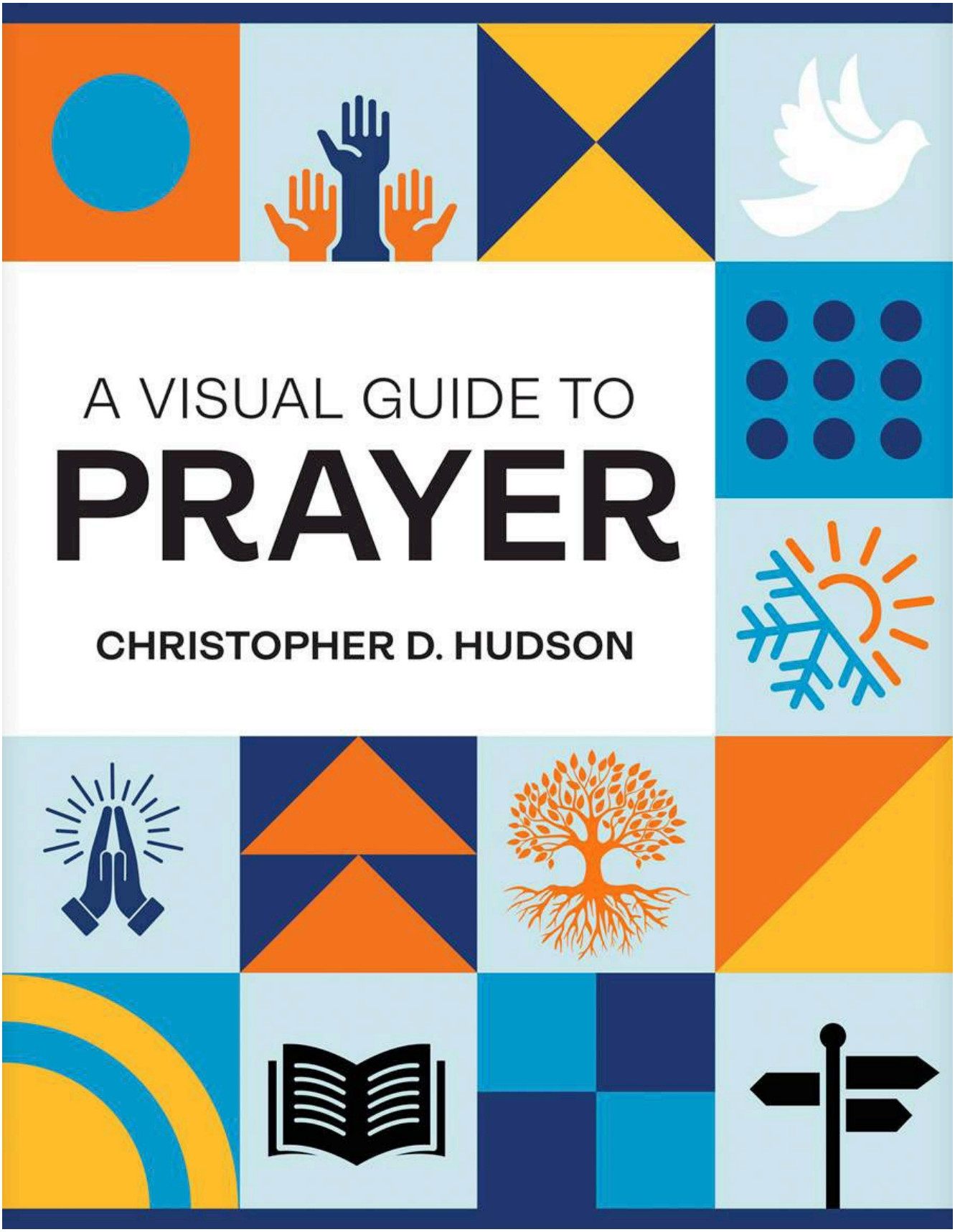



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Using memorable charts and diagrams, this book immerses you in the Bible's teachings on prayer, inspiring you to develop a deep, vibrant prayer life and experience spiritual growth.

