



# PRAYER

CONVERSATION TO COMMUNION

A PRAYER GUIDE BY  
JONATHAN AND KRISTINA CRABTREE



# PRAYER


CONVERSATION TO COMMUNION



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# PREFACE

How do you pray? Randomly or strategically? Morning or evening? When you're desperate or disciplined? Would you like to know a little more about prayer and how you can stay focused during these holy moments with God? Then, check out this book.

In "Prayer: Conversation to Communion," you will learn more about the spiritual discipline of Christian prayer and the movement from conversation to a communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this book, Jonathan and Kristina describe a recently developed prayer called, "praying the cross," in which you learn how to join Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in praying to God the Father.

In addition to learning how to pray the cross, you will receive a 30-day reading guide incorporating the Psalms and the Gospel of Luke as a guide for developing your own reading plan. Read this book for free and take part in a discipline to grow in your faith in Jesus Christ.

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This book is for those seeking a deeper relationship with the living God. It is for those who have struggled with prayer and just never could get into a rhythm of prayer as a daily discipline. This is not a magical formula, yet a daily practice that we have discovered for ourselves. It has brought about transformation in our own journey and relationship with God. We pray that this book will transform your life and knit together your relationship with God.

It is time for a discipline that doesn't feel like work, but a discipline that brings about joy and anticipation each day. A discipline that helps create continuity between your mind and heart while reading scripture. A returned discipline like the historical people of the bible who lived and breathed the Psalms as their life of prayer. It's time for a change. We pray that this book will be for you!

We pray that you will experience the grace of God like no other time in your life. We pray that your mind will be renewed by the transformation power of God's word read everyday. We pray that this simple act of prayer that we have discovered will help bring hope and joy back into your relationship with God. We pray that this will be the discipline that sets your dream and aspirations for life on fire for all the world to see and be blessed by.

We pray for those who picked this book up that said they would never pray to God again or wants nothing to do with God. I pray that the movement of the Holy Spirit will work within your curiosity and give you a glimmer of hope.

We pray for those who have almost given up hope on life itself. May this be the tool, change, and discipline you need

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to help you to keep going and to get stronger everyday. You are never alone and we pray that you will feel the love of God and the communion of his Son Jesus Christ, and the movement of his Spirit in your life to give your endurance and strength to keep going. May God's light shine on you.

*May the Lord bless you and keep you, make his face shine upon and be gracious to you. May he turn his face toward you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

Jonathan and Kristina Crabtree





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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION TO  
PRAYER



Being raised in a Christian home meant that Sundays were solely dedicated to Sunday school and worship, as well as evening services every week. It meant we would pray at mealtime and major holiday meals such as Thanksgiving or Christmas. It meant there were scriptures uniquely designed and imprinted upon anything imaginable for the sake of decorating the home. While I cannot remember our family taking any sort of time to have weekly or daily family devotion, I can distinctly remember my father reading his bible early every single morning and my mother reading her bible every single evening. I was formed by their habits from a distance, not even realizing it. My parents' commitment to raising their children in a Christian home meant that habits, disciplines, and other forms of "liturgical" acts were forming us into the persons we would become. I may not have learned how to read scripture or even how to pray from my parents' direct instruction, but I did learn from indirect observation. What would others around us, such as our own children, say they learn from our daily habits and discipline? If you were

raised in a Christian home, or if you consider yourself raising children in a Christian home, what daily habits are you doing? Guess what? Those habits will form your children.

WHILE I WANTED SO DESPERATELY to read scripture and pray every single day just like my parents, I never could establish a real good habit of it. I would pray every now and then by actually sitting down and beginning with “Dear God...” and ending with being awakened by my alarm clock the next morning. Days, sometimes weeks, would go by before I ever felt guilty enough to pray or try to read scripture. Knowing that guilt could never be the sole motivator for me to engage in a daily discipline of prayer and scripture reading, I wanted a relationship similar to my parents. I wanted to seek God because it was a desire, a want, a longing for Him. For many times, praying felt empty and void, because I had not taken time to know God through His Word. So, my faith in God was surface-level at best. I had no doubt there was a God, but I significantly doubted God could do something in my life. I continued with weekly worship attendance, mostly falling asleep during the sermons, but profoundly impressed I had a Sunday School teacher every week even though I was most often the only student. Habits can make the home, right?

