

# GROW

6 ADVENTURES IN PRAYER

BY RANDY THOMAS



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# Introduction

Here's what I've learned about my own life of prayer:

1. I tend not to pray.
2. Prayer is dangerous . . . because it changes me. Now I'm good with change - as long as I'm in control. But prayer requires submission and always demands new chapters of trust.
3. Yet, when I do practice a season of regular prayer, I grow; perhaps like no other time.

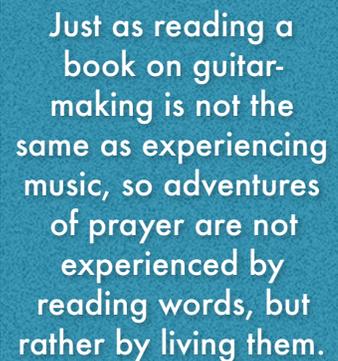
So this is a book designed to prompt you to experience 6 adventures in prayer. You, of course are free to apply it (or not) as you deem best . . . individually, in a group, on a retreat. Over 6 days, 6 weeks, or 6 months - the choice is yours.

However, I believe best results happen when a group of individuals, over a 6 month period, agree to pray each prayer for a month. Group times can then be used to share experiences.

I do have one request though, please don't simply read them. It may seem strange, but I've read a lot of books about prayer - and substituted the reading for prayer. I've weighed the content in my mind, digested what I found helpful, and then walked away.

Just as reading a book on guitar-making is not the same as experiencing music, so adventures of prayer are not experienced by reading words, but rather by living them.

May God bless you on your journey.



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# Markers of Growth

How could following a God who walks on water not be wild?

Spiritual transformation is a process few can describe. Maybe that's because its, after all, spiritual.

Jesus himself described the process as trying to understand the nature of the wind, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

However, one can see the effects of the wind: Hair that whips around the face, frayed flags, or even in some cases, uprooted trees.

Likewise there are marks of spiritual transformation.

## 1. Awakenings

Transformation is always marked by "Ah-ha" moments of insight. New understandings of self and of God, burst our old wine skins of thought.

It's Job crying out at the end of his adventure, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." (Job 42:5)

It's Thomas declaring to the risen Lord, "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28)

It involves perceiving the huge contrast between oneself and God. This experience may produce several fruits - renewed commitment, greater love, a fresh humbling - but it always brings with it the insight of, "Now, I see."

## 2. Dependency

Transformation is also marked by a leaning on the Spirit. It begins with a heightened awareness of the need for God but adds the bold step of living a life expecting His intervention.

It involves taking a risk on behalf of others.

It is life filled with surprise.

It truly is adventuresome.

How could following a God who walks on water not be wild?

### 3. Newness

Transformation is also marked by becoming new. New actions, new attitudes, new filters.

When one first comes to faith, obviously, there are actions put aside. Before falling in love with Christ, His name might flippantly be used. But after perceiving His sacrifice, even His name is honored.

As one grows, attitudes are also altered. Before falling in love with the providence of God, troubles are perceived as a curse. But after witnessing how God uses them to produce completeness, they are gladly endured.

Then too, as one begins to become more like Christ, filters are changed. Before falling in love with the humility of God, there is racism and sexism. But after grasping the beauty of the image of God which lives in each man, woman, and child - no one can be objectified. Each is stamped with His image.

All of the old is in the ongoing process of becoming new - new behaviors adapted, new perspectives carved, and new world views provoked.

These are some of the markers of growth. But again, like the wind, I can't create them...but what I can do is put myself in environments where my hair is blown, flags are frayed, and trees uprooted. This is the adventuresome life of prayer suggested on the following pages.

#### But Be Warned

Wear these six prayers for a season, breathe them, agonize over them and, as a result, experience environments conducive for the Spirit to do His great work. And in His own timing, you will grow. The goal of this work is to provide you with the means of beginning your own faith adventure.

God may be described in many ways. He's the God of all comfort, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the Father of all compassion. But you will never see His name paired with boredom.

So, be prepared. Approach these next pages honestly and sincerely and He will lead you on an adventure of faith.

Goodbye boredom. Say, "So long," to life as normal.

***Hello wind.***





## For Discussion:

1. Have you ever had an “Ah-ha” moment when you saw your circumstances in a new light? What did God reveal to you about yourself during that time?
2. When was the last time you had an “Ah-ha” moment? What prompted it?
3. After you met Christ, how did you begin to view others differently?
4. What does relinquishing control in your life mean to you? What makes this difficult? What would make it easier?

# Adventure 1: The Learner's Prayer

Ever watch a true musician at work? It doesn't seem like work at all. There's a oneness between the artist and the instrument. The music comes not from notes on a page, but from a heart that sometimes cries or sometimes laughs . . . the musician is the music.

I think this is what the apostles witnessed when they saw Jesus pray. Undoubtably the twelve had been around prayer all their lives. Rabbis modeled it. Families recited them at Passover.

Yet, these men, after seeing Jesus pray, realized they knew nothing about prayer. And so they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke 11:1)

*And He, because He is gracious, did.*

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If you are married, you know the unfathomable worth of being able to communicate on a deep level with your spouse. Blessed is the couple who learn to consistently hear each other. Countless books are written on the subject. Counselors tutor couples in the art of listening.

But how much greater is it to learn how to communicate with God? The Lord is willing to take you on such a journey. He, Himself, is willing to be your tutor. It's unthinkable. He doesn't send a messenger to teach you. He answers this request himself . . . Lord, teach me to pray.

*Ask, and He, because He is gracious, will.*

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## 5 Things You Should Expect

When the apostles asked Christ to teach them, He answered in several ways. First, He instructed them. Then, he apprenticed. Then to their surprise, He left them. Eventually His Spirit guided them.

My personal experience says that God will more than likely teach you to pray through similar unorthodox means.

