

Your Powerful Prayers



Reaching *the* Heart
of God *With a Bold*
and Humble Faith

SUSIE LARSON



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2016931191

ISBN 978-0-7642-1332-8

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Cover design by Faceout Studio, Emily Weigel
Interior artwork by Andy McGuire

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16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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To my youngest son, Jordan

I watched you walk through the valley of the shadow
with honor, humility, and conviction. You're an amazing
young man. Dad and I are so blessed to call you our son.

To the Nazarene

You became sin, though You never once sinned,
that we might become the righteousness of God.



Jesus, I ask You to pour out Your spirit
on the precious souls who pick up this book.

May You do a wonder-working miracle in their lives.
Empower their prayers. Ignite their faith.
And change the world through them.
In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

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Foreword

The Spirit of God is moving.

Last year I, too, wrote a book on prayer. As did several other Christian authors. Susie then told me she also was finishing a book on prayer. At first I thought I had made a mistake; apparently I had jumped on some bandwagon I wasn't even aware of. But then I saw the signs for what they really were—proof that the Spirit of God is moving. God is raising up His people to pray. I think He knows we are facing hard times, and like a good Father He wants to equip us.

But as I began talking about prayer on radio shows and blogs, I discovered that God's dear people had some real misunderstandings about prayer, and a good deal of disappointment. Mostly disappointment. Many had, in fact, given up on prayer altogether, which is like a soldier laying down his weapons in the midst of a firefight. Giving up on prayer at this moment is not a wise thing to do!

But I understand the disappointment. I think we made an assumption that wound up hurting us. We thought prayer was simply asking God to do something, and then waiting to see

if He did it. When it seemed that God ignored our prayers, we were hurt. And gave up.

But notice how the people who walked closest to Jesus saw it: They watched the prayer life of their Master, and their reaction was, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). *Teach us* to pray! In other words, they realized prayer is something to be learned, something we need some coaching in. Prayer is, in fact, far more like learning to drive or getting married or becoming a parent than like sneezing. It isn’t quick and easy; it is something you grow into, something you mature in and get better at over time. Just like the young couple who at first thought, *All a marriage needs is love*, the disciples discovered they had a lot to learn in order to pray effectively. And the sooner they got to it the better things were going to go.

Now *that* is a hopeful view of prayer.

Because we *can* learn and grow, and we *do* get the hang of it, and then—much to our joy—we begin to see far more results in our prayers. Isn’t that why we pray—to see things change?

That is why you will love this book. Susie has learned in the best school of all—the school of hard knocks—just what powerful prayer looks like and how to stick with it. And she has a lot to say to us. Susie is among my favorite radio hosts because she is real and she loves God and she *gets it*. This is a woman with a real prayer life. She’s talking about things she has learned from the Master.

And that is why she can say your prayers will become powerful, too. They will. And the world will never be the same.

John Eldredge

Introduction

Some things may be neglected with but little loss to the spiritual life, but to neglect communion with God is to hurt ourselves where we cannot afford it.

A.W. Tozer, *Tozer for the Christian Leader*

The sense of God's presence *can* become the unwavering possession of our souls.

F. B. Meyer, *Streams in the Desert*

And so I walk in the LORD's presence as I live here on earth!

Psalm 116:9 NLT

I have a distinct nighttime memory of me as a little girl, curled up in a ball on my bed, afraid to move an inch. I pull the covers up over my head and whisper, "Dear God, be my shield of protection." I have no idea God breathed those very words on the pages of Scripture. I don't know much about God at all at this point except that He is real. And so I pray.

Every night, with my knees tucked close to my heart, I nestle under my blanket and ask God to cover me. I utter the prayer of a little girl who has been hurt at the hands of teenage boys. Though I come from a wonderful family, fear fastened itself to my soul, which affected my view of the world and of God. My prayers as a young girl are born out of insecurity, an aching soul, and a desperate need for someone stronger than I am to help me.

This is my perspective:

- Mean and hurtful people walk the earth.
- I'm small and have no voice.
- God is big and *out there* somewhere.
- I'm vulnerable.
- I pray He'll come through for me.

Like flicking a feather into the air and hoping it catches flight, I toss my prayers in the air in hopes they'll somehow reach the ears of God.

