



BONNIE ST. JOHN

# Prayer Guide

**HOW STRONG WOMEN PRAY**

by Bonnie St. John



This guide has two parts: Group Leader's Guide and Individual Prayer Guide. Individuals may want to skip to page 6.

## Part 1 – Group Leader's Guide

### **SETTINGS FOR USING HSWP**

How Strong Women Pray can serve as a useful guide to direct and inspire those seeking to build and enhance their personal prayer life. The book may be used for personal prayer and Bible study, and in a variety of group contexts, including:

#### **MID-WEEK PRAYER SERVICE OR BIBLE STUDY:**

Use HSWP as a closing or opening activity during mid-week prayer service or Bible study. Use the Long-term Group activity below to help participants become more focused on prayer. You also may use HSWP as a special, six-week study on prayer. Study one of the sections at a weekly meeting for six sessions.

#### **VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL:**

HSWP can be used as the curriculum for an adult VBS class, or at the beginning or close of each VBS lesson if standard curriculum is used. To use during VBS, discuss one or two of the sections nightly, for example,

**Day One:** Opening study on prayer;

**Day Two:** Facing Life's Storms with Childlike Faith;

**Day Three:** Climbing the World's Highest Mountains;

**Day Four:** From Marriage to Politics: Powerful Relationships and Motherhood and Working with the Spirit;

**Day Five:** In the Valley, We Grow, and, And Still I Rise . . .

#### **WOMEN'S MISSIONS SOCIETY:**

Use HSWP to begin the meeting and set the tone for your weekly/monthly missions study. After opening the session, the leader or a member of the group should read aloud an excerpt from one woman's life experience and method of prayer. You also may use HSWP as a special, six-week study on prayer. Study one of the six sections at your regularly scheduled meeting. If you want to engage in a longer study of HSWP, highlight one of the contributors during each missions meeting and rotate among the six sections for study each meeting thereafter.

#### **PRIVATE OR CHURCH-RELATED PRAYER GROUP:**

Use HSWP as a focal point or as a study on prayer before actual praying commences. At each occasion of the group's meeting, consider what type of prayer the primary focus will be, according to the sections of the book: 1. Facing Life's Storms with Childlike Faith; 2. Climbing the World's Highest Mountains; 3. From



Marriage to Politics: Powerful Relationships; 4. Motherhood and Working with the Spirit; 5. In the Valley, We Grow; 6. And Still I Rise.... If you want to engage in a longer study of HSWP, highlight one of the contributors during each prayer meeting session and rotate among each of the six sections for study each session thereafter.

## **SUNDAY SCHOOL:**

Combine HSWP with a close-ended study on prayer (perhaps 13 weeks or one quarter). Each week, choose a Bible passage as the focal point of study, and find stories in HSWP that help to expound on that passage. Follow the model for Long-term Groups.

## **PRAISE SERVICE:**

Use the experiences of the book's contributors and their various victories/deliverances as a foundation for a praise service, thanking God for His ability and willingness to deliver those who call on His name. Read a contribution from the book and pray on this type of circumstance that others may be confronting (i.e. relationship problems, adult child issues, divorce, bereavement, employment problems). Offer words and songs of prayer and praise for their circumstances.

## **EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH:**

Use HSWP as an evangelistic tool to reach out to women who may be struggling with various life circumstances—from professional women to women who are marginalized by society. Share the stories of the contributors and help women understand that, through prayer, their own circumstances can be positively affected. This approach may be helpful in reaching women who may not be ready to commit to regular church attendance or participate in organized religion.

## **SHORT-TERM GROUPS OR TOPIC-ORIENTED BIBLE STUDY SESSION:**

The various HSWP contributors have a number of different approaches to prayer. Some talk and listen to God continuously during the day. Others have specific times and approaches to prayer. Ask group members to share their individual approaches to prayer and how they evolved into their personal style of prayer.

Ask each member of the group to find a contributor to the book who can serve as a prayer model. This should be a person with whom the member can identify in terms of circumstances or mode of prayer in relating to God. Discuss: How can we benefit from identifying with others through our approach to prayer or our life circumstances? Allow members to review their various contributions included in this guide and answer the personal reflection questions.

## **LONG-TERM GROUPS, PRAYER CIRCLES, MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY, WOMEN'S MISSIONARY SOCIETIES:**

The various HSWP contributors have a number of different approaches to prayer. Some talk and listen to God continuously during the day. Others have specific times and approaches to prayer. Ask group members to share their individual approaches to prayer and how they evolved into their personal style of prayer.

## Group Study Guide for HSWP

### **INTRODUCTORY SESSION: ASSESSING YOUR PERSONAL PRAYER LIFE**

In order to help group members develop or enhance their individual prayer life, discuss the various experiences and prayer approaches of HSWP contributors and pose the Personal Reflection questions included in this guide intermittently throughout your sessions. Before beginning Section I, discuss the merits of each various modes of prayer and techniques for praying.

Author Bonnie St. John writes of the contributors to HSWP:

“Despite their differences, their prayer lives were similar. They prayed anywhere and everywhere: in cars, bathrooms, beds, gyms, planes, and more. They talked to God in normal words, sometimes even out loud.”

I’ve learned that prayer is simply the desire to be closer to God. God is always there for us, reaching out to connect. We are the ones who turn away, get busy, and tune out God. Prayer is what brings us back into alignment — into oneness — with God.”