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# INTRODUCTION

I used to think that prayer was the horrible obligation of a Christian. Maybe you've felt that too. For years I wanted to be a *good* Christian and went through the routine, but I rarely felt like I encountered God. I experimented with different methods and journals. I downloaded every prayer app in the app store. Each offered promise and hope, but none brought life to my prayers. They gave me structure and helped make prayer routine, but it was a routine that felt dull.

Eventually, an older mentor challenged my view of God and prayer. He asked, What if Jesus—the Author of Life—could bring *life* to your prayers? What if prayer wasn't an obligation but an opportunity to visit with God? What if your relationship with him could be vibrant? Enjoyable? What if prayer could become the most life-giving part of your day? With his help, I decided to try again.

I never imagined that the answer to finding more life in my prayers would be found in a one-word answer: *time.* When prayer is boring, the last thing you want to do is spend more time doing it. You want to finish, not linger longer in silence. But I began a different approach. Prayer became a place to sit with God and bask in his love rather than give him a list of assignments I had prepared for him. Over time, the more I sat with God, the more prayer changed. It became the best part of my day—the part I really didn't want to go without. For me, prayer became a place where I stopped talking at God and started communing *with* him.

This book is designed to help you get there too. It begins with an introductory chapter to prayer, helping you understand what prayer can be. The book then walks you through different kinds of prayer—some of which may be new to you—whether prayers of praise and worship, prayers of confession, bringing your requests to God, or seeking his direction. You'll explore the three-word prayers, the five-finger prayer, and the Prayer of Examen. All of these help build what I hope becomes your own growth in learning how to be with God and finally settle into your own life of prayer.

What makes this book remarkable is the strong use of infographics, charts, and images to help make prayer accessible and memorable. Each chapter presents material in a way that makes complex spiritual concepts and models of prayer easier to grasp so you can personalize them more fully.



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I organized this book so you can read it straight through, chapter by chapter, building on your understanding of prayer. Or you can jump to the chapter that addresses the challenge you face right now. If you're going through a difficult time, the best place to start might be learning how to create your own prayer of lament (chapter 5). Or if you find your times of praising God a little dull, perhaps learning that there are seven different Hebrew words for praise will change how you begin to think about praising God (chapter 3). Whether you use this book in a class or in your personal life, I hope you'll engage it personally and not just academically. This guide—and prayer itself—is meant to be lived, not just studied.

Prayer is an invitation to bring God into our world, into the situations that concern and stress us most. Even when we're busy, taking time to pray reminds us that we need God's assistance and help, and that we depend on him.

If you just want to learn more about prayer or if you're stuck in the same cycle I was—doing all the right things but not connecting with God—then this book is for you. The chapters that follow are an invitation to discover prayer not as a duty to fulfill or a discipline to master, but as a journey through Christian practices that lead to a relationship you can enjoy.

Christopher D. Hudson

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# Three Little-Known Truths about Prayer

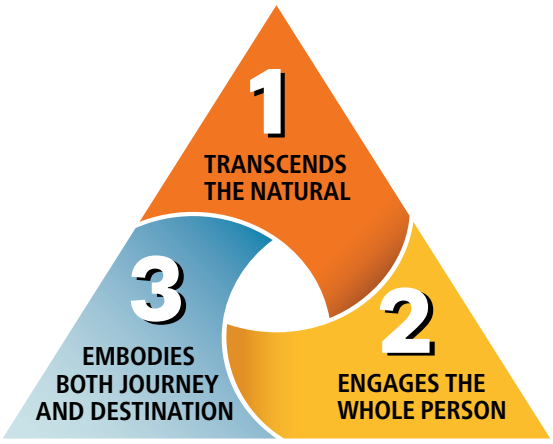
Prayer does more within us than we realize. Here are three truths about prayer that affect us in ways that aren't always obvious.