In eighth grade I come to know Jesus as my Savior. Even though I understand that I am saved, I don't at all grasp that *I am loved*. Most of my prayers—and my everyday choices, for that matter—are born out of a straining, striving, hope-I-can-jump-high-enough-for-God-to-bless-me kind of mind-set.

It isn't even until I've been married for several years that I realize I still curl into a little ball at night. Which leaves the rest of our king-sized bed to my husband. I have all this space available to me, yet fear pulls me to its corner. By then I considered myself a pretty serious follower of Christ. But my choices and my prayers still bear the signs of someone not quite convinced that she is the object of God's profound delight and lavish love.

Imagine my amazement when, later on in life, I stumbled onto truths and verses like these:

- God is my shield of protection: “*Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him*” (Proverbs 30:5).
- My cry reaches His ears: “*In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears*” (Psalm 18:6).
- He knows my name and will come for me: “*Don’t be afraid, I’ve redeemed you. I’ve called your name. You’re mine. When you’re in over your head, I’ll be there with you. When you’re in rough waters, you will not go down. When you’re between a rock and a hard place, it won’t be a dead end—Because I am God, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior*” (Isaiah 43:1–3 THE MESSAGE).
- I have authority: “*Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you*” (Luke 10:19 NLT).
- His love (not my striving) is what fills me up to overflowing: “*May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God*” (Ephesians 3:19 NLT).
- Things change when I pray: “*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results*” (James 5:16 NLT).

Looking back over the years, I’ve noticed that my personal prayer life evolved this way:

- Vulnerable young girl: *Prayers of protection*
- Young woman, searching heart: *Prayers for identity, confidence, and to know God more*

- A woman in crisis: *Prayers of bulldog faith based on the power of God's promises and the treasure of His presence*
- A woman on a mission: *Audacious prayers born from the knowledge that I'm loved, called, equipped, and sent*

Jesus has never failed me. He's invited me—one baby step at a time—to stretch out and explore the depths and the power of fellowship with Him. He wants me to be comfortable with, yet at the same time *undone by*, His great love for me. I'm learning how to accept His profound and lavish acceptance of me.

What does God's love and acceptance of us have to do with prayer?

Everything.

Think about your own journey. You too have your own bruises and battle wounds. Your experiences have no doubt shaped your view of God. Maybe you've found that when you pray, some things change, but others, not so much. Maybe you wonder if His promises are true *for you*.

Can I tell you, friend? They are! His promises are true for you. He invites you to know Him more intimately, to walk with Him more profoundly, and to trust in His Word more confidently.

Do you long for your whole soul to be filled with the fullness of God so that your life spills with grace, insight, and power? You can. Jesus says so. Here's the answer:

Get to know this love.

Re-read this powerful verse: "*May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God*" (Ephesians 3:19 NLT).

If we want to be powerful in prayer, we must spend our lives learning to accept and embrace how fiercely God loves us. We must continually stand in awe of the fact that Jesus defeated death and sin *for us*. And then from there, live our whole lives in response to what Jesus has already accomplished for us. This

is what it means to stop our striving and to know that He is God (Psalm 46:10).

The more we pursue Jesus, the more we understand how relentlessly He *pursues us*. Jesus wants to talk with us. He wants to hear what we have to say. He has power to establish us, things to teach us, direction to give us. We need Him. And He deeply wants us near Him.

If we live our lives and we approach our prayers as though we're trying hard to jump high enough to reach the sky, we'll only wear ourselves out. We'll pray weak prayers, and we'll never fully experience what God has made available to us.

*If we want to be powerful
in prayer, we must spend
our lives learning to accept
and embrace how fiercely
God loves us.*

The truth is, love came down and rescued us. Jesus came to us. He died for us. He defeated the powers that oppose us. And now He sits at the right hand of the Father, praying for us. Imagine!

We have access to the throne room of heaven because of Jesus. We get to enjoy His presence. We get to draw on His resources. We get to trust in His love. We get to count on His promises. And we are invited to pray in agreement with the prayers He's already praying for us. Read Eugene Peterson's beautiful paraphrase of Romans 5:1–2 in *THE MESSAGE*:

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

You probably already know this, but it bears repeating: The Word of God and your prayer life are your lifelines. If you pray without regularly reading the Word, you'll be like a ship without a sail. You'll wander wherever the winds take you. If you read the Word without engaging in prayer, you'll be like a sail without a ship. The wind may fill your sail, but you'll never get anywhere.