### **STUDY I. FACING LIFE’S STORMS WITH CHILDLIKE FAITH**

1. Every person goes through storms at some point in life. Ask a member or several (as time permits) to share a personal life storm and how prayer helped him/her through.
2. Ask members to share how going through the storm strengthened him/her, perhaps in preparation for other events in life.
3. Members should list their personal philosophy/formula for dealing with the storms of life. Members who feel led should share their list with the entire group.
4. Ask: What do you pray for when you are in the midst of a life storm?
5. How did you relate to God during your most recent storm? How did the storm affect your relationship with God? With others connected to you during the storm?

### **STUDY II. CLIMBING THE WORLD’S HIGHEST MOUNTAINS**

1. Read the lyrics to “Lord, Don’t Move the Mountain,” by Inez Andrews (available online). Ask: Is this your response to God when facing spiritual mountains?
2. Ask members to share his/her personal spiritual strategy for climbing mountains.
3. Ask: What is faith that moves mountains?
4. Discuss: How can climbing mountains be viewed as spiritual adventure?
5. Ask members to share a favorite passage that they rely on for encouragement to climb mountains?



### **STUDY III. FROM MARRIAGE TO POLITICS: POWERFUL RELATIONSHIPS**

1. Share: Why are relationships so vital to spiritual growth?
2. Give group members a sheet of paper and a pencil. Ask each to draw an image of symbol that to them represents positive relationships (for example: a circle may represent wholeness or completeness). Allow members to share their drawing. Then, ask them to share how prayer can facilitate building or creating the images that they drew.
3. Ask: What relationship in your life has served, more than any other, to bring you closer to God?
4. Discuss: How does prayer build our personal relationship with God? How has your prayer life built your personal relationship with God?
5. Ask members to search this section of the book and share a passage that they found most meaningful and insightful regarding relationships and prayer.

### **STUDY IV. MOTHERHOOD AND WORKING WITH THE SPIRIT**

1. Share: How does the image of motherhood help us to relate to God? Read Luke 13:34.
2. Ask members who are mothers to share how they prayed during pregnancy/adoption; after the child was born or came to her; and her prayers as a mother today. Ask women who do not have children to share ways that their prayer lives have been affected through mothering relationships—whether they were being mothered or were motherly to a younger person.
3. Search this section of the book and share a passage that you found most meaningful and insightful regarding relationships and prayer. How do mother-child-type relationships help us to understand our relationship with God and His loving, nurturing ways?
4. Discuss: How does prayer help a mother/parent today in negotiating the difficult task of giving a child age-appropriate freedom in today's world? (For example, allowing a teenager to have a car)
5. How can the experience of parenting (even for brief periods of time) strengthen one's relationship with God through prayer and through action?

### **STUDY V. IN THE VALLEY, WE GROW**

1. Define what being "in the valley" means to you.
2. Give group members a sheet of paper and a pencil. Ask each to make two columns. In the first column, they should list healthy emotions and feelings when in the valley. The other column should contain unhealthy emotions and feelings. Ask members to share how the positive emotions/feelings can enhance prayer and the unhealthy emotions/feelings can hinder prayer. (Recognize that some members may list unhealthy emotions as healthy and vice versa.)
3. Ask: How do you know when you're in the valley and how do you pray when you are?



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4. Ask members to share a valley experience that facilitated powerful spiritual growth? Ask them to share how prayer made the difference.
5. Ask members to search this section of the book and share a passage that they found most meaningful and insightful regarding prayer when in the valley.

### **STUDY VI. AND STILL I RISE . . .**

1. Read Maya Angelou's "And Still I Rise..." Ask members: How can we pray to have an "And Still I Rise" attitude about life? In what is such an attitude rooted?
2. How can a strong prayer life foster in us in achieving and maintaining an indomitable human spirit?
3. Ask: In what area of your life has possessing an "And Still I Rise..." attitude helped your spiritual growth?
4. Discuss the vastly different life experiences of the women in this section—from Immaculee Ilibagiza to Kathy Ireland to Dorothy Height—and how each of them succeeded with an "And Still I Rise..." attitude.
5. Search this section of the book and share a passage that you found most meaningful and insightful about being a servant of the Lord who possesses an indomitable spirit.

## **Tips for enhancing prayer group experiences**

Use the following ideas to enhance your teaching/learning experience using HSWP:

1. Use presentation software such as PowerPoint to project key phrases from each of the six sections of HSWP. As you pray, flash a key phrase from one of the contributors on the screen. For example, if your group is praying about "Facing Storms with Childlike Faith," you may use a quote from Ann Marie Moloney: "You need God backing you up.... He's the strongest backup I'll ever have. If you don't believe in Him, if you don't have faith, how do you go out there?" Then, focus your prayer on persons who are facing difficult circumstances. Pray that they will face their particular uncertainties with complete faith and trust in God and God's ability to give deliverance, according to His will.
2. Choose several quotations from different contributors to the book and write a quote from them on an index card. Give each member of the group one or more cards. For silent prayer, each member should read his/her card silently and proceed with prayer. For group prayer, ask a member to read a quote aloud and proceed with prayer.
3. A member may read a passage from the book aloud or role play a contributor's story or experience before the group a before prayer begins.
4. Write quotes from the book on slips of paper. Place of the slips into a glass jar or some other container. Pass the container to group members and ask them to pull one. Ask group members to read the quote to the group and initiate a prayer related to those circumstances. For example, if a group member has

chosen a slip of paper with a quote from Maya Angelou, such as, “If I could go back to when I was twenty years old and teach myself something about prayer, I would just tell myself to be more grateful. Be even more grateful.” The member should then pray about gratitude for God’s blessings.