1. **Expect to be thrown in the deep end.** Much like learning to swim by being thrown in the ocean, anticipate being placed in environments where prayer is your only recourse. Usually this step involves putting you in the midst of brokenness.

**The Learner's  
Prayer:  
Lord teach me  
to pray.**

2. **Expect to remain in the ocean.** As my good friend, Klaine, loves to say, “There’s no growth in your comfort zone and no comfort in your growth zone.” It will not be pleasant - you will see the effects of sin. You may be sickened by the apathy of believers. You may want to run, turn away, or wish for the peace of ignorance. But God will keep you there.



3. **Expect to wrestle with connecting the dots.** Eventually you will recognize the brokenness you see, you caused. This will be hard. You will want to fight against this. But eventually God will break you and you will confess, “My lack of concern, my lack of prayer, my lack of presence, my refusal to engage the brokenness is why the darkness is so dark.” Then you may wonder why you didn’t realize it before - of course, its dark. It is always dark when there is no light.

4. **Expect to be broken.** Out of your brokenness you will cry out to God not because you should, but because you must. God’s answer to “Lord teach me to pray” will unfold. You learn to pray because it is all you have . . . and you will discover, the God who hears is all you need.

5. **Expect to worship.** Your praise may take the form of a lament, a plea, an outflowing of gratitude or an attempt to communicate beyond words the wonders you’ve seen God do - but you can no longer keep silent. You must worship.



**Civil Courthouse**

### **A Most Unusual Adventure**

I prayed, “Lord, teach me to pray” for 30 days. It sounds flippant, but I was embarrassed. I had been a minister for 15 years, gone to school, preached, taught - but I had to admit - I needed to be taught to pray. So I asked, earnestly, sincerely, constantly, “Lord, teach me to pray.”

And God, because He is gracious, answered. My adventure began.

I will confess when Bryan asked me for a favor, I had no idea God was at work. Bryan was in the middle of a custody battle for his two children. He and his wife had been divorced for some time.

Because I was Singles Minister at our church and Bryan was a leader in our Singles Ministry, Bryan assumed I could testify to the quality of his parenting skills.

So, at the appointed time, I traveled to the courthouse prepared to serve as a witness. But God was interested more in what I witnessed than what I shared. In fact, my testimony was never needed. Bryan won his hearing without me ever taking the witness stand.

But what God did was have me sit in the hallways of the Family Courts for two entire days - on call - waiting to give testimony that was never requested. The Lord wanted me to mourn, not talk; grieve, not validate; question, not answer.

Never before had I  
sat in such a  
crucible of pain.

Family Court, sometimes call Civil or Divorce Court, is where the legal matters of families who decide they can no longer live under one roof are handled. Parties involved wait in the hallways of the Courthouse for their case to be brought before a judge. Attorneys pass through the hallways carrying brief cases and briefs, scuttling from client to client, bearing offerings of concessions from opposing attorneys or rulings from the court.

For litigants, much of the time in the courthouse, is spent in the hallways. It is there nerves are frazzled. It is there anger boils. It is there tears flow frequently and incessantly. Dreams are shattered. It is the home of hopelessness and of the ridiculous. The hallways are an emotional bloodletting. And it was to these hallways I was being called. To teach me to pray, this was the arena of brokenness the Lord was leading me towards.

While waiting to testify on Bryan's behalf, I witnessed angry faces, heard nervous laughter, and saw anguish up close and personal. For years I had taught divorce recovery classes and hosted events for families in distress. I was not a rookie when it came to these matters. But never before had I sat in such a crucible of pain.

Later, I learned the rulings from these very courts effected about 1500 children a month. Something had to be done. Little did I know, but God was already doing it. He was changing me. The five expectations outlined above, I began to experience.

Eventually, God opened doors so I could walk these very hallways offering hope. I was to be the Volunteer Chaplain in the Civil Courthouse. No other such position existed in the nation. Chaplains in hospitals, thankfully yes. In the military, absolutely. In our prisons, affirmative. But in the divorce courts? Never. God would humble me, then surprise me with the adventure of a lifetime.

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## Next Steps

My adventure started with, “Lord, teach me to pray.” Are you ready for your adventure?

If so, here’s what you do:

- You join the ranks of His earliest disciples by enrolling in the Kindergarten Class of Prayer.
- You forget what you know, because compared to Christ, none of us know anything about prayer.
- You earnestly ask, “Lord, teach me to pray.”
- Repeat it several times throughout the day until you really mean it. Continue this practice for 30 days.

*Then, get ready for an adventure. Jesus will answer your request.*

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## For Discussion:

1. If you were to ask Jesus to teach you to pray, what are some of the means you think He might use?
2. What does the term, “remain in the ocean” mean to you?
3. Does brokenness change your prayers? If so why and how?

# Adventure 2: The Prayer of Intersection

Busy. That's us. Fast food, fast cars, and sound bites. We are a people on the go.

Want proof?

By now you're already tempted to fast forward to the end of this chapter . . .

But what if God wanted to turn things around for you - not necessarily by slowing things down - but by redeeming the purpose of your moments.

**The Prayer of  
Intersection:  
Lord allow me to  
spend time today  
with the people  
of your  
choosing.**

## Intersection with Philip

I think if I had been Philip, I would have argued. After all it didn't make any sense. Philip was in the middle of an amazing revival, surprisingly enough, in all places - in Samaria - the place no self-respecting Jew would visit.

People were responding in droves. Entire cities were being transformed. Joy was sweeping the country. (Acts 8:8)

And who was leading the charge? One of the twelve? One of the inner circle? No it was Philip, one of the guys assigned the care of the widows in Jerusalem. He was publicly announcing, even in Samaria, Jesus was the Messiah.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard, they sent reinforcements. Peter and John were sent to pray for the people. Transformation was happening.

