

# *What Every Leader Needs to Know About*



## **Leading in Prayer**

**Betsey Heavner**



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## Introduction

Congregations identify leaders all the time. Someone is named to chair a committee, for instance, or asked to guide a task force. There are many reasons that individuals have a leadership position. Some leaders are chosen because they know about the work the committee will do. Others are asked to serve because of their faithful commitment to the congregation. Some people agree to lead simply because the job needs to be done and no one else will do it. Some leaders emerge because of their professional and secular experience; others emerge because their lives display the fruits of deep faith.

Effective ministry calls for leaders who combine both skills and faith. Effective ministry calls for spiritual leaders. Spiritual leadership is a life of growth. Spiritual leaders continually increase their practical leading skills while deepening their relationship with God.

The booklets in this *What Every Leader Needs to Know About . . .* series are about being a spiritual leader. Each

booklet has basic information for the growth of spiritual leaders in congregations. Some booklets in the series focus on people skills and others focus on spiritual practices, yet each one brings these two facets of leadership together. There are other resources apart from this series that outline job descriptions and models for specific ministries. Some of those helps are listed in the bibliographies of these booklets.

Spiritual leadership suggests that every leadership experience includes the possibility of life-changing transformation. It may be that the leader's life is transformed. It may be that the committee or task force becomes a faith community in which God's presence is known. It may be that the product or project of the work transforms the congregation and the world. Spiritual leadership expresses the hope that God's transforming love will infuse individual lives, small groups, congregations, and the world.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. . . . Let love be genuine” (Romans 12:2, 9).

*Betsey Heavner*  
*Director, Congregational Leader Formation*



## What Is Prayer?

**M**ost Christians, and many Christian leaders, feel inadequate in their prayer life. New Christians observe other people praying and hear calls for prayer at church gatherings but may not be sure about what to do. Mature Christians may seek a deeper and richer prayer life and feel frustrated in their efforts. Prayer is crucial to a growing relationship with God, and it is the foundation for living with the deep peace of shalom in our complex, chaotic world. Perhaps we feel inadequate because we recognize the essential nature of prayer. People wonder about how to pray, whether there is a “right” way to pray, or what happens in prayer. Even the apostle Paul, in the first century, confessed, “We do not know how to pray as we ought” (Romans 8:26).

Prayer is simply talking with God. Think about the ways you communicate with people; these are all the ways you can talk with God. We human beings communicate in many ways, both verbal and nonverbal, to express

a range of emotions, to make our needs known, and to deepen relationships with others. As an individual grows in understanding of God's love, it is natural for that person to begin to communicate with God, and that communication is what we call prayer. The Book of Psalms, often called the prayer book of the Bible, contains examples of the ways ancient people talked with God about their experiences and concerns.

There are other examples of prayer in the Bible and in the writings of many people of faith.

One day I told a friend that I often pray when I am driving on long stretches of rural highway, observing the fields, forests, and sky. Her response was, "I hope you keep your eyes open!" She thought prayer meant closing your eyes and perhaps putting hands together. I assured her that I keep my eyes open! In all cultures and congregations there are preferred ways of doing things, and this includes ways of praying. The truth is, there are as many ways of talking with God as there are people created by God. Yet we learn by watching and listening to others. People throughout history and around us today can be our spiritual guides who direct us in prayer.

Wherever you are in your prayer life, God invites you to a deeper prayer life. Whether you are a beginner or a

Prayer is not about us; it is about opening to God.

more experienced pray-er, it is helpful to evaluate your current practice and search new ways to communicate with God. Use the questions for reflection that follow to evaluate your current practice of prayer.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. When in your life have you felt especially close to God?

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2. Describe circumstances that help you think about God.

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3. How would you rate your prayer life on a scale of one to ten? Why do you choose that rating?

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4. Have you ever felt guilty or ashamed for not praying?  
Why did you feel that way?

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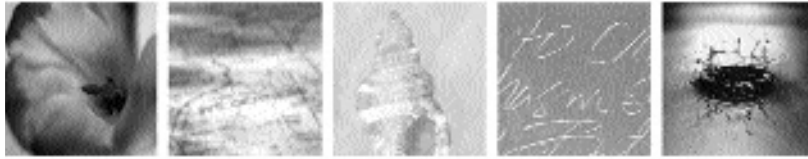
5. What aspects of prayer need strengthening in your life?

