel's Whispers" and I liked the thought that even though I couldn't be praying continually, her angels would keep praying for her. So I put the candle in a safe, visible place, lit it, prayed for her trip, and then went about my day. Every time I walked by the candle I'd pray for her. The candle kept burning until she arrived safely.

Maybe our prayers are like that candle. Our faith and trust in God is like sweet-smelling incense rising to His throne. Maybe He enjoys the fragrance of our prayers like I enjoyed that candle. It's beautiful to think that the fragrance of our

prayers may fill the halls of heaven like the candle's aroma filled my home.

So I decided to stop worrying about all the times I hadn't prayed. I'll do what I can and try to be as prayerful as possible. When I'm especially desperate, I'll light a fragrant candle and entrust my thoughts and prayers to God. Then I'll trust Him with all the rest, with my life and the lives of those I love, casting all my cares on Him, because I know He cares for me. I'll put the verse "Pray continually" in context. I'll do my best to pray continually, but I'll trust in God's mercy when I fall short of "continually," and I'll give thanks in every circumstance.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. ■



BY SALLY GARCÍA

# MY DISHWASHING PARTNER

## SOME OF MY MOST SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS WITH GOD

have been with my hands in dishwater. For many years, I've been in the habit of starting my morning with devotional reading and prayer. But inevitably, time ticks by, and I need to get up and begin the day before I feel like I've quite finished. Paraphrasing the old gospel song, "I'd stay in the garden with Him, but the day around me is starting."<sup>1</sup>

So I tell God, *We can finish this later*, and carry my breakfast dishes to the kitchen. I don't really enjoy doing dishes, so I sometimes put on some inspirational music or a podcast while I work, but often I work in the stillness and just let my mind flow. I muse over events and wonder about *how* and *why* certain things are happening. I think of my daughter and her family and other loved ones,

and pretty soon my thoughts turn into simple prayers.

Then sometimes a *new* thought will come into my mind, something that I've never realized before. Maybe a new way of looking at a situation or a bit of encouragement, an idea, or a solution to a problem I'm facing. Sometimes it isn't even a thought, but a peace in my heart and a feeling of trust and gratitude.

When this happens, it's obvious to me that it's not something I've conjured up on my own; I believe the inspiration comes from God's quiet voice speaking within my soul. As Billy Graham said, "I can tell you that God is alive because I talked to him this morning."

SALLY GARCÍA IS AN EDUCATOR, MISSIONARY, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

Look at the amazing example of Brother Lawrence. He was a humble cook in a seventeenth-century French monastery who was able to turn even a boring job, such as washing dishes, into an act of worship and an opportunity to build his relationship with God. He said: "The key to friendship with God is not changing what you do, but changing your attitude toward what you do. What you normally do for yourself you begin doing for God, whether it is eating, bathing, working, relaxing, or taking out the trash."<sup>2</sup>

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God.  
—Brother Lawrence (c. 1614–1691)

Jesus wants to be your best friend and trusted partner. Just invite Him in: *Dear Jesus, please come into my life and stay by my side always. Help me get to know You better and draw closer to You through reading Your Word. Amen.*

1. "In the Garden," by Charles Miles, 1913
2. <http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/practicing-god-s-presence-in-2017.html>



# THREE FAITH-BOOSTING LESSONS

BY MARCUS VERNIER

## IT BEGAN ONE MORNING WHEN I DISAGREED WITH SOMETHING MY WIFE SAID.

It was during one of those trying patches where you find yourself irritable and finding fault with everyone around. I was about to contribute a sharp retort when I caught myself mid-speech and decided to pray if I should go ahead with it. The answer was an emphatic “No!” It all happened so quickly in my mind, but it set off a chain reaction that ended up bringing new insight.

The second lesson took place soon after. I was closing our business’ monthly reports, which can be challenging, as they’re quite intricate and require patience and persistence. A new detail came up that caused a

break in my mental flow. Despite the work being timely and important, I couldn’t get my head around this new factor.

My spirits sagged, and a few mouse clicks later, I was checking the news, then drifting into Facebook, and so on. Finally, much discouraged, I struggled to pull myself together and pray about what to do. As often happens, the solution came almost immediately. If I’d done that at the start, I could have saved myself a lot of time, not to mention stress.

God’s Word encourages you to “give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you.”<sup>1</sup> But how can we give God our burdens if He’s a block away? Or even several yards away? We can only give Him our burdens if He’s right next to us, or rather *in* us. The closer we are, the easier it is to trust Him with our cares and burdens and to

communicate with Him. “God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”<sup>2</sup>

This reminds me of when I lived in Hong Kong and I used to take a ferry to the Central District. As it slowed down and neared its mooring position, it would bob about almost frantically until it was tied up and secured to the harbor wall. And therein lies the third lesson: Laboring to enter into rest through prayer, as God’s Word encourages us to do,<sup>3</sup> takes effort. But it’s the way for us to be tied securely to the one who has all the answers and can help us succeed, even despite ourselves.