Yet, in the midst of this, Philip received strange instructions. "But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" It was there he was to meet an Ethiopian.

What must have appeared as an interruption was actually a designed intersection.

## Designed Intersections

Imagine a 10-foot piece of rope stretched across the room. Allow this rope to represent your life. The beginning represents your birth; and the end your death.

As none of us knows the length of our days, picture a spot along the rope to represent today.

Now imagine another rope in the room. This one represents the life of your co-worker, or neighbor, or friend. We'll name her Fran. Picture a spot on her rope that represents her life at this moment, also today.



Now imagine crossing the ropes so that both “todays” intersect with each other.

Can you picture how unique this intersection is?

You see, out of all the people in the world you could work with, or live next to, or know as a friend - its Fran. And its not the Fran of the past, when she was a teenager; nor of the future, Fran the retiree; but Fran, today, just as she is.

And likewise, Fran gets to experience you - just as you are today. The present you - the you who just read these words.

What would happen if you prayed for these intersections, “Lord allow me to spend time today with the people of your choosing?” What if you asked God to orchestrate such meetings?

Throughout scripture it is evident God puts the right person, at the right place, at the right time. Ananias was there when Saul, later renamed Paul, asked what he needed to do. Nathan the prophet, at the right time, confronted King David about his hidden sin of murder and adultery. And out of the several gates leading into the temple of Jerusalem, Peter and John choose the Beautiful Gate at just the right time to meet and heal the crippled beggar. God has always been about putting the right people, at the right time, at the right place.

What if you saw every person you met today as person of the Lord’s choosing? What if every intersection was an answer to prayer?

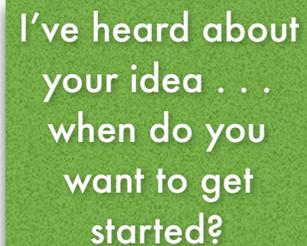
Suddenly every email, every phone conversation, every interruption is morphed into a divine appointment. Luck is removed from your vocabulary. And most importantly, a craving for direction, for words, for understanding, for clarity, for wisdom - a total dependency upon the Father is produced. For who among us can handle the potential holiness of the intersection? What we want to assume is the Lord is faithful, he will send the right person at the right time - God is at work!

## Wrong Guy

Frankly, I was a little offended when Bryan's custody trial ended. He had asked me to testify that he was a good dad. I had waited in the hallway for two days - but the trial ended and my testimony was never needed. Bryan thank me for coming and left.

But I remained. I wanted to go meet this judge who had me wait in the hallway. I learned later this had nothing to do with the judge, "the rule" had been evoked, meaning potential witness could not hear the testimony of others. But in ignorance, or better describe, arrogance, I wanted to offer a suggestion.

I walked in the courtroom looking for the Judge but instead found his bailiff. I was taken back - Calvin was the bailiff. Who would have thought out of all of the hundred of deputies who worked for the sheriff's department and out of all of the courtrooms he could have served, who would believe it would be my friend Calvin. Right person, right place.



I've heard about  
your idea . . .  
when do you  
want to get  
started?

Calvin and I exchanged stories and eventually I asked my question, "You know, I thought I'd seen a lot of pain in places, but Calvin, you gotta know these hallways are something else. Who is your chaplain? He's got some job."

Calvin looked at me like I was crazy. "Chaplain? In the courthouse? That can't be done. Its never been done. Why if you wanted to see that happen the judges would all have to sign off on it. You don't know any judges do you?"

Well as God would have it, I did. I knew only one. And he was brand new - just elected a few months before. He was the highest elected judge in 12 counties and we went to the same church. Right person. Right place.

I contacted him and shared with him my crazy idea. I wanted to volunteer three mornings a week to walk the hallways letting people in the process of divorce know that God wasn't done with them yet. Their spouse may be, but God wasn't. I wanted to attempt to give hope to the hopeless. I had no idea how, but knew it needed to be done.

In a matter of days another judge contacted me. His words were pointed. "I've heard about your idea," he said over the phone, "I think its great. When do you want to get started?"

Call it a panic attack, call it a moment of clarity, call it fear - but as he said these words, my office started spinning, my pulse began to race, I had to sit down. I thought to myself, "Lord, this was a crazy idea. I'm not the right person! You need someone who's lived it, not me Lord, I've been married since I was 20 and have never walked the path of divorce."

Somehow I managed to end the conversation with the judge without making a fool of myself. Next steps were agreed upon and things started happening.

But I was still questioning if I needed to hand this idea off to others. So, and I'm not proud of this, I pulled a Gideon. Gideon was the one in scripture who doubted his



calling and asked God for a sign. He and I had a lot in common: weak faith, overwhelming obstacles, strong sense of inadequacy, and both of us requested a sign. Gideon asked for a fleece. I asked for the strangest thing I could think of - an angel. I said, "God send me an angel and I'll know you want me to go."

Two weeks passed. I had not shared my weak and strange prayer request with anyone so I was quite surprised by what happened next. Eight of us had just ended our meeting. We were all full-time ministers at the church; each of us was used to praying with others. But out of all eight of us, for some reason, the receptionist looked at me and said, "There's a lady out here asking for prayer, can you meet with her?"

Tammy came into my office. We had never met before. She told me her story of a husband who was incarcerated and a son addicted to drugs. She was concerned her son would follow his father's footsteps. After listening, I offered to pray and politely told her she would be welcomed to pray as well.

When we both finished praying, Tammy kept her head bowed. She then said, "Randy, I know nothing about you or about this church, but the Lord has told me to tell you that standing over in the corner of your office is an angel."

I looked, but saw nothing.

"You can't see him?" she asked. "He's dressed in white and has a red sash on. That sash denotes power and authority. And this is what the Lord wants you to know . . . That angel has been with you and will go with you wherever you go." She paused and then repeated, "The Lord says you didn't get it - that angel has been with you and will go with you wherever you go."