## Part 2 – Individual Prayer Guide

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Review the following excerpts from the contributors to HSWP. After reviewing their comments, use the Personal Reflection questions and exercises to help you to enhance your personal prayer life. These stories and reflection activities may be used as a part of the activities in the HSWP Prayer Guide or in your private prayer time.

When I was on the road as Miss America, one of my oldest friends contacted me with an important request. She was dying of cancer and wasn’t sure how much longer she had to live. She asked me to pray for her, and of course I agreed.

I wasn’t exactly sure what to do. Should I pray for a long time? Maybe I should fast? I decided that God was in charge of her life, and if it was time for her to leave the earth, praying for a long time wasn’t the answer. I sat down and said to God, “My friend has cancer. I don’t know what Your plan is for her life. I trust Your decision and I ask You to give her a peaceful feeling about whether she will die soon or not.”

Heather Whitestone McCallum  
Miss America 1995

PERSONAL REFLECTION 1: Heather’s story affirms that at times circumstances confront us that are so overwhelming we may not know what or how to pray. When you face situations that appear to be overwhelming how do you pray? How can you remain focused on God’s will, which may not be what you would like the outcome to be? Cite a personal Scripture passage that comforts and assures you to trust the will and work of God.

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I didn’t think about any of that. I just went and I did what I had to do. How do you find the strength in a situation like that? It’s God. Who else could it be?

There’s no question that I had the courage to do it because I trusted and I knew that He was going to help me. If that poor child had passed away, obviously I would have been devastated, but at least I know personally that I did everything I could to make sure that baby was okay.

You need God backing you up, especially on this job. He’s the strongest backup I’ll ever have. If you don’t believe in Him, if you don’t have faith, how do you go out there?

Ann Marie Moloney  
NYPD Detective

PERSONAL REFLECTION 2: Ann credits the presence of God in her life with giving her the strength to do what was required of her. How strong is your prayer life? Has your relationship with God developed to the extent that you feel certain of His presence and strength, even during the difficult times? In what ways has God's presence been made known to you as you facing a trying circumstance?

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Where is my loved one? Is Kendrick in heaven? What is that like, Lord? So one night for some reason I just had to question. I said, "Lord I really want to know if what I believe is true. Is the spirit part of Kendrick is still here? I really want to know about that. Is that the way it really is?"

When the serviceman told us that the house could have blown up. Immediately, I thought back to my prayer. I had a sense of inner knowing that this was the answer to my prayer.

Dr. Suzanne Karefa-Johnson  
Hospice Physician

PERSONAL REFLECTION 3: How can prayer strengthen your faith regarding loved ones who have passed on? Has prayer helped your relationship with God grow to the point that you are certain about what lies beyond death?

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Everyone told me not to worry about Katrina. They said, "On TV they say it's going in the other direction." But I knew it was coming to New Orleans. God told me, "Get out now. Don't wait."

When the last hurricane had threatened New Orleans, I prayed, "God, if you get me out of this one, I will never, ever stay and wait. As soon as I hear the warning I will prepare to go. I will never take a chance."

My conversations with God are just like talking to a human being, the same as talking to anyone. It's just a simple routine of asking God to help me or to show me what to do. It can be as simple as: Lord, help me. I don't drop to my knees at a certain time of day, but I'm always asking the Lord to guide me in the direction that He chooses. If something important is not going to work out, I just get a sense or...a feeling from Him about what I should do.

Colette Branch  
Owner, Independent Living Services Business

PERSONAL REFLECTION 4: How does Colette's explanation of her prayer life underscore the significance of listening to God in order to gain direction? How can having ongoing conversation with God help you to have greater trust in God for direction any time, anywhere?

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Through prayer, I learned that all of my gifts and all of my talents were from God, and that He was using me to do something with those talents. Now I know it's not even about me. It's all God.... I believe that praying as a family has strengthened us to meet the challenges that have come our way. When we are willing to be in a relationship and listen to Him, God can do great things!

Vonetta Flowers  
2002 Olympic Gold Medalist

PERSONAL REFLECTION 5: Vonetta's experience with prayer highlights the importance of knowing that God has given us gifts and talents, and that it is through Him we accomplish great feats, rather than through any personal sense of greatness. How does your prayer life reflect the greatness of God rather than the greatness of self? How does prayer help you to maintain perspective regarding who you are and who God is?

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Listening to God is not like hearing voices. What happens to me is that I get into a frame of mind where a tranquility comes over me that enables me to go back down the hill and not be swallowed by the things that are thrown at me, to not be overwhelmed by what's waiting for me.

It's a feeling of serenity. It's not specific words. It's not as though God tells me, "At 9:30 this particular issue will come up and this is what I want you to say." God isn't saying "do this or do that." I have to make my own decisions. But He is putting me into a frame of mind where things are not as overwhelming, and I am better able to cope.

Libby Pataki  
Former First Lady of New York State

PERSONAL REFLECTION 6: Libby has found great value in stillness with God. In what way(s) does stillness in the presence of God benefit you most? How do you arrive at the stillness you require for prayer? Is it creating a physical environment or a mental condition?