Jesus is committed to getting you safely home. And to the extent that you read His Word, you will recognize His truth. To the extent that you trust His love, you will be powerful in prayer. And, the more you grasp God's great heart for you, you will embrace His heart for the greater kingdom story He's writing on the earth today.

Prayer not only invites Jesus' involvement in our everyday affairs—prayer changes us. Prayer links us in intimate fellowship with the God of heaven who sings beautiful songs over us, who loves us, and who will never—no, never—forsake us.

Jesus wants to teach us things we do not know. He wants to open our eyes to things we could never perceive on our own. And *He wants to hear from us*. He wants us to be free to express what's on our hearts. He wants to use us to impact the world today. He guards, He guides, He corrects, He protects, and He provides. He invites us into His inner courts because we belong to Him.

And though He answers prayers, grants us some of the deepest desires of our hearts, and tends to the things that concern us, Jesus Himself is our greatest treasure. Any gift from His hand pales in comparison to the treasure of knowing His heart.

Andrew Murray wrote:

When the name of Jesus has become the power that rules my life, power in prayer with God will be evident as well. Everything depends on the name; the power it has *on* my life is the power it will have *in* my prayers.¹

Jesus isn't a means to an end. He's the beginning and the end. He's not at our beck and call. We're the ones who wait on Him. He's not biding His time until we give Him something to do; we receive our marching orders from Him.

And yet. *And yet*, He listens to us. He's moved by our heart's cry. He empowers our obedience. He strengthens our soul. He moves when we pray. And He transforms us as we go. The power in our prayers is directly connected to God's power in our lives.

So the question of the day is this: How surrendered are we willing to be? How much access will we give Him to our story? Will we trust Him? Do we believe that He is good and mighty and true?

We can pray as ones who are not only spoken for by God Himself, but as ones who have His Spirit alive in us, His promises offered to us, and His presence with us, every step of the way. Prayer links us in fellowship with the star-breathing God. Prayer strengthens our faith, encourages our hearts, changes our circumstances and/or perspective, and impacts our story as we dialogue with God about what we see in the world.

One last thought I want to leave you with before we dig into this book study. The place of power, the sweet spot in our faith walk, is that place where joy and faith collide. Jesus invites us to a hilarious-dancing-leaping kind of joy—a joy that invites us to relish our food, enjoy our loved ones, stand in awe of a sunset, and embrace His goodness because every good gift comes from His hand.

This kind of joy—the joy of the Lord Himself—is our strength. It's a discipline and a fruit. When we choose joy and taste and see that God is good (even when He's not giving us what we want at the moment), we come to enjoy the joy of the Lord.

*The power in your prayers
is directly connected to
God's power in your life.*



Then there's tenacious faith. We cannot please God without faith. Faith is our substance, our spiritual traction; it's evidence of our trust in a faithful God.

Many Christians live with little spiritual traction, never fully enjoying the joy of the Lord and never fully embracing a fierce faith that engages God and His promises. Picture these two things—hilarious joy and fierce faith—standing miles apart. Many Christians live in that dull land in between: underwhelmed, uninspired, under-joyed, and under-faithed.

But imagine bringing the two together, side by side, as if no more space existed between these two forces. Imagine if these two invitations—hilarious joy and fierce faith—were continually and consistently juxtaposed in your life. Imagine if winsome joy marked your life in every way, every day. Imagine learning to enjoy every good thing in your life as a gift from God and thus cultivating a perpetual heart of gratitude and thanksgiving. And imagine having such a fierce faith that you know how to pray, and things change when you pray. Imagine having a firmer grip on His promises.

Fierce faith. Hilarious joy. Think it's not possible? It is.

And it's the only way to live.