Tammy left. I wept. My adventure was beginning. The Lord wanted me to intersect with lives in the hallways of the divorce courts. I eventually left my job and started a faith-based nonprofit as a chaplain in the courts. He surprised me, I was the right guy at the right time.

## A Changed Life

No it wasn't an accident - Philip was sent to meet the Ethiopian. But it does make one wonder, "Why send the man leading the revival? Why not send Peter or John? Or someone else from Jerusalem?"

Perhaps it was because Philip viewed people differently. The people of Samaria, were often despised. If Philip had been like most people of his culture, he never would have stepped foot in Samaria. Samaritans were so loathed it was the custom for Jews to walk around their country - to not even step foot on their soil - even though it meant walking extra miles in the process. But Philip went into Samaria. He offered Jesus to the very people that others refused to visit.

Perhaps, his willingness to go where tradition said he shouldn't was the very reason he was sent to the Ethiopian. Just like it made no sense for a Philip to go to Samaria, it made no sense for him to leave the revival. But he did. And as a result, the Ethiopian discovered the Christ who Philip loved. Right person. Right place. Right time. A designed intersection.

## It's Personal

You see out of all the people who read English, and out of all the people who could be reading these very words right now, God has placed them before your eyes.

At this very moment you are experiencing a designed intersection with these thoughts. You are the right person. This is the right time.



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## Next Steps

So here's what you do.

- You accept the truth that the Lord is in control - He places the right person, at the right place, at the right time.
- You earnestly ask, "Lord allow me to spend time today with the people of your choosing."
- Repeat it several times throughout the day until you really mean it. Continue this practice for 30 days.
- Then watch what God does with each conversation, each email, each intersection you have. You will become the right person, at the right place, at the right time.



*Get ready for an adventure. Jesus will answer your request.*

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## For Discussion:

1. Think about the people God has put you with this week. What have these moments demanded from you? What are you glad you did? What do you wish you would have done differently?
2. Think about the difficult relationships in your life. In what ways might they be designed intersections?
3. It's Personal: In what way(s) are you the right person at the right time? What do you think God hopes for you?

# Adventure 3:

## The Schoolhouse Prayer

### The Twist

In the movies, it's the unexpected twist that makes you take note. Who doesn't enjoy the surprise, "Luke, I am your father" ending?

One would think Christians, of all people, would expect the unexpected. We serve a God who does exceedingly beyond what we can ask or imagine. (Eph. 3:20) As a result, the unexpected is the norm.

But it appears the enemy has deceived many into believing life is dull, predictable, routine. How can life with an amazing God ever be characterized as routine?

For those who are open, God will enroll them in His school. Now every school has teachers and students.

The teacher is easy to recognize. She or he is usually older, trained, knowledgeable, and more experienced. The teacher's desire is to help. Students, on the other hand, may or may not be attentive, but are almost guaranteed to complain about being tested. Their desire is to make it to recess. Walk into a classroom, and it is quite easy to determine who are the students and who is the teacher.

But the twist is in the Lord's classroom, you never can be certain of the identity of those present. In fact, from moment to moment, the role changes. Teacher and student can change chairs mid-thought. At one minute, the Lord is directing you to share; but the next He is hoping you will receive.

### Double Identity

Isaiah 61 is a powerful chapter with a twist. The text describes the mission of one who is anointed by the Spirit. The servant is to bring good news to the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom to captives, announce a coming day of justice, and to comfort the grieving.

### The Schoolhouse Prayer:

Lord, put me in your Schoolhouse. If I am the teacher, may I teach as you; but if I am the student, remove my pride so I may truly learn.

As the message is experienced, an amazing transformation is pictured. Garments of grief are exchanged for garments of praise. Those bent over with despair - stand tall, like mighty oaks, declaring the praise of their deliverer. A grove of oaks stands where the afflicted once covered.

Then the twist . . . the servant looks, as it were, in a mirror. He admits he is not the one who brings transformation. Rather, the servant is merely the deliverer who himself has been delivered. He too has exchanged his garment for a garment of praise. He is both one who shares and one who receives. He is teacher. He is student.

In fact, there is a cadence, a rhythm to this passage. Its excitement builds upon itself. Its crescendo is reached as the servant recognizes he stands among the grove of mighty oaks, a grove that springs up before all nations to the praise of His glory.



Then the double twist . . . After Jesus began His public ministry news about Him spread. Upon returning to His hometown, people were curious. On the Sabbath, He went the synagogue and had a chance to read. (Luke 4:17) Out of all of the passages Jesus could have used to describe His ministry - this is the passage he selected. He could have referred to Moses, the law-giver. Or to Abraham, who was associated with the covenant. But instead, he used Isaiah 61.

Only a humble God would picture Himself as the deliverer who would need to be delivered from the grave. He chose to clothe himself with our garments of despair so we might exchange them for garments of praise.

### **Surprise Learning**

Once God opened the door for the court ministry, my education began. The plan was for me to wear a badge that designated me as Volunteer Chaplain. But first I needed to build relationships, and learn the culture of the court.

So for the first four months, I did nothing but pray and observe. One judge was kind enough to allow me to meet with him privately to ask any question concerning the process of divorce. The days seemed to drag on - not because there wasn't much to learn - but every day I witnessed so much pain. I was eager to start.

Finally, the day arrived and I was able to wear the badge, "Volunteer Chaplain." However, that first day, there was a problem. There were no people in the courthouse . . . or at least, that's what it seemed.

Mind you, the courthouse was actually quite full of people. Over 320 people per week were granted a divorce. Daily, the courts were a beehive of activity and this day was no different. But fear had blinded me. Worry had silenced me. What was I to say? Who should I talk to? And why would they listen?