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When I slowed down and cut out the chatter of TV, computers, phones, and non-stop activity, I made space to begin hearing God and open the door to a relationship with Him. I didn't know it at the time, but the habit of "self-hypnosis" that I took with me off the mountain would be the way that God was finally able to get through to me.

Bonnie St. John  
Author, Motivational Speaker

PERSONAL REFLECTION 7: Bonnie made space in her life to have quiet, serene time with God. How can you create a physical environment that is conducive to prayer? What do you need to do to foster a spiritual environment that is conducive to prayer? What obstacles or challenges do you face in doing so?

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Our prayers are not always answered in the way we think they should be. If something doesn't happen the way



you want it to, you should wait and say “Well maybe this isn’t the time when this is supposed to happen and it will happen later.” Keep your thoughts positive. You should never be upset about God and your prayers.... You have to trust God. You can’t be angry. I believe what goes around, comes around. You reap what you sow. How you are, is what you get back.

Nadia Comaneci  
Five-time Olympic Gold Medalist, 1976 Games

PERSONAL REFLECTION 8: Nadia’s comments indicate the need to pray and trust God for the timing of the outcome. How often are you truly able to release the results of your prayers to God? How are you able to keep your prayer life vibrant and positive, even as you await His answer to an important life concern?



Another time I pray is when I am going into a stressful situation. I realized four or five years ago that I could put myself into “the zone” by praying, and actually lower my heart rate. If I know I am going into a setting where I might get very emotional or if I just want to stay very focused, I use prayer as a calming influence. Part of it is very centering and the other part is giving myself over.

Amy Domini  
CEO, Domini Social Investments

PERSONAL REFLECTION 9: Amy cites significant results from going into her prayer “zone.” Have you ever experienced such a spiritual place? If so, how does it enhance your prayer life? If not, how could being in a “personal prayer zone” benefit your prayer life?



I prayed about Billy and his drinking all the time after I came to the Lord. Before I was praying, I tried to handle it through arguing. Prayer worked much better than arguing. It helped me tremendously. I learned not to take matters into my own hands....When I pray by myself I start off with the same pattern, but I don’t know where my prayer’s going to go. Sometimes I’m just really troubled that I don’t feel like my focus is strong enough on the Lord. I wouldn’t necessarily pray about things like that with Billy because I don’t want to saddle him with my own personal problems that I feel like I’m having with the Lord.

Some things you just need to work out with the Lord by yourself. There are certain things you want to do with your man; there are certain things you want to do with God; and there are certain things that God expects you to take care of yourself.

Marilyn McCoo  
Platinum Album Singer/Actress

PERSONAL REFLECTION 10: Marilyn’s reflections highlight the challenge of developing and shaping a personal prayer life while maintaining an intimate or significant relationship. How can prayer help you grow both personally and in your relationship? What challenges do you face in your marriage or personal relationships in building and maintaining your personal prayer life or your prayer life together?





I used to pray with an expectation, telling God “this is what I need” or asking for help with specific things. I realize that I was always telling God what to do, giving God a “to do” list. Now I deal with uncertainty more easily. It works much better when I open my heart and let God teach me how to live.

Kelly Hoke  
Homemaker/Military Spouse

PERSONAL REFLECTION 11: Kelly has arrived at the difficult spiritual posture of letting go and letting God. Have you arrived at this place in your own prayer life? Can you let go of some things but not others? Recall a spiritual challenge and reflect on how the experience helped you to open your heart to God rather than telling God what to do with your life.



I believe in God above.

I believe in Jesus’ love.

I believe that I should be kind and loving, Lord, like Thee.

That’s the minimum that I will say every night. Then, depending on the day or the concerns or what’s on my mind, I will say perhaps a more formal prayer, like The Lord’s Prayer or the Nicene Creed. I also ask for God’s blessings on people who I know and pray for people who I don’t know.

Christine Todd Whitman  
Former Environmental Protection Agency Head/Former New Jersey Governor

PERSONAL REFLECTION 12: A part of Christine’s prayer life includes the comfort of reciting familiar prayers and passages. Do you have a favorite Bible passage or saying that gives you comfort or hope? How can you use this passage to help you in your personal conversations with God?



I would like them to see that we never avoid prayer. We say our prayers and we are grateful for what we have. Prayer and church are big things in our lives. I was brought up going to church on Sundays and we still go. We say blessings before meals. My husband and I say our prayers every night.

Barbara Bush  
Former First Lady, United States of America

PERSONAL REFLECTION 13: Barbara’s comments on prayer indicate a need for living a life that supports and fosters a strong and healthy prayer life. Spend some time reflecting on whether your lifestyle supports a vibrant, healthy prayer life. Pray about eliminating personal hindrances to a strong relationship with God through prayer.





Before my feet hit the bedroom floor in the morning I want to spend time talking with Him. Even if I'm walking through a valley or experiencing a difficult time, I try to start out first by praising Him and thanking Him. Usually, my opening line is: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it," (Psalm 118:24 RSU).... Beginning the day with prayer has had a profound effect on my life, even if I'm in the refiner's fire. I pray every morning, if only for ten minutes. It takes the focus off the fire and puts the focus on the Father instead.