## 1. Prayer is a supernatural act.

When we pray, we leave behind our focus on the kingdom of earth and turn our attention to the kingdom of heaven. It's there that we meet God, who stands above time and space and is not bound by the constraints of our human existence. When we pray, we enter an otherworldly realm to talk to a God who is immaterial and not limited in any way. And we know that he hears and receives us. The book of Hebrews says that through Jesus we can boldly enter the Most Holy Place (10:19–22).

The very act of asking God to intervene in our lives is supernatural—it's miraculous. We ask him to provide our daily bread because our needs do not take care of themselves. We ask him to work and supply, using his supernatural abilities. When Jesus called his disciple Peter to step out onto the water (Matthew 14:28–29), Peter took that miraculous step in obedience, and God provided for and protected him. God does the same thing for us, even when we're not walking on water. So, when God answers our prayers, he does so supernaturally.

When God heals a person who's battling cancer or brings peace between two people




in conflict, it's a miraculous intervention. When God works in hearts, even when we're in rebellion against him (Romans 5:8), so that we follow him, love him, and become agents of love to others, it's also miraculous. These are examples of what can occur when we meet God in prayer.

## 2. Prayer involves the whole human experience.

We live with physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions, and prayer brings them all together.

Prayer is *physical* because we assume a posture when we talk with God. Whether we kneel in prayer, stand before him with our arms outstretched, or just sit quietly, we are engaging physically with God.

Prayer is *emotional* in that it lays bare our hearts before God. We share our deepest feelings, the issues that set off our anger or



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break our hearts. We celebrate with him the successes that bring us joy and happiness.

Prayer is *social* in that it often involves praying for others, asking God to work in their lives.

Prayer is *spiritual* because it's the place where we connect with heaven, and heaven connects with us. We're able to approach the throne of grace with confidence to meet God.

## 3. Prayer is a journey *and* a destination.

Prayer is both a *process* and a *destination*. Prayer in itself is not the means to an end. We don't pray so that God does what we want or gives us the requests we bring. Prayer is about being with God.

As with any relationship, it can be awkward at the beginning of prayer to figure out what to say, how to communicate, what our style is, and what we're going to share. But as we grow in our faith, our conversations with God will become much more free-flowing, and we will communicate naturally without giving it a second thought. Allowing ourselves to pray and develop such a bond with God allows our communion and fellowship with him to deepen over time.

Because we are with God, who made us and knows our words before we speak them (Psalm 139:4), the words we speak in prayer are less important than we may realize. With a spouse or a good friend, we usually need to speak words. Sometimes that person can anticipate our thoughts and finish our sentences. And they may do so with some accuracy but never completely. It's different with God. He knows our thoughts and feelings even when we don't express them out loud.

Sometimes being with God in silence can be sufficient because our attention is turned toward him. We know he's there and can sense his love for us. Sitting with him can be enough, even if words are not exchanged.



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# Prayer as a Foundation

Prayer is a foundational spiritual discipline. We see it in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve walked with God, in the exchanges between Noah and God, and between Abraham and God. It became a model for us in Jesus, who took moments to pray at set intervals, like early in the morning, but also in passing moments, such as giving thanks for food.

Because prayer is ultimately reliance on God, it becomes the underpinning of other spiritual practices, such as Bible reading, worshiping, fasting, and ministering to others. Prayer is a practice we can do at any moment, regardless of our situation. It becomes the air we need, which sustains us with every breath. Prayer is spiritual oxygen that keeps us near to the Father.

## Prayer Is Like Spiritual Oxygen




What is your relationship with God like? Remember, there is no right or wrong answer to that question. Honesty is what matters.



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## Layers of Learning




Each one offers a personal perspective on the discipline. Some will resonate with us more than others do. Some may become as familiar to us as the lyrics to our favorite song. Some may inspire us to venture off in different directions with our own prayers. For those who are unfamiliar with the Bible, finding these hundreds of prayers may be challenging at first. A great place to start, then, is the aforementioned book of Psalms, which is a collection of prayers offered by masters of the craft—including David. These masterpieces stand ready to aid us by orienting our thoughts, teaching us to pray, and enabling us to talk with God with honesty and transparency.