So, I hid. I retreated to the deserted basement of the courthouse and had “me a sits.” There I confessed, “Lord, I am too scared to speak. I know I thought this day would never come - but now that its here, I can’t find any words. If you want this to happen, you are going to have to get someone to speak to me. I can’t do this.”

With that, I left the safety of the basement and made my way to the 3rd floor. It was the least crowded. There I found a nearly empty bench to sit.

There was only one other person on the bench. It was a lady, maybe in her 40’s, who was hugging the far end of the bench, about 10 feet away. On the bench the two of us sat, each hugging our respective ends like they were the best real estate in town.

But as soon as I sat, she strained way forward and looked my way. Her head slightly turned as she read my badge and said, “Volunteer Chaplain, huh. You must be here to talk to someone. I sure could use someone right now.”

She had no idea what had happened. But she had just become my teacher. I thought I was there to comfort her. But God switched our roles. I was now the pupil, she the instructor. God used her to remind me of His faithfulness. He provided just what I needed. I scooted down the bench and began to listen.

School was now in session.

## The Fountain of Humility

*All of you,  
clothe yourself  
with humility.  
(1 Peter 5:5)*

Practice the Schoolhouse Prayer daily and you may experience the fountain of humility.

Peter writes, “All of you, clothe yourself with humility.” (1 Peter 5:5)

I know of no better way to wear humility than to make the Schoolhouse Prayer a daily routine. It builds excitement into every conversation. It forces one to listen well to God’s leading. Am I to teach? Or I’m I to learn?

And the amazing thing is it that matters not with whom you are interacting. If God used a donkey to instruct His prophet Balaam (Numbers 22), he certainly can use you or anyone you meet.

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## Next Steps

So here's what you do:

- You earnestly ask, “Lord, put me in your Schoolhouse. If I am the teacher, may I teach as you; but if I am the student, remove my pride so I may truly learn.”
- Repeat it several times throughout the day until you really mean it. Continue this practice for 30 days.
- And then, hold on. You will be surprised! Surprised - at how He uses you to teach and at what you learn (and even who you learn it from).

Oh, good news! At this school, Jesus has already paid your tuition!

*Get ready for an adventure. Jesus will answer your request.*

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## For Discussion:

1. Think of someone in your life who inspired you by their faith walk and wisdom. How has their wisdom affect you?
2. When you find yourself in the position of teacher, what questions do you think you should reflect on to determine what the other person needs?
3. Which of these two roles, teacher-student, do you struggle with the most? Why?
4. Do you agree or disagree: “Practice this prayer daily and you may experience the fountain of humility.” Why or why not?

## Adventure 4: Mourning Prayers

Seldom do we attach the word risk to prayer. Prayers bring comfort. They bring peace.

That's often true, but not Mourning Prayers. The prayer of mourning is the sigh of grief.

Here's the prayer: "Lord, today, allow me to witness the consequences of sin."

But be warned: This will put you in grave danger for its fruit is risk - not just risk contemplated; but the risk assumed through action.

**Mourning Prayers:**  
Lord, today, allow  
me to witness the  
consequences of sin.

### Suit Up

This is the prayer the enemy fears most. He is the father of lies and deception (John 8:44). The last thing he wants is for you is to see the results of his schemes. So be prepared, he will distract you, attempt to convince you this prayer is beneath you, or above you, or may even try to overwhelm you with busyness thereby robbing you of the time required to absorb this prayer.

But suit up! "Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." (Eph. 6:11) Pray, "Lord, today, allow me to witness the consequences of sin."

Here's what may happen:

First, you may be flooded with new insights regarding the world. You may see the news differently. The jokes you hear at the workplace may sour your stomach even more than before. You may more easily recognize the hollowness of our culture. Consumerism may become more apparent.

Then you will look in the mirror and may find yourself struggling to continue gazing. You may be tempted to run; to hide. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, hiding - but hold fast my brother; hold onto God's promises my sister - this feeling is only the ploy of the evil one trying to wear you down. Remember, you are loved and highly valued; you are clothed with Christ and His righteousness defines your identity.

The third result may surprise you. You may experience two emotions at the same time: Gratitude and Anger. One second you may be thanking God for His rescue. Then the next you may be angry at the wreckage of sin. At one moment you may be overwhelmed by His grace. At another time, you may struggle as you see the faces of

innocents who are hurt by the consequences of sin. You may be incensed as you recognize sin's attempts to desensitize our culture - to call evil good and good evil. You may grieve its success at reducing individuals to mere objects on a screen, or relationships as toys to be tossed. These things will cause you to cry out, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

May your anger then allow you to take the next step - may you clearly see the enemy. May you feel mercy towards his victims, those who have bought into his lies. May your anger be focused.

If so, you may find your words increasingly filled with grace. You may find yourself crying out on behalf of the evil one's victims. Grief over sin may sweep over you. Your prayers may be filled with intensity.

**The ones who embark upon the Prayer of Mourning will find themselves at the center of the battle - standing in the gap between the broken and the presence of God.**

Next, you may find yourself not just contemplating risks but assuming them. Actions may be taken.

The ones who embark upon the Prayer of Mourning will find themselves at the center of the battle - standing in the gap between the broken and the presence of God. Pray this prayer and discover your checkbook - changed; your calendar - adjusted. This, of course, is why the enemy doesn't want you aware of his schemes (2 Cor. 2:11).

This leads to a life-style of ever greater dependency. Dependency because you will experience utter failure at stopping the consequences of sin. You will recognize you have no remedies. He alone is the Great Physician.

And then, you may find sweet comfort as you see first-hand the healing power the Redeemer. This is why Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." (Matt. 5:4)

### **Break My Heart For What Breaks Yours**

It was a Sunday afternoon and it was my turn to lead the study. It had been a year or so after I began walking the hallways of the Civil Courts when God opened another door.