Janet Parshall  
Nationally Syndicated Radio Talk Show Host

PERSONAL REFLECTION 14: Janet's sets the foundation for her day through daily morning prayer. Are you able to begin your mornings with prayer each day? How does beginning each day prayer affect your daily outcomes? What steps can you take to ensure time each morning for prayer?

If Craig is awake we pray together. It's the most intimate thing a husband and wife can do. ...I also sometimes pray in the quietude of my car. It's wonderful; there's a whole big section of my commute where I'm going around the Blue Ridge Mountains, so I'm blocked on my cell phone. I can't be distracted even if I want to be. And in the car I can talk out loud to Him, as if He is my best friend and is sitting next to me.

Janet Parshall

PERSONAL REFLECTION 15: Janet's testimony reveals her resolve to take advantage of every opportunity to converse with God. Do you seize every opportunity available to you to pray? Think about some times/places, no matter how unconventional, that are available to you each day that represent opportunities to engage in prayer.

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I have always prayed regularly, but my prayer routine has changed as more pressures crowd out the meditative quality of my prayer. I increasingly need to rejuvenate or restart myself. I need blank space. Regular exercise is the one time when I really do have some success in tuning everything out and getting a mental break.

I find myself praying as I dress after working out in the gym. I go to a gym with very few women. In the locker room I am alone. It's peaceful.

It's a ritual for me. I clear my mind and I pray. If I try to start solving problems too quickly, I mess up the ritual and it doesn't work.

Marty Evans  
Rear Admiral (Retired), U. S. Navy

PERSONAL REFLECTION 16: Marty's relationship with God was enhanced through a difficult situation. Further, the demands of her position necessitated finding ways of getting the time she needs with God to gain guidance and direction to handle life's problems. Think of an experience in your life when you started solving a problem before praying about it. What was the outcome? How did the experience serve to teach you the value of waiting on the Lord?

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It wasn't just the face of Jesus, it was His whole body. And He wasn't just standing there, He was...He was line dancing?!?!?

As I sat there in the bathroom stall at the convention center, I saw myself line dancing to the country and western muzak playing through the hotel's sound system. Jesus was kicking up His sandals; His robes were flying as we danced. He smiled at me and His blue eyes laughed.

All my tension melted away. I laughed and relaxed. I felt He came to help me and He gave me exactly what I needed. It was especially striking because I had not thought about Jesus in years.

I went out on stage with confidence and joy. I gave the speech of my life.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 17: Bonnie's vision of Jesus line dancing is a reminder that He wants a close and personal relationship with those who believe in Him. Do you have a mental picture of God that gives you peace and comfort? How can that imagery help you in developing or maintaining a strong, intimate prayer life with God?



The most important thing I've learned about prayer is in my failures. I have learned how deep and wide and high and long the love of Christ is. In the ways that I've let myself down or let other people down, I've realized the absolute healing power of forgiveness.

In Sunday school class we were studying about the life of Peter. Somebody asked, What is the difference between Peter and Judas? As a young child, I would have said, "Judas was a scoundrel who betrayed Jesus."

But what's the difference between the guy that betrayed him and wound up killing himself and the guy that betrayed Jesus and wound up being the rock on which the church was built? The only difference between those two is that one felt that his sin was too great to be forgiven and the other trusted absolutely the power of love and forgiveness.

Amy Grant

Grammy Award-Winning Recording Artist

PERSONAL REFLECTION 18: Amy's relationship with God through prayer has taught her the power of forgiveness. How has prayer helped you to understand and feel the depth of God's love and His unending capacity to forgive? Reflect on a deep and intimate experience with forgiveness. How was your prayer life impacted at the time? How was it impacted once you were beyond the experience?



How many times have I found myself in a pickle and then suddenly realized I had not prayed about my circumstances? Why is this the last thing we think of instead of the first thing?

So often we will forget to pray...but we haven't forgotten God. It is simply that we have used our own understanding as a replacement for prayer. We have leaned on our own understanding and, frankly, our ego.



But by not praying about Touched by an Angel, I did not give God the opportunity to show me all the possibilities. I rejected the idea of working on the show on a Wednesday. By Friday, I realized that in every prayer I had prayed since Wednesday, God continued to impress the angel show on my heart.

Everything in my head was saying “No way, no way.” But when I prayed, I got this awareness and I thought “God, you have got to be kidding me.”

Martha Williamson  
Television Producer

PERSONAL REFLECTION 19: Prayer affected a major, life-altering decision in Martha’s life. How has prayer helped you to recognize when you were operating on ego on rather than on divine guidance? Think about a situation in your life when prayer made a major difference in the decision you made—perhaps one that proved to be life changing.

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And that means you have to be willing to give it all up. You have to say and believe that your career, your relationship, your image isn’t more important than your relationship with God.

I got down on my knees and started to pray. I realized that even being on my knees wasn’t enough. I had just seen *The Thorn Birds*, and I had seen Richard Chamberlain when he was being confirmed as a priest in Rome. He was flat on his face with his arms outstretched on the floor in front of the Pope. I thought “That’s pretty humbling. How much more can one humble one’s self?”

So I did it. I put myself flat on the floor and I put my nose to the carpet and something came over me. I saw there was still so much pride. I lay on that floor until I felt in every bone of my body how completely reliant I was on the Lord to guide me and sustain me.

Martha Williamson

PERSONAL REFLECTION 20: By lying prostrate before God, Martha gained a newfound sense of humility before Him. Have you ever longed for peace or resolution to the extent that you were willing to humble yourself before God without concern for appearances? Do you have a certain posture or position that heightens your feeling of humility before the Lord?