## Liturgical Prayer

For many people in the Christian tradition, prayer is associated with liturgy—that is, the same prayers offered by people around the world throughout the ages. Liturgical prayers give us words to say that can apply to any situation in any era. Knowing that countless other believers are speaking the same words gives us a sense of unity. Liturgical prayer can express the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17:20–23 by giving believers shared words of worship. Hundreds of millions of Christians throughout two thousand years of history have recited the Lord's Prayer as a regular liturgy (Matthew 6:9–13).

Instances of liturgical prayers are straightforward to those who attend liturgical or mainline Protestant traditions, as well as Catholic churches, but may be foreign to other faith traditions. Liturgical roots can be traced to the earliest days of Christianity. We see evidence from the Didache (first century); the early Celtic Christians in Scotland (sixth century) who prayed Psalm 119 over the course of 365 days, reciting it together; the Book of Common Prayer (used



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for centuries in the Anglican tradition); the Catholic daily missal (a prayer book used during Mass); and modern liturgical prayers written to unite Christians around the world.

Liturgical prayers can be valuable resources, especially to people who are new to prayer or who are looking for something different to try. Though some find liturgies to be stale, a liturgical prayer is not heartless unless it's made so. There's nothing rote about reciting the Lord's Prayer unless you're just going through the motions. Liturgical prayers provide deeply personal experiences when we offer them in sincere faith to the Father.

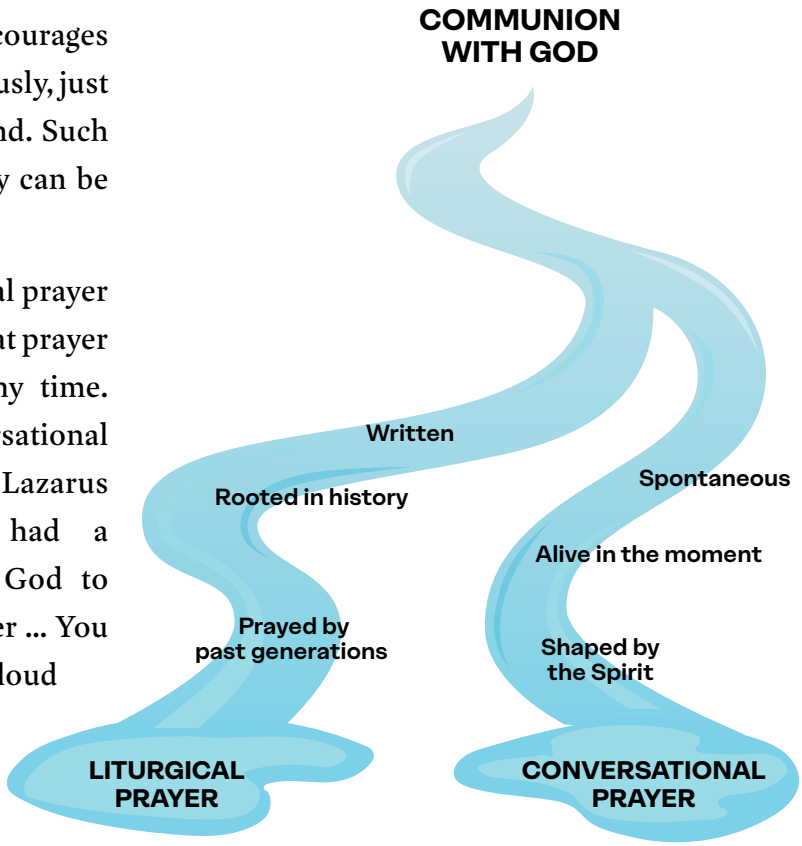
## Conversational Prayer

At the opposite end of the spectrum is conversational prayer, which encourages people to speak to God spontaneously, just as if they were talking with a friend. Such prayers are free and natural. They can be very personal and direct.