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## The Prayer Life of a Spiritual Leader

It is especially important to congregations that leaders develop strong prayer habits. Communication with God brings groups and individuals into common union with God. We become aligned with God so that we begin to see our lives and the world with God's eyes. We grow more attentive to needs around us and begin to rely on God to direct our response. We grow in joy and delight as we are aware of what God provides and gives us; we begin to understand our role as stewards of God's world. We begin to see other people as God sees them and thereby improve relationships in our families, in the groups where we serve as leaders, and in our communities and the world. When we talk with God, we gain clearer direction for the role God wants us to have in the world. Additionally, a leader's prayer life becomes a model for other Christians who are observing the leader's life. God then guides the life of the congregation.

## Many Ways to Pray

All Christians are called into a deeper relationship with God as they mature in faith. The lifelong journey of faith shapes and forms us as disciples of Jesus. The first question on page 9, “When in your life have you felt especially close to God?” helped you think about your prayer personality. Some people feel closest to God when they are studying the Bible or other writings and engaging in theological debate. Some people feel closest to God in close, harmonious relationships with other people and in the emotions and longings of their hearts. Others feel close to God when they go to a quiet place by themselves. Some people feel closest to God when they travel or spend time in a natural setting. Other people are closest to God when they are creative and trying new things. Some people feel closest to God when they work on projects that serve others. Some people are closest to God in the liturgy of worship and the rituals of significant occasions like Christmas Eve services, patriotic parades, graduations, or weddings. Many people feel close to God in several of these ways.

By paying attention to the way God has created you, you can strengthen and reinforce your prayer life. The

Prayer—and more prayer! If you would be “thick with God,” there is no other way than prayer.

—W. E. Sangster,  
***Teach Me to Pray***

way God created you, with your preferences and personality, is God's invitation to you for close communication.

To learn more about your prayer personality and related ways of praying, see *Paths to Prayer*, listed in the suggested resources at the end of this booklet.

## **Pray Without Ceasing**

Whatever manner you find for prayer, the most important thing is to DO it! Paul sets a goal for us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)! Christians find that a daily time of prayer builds a strong prayer habit. Prayer becomes part of the rhythm of our days. Most people start by setting a regular time of day for prayer. The prayer time might include reading some Bible verses, sitting silently in meditation, reading printed prayers and other sacred reading, or going for a prayer walk. Many people regularly give thanks before eating. Christians often develop the habit of thanking God for the new day as they awaken. When a daily prayer habit is established, you can add new prayer practices that help increase your awareness of God's presence throughout the day.

Some people find it helpful to have prayer reminders. For example, whenever one friend hears a siren, she prays for the people who need help and for the people God has provided to give aid. One man has a clear heart sticker on his watch so that each time he checks the time, he is reminded to pray for his family.

## Listening to God

People who have maturity in prayer know that there is a listening side to prayer. For Christian spiritual leaders who have busy schedules and multiple responsibilities, listening to God is both courageous and highly profitable. It is courageous because God may direct us in ways we do not plan or expect. It is profitable because listening for God's guidance affirms and confirms that we are aligned with God's purposes in our lives and leadership. The great reformer Martin Luther is said to have believed that when he had extra work to do, he needed to take extra time to pray.

Listening for God's guidance is an attentive awareness to God's presence in our lives and in the world. God guides us in general ways such as through the standards for behavior in the Bible and other writings, through the faith community, and through the counsel of individuals. In addition there is specific guidance that is part of the listening side of prayer. Isaiah said, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (Isaiah 30:21). We continually choose how attentive we will be to God's guidance.

You may wonder how Christians experience or "hear" God's guidance. A few people will describe actually hearing a voice that offers direction. More often, though, Christians tell about a new idea, a strong feeling, a prompting, or an intuition that suggests a way to move forward. Some people find that answer to prayer comes through conversation with another person, from a worship experience, or through reading. Sometimes an issue is

resolved during sleep, and we wake with a peaceful sense of how to move forward. Quakers believe that God's guidance comes during group meetings, when truth is revealed partially to individuals and the Holy Spirit brings forth the wholeness as individuals share insights.

### Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways are you currently aware of God's presence on a daily basis?

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2. What new prayer practices will you try during the next few days? (Mark your calendar to check yourself.)

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3. When have you been aware of God's guidance as you listened to God?

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## Praying Together

When we recognize God's guidance, our response is prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving. Our faith heritage teaches that God's guidance to an individual needs the confirmation of the faith community. Leaders especially must be cautious about proclaiming individual revelations, remembering that God guides the whole community about its purpose in the world.

In vital congregations, the pastor and lay leaders regularly pray together. Time is set aside to pray for the congregation and for the leaders and for listening to what God would have them do. Jesus urges us to pray together, "for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20).

In *Teach Me to Pray* (The Upper Room, 1959), W. E. Sangster gives practical details for forming a prayer group:

Now raise with God the question whether you should join some prayer group already in existence or start one. If you are led to start one—there may be no group you *could* join—inquire of God to what *one* person you should mention the matter first.

Pray further about the conversation, seek a suitable time and have an unhurried talk with that person. Tell him or her how God has led you, why you think united prayer so important, and what you hope may come of this venture.

If—at once or after reflection—the other person agrees to join with you, you have a prayer cell. Two are enough.

A prayer group provides a leader with accountability and correction. When a leader prays with other people, God has as many ways to speak to the leader as there are praying friends. Insights are shared and God's presence is noticed and celebrated.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Describe how you have experienced God's guidance in your life.

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2. What would you currently like to hear a word from God about? Write a prayer asking for God's guidance with this issue.

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## Learning About Prayer From Jesus

**C**hristian prayer is rooted in the prayer life of Jesus. For over two thousand years Christians have studied the Gospels and meditated on the life of Jesus to grow closer to God. The life of Jesus provides a model for discipleship and for leadership. Here are some observations about Jesus' prayer life and some Scripture references that you might use for prayer study.

### **Praying Alone and Praying With Others**

Much of the Sermon on the Mount deals with prayer. Jesus says, "Do not pray like a hypocrite, who prays so that others can see his holiness. Instead, go to your room and pray privately, just you and God" (Matthew 6:5-6, paraphrased). Jesus encourages going away from others for private prayer. There are examples of Jesus going away and praying privately (see Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16).

Christians understand Jesus' words to "go to your room" in two ways, both literally and figuratively. Many

people have a special place designated for prayer, a room or location in their home for a quiet time with God. In addition, Christians understand that each person has an interior place of heart and mind where they can focus for prayer. This interior aspect is part of the prayer tradition called centering prayer. (See page 139 in the book *Praying Together*, listed in the suggested resources at the end of this booklet.) Praying alone helps us focus full attention on our relationship with God.

Jesus balanced praying alone with praying with others. In Mark 11:17 Jesus quotes Isaiah to remind his followers that people gather in God's house for prayer. In Luke 18:11 Jesus criticizes the Pharisee who stands by himself giving thanks to God that he is not like other people. And when Jesus teaches people to pray, he begins with "our Father," not "my Father" (Luke 11:2). As we pray with others in small groups and in congregational worship, we avoid spiritual pride by focusing on God rather than on the people around us. We also experience the encouragement of Christian support and the love of God expressed through other people.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How does your prayer life show a balance of praying alone and praying with others?

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2. Which side of this equation do you need to pay attention to in order to achieve the balance Jesus demonstrated?

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### **Jesus Prayed—In the Midst of Daily Life**

In addition to regular times set aside for prayer, Jesus frequently talked with God during daily activities. In the same way that we have conversations and develop relationships with close friends, talking with God is both spontaneous and planned.

Read Matthew 14:13-23a. Jesus was grieved when he heard of the death of his cousin John, and he withdrew to pray. But the crowds heard where he was and came to him. He was strengthened enough through his conversation with God that he turned attention from his own grief to compassion for the crowd. He healed the sick, and then he tended to their hunger with a feeding miracle. When the meager food was brought to Jesus, he looked to God and blessed and broke the loaves, and it was enough! In the evening, Jesus went off by himself to talk with God again. Jesus shows us how to live intimately with God in the midst of the busiest day and the deepest emotions.

