

A 40-DAY PRAYER DEVOTIONAL

**THE
GOD
WHO
HEARS**

JAMES MERRITT

FOREWORD BY GREG LAURIE

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*I dedicate this book to all the prayer warriors
I have pastored and connected with along so many avenues over the years
who have let me know of their constant prayers for me.*

You know who you are.

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FOREWORD

GREG LAURIE

Have you ever been in what seemed like an impossible situation with no way out? Have you ever had a desperate need that had no seemingly possible solution?

Have you ever thought there was no future for you, and that it was just too late?

If so, then you need to know more about the power of God and what can take place through prayer.

One thing that stands out in the pages of Scripture is that prayer can dramatically change situations, people, and, on occasion, even the course of nature itself. But what prayer changes the most is you and me.

God allows hardship and difficulties in our lives so He can reveal Himself and put His power and glory on display for those who are watching. When we pray, we're acknowledging our weakness and our need for God's help.

Maybe that's the reason we don't pray as much as we ought to. Prayer is an admission of weakness on our part, and some people don't like to admit they have a need.

The strongest man who ever lived was Jesus Christ, and we read repeatedly in the Gospels that Jesus prayed—and He prayed a lot. He would spend the night in prayer. He would rise up early while the disciples were still sleeping and pray. And as the crucifixion approached, He turned to the Father in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Bible tells us that “while Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God” (Hebrews 5:7 NLT). Notice the phrase “with a loud cry and tears.” There’s a place for that too in prayer.

So if Jesus, who is God, prayed a lot, then undoubtedly we need to pray a lot too.

God is deeply involved and deeply concerned about what you’re facing right now. If it concerns you, then it concerns Him. But we also need to recognize that prayer is getting God’s will on Earth, not our will in heaven.

As Christians, we know this, yet we would all have to admit that we don’t pray as much as we ought. But I have good news for you...help is on the way!

My good friend Pastor James Merritt deals with how you can unlock your prayer life, and you are holding that book right now in your hand. He is one of the finest Bible teachers in the world today, and when he speaks or writes, I take the time to listen.

In *The God Who Hears*, Pastor James focuses on the prison prayers of the great apostle Paul and shares practical and applicable truth that will enhance your prayers.

Let’s get started and learn more about prayer together!

INTRODUCTION

YES, GOD HEARS US

*If you believe in prayer at all, expect God to hear you.
If you do not expect, you will not have. God will not
hear you unless you believe He will hear you; but if you
believe He will, He will be as good as your faith.¹*

CHARLES SPURGEON

You hear prayers.

PSALM 65:2 NET

Here's a story you may have encountered before, but can you relate to it? A young reporter in Israel was searching for a human-interest story when she learned about an old man who'd been praying at the Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem twice a day, every day, for many years. Sure enough, she found him there, standing as he rocked back and forth with eyes closed, beating his breast, raising his hands to God, passionately praying.

When he stopped, the reporter approached him and asked, "Sir, how many years have you been praying here?"

“Fifty,” he told her.

“What do you pray for?”

“I pray for peace between the Jews and Arabs, for our children to grow up in safety and friendship. I especially pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”

“Do you believe your prayers are effective?”

With apparent sadness, the old man replied, “Not really. I feel like I am talking to a wall.”

Before you begin this devotional prayer journey, I believe I owe it to you to be upfront, candid, and transparent. Praying has always been hard work for me. Sometimes I’ve felt as though my prayers were just bouncing off the walls or the ceiling, never leaving the room, never moving the needle, and bringing frustration rather than exhilaration. I’ve even considered raising the white flag of surrender and giving up. So not only do I not think of myself as a great prayer warrior, but I’m still learning how to pray both effectively and with certainty that I’m truly connecting with God.

The truth is I’m not sure any Christian graduates from the school of prayer, so I’m guessing that you, too, would benefit from learning more about how to pray. Here’s the first lesson we all need to learn, coming through what may be the three greatest words about prayer we’ll ever hear:

God hears prayer

These simple, short, single-syllable words lined up in a sentence tell us why every follower of Jesus can pray not only consistently, constantly, and continuously, but also confidently. They can transform how we think about prayer, believing that our prayers can make an eternal difference in both our lives and the lives of others. But when I say God hears prayer, don’t just take my word for it. Over and over in his Word, God himself tells us he hears when we call:

- The righteous cry out, and *the Lord hears* (Psalm 34:17).
- Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, *I will hear* (Isaiah 65:24).
- Call to me and *I will answer you* (Jeremiah 33:3).

When you pray, you also have the Lord's full attention. He hangs on every word you say. He doesn't put you on hold, ask you to wait in line, or require you to make an appointment.

The second lesson we must learn was succinctly stated by English preacher Charles Spurgeon:

*God will not hear you unless you believe he will hear you.*²

This makes sense, doesn't it? If you don't believe another person is listening during a conversation between the two of you, what will happen to your attempt to communicate? But again, his Word makes it clear that God *is* listening. First Peter 3:12 says, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer."

Now, knowing and believing that God hears our prayers is foundational to our prayer lives, but we also need to know *how* to pray—to the glory of God but also because we want to make the connection with him we so crave. We want to replace the feeling we're not getting through to God with the knowledge that our prayers are truly soaring to his very throne room.

Here's a true story illustrating how important it is to make sure we're on heaven's wavelength—and that we know how to get there.