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... God will never forsake us or take a break from blessing and loving us. Our prayers are for remembering that, for affirming it. Our prayers are for us. God doesn’t need our prayers or praise. Nothing we can say or pray will make God love us more. As God’s beloved, we have the divine right to live in all the many rooms of the mansion, the right to everything to fulfill your needs and obligations. Our prayers aren’t for asking, but for affirming our faith—faith that we, as God’s beloved, can be willing channels for the highest good, and that all our needs are met in the divine-right way, at the divine-right time.

Praising and thanking don’t open God’s heart wider. They open ours and fill it with love and gratitude, liberating us



from fear, making us wiser, stronger.

Susan K. Taylor  
Editorial Director, Essence Magazine

PERSONAL REFLECTION 21: Susan’s reflections on prayer reveal her absolute knowledge of God’s love for her. How has the matchless, unending love of God been revealed to you through prayer? How does knowledge of God’s love affect your conversations with God?

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I tend to pray for strength, not specifics. And the reason is captured in one of those expressions from my childhood: “The Lord will help those who help themselves.”

So I don’t see prayer as a mechanism for guaranteeing you’ll get something directly—do not pass go—from God. It requires the one who prays to also take action.

Prayer, for me, really is about a partnership. Learning to be in partnership with God isn’t easy. And I don’t want to sound self-righteous either. There is always the temptation to pray for specific things. In the pain of my divorce, I remember that I got into the praying for specific things....

Johnnetta B. Cole  
President, Bennett College for Women

PERSONAL REFLECTION 21: Johnnetta’s prayer life reflects a sense of partnership with God to strength her for whatever lies on the path before her. How does your personal prayer life reflect a sense of partnership with God? How often do you omit the specific details of your life and trust God to work in partnership with you to accomplish His will?

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It’s more effective for me to pray for God to work on me than it is for me to pray for God to work on all the other people around me. That’s what I mean by defining prayer as activation of my partnership with God. Other people, they gotta get their own partnership! I’m in the position to try to take care of mine. They gotta get their own partnership!

Johnnetta B. Cole

PERSONAL REFLECTION 22: Johnnetta focuses her prayer concerns for God working on and through her rather than on others. How difficult is it for you to focus on God dealing with you and your personal issues rather than on others? Does your personal prayer life reflect a concern for God changing circumstances, changing others, or changing you?

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I prayed with desperation from a deeper place inside myself than I had ever felt before: "Help me, God."

"Help," is all I could say. This was no flowery prayer. It was a cry from deep inside my soul. I felt as though I was drowning in a sea of heartache and might never get air again.

Immediately, miraculously, the pain lifted. I sat up. I looked around. I was amazed. This was the most powerful prayer experience I ever had....when I finally reached for God in desperation, God gave me strength far beyond my own. Suddenly, God was real. I understood prayer was not a wish, but rather, something that made all the difference in my life right then and there.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 23: Bonnie's experience with immediate healing demonstrates that prayer need not be formal, long, flowery, or drawn out. Reflect on a time when your call to God was immediate, short, and swift. Compare the times when you can only utter brief prayers and the times when you find it necessary to have deep and intimate conversations with God. What dictates the kind of prayers that you pray?



In my acting, prayer and God play a role. I truly believe that the more I act, the more I learn to quiet myself. Once I've done the work—I've learned the lines, I know what my character does for a living—once the technical stuff is out of the way, then I do nothing but completely relax.

The parachute feels like my idea of God. As soon as you're out there on stage with the audience and the play kicks in...then something else takes over, something far bigger than me.

Eddie Falco

Actress

PERSONAL REFLECTION 24: Eddie recognizes some of the elements of a strong prayer life in her acting career. On the stage of your life, does prayer facilitate your ability to let something bigger than you take over? How does prayer help you to allow God to take control?



I prayed, like many people do, wanting God to make everything easy for me....In my early morning prayers, I felt God showing me the path, but I felt I was smarter and knew better. I kept trying to make it work. Even though I wasn't always obedient, prayer still helped....

Late one night, after Darcy and Grant were in bed, I sat alone in the living room, slumped in a chair. "God," I said. "I can't do any more than this." I had hit bottom....

I had no choice but to let go and let God.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 25: Bonnie's life circumstances brought her to an awareness that she was not in



control. Reflect on a time in your life when you “hit bottom.” How was your prayer life affected? How did hitting bottom make room for you to “let go and let God”?

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It took me a long time to realize that God is God and He will do what He knows is best, and that I can pray specifically, but I must trust the outcome to Him, even when it is not what I would want.

I used to try to do formal prayers, I used to pray in tongues and groups and churches. Now my prayers are more a part of my life, like breathing. I look at the mountains and I think “God created all of this simply to bless us? Amazing!”

Delilah Rene  
Nationally Syndicated, Radio-Show Host

PERSONAL REFLECTION 26: Delilah’s conversations with God, for her, are like breathing air. How does your prayer life reflect a relationship with God that is so essential that it is akin to breathing air?

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The Bible says to pray without ceasing (see I Thessalonians 5:17). To me that says our lives are meant to be a prayer. Once I realized that, it changed everything for me. I realized that if I was to truly pray without ceasing it meant that my life is to be a prayer from the minute I wake up in the morning. I begin the day in prayer—even before I get out of bed—my first thought is on Him.