SHORTLY AFTER MOVING TO COLLEGE, I was encountered by the God I believed to be distant in a very upfront and personal way. While driving home to be with my grandfather on his deathbed, I believed to have heard the audible voice of the Lord who said, “Jonathan, I’m not done with you yet.”

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WATCHING my grandfather take his final breaths, I sensed a more internal wording from the Lord, and not as audible, say, “Just as he is taking final breaths, I took a final breath and died for you.” For me, this was the most pivotal scene in my story and one that has never left my memory. From that moment, I knew my sins were forgiven, and I knew the Lord’s forgiveness and love for me were personal. Unfortunately, I struggled to develop a daily habit of prayer and scripture reading. For me, I cherished the spiritual moment of hearing the voice of the Lord and receiving what I believe to be an assurance of salvation, and I used it to build my faith in Him. I’ve learned you cannot build a foundational faith and theology only on feelings and experiences. We forget them. But, there’s one thing that does not fade and that’s God’s Word. So, I knew at some point I had to develop a habit of praying and scripture reading if I was ever to grow in faith.

EVEN AFTER GRADUATING FROM SEMINARY, I still had no better daily habit of praying and scripture reading than when I began. I was either too tired, woke up late, forgot, felt guilty, or just simply didn’t want to. That all changed, and when it did, it changed for good.

AT A CONFERENCE ON PRAYER, it suddenly hit me. I made a decision to read scripture and pray every day for the rest of my life, and I’ve never missed a day in over six years. I’m not boasting. I’m simply saying something inside of me

‘clicked.’ Even on my toughest of days being sick, tired, or whatever, I’ve never missed a day. I can’t because I tried.

THE NEXT DAY after this prayer conference, I resolved to a daily habit of reading and prayer by simply designing a way of reading and praying. Just like my parents formed me in their daily habits, I want to form my own children in the same way. Why? Because I want them to know that faith, theology, and the Christian life is best built on disciplines of prayer and scripture reading and not an experience. An experience will run out of fumes. Reading God’s unchanging Word and praying to Him, an unchanging God will strengthen one’s faith in Him.

I KNOW that on my worst days, I will read and pray in a specific way, and I know in my head and heart that Jesus is Lord. It becomes more about me talking with Him, and it becomes more of me realizing His very near presence and His invitation to commune with Him. So, while raising our own children in a “Christian” home, we’re raising them to realize Christ is always present within our homes, and with us wherever we go. If you’re ready to engage in prayer and scripture reading in such a way that you realize the communion with the Lord, then turn the page. It’s time to get this discipline going.

CHAPTER 2

# CONVERSATION TO COMMUNION



One of the more dramatic moments of any movie or T.V. show is when a main character is sentenced to death. Usually what takes place within these final moments is a call for any final words. When death is imminent, it's interesting what words the accused will say. Whether they say nothing or something, these words are the last others will hear, and most likely be remembered. What difference will the final words make in the person's final moments other than impacting others who live on? How does the character know what words to say? Most importantly, what will these words do upon landing on the ears of gathered listeners?

IN LUKE'S GOSPEL<sup>1</sup>, we find a unique narrative describing the final words of the criminals and Jesus Christ on their own crosses. One criminal mocks Christ by sarcastically invoking Him to save all three of them. The other criminal, after rebuking the first criminal's comment, then carefully,

as though each word would be his last, humbly asks Christ to “remember him” in the kingdom.

JESUS ASSURES the criminal of his future place in “paradise.” With the criminal’s final words in this life, Jesus responds to him with final words for a new life. This, I believe, is at the heart of praying and moving from conversation to communion with Jesus.

EARLIER IN LUKE’S GOSPEL, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. The late Eugene Peterson comments on this by saying it’s the only time the disciples asked Jesus to teach them something. How does Jesus teach them? He begins by praying “Our Father.”<sup>2</sup> He does not pray to His father or your father. He prays to Our Father, and this prayer is the model for how we join Jesus Christ, the High Priest, in praying to Our Father.