Jesus gave thanks and praise to God in the midst of daily events. For example, in the midst of reproaching

unrepentant cities, Jesus gave thanks to God for disciples who received him (Matthew 11:25). Jesus prayed before making important decisions, as in Luke 6:12-13. And Jesus was the channel of God's healing touch in numerous stories.

Jesus also used many different prayer postures. He looked up to heaven (Mark 6:41); he prayed with hand gestures in lifting up and breaking bread (Mark 14:22); he sang psalms (Mark 14:26); he threw himself on the ground (Mark 14:35); he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21). In several stories of healing, Jesus prayed with his hands, providing healing touch. It is easy to imagine that Jesus' healing touch included a look of compassion and silent prayers to focus the flow of God's healing power.

### **Question for Reflection**

1. Each day we make decisions that are most clearly revealed on our calendars and in our checkbooks. Review your recent calendar and checkbook entries as you consider how prayer in daily life has influenced your decisions. What does this review tell you?

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## **Jesus Prayed—For Himself, for Disciples, and for Enemies**

Immediately following his baptism, Jesus went on a forty-day retreat to discern God's direction for his ministry and life. When he was weak with hunger, he faced temptations that many Christian leaders face. He was tempted to make a name for himself by using his power inappropriately, claiming power that is God's, and worshipping the powers of this world. With the strength Jesus gained from forty days of seeking God's will for himself, he was able to resist these temptations throughout his ministry. Jesus sought God's direction for his life, and he was able to know when he should act and when he should move on to another place or another group of people.

Jesus' prayer for his disciples is recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 17. The prayer is for his disciples through all time up to this day and is a model for the way we might pray for others. First, Jesus prays that disciples will be protected in God's name. Next, he prays for unity among his followers. Being one with God as Jesus and God are one (verse 11) is essential for effective witness in the world; but this unity does not mean we are all alike! We must be in deep conversation with one another just as Jesus modeled conversation with God. Third, Jesus prays for our growth and joy in faith. Finally, Jesus prays that our lives will be a witness to those who are not yet disciples. We are blessed to be a blessing.

What does it mean to pray for enemies? Jesus instructs his followers during the Sermon on the Mount to love our

enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). There are instructions to love our enemies in Luke 6:27-36. Who is our enemy? Most people naturally think of people far away who are different. It is harder to think of someone in our family with whom we have failed at unity. It is hard to recognize as our enemy the person at work or school or church whose presence brings forth feelings of anger or resentment or dislike. Perhaps our enemy is someone whose opinion or experience is different from ours. As Jesus died on the cross, he prayed, “Father forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

**Question for Reflection**

1. Do you pray for yourself, Jesus’ disciples, and your enemies? Talk with God as you think about these ideas, then write a prayer you can use throughout the day.

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### **Jesus Prayed—And Took Action**

When Jesus was questioned about the greatest commandment, he responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). What a challenge!

Jesus says we are to balance a life of prayer with responsible service in the world. And Jesus is our best role model. Jesus joined a prayer life to faithful action in God’s world. The Gospels describe a rhythm of life that weaves prayer, teaching by word and example, worship, healing, and active concern for people.

Loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind leads to a life of deep and sincere spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, participation with a faith community,

study, and sacramental living. Loving your neighbor as yourself means acting on those issues you pray about, working responsibly for the healing and reconciliation of the world, and practicing self-care. Preachers and teachers have been heard to describe this concept with these words: Pray as though everything depends on God, and act as though everything depends on us.

Jesus harshly criticizes religious people who have outward practices of faith but no concern for physical and emotional needs of people. Read Matthew 25:31-46.

### **Question for Reflection**

1. Which side of the Great Commandment is easier for you to follow—loving God or loving neighbor?

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Name some actions you might take to build habits that move you closer to the ideal of loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind and loving your neighbor as yourself.