Once you start realizing that your life is to be a prayer in itself, it just makes each moment so much more precious because you are always in the presence of the Holy One. That impacts how you speak, where you go, and what you spend your time doing. It makes the awareness of your Lord just that much more profound.

Kathy Lee Gifford  
Singer, Songwriter, Actor, and Producer

PERSONAL REFLECTION 27: Kathy understands her life as prayer. In what ways is your life a living prayer? Imagine your life as a prayer. Take a sheet of paper and pen and write down some of the words and phrases that would express your life prayer.

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I was in Baltimore to give a speech for a major corporation, but I had agreed to drop by this shelter for runaway teen girls while I was in town....

I prayed as I waited for them. I prayed for a way to reach them and connect with their hearts. My degrees from Harvard or Oxford would not impress them or make them feel close to me. Stories about ski racing would sound like stories from outer space to these inner-city, homeless girls. They were struggling with problems like finding the next safe place to eat and sleep. Many of them were probably escaping physical or mental abuse. I searched my



heart for something that would be of use to them.

I shared with them that my human instincts were warped. I needed God to show me how to love. I knew I had to pray and build a close relationship with God to have any hope of knowing love.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 28: Bonnie's experience at the shelter reflects her new insight gained regarding intercessory prayer. How often do your prayers reflect a desire to be used by God to reach others? How can you become more conscious of the need to pray about how you relate to others?



In the crowded, damp bathroom, Immaculee heard God say, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." She began to comprehend that if she couldn't forgive, she couldn't be close to God. She understood that forgiveness was her only escape from the paralyzing fear that had been attacking her mind. But it was so difficult, she couldn't do it alone. She had to ask God to help her forgive. Eventually she began to pray for the murderers.

Immaculee Ilibagiza

Best-selling Author, Rwandan Genocide Survivor

PERSONAL REFLECTION 29: Immaculee endured a horrific experience that few people will ever endure. Yet through that ordeal she learned the power of forgiveness. Do your prayers invite a spirit of forgiveness? Reflect on a time when, through prayer, God called upon you to forgive someone. How can prayer help you to come to a place of forgiveness? How do you pray to forgive others?



I think it's a constant battle to stay connected with God. You can't just reach out to Him one day in a moment of need and then just expect to go on with your life after the crisis passes. Tomorrow comes and we will be in trouble again. Keeping that connection going every morning and evening, even if it is just for five minutes, is what makes us -stronger...it is very powerful.

Immaculee Ilibagiza

PERSONAL REFLECTION 30: Immaculee remained connected to God under nearly impossible circumstances. How does your prayer life help you to remain connected to God in both joyful and stressful times? Have you ever distanced yourself from God and tried to reconnect quickly in a time of distress?



I began to pray by sitting still and feeling love and gratitude toward God. I usually asked, "God, what do I need to know today?" Many, many times the answer was simply how much God loved me. Daily doses of being loved by God, and feeling it built up my spirit and gave me strength to live in my tough new city. My soul had been sup-



pressed for so long. Every day that I took the time to connect with God, I grew.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 31: Bonnie's approach to prayer indicates an open agenda with God. In reflecting on your own prayer life, do you come to God with an agenda, a wish list, or a to-do list? Or do you come openly seeking communion with Him? How can you benefit from praying with a heart that is open and available to hear from God?

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Prayer gave me the strength to face opposition from a stronger foundation.

It gave me inner strength...and more....

I think prayer helped me clarify the values I stood on. It separated this from being personal. I found that more and more people on all levels were supportive....and now they are very proud that they were!

My favorite Bible verse is Micah 6:8, and I try to embody that verse every day. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (NIV).

Dorothy Height

Chair and President Emerita, National Council of Negro Women

PERSONAL REFLECTION 32: Dorothy credits her many accomplishments to prayer that is grounded in her favorite Bible verse. What one Bible verse or passage helps you to frame your prayer life? Does the verse/passage reflect what God can do for you or what you can do for God?

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Now that more time has passed, I find myself spontaneously moving into prayer on the phone or in conversation. For example, if Allen tells me what is on his schedule for the day, I may ask God to bless him and keep him close as he faces each challenge. I may ask God to use him to bless others as they work together. Increasingly, it just feels natural to let my heart overflow with my love for Allen and my trust in God's support of us as individuals and as a couple.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 33: Bonnie reflects on how her moments of prayer with Allen have grown. How can your significant or intimate relationship help you to develop a deeper prayer life? How can your prayer life be aided or enhanced through relationship?

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My friend showed me how we could be prayer partners, focusing on praying for our girls together. We decided we would pray for them continually, without ceasing. We made a commitment to pray for six months for fifteen minutes every morning. We reserved the time from 6:00 to 6:15 a.m. to pray for our daughters. She would be at her home and I'd be at my home. I always got down on my knees, because if I lay in bed and prayed I'd fall asleep. The only quiet, private place I had in my house at that time was in the bathroom. So I'd get on my knees in the bathroom and I'd pray. It sounds kind of crazy, but boy, God answered those prayers!

Barbara Ireland  
Mother of Kathy Ireland

PERSONAL REFLECTION 34: Barbara's prayers reflect the concerns of a loving, caring mother. How do we benefit from the prayers of the people who love us? How can the people you love be blessed and guided by your prayers?