TAKING the Lord’s Prayer as it is in Luke’s Gospel, let’s look at each component as a way of understanding how to pray the cross.

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, hallowed be Your name. – The introduction – we pray to Our Father in heaven in proclaiming His holiness, and holiness is what we are seeking. We cannot obtain it by our own efforts, nor can we earn it solely on our merits. Holiness comes from the working of the Holy Spirit within His Church. Holiness means ‘other’ meaning there is nothing that compares or



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contrasts with it. It is unique, and it comes from God in heaven. Praying the cross is a method by which I seek daily holiness, by carrying my cross. You can too.

YOUR KINGDOM COME. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. – The institution – Holiness is what we seek; His kingdom is what it looks like. Therefore, we pray that our Father's kingdom and will would be done *on earth* as it is in heaven. We can expect it today, and not just at the end of our lives. We can pray for and build the Kingdom right now and by praying the cross.

GIVE us day by day our daily bread – The ingredient – We need sustenance, primarily the Lord's Supper, but not everyone can receive that every day or every week. If your church does not receive the Lord's Supper or prays the Lord's prayer every week, encourage your pastor and worship team to do so. Jesus is the bread of life, and Jesus' death on the cross is where our sins were laid. Jesus' rising from the grave defeated death and sin's power. So, as the daily bread, Jesus gives us new life every day.

AND FORGIVE US OUR SINS, as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us. – The initiation – If we're forgiven, then we will forgive others. Perhaps this is the most difficult line of the prayer. But, we must forgive as we have been forgiven. We lay our debts upon the cross, and so we do the same to others.

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AND DO NOT LEAD us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one – The imitation – The assumption is not that God would lead us to temptation, but the conclusion is that God would deliver us from the clutches of the evil one. Temptations still persist, but God our Father will deliver us from the evil one. When in the most compromising of situations, we either give in to temptation or resist. One criminal gave in and mocked Christ. The other resisted and despite his temptation to follow suit, the criminal praised Christ.

THE END IS where we begin. We recognize our want of communion with Christ, but we also recognize our lack of daily carrying the cross in order to do so. We are tempted to sleep later, live busy lives, connect with the world constantly, and involve ourselves with so many other things without batting an eye. But, suddenly when we find ourselves in a helpless situation, gasping for air, reaching for help, struggling to stay committed, we find ourselves too on the criminal's cross saying, "Lord, remember me in Your Kingdom." To which Jesus replies, "This day you will be with me in paradise." So, let us learn how to pray the cross of Christ in praise and prayer to Our Father.

WE KNOW OUR TEMPTATIONS. We may think we don't, but if we sit down with our cross, we will quickly call to mind our temptations. Write them down. One by one, and right on top of one another. We are praising Christ's work on the cross by calling to Christ the High Priest to remember us before the Father in the prayer in which He leads the Church. So, lay down your sins and temptations on the messy cross that it is. Now scratch through it, making it

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look like the horizontal beam of the cross. This is how we build the cross: with sin, stain, grit, grime, and temptations. Nothing more than a mess. When we pray to Our Father in Heaven, as Jesus taught His disciples to pray, we call to mind the scriptures in Hebrews stating the role of Christ as High Priest, or one who mediates on behalf of the people.

THE HIGH PRIEST of the Old Covenant represented humanity as humanity, therefore always falling short of God's glory. The Great High Priest of the New Covenant represents both humanity and divinity, therefore elevating His work to a Holy degree; one that could not be achieved by even the holiest of High Priests. So when we pray, we join in with Christ, the High Priest, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as Christ leads the prayer of His Church to God the Father in Heaven. Christ remembers us, remember?

Now, when we begin with the end (temptations and sin) we can begin to see heaven on earth, God's will, daily bread, and forgiveness of others because we begin to see the suffering of others as the Lord leads us to pray for specific people. But, we have to get the messiness of sin and temptations out of the way and on the cross beam where they belong so we can see the victory of Christ rising from the grave. There is one other aspect to pair with praying the Lord's Prayer and that is the Psalms.