We see examples of conversational prayer in the life of Jesus, who showed that prayer can happen anywhere and at any time. We catch a glimpse of conversational prayer just before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The Lord had a conversation with God, asking God to hear him. But then he said, "Father ... You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people" (John 11:41–42). Jesus knew people were listening. He used a quick, conversational prayer to acknowledge that fact. Conversational prayers can be richly profound ways to lay our hearts bare to God, as Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–44).

Whether we're engaging in spontaneous conversational prayer or memorized liturgical prayers, the Holy Spirit can work in both types—and both can be effective in drawing us toward closer communion with God.

## Two Currents of Prayer

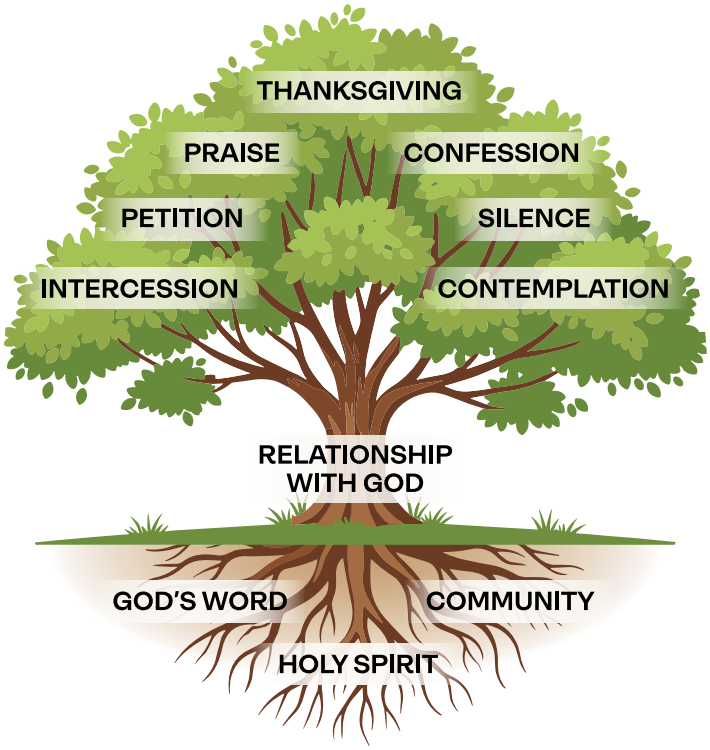





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## The Many Forms of Prayer

Prayer can take all kinds of shapes and forms, just like conversations. Sometimes we build relationships with people by asking them to meet a need. As children, we might reach out to a parent and ask them to do something for us. We may go to a teacher and ask for a favor. In the workplace, we may ask a colleague or boss for assistance to achieve a goal or to collaborate on something important to us.

Relationships are not always built with words. Sometimes they're built with presence and activity. A relationship can grow simply from being with someone. A relationship can be built in silence as we walk shoulder to shoulder with someone through life. We can let them know we love them by being with them and devoting our attention to them, even without words. Prayer works in a similar manner.

Many people look at prayer as something that requires us to interact with God according to specific rules. We must address him properly, work through our confession of sins, thank him for his blessings, praise him, and then maybe, if there's time, ask him for the items we need. But in relationships we can just be with someone. When it comes to God, sometimes that means just sitting with him in silence or thinking about him. Other times it involves offering a quick prayer or asking him for something.



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# What Makes an Effective Prayer?

The Bible outlines the elements that make for effective prayer. Let's look at some of them.

| WHAT MAKES PRAYER EFFECTIVE | WHAT DISQUALIFIES PRAYER | REFERENCES |
|---|---|---|
| Faith | Doubt or unbelief | James 1:6–7 |
| Humility | Pride | Luke 18:13–14; James 4:6 |
| Obedience to God's commands | Willful disobedience | 1 John 3:22; Proverbs 28:9 |
| Asking according to God's will | Asking with selfish motives | 1 John 5:14; James 4:3 |
| Forgiving others | Unforgiveness in the heart | Mark 11:25–26 |
| Honoring your spouse (if married) | Dishonoring your spouse | 1 Peter 3:7 |
| Honoring those closest to you | Mistreating those closest to you | Matthew 5:23–24 |
| Repentance and confession of sin | Cherishing sin | Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:2 |
| Persistence and not giving up | Giving up or quitting | Luke 18:1–8 |
| Praying in Jesus's name | Trusting in works or rituals | John 14:13–14; Matthew 6:7 |
| A clean heart and right motives | Hypocrisy or showy religion | Matthew 6:5–6; Isaiah 1:15 |



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# Strategies for Building a Discipline of Prayer

Here are some practical strategies to consider when you're trying to build a discipline of consistent, intentional times of prayer.