A judge in the Juvenile Courts had heard about the work in the Civil Courthouse and asked if I could supply services to their courtrooms. These courts interfaced with about 6000 children, ages 10-17, each year.

Each had a story. Some, who were detained, had never before spent the night away from home. All were in need of hope.

The study I was to lead involved twelve male teens, detained for possible sexual offenses. It was a hard group. At least, that's the way they wanted to appear to each other. I related the simple story, of a gracious father, his prodigal son, and a clueless sibling.



They were captivated by the story found in Luke 15. They all related to the feelings of the prodigal as he left home, chuckled when he ate pig-slop (some even compared it to their current diet), but were silenced by the response of the Father who ran to meet his son.

When our time ended, one of the teens asked if he could talk to me privately. Permission was granted by a guard and the two of us found a quiet spot to chat.

“Was that story real, man?” he started. “I mean,” he continued, “I’ve never seen anything like that in my life.”

In this, he spoke the truth. He was being raised by an alcoholic grandmother, had never met his father, and his mother was, missing. For his hearing, he sat alone - no one from his family was present. He had been in detention for two months. No one had visited. He was 15 years old.

Tears began to well up in his eyes, “That’s some messed up story . . . Man, that’s just a fairy tale, right?” He looked down and wiped his eyes with his sleeve, “Do you think I could ever be loved like that?”

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How does this young man’s story make you feel? Angry? Sad? Compassionate?

Those responses are normal, but they are not enough. Start there, briefly dwell there, but do not end there. Do not allow your feelings of compassion and anger to substitute for movement. You must take the next step of mourning - action. If the enemy can not keep you from such feelings, his next ploy is to convince you that by feeling them, you’ve done something great.

Years ago, I had a friend who sought my counsel. He was in turmoil. He was having an affair with a married woman. He felt ashamed and guilty. He decided to end the relationship and asked the Lord for forgiveness.

Two months went by and he returned even more remorseful. He confessed he was now involved with another woman and felt awful. Again he ended the relationship and sought forgiveness.

One month went by and he returned. But before he could speak, I said, "Wait, let me guess, you're involved with someone new." He in horror said, "How did you know, is it out?" "No, I haven't heard, but its evident, I'm part of the problem. And I refuse to be part of it any more." He looked puzzled. "I need you to leave, right now. You are confusing visiting me with repentance. I am no substitute for action."

He was angry, but he left. That afternoon a mutual friend of ours called. He reported, "I don't know what you told him, but he is turning his whole life around. I've never seen this before."

I am weary of living in a world where the consequences of sin bring so much pain. It's time for action. It's time for Mourning Prayers.

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## Next Steps

So here's what you do:

- You suit up.
- You pray, "Lord, today, allow me to witness the consequences of sin."
- Repeat it several times throughout the day until you really mean it. Continue for 30 days.
- And then, know the roller coaster ride is coming - but know God is at work. Hope is at hand.



*Get ready for an adventure. Jesus will answer your request.*

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## For Discussion:

1. Think of a time you were angry at the wreckage of sin. Was the sin your own or someone else? What lesson did you learn?
2. Think of a time you were overwhelmed by His grace. How did you experience it? What lesson did you learn?
3. As a result of seeing more of the consequences of sin, what actions do you think the Lord is calling you to? What's your next step?

# Adventure 5: Will Alignment

For many disciples, prayer is a step above a chore. A duty to be performed.

Doesn't that strike you as odd? How can prayer, which was central to Jesus, be marginalized by those who want to live like him?

**Will Alignment:**  
Lord, what do you want? What grieves you. Show me.

## Earnest Prayers

When I lean into brokenness and start praying not because I should, but because compassion dictates I must, I find my will is changed. I begin aligning what I want with what God wants.

Perhaps this is one of the deeper purposes of prayer - it serves as a will alignment. Vehicles out of alignment can still negotiate freeways, but not without wear and tear. Serious misalignment causes wobbling and eventually halts progress. Can prayer alignment issues be similar?

## Why We Don't Pray

Lack of prayer is not as much an indication of apathy, low commitment, or of poor discipline as much as it's a sign of a self-absorbed life.

Frankly, we don't pray because we arrange our lives so we don't need to. We tend to reduce our calling to what is manageable or easy. We define the boundaries of our activities by the limits of our abilities.

But what if God wants us to look beyond our ability? What if His desire is for us to ask? To seek? To knock?

## Childish & Adult Prayers

Some have described two types of prayers - childish and adult. Childish prayers are those focused on self. Like the sea gulls in *Finding Nemo*, their cry is "Mine, mine, mine."

I think God, who is gracious, loves hearing from me even when my prayers are self-absorbed. But I can't help but wonder if there are times He longs for me to grieve with Him over the darkness which holds our world in captivity. Prayers motivated by a profound sense of despair over the effects of abortion, divorce, illness, abuse, sexual

addictions, and fatherlessness. These things He hold grievous. These are adult prayers.

A layer of childishness began to unravel when I stopped asking, “God, what is your will for my life?” and instead simply asked, “Lord, what do you want?”

The problem with the first question is I still remained in the middle of it - it was all about me. Adventure began when I started praying, “Lord, what do You want? What grieves You?”

Its quite clear what God is for. He is for people. All people. When a baby learns to walk, God is thrilled. When a husband loves his wife well, He smiles. When a mom caresses her newborn, He shares her feeling of deep joy.

On the other hand, when pain enters a marriage, He is grieved. When people are laughed at, He hurts. When oppression or prejudice erupts, He mourns.

**A layer of childishness began to unravel when I stopped asking, “God what is your will for my life?” and instead simply asked, “Lord, what do you want?”**

As I applied this thought to the world I lived in, things got clearer. It was not hard to determine from scripture that God was for children. His will was for kids to be in healthy environments where they experienced His love. He grieved when they were hurt.