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So I prayed and I prayed and I prayed: "God, please give me the words to say because I can't do this on my own. I need the words."

In my own words, it would have come out either mean and accusing, or more subtle and clever, but with a dig. Yes, probably mean and clever with digs is the route I would've gone.

I prayed, "God, help me deliver this message in the way You would want it and I will be the vessel." I surrendered to Him and let Him give me the words. It was amazing! When we talked, the outcome was beautiful. It just changed the whole day. It could have been a really yucky day, and instead, it was a beautiful day.

Kathy Ireland  
CEO of Kathy Ireland Worldwide

PERSONAL REFLECTION 35: Kathy's story highlights the importance of trusting God even with the small effects of our lives. Does your prayer life reflect your trust in God for all things—whether big or small? How do you feel about giving the small things to God? Do you feel that you are wasting His time? What assurances do you gain through prayer that God cares about every aspect of your life?

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The answer to my prayer was that God touched me with love. It was like the kind of religious experiences they describe where you see the light or a visitation.

I felt this overwhelming love. After that, I knew that I didn't need to act on my sexual cravings, instincts, and urges, because God was a greater love, and I was covered. It was a very physical feeling. It gives me goose pimples to think about it now. I was protected from all those influences as a teen.

Ruby Schwimmer  
Mother of Bonnie St. John



PERSONAL REFLECTION 36: Prayer helped Ruby to understand and feel God’s loving care and protection. How does prayer help you to enter and maintain your assurance of the constant peace and presence of God? How can a greater understanding of God’s love guide you to focus on God’s love rather than on actions or activities that are harmful for you?

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Prayer and healing matter because they bring us closer together to experience real love. I discovered prayer stories from my mother that I never knew, and shared them with Darcy. I have been able to talk with her about my prayer life as it changes. Darcy and Grandma talked about prayer to each other before she died. It was the courage to finally have conversations about prayer that made us stronger and closer to God... together.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 37: Bonnie’s own prayer life was strengthened through helping her daughter develop a personal prayer life. Consider whether there is someone who you can help to develop a personal and intimate relationship with God. How can guiding a younger person to have a prayer relationship with God have an impact for generations?

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When I was a teenager, I prayed, “God, make this person like me.” I remember saying Novenas five times a day to find a boyfriend. Now I pray for strength and for the other people in my life. I thank God for everything. For myself, I pray, “Just keep me going.” I don’t pray for clarification or direction anymore. I feel relaxed and calm about being guided. Now I always begin my prayers by thanking God for everything.

Karen Kim  
New York City Social Worker and US Army Reserve Captain

PERSONAL REFLECTION 38: Karen’s story reflects a growing and evolving relationship with God. How has your prayer relationship with God evolved? In what ways does your prayer life reflect a deeper, more meaningful relationship with God?

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As other people mentioned the challenges in their prayer lives, I restrained myself from jumping in with ideas and solutions. One thing I learned from being with these spiritual advisors was to listen and let people wrestle with their problems without trying to fix them. By standing back and letting the discussion unfold, I learned more from listening to them give advice to one another. Their mentorship helped me to tone down my ego and leave more room for God....



BONNIE ST. JOHN

When I had my prayer life all bottled up inside, I felt I was running against the wind. Now, in the community of prayer I have built for myself, I have the wind at my back.

Bonnie St. John

PERSONAL REFLECTION 39: Bonnie's experience with her prayer group revealed a new dimension of prayer. How is your prayer life enhanced through sharing prayer experiences with others, either formally or informally? What do you perceive to be the greatest benefit of sharing prayer concerns and victories with others?

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In that instant in my life I knew that I was a child of God...and knowing it then, I know it all the time, fresh. Just saying it makes me thrill, in the classic sense. I mean, my body—Wheew!

At that moment, I had to leave the room. I started weeping...with the knowledge of it. And I could do it again right now. That which made the seas and mountains, made stars and moons, and goldfish...That loves me?!!

It was a freedom...a relief...a license to try to do all the good in the world. If That loves me, then I can do anything good. You see?

Now I pray all the time. I pray when I'm walking from here over to the chair. I pray at any time...when something crosses my mind, I have a prayer. Mostly I'm thankful: Thanking God for God, thanking God for Jesus, and thanking Jesus for Jesus. I am thankful for the idea of love, the idea of forgiveness, and the offering of peace and joy two thousand years ago.

Maya Angelou  
Author, Poet, Professor

PERSONAL REFLECTION 40: Maya recalled a powerful spiritual experience that taught her something about the love of God for her. How does your prayer life bring you into deeper awareness of God's love for you? Does prayer help you to see God's greatness casting a long shadow over your smallness? Use a pencil and paper to draw an image of you and God, as reflected by your prayer life?

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If I could go back to when I was twenty years old and teach myself something about prayer, I would just tell myself to be more grateful. Be even more grateful.

I know that at twenty I didn't know very much. I knew that I was blessed, but not enough to know that I didn't know very much. I didn't know I knew what I knew. But I am a good student. I do listen. I would like to be more grateful today than I was yesterday.

Maya Angelou

PERSONAL REFLECTION 41: Life has taught Maya the value of gratitude in prayer. To what extent do your words of prayer reflect gratitude for God's blessings, or are you constantly seeking more? Is your cup over-



BONNIE ST. JOHN

flowing or half empty? Reflect on your prayer life and consider how you can express a deeper level of gratitude for life.

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