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# Prayers of Biblical Leaders

## The Bible as a Guide to Prayer

In addition to the guidance that Jesus gives us for our prayers, leaders in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible also give us prayers and examples. These prayers are words you can pray to help guide your spiritual leadership. Psalms, often called the prayer book of the Bible, contains ancient prayers that express the full range of emotion as people cry out to God. Whether you are beginning in prayer or have been praying for a lifetime, you will find words and images to express your prayers in the Psalms. Faithful people through the ages have prayed a few verses of the Psalms each day. Note these examples.

- Awe . . . . . Psalm 8
- Comfort . . . . . Psalm 23
- Pardon and forgiveness . . . Psalm 51
- Help . . . . . Psalm 61,  
Psalm 70

Joy in worship . . . . .	Psalm 84
Despondency . . . . .	Psalm 88
Thanksgiving . . . . .	Psalm 100
Vindication . . . . .	Psalm 109

## **King Solomon Leads the Prayers of the People**

Ten centuries before Christ, Solomon, son of King David, completed the building of the great Temple in Jerusalem for worship of God. The prayer of dedication and celebration is recorded in 2 Chronicles 6 and 7. Solomon’s spiritual leadership at this time in his life includes four points to help us today.

*First*, Solomon used his position and power to direct everyone’s attention toward God. The Temple and its furnishings were magnificent (the description is in 2 Chronicles 3 and 4), yet Solomon added to the magnificence with more planning! For the dedication day, special attention was given to planning the worship. Solomon spread out his hands to extend God’s blessing to the people, and he humbly knelt as he spoke to God.

*Second*, Solomon described how God’s historical promises, presence, and guidance were the foundation that made the Temple possible. Solomon made clear that the current accomplishment was the result of the long history of God and people. Today we see examples of this long history. First Main Church is a healthy, growing congregation with vital ministry and impact in the community. The effective spiritual leaders of the congregation frequently tell the story of God’s wisdom in bringing the

right pastor and leaders for each decade. They tell the history of leaders who had skills for building programs when they were needed, leaders who empowered laity when that development was needed, leaders who focused on prayer and spiritual renewal when new teaching was required, and leaders who renewed financial resources when new growth demanded support.

*Third*, Solomon recognized that the human accomplishment of a beautiful Temple had no value unless God was present. Solomon prayed, “Heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! . . . May your eyes be open day and night toward this house” (6:18). Today, spiritual leaders must recognize that they are servant leaders, guiding the work of God.

*Fourth*, Solomon asked that whenever people approached the Temple, “all the peoples of the earth may know your name” (6:33). Solomon reminds us that God is always concerned with all the people, and our mission of making disciples pushes us beyond the walls of our temples.

## **A Laywoman Spontaneously Leads Worship**

Can you imagine the moment of time when Hebrew slaves who were running from pursuing Egyptians witnessed the power of Almighty God to save them? “Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians” (Exodus 14:31). I imagine the clamor and noise of people, horses, clashing weapons, and roaring water. I also imagine the strange silence when the conflict ended.

“Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them” (Exodus 15:20-21a). Miriam’s leadership of celebration and thanksgiving several thousand years ago is a witness for all the people of God today. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, many people are fleeing evil and powerful forces that keep us from the life God intends for creation. We need “Miriams” among us who see the gracious, saving presence of God and will lead us in praise and thanksgiving for God’s care.

### **Faithful Obedience When Culture Opposes God**

“Obedience to God in the pressures and stresses of day-by-day living . . . (is) always at risk . . . (and) obedience to God is difficult when we are bullied into compliance to the God-ignoring culture out of sheer survival,” writes Eugene Peterson in his introduction to the Book of Daniel in *The Message* (NavPress, 2002). The story in Daniel 1–6 guides and encourages us today as we make choices between cultural compliance and following God.

As the story begins, the young people of the conquered Israelites who show the most promise for leadership have been set aside for training and nurture in a new society. Four young people led by Daniel determine to make daily choices of obedience to God. Their determination means they must stand against culture in what they eat, as well as in who and how they worship. As they live faithfully, others join in recognizing the

power and goodness of the one true God. Yet Daniel and the others frequently encounter human pride and cultural opposition. The young leaders in Babylon both challenge and instruct leaders today.

### **Paul Shows How to Pray for Others**

Each of Paul's letters in the New Testament begins with greetings in the name of God and prayers for God's blessings on the recipient of the letters. In most of the letters, Paul writes that he gives thanks to God for the recipients, and why the people are God's blessing to him. Then Paul goes on with instruction, correction, and guidance.