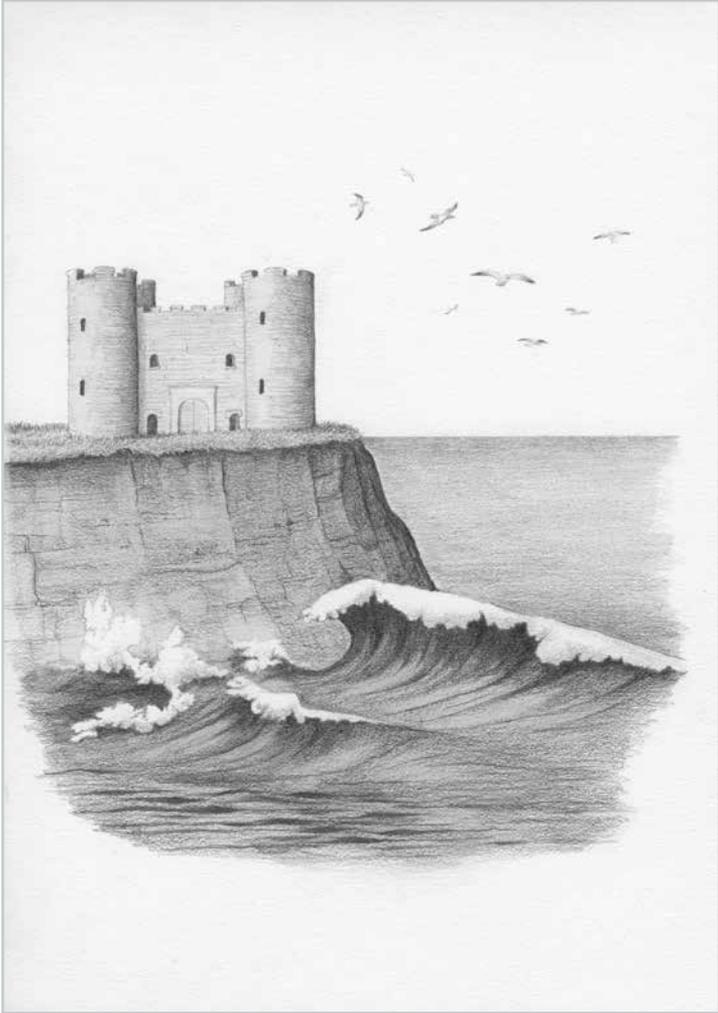
Don't you want to experience God's presence and power in your life in ever-increasing measures? Don't you want your capacity for His love, your understanding of His grace, and your grasp of His promises to increase with each passing day? I do too.

I don't know how you'd describe your own prayer life, but my prayer for you is that no matter where you find yourself, you'll find God right in your midst, and your prayer life growing by leaps and bounds.

In the chapters ahead, we'll explore what it means to be heirs of God. We'll learn how to have a firmer grasp of who we are, because we are in Christ. We'll read about the power of prayer, and then pray powerful prayers every single day.