I was the chaplain in a court house where 1500 children a month experienced their parent’s divorce. As I leaned into their stories, it became imperative - compassion dictated that I pray. I didn’t have to question what was God’s will - it was obvious he was for these kids. He wanted these children to know they were precious in His sight. So, I prayed that His will would be done for them.

And God, because He is good, made things happen. He allowed me to begin dreaming of a faith-based seminar for these children. As news spread of this possibility, a child therapist and a psychologist teamed up and volunteered to write curriculum. Several judges volunteered to record their voices as part of a children’s melodrama used at the seminar. Churches offered their facilities to host the events and provided volunteers. The seminar was born. Alignment with God’s will produced momentum. And as a result, thousands of children were helped and hundreds of volunteers were blessed.

### **The Tipping Point of Prayer**

There’s much I’m still learning about this, but I have discovered aligning my will to God’s may be the tipping point of prayer. A tipping point which produced three results:

First, I prayed more. When my heart aligned more with God's, I prayed not because I should, but because we shared common interests. Baseball fans can talk hours about pitching. Motorcycle enthusiasts love to talk Harleys. Likewise, the more my passions aligned with God's, the more I desired to share with Him. I found myself talking to Him often about helping children of divorce.

Second, I prayed with a greater intensity. As I began to share God's burden for these children, I could not help but pray earnestly. I began to ask, to seek, and to knock on their behalf. I woke up from my sleep of complacency. I learned that real prayer seldom happens until the needs of others trump the need of self.

Third, I saw God do amazing things. Dramatic changes occurred as I aligned my efforts and prayers with what I knew He was for. Funds and interest came from nowhere. Doors opened, where before, there were no doors. Favor was granted. Children were helped. I saw that will alignment and adventure often go together.

**Real prayer seldom happens until the needs of others trump the need of self.**

### **No Time for Prayer?**

Struggling to find time to pray? My friend, it's not time but rather your heart that's the issue. Your heart is out of alignment with God's. Ask Him what He is concerned about. Things will change when your will is aligned to His.

I believe Jesus was teaching this when he instructed us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matt:6:10) He underlined this by giving us an example in the Garden as He prayed, "Not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

For God's will to be done on the cross, it took the willing sacrifice of His son. Is it possible that God is waiting now for the sacrifice of our will for the next chapter of His will to be done?

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## Next Steps

So here's what you do:

- Be honest - guilt, self or compassion - which most often motivates your prayers?
- Get a will alignment. Pray: "Lord, what do you want? What grieves you? Show me."
- Repeat it several times throughout the day until you really mean it. Continue for 30 days.
- And then, look out for doors He opens.



*Get ready for an adventure. Jesus will answer your request.*

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## For Discussion:

1. The author wrote, "Frankly, we don't pray because we arrange our lives so we don't need to." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. How would you define "childish" and "adult" prayers? What are some examples of "adult prayers" that you have recently voiced? What motivated them?
3. Explore the difference between praying, "What's your will for my life?" and "What's your will." In what way(s) might it be dangerous?

# Adventure 6:

## The Hopegiver's Prayer

Hope is one of the few things everybody values, but no one really wants. What's desired is control. If I'm in control, I don't need hope.

That maybe one reason why grasping for control is so prevalent. The common assumption is a well maintained and controlled life produces predictable outcomes. Assumptions vary from person to person, but they go something like:

- If I work hard, I'll get ahead.
- If I play it safe, I'll live to see my grandchildren.
- If I'm kind and go to church, good things will come my way.

But the problem is we live in a fallen world. And no matter how badly we attempt to control our environment - security based on control is merely an illusion.

Just ask those whose homes were visited by a tornado; talk to those who were recently told they have cancer; or sit with one who was laid off from his or her job. None of us have control, but we like to think we do. And even though intellectually we know maintaining control is only a fantasy, we continue to seek it over hope.

That's why its such a great moment when the illusion of control is stripped away. When the tornado, or cancer, or layoff becomes real - then the lie about control becomes evident. And at that moment, one is vulnerable to accepting truth: Hope lies in the goodness of God - for He is always in control.

### Giving Hope

So how does one capture that moment and point people toward God, the source of hope? That's the challenge of the would-be hopegiver.

I believe the answer lies in the prayer, "Lord, help me to be fully present - and to point others to you."

### The Hopegiver's Prayer:

Lord, help me to be fully present - and to point others to you.

This implies two basic truths:

1. When you are fully present, others feel understood; and feeling understood is the doorway to hope. Without feeling that someone else “gets it” a person will hold tightly to their defenses. They will even argue, “You just don’t understand.” But if they feel heard and accepted, they can begin to release their grip and consider hope. The importance of feeling understood should not be minimized. Even though it is incomplete in itself, it sets the stage for the second basic truth.
2. People find hope when they experience God’s presence. This is what the Psalmist described, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.” (Psalm 46:1-2) Our task is to point people to Him, reminding them of God’s care.



## The Three Stories

To be fully present, one must become adept at hearing the three stories involved in every conversation - the external, the internal, and the sacred.

**The external story** includes the verbals and non-verbals that are shared between two people. Its the facts and nuances of a conversation. An example is the dialogue between two friends who share the news of the opening of a new restaurant which features New Orleans cuisine.

**The internal story** is the private dialogue within an individual while the conversation is taking place. For example, as one friend mentions New Orleans cuisine, the other may act like he’s engaged in the conversation, but in reality, his internal story has him remembering the New Orleans vacation he shared with his family.

The sacred story involves listening for God’s purpose in the conversation. Consider, “Out of all of the people who could be hearing news about this new restaurant, why has God allowed me to be here? What has God already been doing in this person’s life up to this point? How might God use this moment for something in the future?”

So to be fully present, one needs God’s help to:

- Catch the verbal and non-verbals of the external story.
- Monitor one’s own internal story. It’s important to gage this well. If the volume of the internal story is too loud, it can overpower the external story. However, if its muted, insight may be lost. Listening to one’s internal story is helpful as it gives clues beyond what is said, to what is meant.
- Listen well to the sacred story.