Today, communication is faster and less formal than in Paul's day. The challenge from Paul is to offer prayers and affirmation to the people we are addressing. Communicating with high regard for the other person strengthens families, congregations, and relationships. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is full of prayer, including a formal prayer to let them know he is praying that God will strengthen them and fill them with the power and love of Christ (Ephesians 3:14-21). Paul writes to the Philippians: "This is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best" (Philippians 1:9-10). Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for him in his work (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Each of Paul's letters closes with a prayer of benediction. Paul's prayer life shows leaders that conversation with God is part of day-to-day conversation with others as well.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Which of these biblical leaders challenge your leadership?

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2. How is God calling you as you think about the prayer through the lives of these biblical leaders?

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3. How might these biblical prayers be a part of your leadership with others?

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## The Prayer Lives of Contemporary Leaders

**M**ost Christians first learn to pray by watching others. Some people have learned to pray as small children in a home with praying parents. Other people have watched teachers, youth sponsors, and Christian friends. Many people watch pastors and lay leaders pray in worship services and church meetings. Both new and experienced Christians are interested in developing their prayer life, and they continue to learn by watching others. I have been influenced by the words and styles of praying I see. I often find myself practicing what I have observed in an attempt to improve my own prayer life. There are times when the prayers of others intimidate me, and I am discouraged from speaking my own prayers aloud. Many times the prayers of others encourage me, and I experience God's loving presence.

At the end of the last century, religion writer Jim Castelli interviewed spiritual leaders in America about the way they pray. His in-depth interviews included a

diverse group of personalities such as Quaker writer Richard Foster, pollster George Gallup, Jr., evangelist Billy Graham, Catholic priest and mystery writer Andrew Greeley, and former general secretary of the National Council of Churches Joan Brown Campbell. *How I Pray*, listed in the suggested resources at the end of this booklet, is his report of the conversations. From the interviews of a diverse group of people, Castelli summarized that there are great similarities in practices of people who pray.

- Among the people interviewed, every human activity is in some way associated with prayer. People who pray seem to “pray without ceasing.”
- Prayer is something people turn to in order to get through hard times.
- The most popular way people define prayer is “conversation.” Some also describe prayer as a connection or contact with holiness.
- Most people who pray just do it; it comes from deep inside.
- Many who pray believe that prayer is part of life, not separate from it.

Castelli’s interviewees reported experiences that match my observation of people who pray and my own experience over a lifetime. People use a mix of spontaneous and set prayers. There is widespread use of daily devotional reading like *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide or prayer books such as *A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek*

*God* (see suggested resources at the end of this booklet). One person reported that her prayers consist mostly of “Help!” and “Thank you.” These leaders reported finding comfort in repeating prayers that have been prayed for a long time, such as the Psalms, the Lord’s Prayer, and others. People also use short, set prayers such as “God bless you” when someone sneezes and “God is great; God is good. Let us thank him for our food” before a meal. Many people pray at a specific time of day. Prayer during exercise is popular, perhaps because exercise provides both mental privacy and regular breathing, two elements that are helpful to prayer. Other prayer aids include music, the arts, stories, and spiritual reading.

While some people report a sense of calm and comfort after prayer, others report feeling a sense of urgency. For most people, prayer leads to and guides follow-up actions. People who pray have a common belief that God answers prayer, but there is great diversity of opinion about how that happens.

In the twenty-first century, prayer is still important as a means of talking with God. God guides contemporary spiritual leaders—both those who are well known and those who lead quiet lives among us. Each person, created in unique and diverse ways, has different ways of talking with God. Whenever we pray, our prayers are added to the chorus of heavenly and earthly praise described in Isaiah’s vision (6:3) and John’s vision (Revelation 4:8): “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty.”

## Questions for Reflection

1. Which prayer experiences of contemporary leaders challenge you in your own prayer life? How?

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2. What new ways of praying will help you “pray without ceasing”?