MARCUS VERNIER IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN TAIWAN. HE IS A MISSIONARY AS WELL AS AN ASPIRING WATERCOLOR PAINTER AND AUTHOR. ■

1. Psalm 55:22 NLT

2. Psalm 46:1 NLT

3. See Hebrews 4:11.

# WHOSE TIME?

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY



**NOT LONG AGO**, I confided to a friend that I felt overwhelmed with stress and anxiety over my work. She suggested that I spend more time meditating on God’s goodness and studying His Word as an antidote. “But I don’t have time!” I protested.

“What do you mean, you don’t *have* time?” she queried with a twinkle in her eye.

“I mean that I don’t have buckets of time on my hands!” I retorted, annoyed and puzzled.

“Oh, so you don’t *own* enough time? You may as well say that you own sunlight. But you’d never say that, because you know that God made the sun. Why don’t you think of time as a *gift* or a *loan* from God, rather than viewing it as something that you *own*?”

“Well, no ... it’s just that ...” I was stumped. I’d never realized

that I had been thinking of time as something that I “own.” But it was true. The idea of God *lending* or *giving* me time seemed absurd; rather, I was accustomed to thinking that I sometimes generously gave *Him* precious portions of *my* time! The more I thought about it, the more I saw how deeply ingrained this idea was in my subconscious. How often had I said, “He (or she) wasted *my* time!”

The next day, my friend and I talked some more. We discussed how having a possessive attitude toward time had led to my focusing solely on my own ideas, goals, and desires, effectively pushing God out of my decisions. Without His help to streamline my schedule and lifestyle, I was struggling to keep up with my work. No wonder I was stressed and felt that I didn’t “have” time for communing with my Creator.

Over the next few days, I noticed that my flawed reasoning about time had also been influencing the way I viewed my family, job, possessions, and many other areas of daily life. The word “my” had soaked into every corner of my heart. Rather than being thankful for and generous with all that I had been *given*, I was selfishly grasping all that I felt I was *entitled to*. Whenever God did not seem to be answering my prayers and granting my desires, I’d fume over why “*my* God” wasn’t doing what I wanted, when I wanted it—as if He were my “Errand Boy.”

It hasn’t been easy to rewire my mindset, and it’s far from finished, but I am learning to say with the psalmist, “Everything in heaven and earth is yours.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. 1 Chronicles 29:11 NIV



BY MARIE ALVERO

# SIMPLE PRAYER

**SEVERAL YEARS AGO**, my life was very uncertain. And in the middle of that loss, crisis, and stress, I began to question everything, down to the very foundation of my faith. I'd been very comfortable with prayer before, but then it became a struggle. Some days I was angry with God, some days I didn't feel like I could trust Him, some days I just didn't know what I felt.

Then I got the idea to read some of the book of Psalms first thing each morning. I didn't get very far before I realized it's a book of prayers. King David shared all his uncensored thoughts and emotions with God. He didn't wait till he could present

himself "properly." If his heart was broken, he spoke as if it was. If he was overcome with joy, he shared it with God in praise.<sup>1</sup>

In Psalm 139, David says to God: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."<sup>2</sup>

When he was sure he needed help, he prayed: "To you, Lord, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: 'What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help.'"<sup>3</sup>

Doesn't that sound like the communication of a heart that knows God? It's intimate and confident, authentic, broken, and grateful all

at the same time. David brought before God whatever he was feeling. He asked for whatever he needed. I decided to take my cue from him.

I let my prayers lose all formality. I voiced my desperation, hopes, hurts, petitions, joys, rage, fears, and needs using whatever words and feelings I had. Above all, I just kept talking with God. Even though I didn't understand. Even though the answers were slow in coming.

Prayer is simply talking with God. "You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord,"<sup>4</sup> David noted. God already knows what's on your heart, no need to "dress it up" for Him.

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1. King David is believed to have been the author of about half the Psalms—78 out of 150.

2. Psalm 139:7–10 NIV

3. Psalm 30:8–10 NIV

4. Psalm 139:4 NLT



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT

A lot of people don't pray until they're in some sort of trouble, and then they find their faith is weak and their relationship with Me is strained because they didn't place much importance on Me before trouble struck. They feel hypocritical or undeserving when coming to Me in prayer, and they don't know what to do or where to start to make things right.

If you've ever felt this way, don't worry. You don't have to be perfect for Me to answer your prayers. I help all who call on Me in faith and humble desperation. Simply turn to Me in your time of need, get your heart right by confessing your faults and receiving My forgiveness, and believe that I care for you and all that concerns you. Best of all, this can be the start of a whole new relationship with Me in which you experience more answers to prayers and a greater closeness to Me.