IN USING the Lord's Prayer as our model template, we also employ another prayer method used by Jesus, and that is praying the Psalms. The collection of Psalms are prayers,

poems, praises, laments, and songs proclaiming God's faithfulness. Did you know that the Psalms make up the largest portion of Scripture? They become for us the historical prayers by which Israel prayed when they continuously asked God to remember them. So, before praying the cross daily, I read five Psalms. I want them to form my heart of prayer and my communion of prayer so that I learn to pray both, "My God why have you forsaken me?" and "The Lord is my Shepherd." Both are real. Both display communion. Both display my tendency to try and save myself with my own cross and my need for Christ to remember me.

THESE FINAL WORDS continue answering *why* I pray the cross daily, and these words give us an insight as to *how* to pray the cross. Carrying my cross daily involves clinging to it with final words as though my life depended on them because I believe it does. Your life depends on it, too. Without the cross of Christ, we have no hope, for sin seeks to take life from us. Jesus carrying His cross meant that He carried our sins. Jesus being alive meant that His sacrifice is now eternally enacted as He serves as the Great High Priest. If today is going to be my final day, then I want my final words to echo the criminal on the cross saying, "Lord, remember me, and all of these for whom I pray, in Your Kingdom." Jesus as both sacrifice and servant on the cross simply means His remembrance of us in His Kingdom involves Him continuously acting as High Priest mediating to God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit on our behalf.

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SO WHEN WE pray the cross, we pray our final words, trusting that Jesus will remember us in His Kingdom this day because of His sacrifice and His actions as High Priest. Now, how do we pray the cross? The rest of the book will be an in-depth dive into this prayer practice. Here is a summary:

### **WE LAY down our sins to the Great High Priest.**

We begin by writing down our sins, just like writing down our temptations, one on top of the other until it literally looks like a mess. (That's because it is!) We begin here recognizing that while sin has lost its power, sin still remains. Then, at this point, I usually write down a word to symbolize my sin instead of writing out an entire sentence or something. For example, I will write down the word "anger," and then think of the times and reasons I know will lead me to act out in anger.

### **WE STAND up in victorious forgiveness with the Great High Priest.**

Having been forgiven by the High Priest, as He remembers us in prayer, we stand with Christ in prayer and praise. I draw a vertical line through the horizontal line representing and proclaiming my rise in forgiveness.

### **WE ASK the Great High Priest to remember others.**

We listen to the Holy Spirit's prompting and guidance when we begin praying for others. People we may have not thought of in ages will come to mind and the person who constantly annoys or aggravates you will too. Pray for them.

At all four points of the cross, you will decide how you want to group people/situations. On the top of the cross, I pray for those whom the Spirit immediately calls to mind. On the left, I pray for my family and long-time friends. To the bottom, I pray for my own directions and situations. To the right, I pray for those within my household, my wife and children. I indicate each person by making an initial of their name or the situation. After you feel there is no one else to pray for, draw a continuous circle around each individual section and pray the following prayer, one my mentor Dr. Bob Stamps taught me: “Lord Jesus of Nazareth, High Priest of Heaven, hold \_\_\_\_\_ in the strength of Your prayers; hold them in the Father’s love.”

OUR CROSSES ARE MESSY. When in a messy situation, we become desperate for cleanliness. That’s when we look to the cross of Christ, and with our final words, whisper, “Remember me.” As my good friend, Harrison Bell says, “death never has the final word.” Now, look to Christ, and ask Him to “remember you.”

CHAPTER 3  
WE LAY DOWN



**W**e lay down our sins to the Great High Priest.

A SIMILAR ELEMENT in Old and New Testament worship is a sacrificial need in order to approach God. The Old Testament sacrificial system describes the way Israel approached God in order to commune with Him. The sacrifice didn't just show Israel's regretful attitude towards sin, but it displayed Israel's humility and failure to worship none other than God. The Old Testament worship needed a continual sacrifice. Jesus resolves that.

BECAUSE JESUS IS both the Final Sacrifice and the Great High Priest, He continuously acts in this way by representing us to the Father. Because Christ is a man born through a woman, He represents the whole of humanity, and is fully

able to represent us to God as the High Priest. So, *how* do we worship God? In the Spirit, through Jesus.