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## Leading Group and Public Prayer

**M**any Christians are shy about praying out loud or leading public prayers. This insecurity is often the result of self-consciousness or feelings of inadequacy. Your first experience of praying out loud might be as you lead a meeting. You will discover that as a Christian leader, other people will call on you to pray at church and family gatherings and at secular and civic events. This will happen more as you grow your prayer life and other people sense God's presence in your presence. People will see that you are a person of prayer. When you are asked to pray, receive the request humbly recognizing that your life is a witness to others. At other times, you will have opportunities to remind people to pray by offering to do the praying for the group. One leadership role is to initiate group prayer, calling others to prayer.

## Praying Aloud

If you can prepare ahead, consider the occasion for the prayer and include words in your prayer that talk with God about the occasion. The occasion might call for words of thankfulness or comfort or presence of mind. You might choose a prayer someone else has composed, such as a psalm, the Serenity Prayer, the Prayer of St. Francis, or a table grace. There are examples in hymn books, prayer books, and of course the Bible. If you choose a printed prayer, practice reading out loud to get comfortable with the sound of your voice and so that you can read it with sincerity, making the prayer your own.

A public prayer is an occasion when you are talking to God on behalf of the group.

Be cautious about naming individuals in the prayer; it is easy to leave someone out. You can instead express thanks to groups or pray for general concerns. The exception, of course, is a prayer at an event honoring a particular person.

As a Christian leader you might be asked to pray at any time. I remember that the first church leadership role I had was to organize a church dinner. The pastor was late, and it was time to begin the meal. The kitchen workers looked to me and said, “You say the prayer.” I gulped, and I said the prayer. I was, as Jesus said to Martha, “worried and distracted by many things” (Luke 10:41).

## TIPS: SPONTANEOUS PRAYER

- When called upon, accept the leadership role; do not defer.
- Begin with the words “Let us pray.”
- Pause for a moment, allowing time for everyone to take a few breaths and attend to God’s presence.
- If you feel anxious, you might utter a silent plea: “Lord, speak through my mouth the words that touch the hearts of these people.”
- Focus your thoughts on what you want to say to God about the occasion. Simple conversation words are most effective.
- After formal prayer, enjoy fellowship with God through the people gathered.

### Leading Others to Pray

As a leader in the church, you are a role model to other Christians. As you grow in faith and in skill for leadership, God entrusts you to show the heart, mind, and hands of Christ to other people. As you grow in leadership, your effectiveness in leading the work of God will be in proportion to the deepening of your discipleship. You must grow closer to God through prayer

Your first responsibility as a leader is to deepen your own prayer life.

to align your work with God's plans and to avoid the danger of prideful thinking and a sense of self-sufficiency.

When you lead a meeting or a project, remember that you are leading the people of God. As you develop an agenda, plan a workshop, lead a work project, oversee finances, delegate responsibilities, or plan ministry, you are showing by your words and actions the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. The other booklets in this *What Every Leader Needs to Know* series can help you think about planning for ministry, leading meetings, working with other people as a spiritual leader, and finding people and materials to help you do your job.

If your job includes recruiting people to work with you, follow Jesus' example of praying for God's help in choosing the right people for the job (Luke 6:12-13). As soon as your team is assembled, pray for the other members of the team by name. Ask God to work in you and in them to prepare all of you for the task you will do together. Pray for your first meeting and for the ministry your team will lead, asking God's guidance. Ask God to fill the team with awareness of the movement of the Spirit so that the team will do the ministry in a way that accomplishes God's purposes.

Carefully plan the first meeting of your team as a way of setting the tone for future meetings. There are specific ideas for the first meeting in *What Every Leader Needs to Know About Leading Meetings*.

As you work with other people, you have the opportunity to learn about their families and friends, issues of

concern, and opportunities for celebration and thankfulness. Remember though, it is important that you never pry into personal affairs or repeat personal information. You are building relationships that demand trust and integrity. Here are additional suggestions:

- Conclude a meeting by asking members of the team how the others can pray for them. Then have a closing prayer that includes the concerns and celebrations mentioned.
- Ask individuals how you can pray for them.
- Ask people to pray for you in specific ways. Share how God is answering specific prayers.
- Be a role model of gratefulness, giving thanks to God.
- Encourage and support the prayer ministries of your congregation.
- See the list of suggested resources at the end of this booklet for help with developing your own prayer life and forming prayer ministries in your congregation.