Hearing all three stories allows one to be fully present by being more aware of what has been, what is, and what might be. Only the God who was, and is, and is to come can grant such wisdom. This cannot be accomplished without prayer.

Listening at this deep level allows the person in pain to feel accepted, understood and valued. Without this, the one in pain will dismiss your efforts thinking, “They just don’t get it.” However, when a person feels understood, defenses are removed and a pathway to hope opens.



### Pointing Toward God

But this of course, is only the door to hope, it is not hope. Hope begins when God is experienced.

When I first started in the courts, I had business cards printed up that had in bold print, “May I help you?” They were quite handsome cards. Embossed lettering. Inviting font. I would walk

up to individuals I met in the hallways of the courts who were visibly distressed and with sincerity, give them a card. I expected a response. The cards were attractive and I meant well. But no one called.

Then I changed my card. I handed out a simple card that read, “May I pray with you?” My phone began to ring. Judges began to ask for my assistance in special cases. The difference was dramatic.

The first card offered limited hope while the second promised hope in abundance.

To give hope, you point people to God. You remind them He has never left. Sometimes you use words, but usually your actions communicate it better. You remind them by your kindness, that God cares. Your physical presence communicates they are not forgotten, by you or by God.

And then, when they share, you listen. Listen to all three stories. You will see defensives drop. And when the timing is right, you remind them of God's goodness.

When young David was called upon to face Goliath, the King provided him with armor believing that's what he needed. David, on the other hand, clothed himself with hope. David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1 Sam. 17:36)

### **Breaking Down Barriers**

The divorce courts certainly is a place seemingly devoid of hope. But as its Volunteer Chaplain, I was amazed at the hope God brought and the walls hope demolished.

When I first began to serve, people were a little nervous. No one was certain how it would work - would it prove helpful or divisive? Meaningful or trite? Manipulative or supportive?

There was one judge in particular who was apprehensive. She was concerned my role would be used to unduly influence people during a vulnerable time in their lives.

However, there was a day that changed. When I arrived at the courthouse that day, trials had already begun. And the case before this judge was especially difficult. It involved several children who were victims of abuse. And there were pictures. Difficult pictures.

The judge had been so moved by them she needed time to regroup. She dismissed everyone from her courtroom. One of the bailiffs in another court had heard something challenging was going on in her courtroom. He said, "I don't know what it is, but it sounds like you are needed there."



When I walked in the courtroom, I was surprised to see it emptied. Only her bailiff remained. I still had no idea what had occurred but her bailiff nodded his head to her chambers where the judge was secluded.

I opened her door and quietly walked to her desk. There I saw the pictures. Children. Hurt. Innocent victims of extreme violence.

Grief swelled up. Then anger. Then more grief. I then looked at the judge. The two of us wept. Not a word was exchanged.

But God did something in those moments. I was able to join her in her sadness. Both of our jaws were locked in resolved determination.

Somehow hope was born. Perhaps it was born by the silence. Perhaps it was born because the burden was shared - she didn't have to carry this weight by herself. Perhaps it came because I didn't offer some bandaid of a fix. Instead, I shared the pain. I experienced it. God had not allowed her to suffer this knowledge by herself. He had sent me to bear it with her.

From that day forward, this judge was one of my strongest allies. Her wisdom and counsel helped me negotiate difficult challenges in the days ahead. And when others were quick to question whether a chaplain was needed, she was quick to come to my defense.

*Hope: There is great mystery here. Unwanted yet highly needed. Sharable but not ours to give. Our task is to remove barriers, lower defenses. We listen, and we point people to God. And He, because He is good, brings hope.*

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## Next Steps

Are you ready for your adventure?

If so, here's what you do:

- You pray consistently, “Lord, help me to be fully present - and to point others to you.”
- Repeat it several times throughout the day until you really mean it. Continue for 30 days.
- Practice listening for all three stories. Ask Him to train you to be fully present.
- Be on look out for the walls he removes.
- And then, be a good pointer . . . remind the hurting, by your kindness, presence, and as needed, with words, that God has never left.



***Get ready for an adventure. Jesus will answer your request.***

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## ***For Discussion:***

1. For you, what's the hardest thing about being fully present to others?
2. Can you think of a time when someone gave you hope? How did their message fill you with hope? How did they remind you of God?
3. Think of someone in your life who needs hope. In light of what you learned, what might be some of your actions?

## Special Note

The ministry in the courts related in this book resulted in the establishment of NewDay Services for Children and Families. NewDay is located in Ft. Worth, TX.

- After two decades, Newday now has 20 employees, has participated in a federal grant, and has been invited to work in 4 counties.
- It provides spiritual support and guidance to the Civil Courts, Juvenile Justice Center, and One Safe Place for victims of domestic violence.
- In 2015 alone, it delivered services to 1,641 families, 774 fathers, and 248 mothers. This positively impacted the lives of 6,558 children.

See [newdayservices.org](http://newdayservices.org) for more information.

All of this is due to the graciousness of our God.

*Thank you Lord. Thank you.*

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## About the Author

Randy Thomas in addition to being the founder of NewDay Services, has also started [helpfulchurch.com](http://helpfulchurch.com).

He and his wife, Kathy, have been married for 40 years and have three grown children. In addition, he serves as the Care Pastor at Rock Point Church in Queen Creek, AZ.



Randy specializes in training others on how to extend hope to those in need.

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For additional copies of this book or other information, please visit:

The logo for Helpful Church.com features two stylized human figures, one blue and one green, holding hands above the word 'HELPFUL' in green. To the right, the word 'CHURCH' is in blue, and '.com' is in black. The text is in a bold, rounded, sans-serif font.