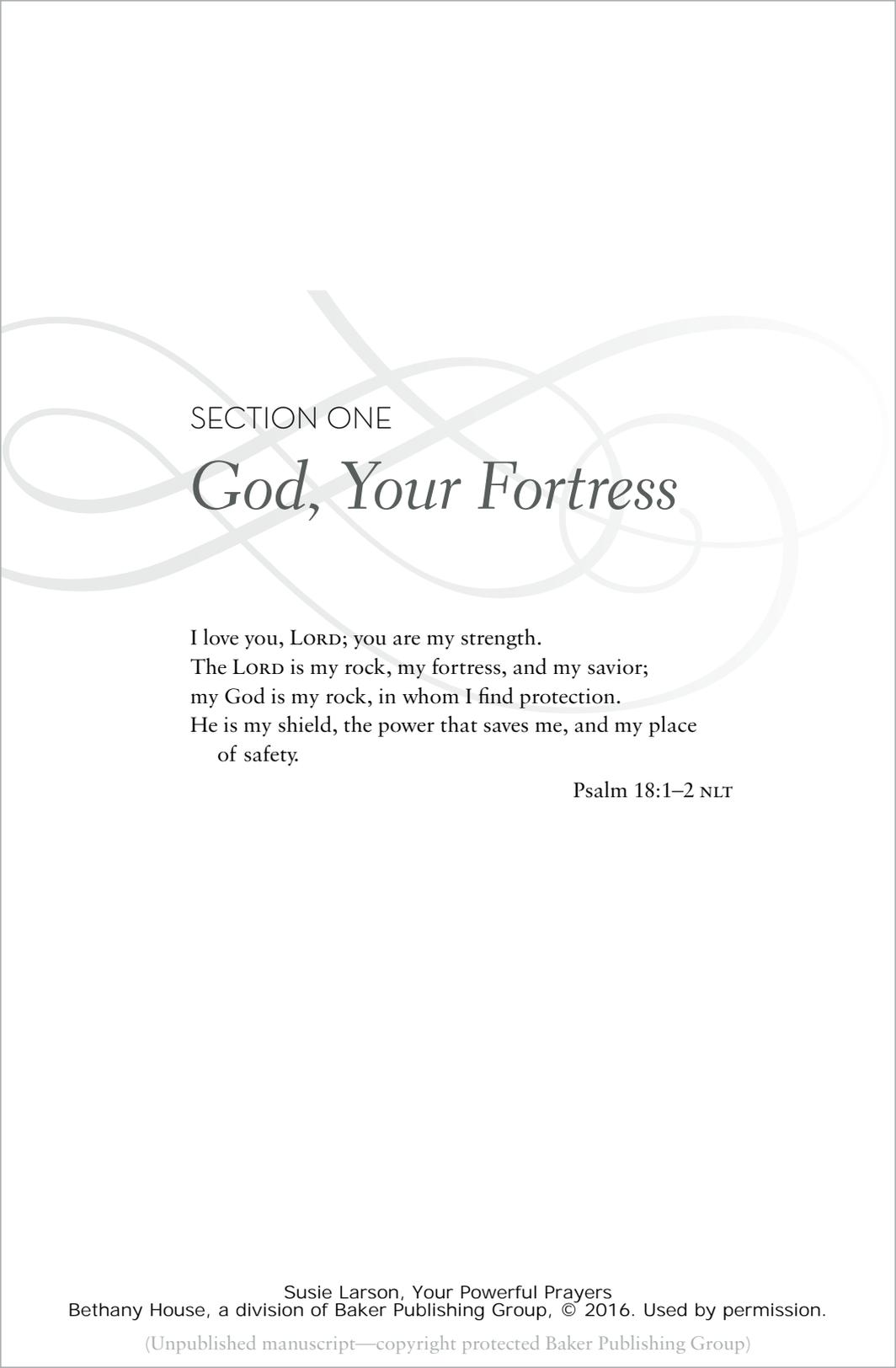
Lord willing, by the time you're done with this book, you will have bulldog faith, tenacious hope, and a more profound sense of your unchangeable identity in Christ. You'll be like a skilled Olympic athlete, conditioned to stand in faith, trained to stand in battle, and prepared to pray prayers that move God's heart in a way that changes the world. I'm so very grateful to be on this journey with you. I'll be praying for you every single day.

In Christ Jesus,
Susie Larson



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SECTION ONE

God, Your Fortress

I love you, LORD; you are my strength.
The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;
my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.
He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place
of safety.

Psalm 18:1–2 NLT

1



Dare to Pray Like You're Loved

You're Secure in Jesus

God is still pursuing you *after* you've placed your faith in Him—not to burden you with more tasks on the to-do list or to whip you into shape, but to love you. He pursues you with an intensity that can breathe life into you.

Jud Wilhite, *Pursued*

But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7–8

As a young mom, I remember lying facedown on the floor, face buried in the carpet, crying my eyes out. I'd been betrayed and rejected by friends. Their treatment of me reflected how I really

felt about myself. I couldn't get out from under the weight of the condemnation and rejection that threatened to suffocate me. I cried out to God and begged Him to help me catch my breath, when suddenly a peace washed over me.

I sensed Him right there with me, as if He sat on the floor next to me with His strong and tender hand on my back. I heard the whisper in my heart, "I am here for you. . . . You don't have to do this alone. I know rejection. I know the twisting, gripping pain that breaks your heart and makes your skin hurt. I understand it well. But it's time to get up now. *I love you. I accept you.* And, you have things to do in this life. For starters, you are going to pray for your accusers."¹

I sat up, squeezed the last drops of tears from my eyes, and wiped away the wetness from my cheeks. I looked out the window and felt utterly grateful for the gift of prayer; amazed that God invites me into a two-way conversation. I heard (though not audibly) the voice of my Savior. And His words got me up off the floor again.