Remember that when we pray, we join with angels and archangels and with the great cloud of witnesses through all time and space who praise, worship, and talk with God. Each voice, each person is close to the heart of God.





## Other Helpful Resources

### Websites

#### **The Upper Room** ([www.upperroom.org](http://www.upperroom.org))

The major focus of resources from The Upper Room, a division of the General Board of Discipleship, is spiritual formation. The Upper Room offers devotional guides such as *The Upper Room*, magazines, books, and studies for individuals or for small groups who want to participate in spiritual formation.

#### **Cokesbury** ([www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com))

Go to Cokesbury when you are looking for curriculum resources for your Sunday school or official United Methodist resources such as *The Book of Discipline*, *The Book of Resolutions*, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, or *The United Methodist Hymnal*. At the Cokesbury website you will also find a variety of books for developing leadership skills and for leading congregations, not only from

United Methodist sources but also from diverse publishers representing many theological views.

**United Methodist Communications** ([www.umcom.org](http://www.umcom.org))

Go to UMCCom to find information and resources for the Igniting Ministries program; audio and visual materials from EcuFilm for use in Sunday school, Bible studies, and group discussions; help in designing a website for your church; official program calendars; and answers to almost any question about the church through InfoServ.

**A Magazine for Leaders**

*Interpreter*, published eight times a year by United Methodist Communications (615-742-5107 or [www.interpretermagazine.org](http://www.interpretermagazine.org)).

**Job Descriptions**

*Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation*, a series of booklets describing leadership tasks and functions of a variety of groups in the local congregation (800-672-1789 or [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)).

*Job Descriptions and Leadership Training for Local Church Leaders* (Discipleship Resources, 2009). A collection of summaries describing numerous leadership and committee positions that a person may hold in a local congregation (800-972-0433 or [www.upperroom.org/bookstore](http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore)).

## **Telephone Consultants**

**Curric-U-Phone**, for help in selecting and using curriculum resources (800-251-8591).

**InfoServ**, for answers to questions about The United Methodist Church and its ministries (800-251-8140).

## Books

*Cultivating Christian Community*, by Thomas R. Hawkins (Discipleship Resources, 2001). Identifies six qualities of Christian community and offers small-group leaders help as they incorporate these qualities into the life of their group.

*Gathered in the Word: Praying the Scripture in Small Groups*, by Norvene Vest (Upper Room Books, 1995). A handbook for personal and group prayer in the Benedictine style of *lectio divina*. Includes suggestions of appropriate Scripture passages for this type of prayer.

*A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God*, by Norman Shawchuck and Rueben P. Job (Upper Room Books, 2003). A guide to daily prayer that follows Scriptures of the Revised Common Lectionary.

*The Holy Bible*. Use several translations to gain insight on prayer.

*How I Pray*, by Jim Castelli (Ballantine Books, 1994). Collection of honest reflections on the technique and value of prayer, resulting from interviews with twenty-seven Americans representing a wide cross-section of religious traditions in this country.

*Paths to Prayer: Finding Your Own Way to the Presence of God*, by Patricia D. Brown (Jossey-Bass, 2003). Takes into account that people approach God in different ways. Includes step-by-step instructions for over forty ways to pray.

*Praying Together: Forming Prayer Ministries in Your Congregation*, by Martha Graybeal Rowlett (Upper Room Books, 2002). Includes descriptions of over twenty-two ways that people are currently praying in congregations, plus a helpful chapter of beginning congregational prayer ministries.

*Responding to God: A Guide to Daily Prayer*, by Martha Graybeal Rowlett (Upper Room Books, 1997). Explores various ways individuals pray and provides guides to daily prayer at the end of each chapter.

*Teach Me to Pray*, by W. E. Sangster (Upper Room Books, 1959, 1999). A small volume packed with practical help for a strong and intimate relationship with God.

*The Upper Room* ([www.upperroom.org/devotional](http://www.upperroom.org/devotional); subscriptions available). Daily devotional guide published bimonthly. Each page contains Scripture, a meditation, a sentence prayer, and a prayer focus for the day.