**1. Choose a regular time.**

Some people find it helpful to set aside specific times to pray. Monks in a monastery might pray at six intervals a day. The ancient Israelites practiced specific hours of prayer (Daniel 6:10; Acts 3:1). Because many of us are forgetful, setting specific times to pray can help build prayer into a habit. Seeing certain numbers pop up on a clock can serve as a gentle reminder to lift our eyes from earthly tasks and respond to the one who is always present.

**2. Find a regular place.**

Adopt a regular place whose familiarity will help orient you toward prayer. When you approach this place, train yourself to think of God. Your place may be a chair, a quiet part of the house, or a certain path. It might also include something that creates atmosphere and helps you settle into a prayerful mindset, like a cup of tea or worship music.

**3. Set reasonable objectives.**

Stories of legendary Christians who would pray for hours can be discouraging and make us feel as if we can't measure up. Don't let these stories become a barrier. Begin with what you can do. Close your eyes and pray for a moment. Then perhaps a minute, maybe two. Extend that to five minutes and then ten and fifteen; whatever you're comfortable with.

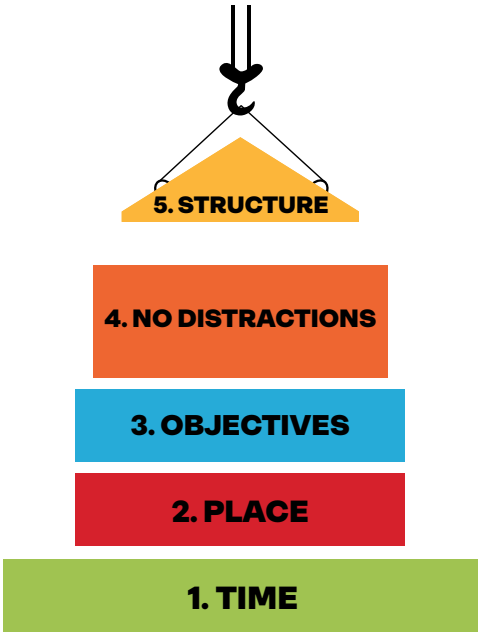
**4. Get rid of distractions.**

Leave your phone out of arm's reach, turn off the TV and close the laptop, and remove any other distractions that might hinder prayer.

**5. Adopt a structure.**

Which approach and structure would help you remain focused in prayer? Choose a prayer model to try in the days ahead.

Regardless of the location, the time, or the structure of our prayers, God knows our hearts and hears our words. He is more honored when we focus on him than when we achieve the perfect silence or connection that we envision. God simply invites us to come to him as we are and frees us from the pressure to pray under ideal conditions.

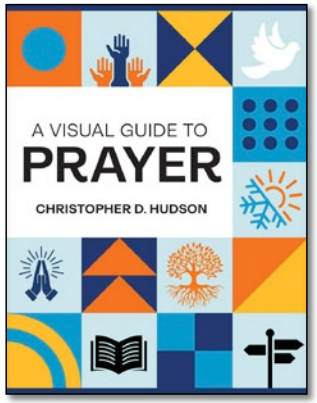





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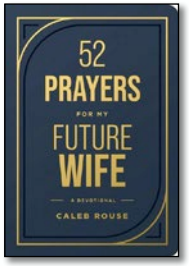



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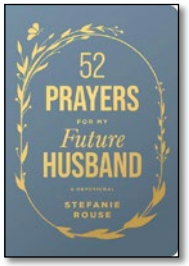



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