Read these precious and profound words from A.W. Tozer:

How unutterably sweet is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father knows us completely. No talebearer can inform on us, no enemy can make an accusation stick; no forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to abash us and expose our past; no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us, since He knew us utterly before we knew Him and called us to Himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us. . . . Our Father in heaven knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. He knew our inborn treachery, and for His own sake engaged to save us (Isa. 48:8–11). His only begotten Son, when He walked among us, felt our pains in their naked intensity of anguish. His knowledge of our afflictions and adversities is more than theoretic; it is personal, warm, and compassionate. Whatever may befall us, God knows and cares as no one else can.²

Trust His Love

Something gets healed in us when we trust God's love. Something comes alive in us when—amidst the pain we endure—we still believe that *He is good*. Something is mobilized in us when we understand that He wired us to partner with Him in a way that fits who we are.

Jesus didn't save us so He can have millions of slaves at His service, all running hard in the same direction, looking exactly alike, all doing the same thing. If we are in Christ, we're no longer slaves. *We are sons and daughters*. He grants us an elevated status, even above the angels.

Still, how He engages with you may be different from how He engages with me. He's the same God, but He's made us each wonderfully unique. And He invites us to know Him intimately and profoundly. He wants us to enjoy Him, because He truly enjoys us.

Consider this in human terms. My three sons couldn't be more different from each other. And I love it that way. I see parts of my image in them. I see parts of my husband, Kevin, in them too. And I see how and why God wired them each with their own convictions for a distinct purpose. I love that they're different. I love how they're different. And I love them because they're mine.

I also see the lies they picked up when life let them down.

And so I pray.

I pray like there's a God in heaven who hears me when I pray and who answers me when I call on Him. You know why? Because there *is* a God in heaven who hears me when I pray and who answers me when I call on Him.

Something comes alive in us when we believe that God is good.

He's committed to you. He cares about your story. He likes how He made you. He'll untangle your fears. He'll extract the lies embedded in your soul and impart truths that will set you free.

Though Jesus invites us to pray at all times, about everything, in every season, prayer isn't just a vehicle to get what we want from God. First and foremost, prayer connects us to the One who loves our soul. Prayer links us in fellowship with the Most High God. Prayer's primary purpose in our lives is that we might enjoy intimacy with our Creator and participate with His purposes here on earth.

Jennifer Kennedy Dean explains the purpose of prayer beautifully here:

Prayer is the means by which you will be freed from your earth-bound, timebound thinking to participate in eternity. True prayer releases His power so that His power can accomplish immeasurably more than we can ask or even imagine.³

Unfortunately, some folks will get to heaven and realize that though they were saved, they never understood or lived in true freedom. They lived in constant reaction to their issues and insecurities. They never shook free of the constant sins that plagued them. They lived far beneath their spiritual privilege because they never looked up and firmly grabbed hold of God's promises or His identity imparted to them.

The truth is, though God deeply loves these precious souls, they missed out on the adventure of partnering with God to see His purposes fulfilled on the earth in their lifetimes.

God invites us to a life marked by power and filled with conviction, one that abounds in love and pours out insight. As we walk with Him, talk with Him, read His Word, and trust His heart, we are changed from the inside out.

Secure in Him

Here's one thing I wish someone would have told me long ago: Though it takes time to mature as a Christian, our *status* is secure

in Christ, no matter where we are on this faith journey. You can't rush maturity. But you don't have to wait to be powerful in prayer.

The minute you receive Christ, you become a new creation. You have the Holy Spirit actively at work within you. Scripture says that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is in you. In you!⁴

What does it mean for followers of Christ, whether brand-new believers or seasoned Christians, to have the Spirit of the living God alive in our souls? Let's look at what Scripture says:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

2 Peter 1:3–4

I plan to unpack this passage more in-depth on the companion DVD study to this book, but for now, consider that God's divine power has given you *everything you need* for a godly life, which you will more easily access the more you get to know Him. He invites you into this back-and-forth dialogue and adventure of faith and obedience because of His own glory and goodness.