When Nelson Rockefeller was the vice president of the United States in the 1970s, he called one of his Secret Service agents, frustrated. He'd been calling the White House to speak to the president, but the operator kept hanging

up on him even though he told her who he was. The agent discovered that, despite a special signal phone having been installed in his residence—a “drop line”—Rockefeller had been calling some number he looked up himself and using a regular phone. All he had to do was pick up the signal phone’s receiver, and he’d be put right through.³

As you read about the apostle Paul’s telling the churches in Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae what and how he prayed for them, I believe you’ll see that he had a direct “drop line” to God. After all, he knew he wasn’t praying to just any god; he was praying to the God who hears, who listens. These prayers also serve as a divine model for how we can pray not just when we’re in crisis but when we’re not. In fact, the best way to learn how to pray when in a crisis is to pray when not in one.

Imprisoned when he wrote these letters we now call epistles, Paul shared prayers we can pray for others just as he did. But we can also personalize them and pray for ourselves. We can pray for anyone and anywhere, anytime, and under any circumstances.

Max Lucado said, “Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.”⁴ I can assure you that as you learn from these prayers that are as much for us as they were for the churches to whom Paul wrote, your own prayers won’t be awkward, your attempts won’t be feeble, your petitions will make a difference, and you can rest assured they will be heard.

Let’s begin this journey of learning how to pray to the God who hears.

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

NEVER GIVE UP ON GOD

When you feel like quitting, think about why you started.¹

ANONYMOUS

For personal reasons, I can't disclose what I went through during the toughest two and a half years of my life, but I faced a situation I never dreamed I would. And after trying to fix it on my own, I finally realized the only thing I could do was pray. So I did, crying out to God over and over. But he didn't seem to be listening, and more than once I thought, *What's the use? Either God doesn't hear me, or I'm just not connecting with him.*

F.B. Meyer said, "The greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer."² Yet on one of the darkest, most depressing days of my whole ordeal, when I was about to give up on even asking God to help, this thought hit me: *If I give up on prayer, I give up on God.*

So as my trial persisted, I kept praying, day after day, asking for God's will to be done in my life and in this situation, no matter what the outcome would be.

Then literally all in one day, my prayer was answered in a far better way than I could have asked. And because of my experience in prayer throughout

those two and a half years, I've come to understand the following two truths I believe are even more important than answered prayer:

1. *Prayer is almost never a one-and-done deal.* We aren't praying to a genie whose lamp we rub and then suddenly appears to grant whatever we wish. We're praying to the God who wants us to pray to him about any situation or concern not once but repeatedly, not only to practice the discipline of true prayer but to develop patience. To grow in our trust in him.
2. *Prayer is not for God to do something for us but to allow him to do something in us.* For so long I hadn't been ready for God to do what I wanted him to do *for* me because I wasn't hearing what he first wanted to do *in* me. We can't stop at hoping or even believing that God is listening; we have to listen to him too. William McGill nailed it when he said, "The value of persistent prayer is not that [God] will hear us, but that we will hear him."³

Not long after I entered this difficult period, someone I love and trust and knew what I was going through gave me a paperweight that still sits on my desk today. I saw it every time I sat down to spend time with God, and here are its three words as they appear:

Pray

Trust

Wait

There's no way around it. I wanted to pray. I understood trust. But the wait part? I wanted to pass. Yet powerful prayer is prevailing prayer. We pray.

We trust. We wait. And then we repeat all three. Giving up on prayer wasn't the way to go, because as I continued to pray, I grew more in tune with waiting for God's solution, believing it would come.

Hear this carefully: *The only failure in prayer is the failure to offer prayer.* Paul reminds us of the need for perseverance in prayer in his opening statement: "Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father..." (Ephesians 1:15-16). Paul knew that when you give up on prayer, you give up on God. The oldest temptation in the book goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to give up on God, and I don't have to tell you how disastrous that was!

Anyone who knows me understands I'm possibly the biggest Georgia Bulldogs fan on this planet, and I've discovered that, for me, being a devotee of the University of Georgia's football team relates to a biblical concept—no joke! Let me start by telling you the characteristics of a bulldog.

This dog will never win a beauty contest. Its nose is stuck up between its eyes, its legs are short and fat, and its shoulders are almost too wide for the rest of its body. But I discovered that the bulldog breed was developed during medieval times and was named because of its function. It gave the impression of being "a little bull," and so the dogs were originally used to attack bulls in an arena to stir them up for combat.

I went on to learn that the very physical characteristics that make this dog somewhat ugly are what make it powerful. Its shoulders help it stand its ground during combat. Its nose is placed in an upward position so that when another animal attacks, it can hold on to it and breathe at the same time. Furthermore, its opponent can't block the flow of oxygen to force the dog to let it go, and the bulldog has such tenacity that it won't let go until its attacker is incapacitated or dead!

When as an old man Joshua was saying farewell to the Israelite leaders, he told them, “Hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now” (Joshua 23:8). I’ve learned that when it comes to prayer, I need to hold on to God and his promises with bulldog tenacity!⁴ Don’t let go of your hope in God nor of the God of hope. No matter what problem you need solved, what question you need answered, or from what difficulty you need deliverance, keep praying to the God who will never fail you.



Father, I will never give up on prayer, for I will never give up on you! When all else around me is falling apart, coming unhinged, and vanishing beneath my feet, I will tie the rope of prayer around your feet and hold to your unchanging power and presence that always comes with and through prayer to the one who always keeps his promises. In the name of the One who taught us to pray and never give up, amen.