And because of His profound and passionate heart for you, He's given you these very great and precious promises. Why? So that you can participate in the *divine nature*, which means God Himself empowers you to live an otherworldly life, not bogged down by your "natural" circumstances!

Sure, we'll encounter trouble on this earth. Jesus said so. But as we lay hold of God's promises and walk in His power, His Spirit in us allows us to defy the gravity of sin and circumstance, and to pray as one who has been and will continue to be redeemed from this life on earth.

We can have as much of God as we want. What will we do with what God has made available to us during our lifetime?

And think about this: What we possess of Him here deeply impacts how our lives play out in eternity. One day we'll have to answer to Jesus for every opportunity, every gift, and every promise He's offered us. How will we respond? Will our life's work go up in smoke? Or will it echo into eternity?⁵

Do we call ourselves *believers* only because we trusted Christ for our salvation? Or do we actually believe that Jesus wants to hear from us? Do we believe with our whole heart that His promises are true for us? Do we believe that our ongoing conversations with God actually impact His influence in and through us? And are we willing to stake our lifestyle on the fact that whether or not we pray matters in the whole scheme of things?

Andrew Murray once asked, "Who could predict what blessing might come through those who agree to prove God's promises?"⁶

What if we just trusted that what Jesus said is true? What if we shifted the weight of our worries, our hopes, our dreams, and our burdens all onto Him, the one who keeps His promises? What if we walked through life with a contagious joy, a lighter burden, and a fiercer faith? What if our ongoing dialogue with the Almighty reflected a heart that fully trusts God's movement and mercy in our lives?

May it be said of us that we live like God's promises are true because we know in the depths of our souls that they really, truly are.

A Blessing for You

May you respond to the invitation to be much more with God than you've ever been before. May you take the next steps to trust Him with greater expectancy, and to call on Him with greater fervency, and to obey Him with greater

expediency. Nothing on earth compares to intimately knowing the One who spoke the galaxies into existence. And He wants to hear from *you*.

Let's Pray . . .

Thank you, Lord, for Your great love. Thank you for wooing me, for pursuing me, and for chasing after me when I lose my way. Help me to see Your image imprinted on my heart. Open my eyes to the wonders of Your great love. Take me by the hand and lead me to a rock that is higher than I, so I can see what You see. I want to do what You'd do, say what You'd say, and pray what You'd pray if You were walking in my shoes today. Redeem my story so that my whole life reflects Your great love. I am Yours and You are mine. Your banner over me is love. Thank you, Lord.

Praying God's Word

Write out a personalized prayer and weave in the truths of the following Scripture. Make the declaration that no matter what you're facing right now, nothing can separate you from the love of God!

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38–39

A POWERFUL WORD: *I Want More*

It is time to know what we want. It is time to stop chasing the temporary in place of the eternal. It is time to stop putting wages in our pockets only to have them exit through the holes. It is time to come back to God, beg Him for revival, and start moving forward into the most and best that can be ours.⁷

Personal Reflection

1. In what situations do you tend not to pray, but worry instead?
2. Is this a repeated pattern for you? Explain.
3. Honest answer here: How do you think God feels about you?
4. When in your life did God's love feel most tangible to you?
5. How often do you think about God's thoughts toward you?
6. Starting today, will you ask God to open your eyes and powerfully awaken your heart to His affection for you? I dare you!
7. How might your prayer life change as you recognize God's unfathomable love for you? Write down your best answer.

Group Reflection

1. We tend to pray about the same things over and over. Sometimes this is all about perseverance, yet other times our repetition reveals a certain unbelief and unwillingness to turn our cares over to God. What (if you don't mind sharing) are the things you pray most often about? Would you say it's perseverance or unbelief that's driving you?

2. Share about a time when you experienced a direct answer to prayer.
3. In what other areas of your life do you desire to see God move and influence the circumstances? Explain.
4. How often do you think about God's thoughts toward you?
5. Why do you suppose our prayer life is so impacted by our understanding of God's love for us?
6. In the days ahead, how would you like to see your prayer life grow?
7. When was the last time you sensed God's tangible love for you?