WE CAN SEE throughout scripture how humanity has repeatedly failed to continuously worship God and commune with God, which is why we need a High Priest who can intercede on our behalf. Unfortunately, the High Priest was also human, thus repeatedly failing, too. Jesus Christ being the Final Sacrifice for the atonement of all sin is the rightful candidate to repeatedly represent us when we choose to worship other things besides God. Allow me to share the role of the High Priest in the Old Testament and how Christ acts as the High Priest in our lives today.

THE DAY of Atonement (Yom Kippur) in the Jewish act of worship is the central act of the High Priest. It was the culmination of daily offerings into one sacrificial element for the atonement of sin. Here is what happened:

FIRST, the High Priest stood before the people as a person himself. He represented humanity because he was human. All of the names were engraved on his breastplate and shoulders to continue with this representation of God. Second, the High Priest consecrated himself, or set himself apart by performing liturgical acts such as washing and sacrifice of an animal, wiping blood on his right ear, thumb, and toe.

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THIRD, he would take another animal and confess all sin before God. Fourth, the High Priest would take the blood in the Holy of Holies (behind a giant curtain) and intercedes on Israel's behalf.

FINALLY, the High Priest returns to the people with the Moses blessing of peace: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord makes his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turns his face toward you and gives you peace." (Num. 6:24-26 NIV)

Now, here is what Christ does. First, Jesus being from the Father and also human, represents us to God the Father. All of us. Secondly, Christ sanctifies himself to lead us into the presence of the Father. (John 17:19) Third, He offers himself as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. By doing so, Christ isn't trying to convince an angry God to be gracious to us; rather, because Christ is God and a sacrifice, He is displaying the whole of His love to us, a sinful world, who chooses to worship other things.

FOURTHLY, after the Resurrection, Christ is making His way to the Holy of Holies to intercede on our behalf. Finally, before Jesus ascends to the Holy of Holies as the Final and perfect sacrifice, He gives us the gift of peace saying, "Peace be unto you." (John 20:19)<sup>1</sup>

WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN the gift of God's Holy Spirit to help us join Christ in His worship of the Father. We are given grace

in order to do this, and grace isn't an object, it's a subject: Jesus Christ. "God gives Himself in holy love to humanity. It also means the coming of God as man, to do for us as a man what we cannot do for ourselves: to present us in Himself through the eternal Spirit to the Father." As God comes to us through Jesus by His Spirit, this act of grace initiates our response, and our response begins with laying down our sins.

IN ORDER for us to take up our cross, we must first lay something down. We must sacrifice, but we must not only focus on being regretful or sorry for our sins. We must remember that we are aiming for holiness, a complete love of God and one another. We are aiming to be more like Jesus, the Great High Priest, and that is going to take some time and work. (At least I know it is for me!) Fortunately, Jesus is graciously helping us. So, at this point in praying the cross, we learn how to lay down our sins so we can take up our cross and follow Jesus.

MAYBE YOU HAVE HEARD sin described in two categories: *original* and *actual*. Sin is when we worship and trust anything other than Jesus. It is our very nature to worship, or ascribe worth to something, and when we begin to channel all of our energy towards that object, we sin. We can also understand sin to be a mistrusting in Jesus. So, sin is a heart issue, as Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:21) When our hearts are engaged towards anything other than Christ and His Kingdom, we are prone to sin. Remember how Jesus taught His disciples to pray? (Thy Kingdom come...Thy will be done)

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Not our will or our kingdom, but His ways and His kingdom is what we are seeking first (Matt. 6:33)

I ADMIT that I have work to do. I do not love my neighbor as myself. I do not love Jesus with my entire being. I'm willing to admit it. Praying the cross reminds me every day that I'm not just a sinner or a failure, but that I'm graciously given a chance to lay down my sins and pick up my cross and follow Him. Jesus knows this about humanity, which is why He is the Great High Priest who continuously mediates on our behalf. So, what does *original* and *actual* mean?

*ORIGINAL ASSUMES HUMANITY* is born into sin from the *origin* of Adam's sin in Genesis. We inherit the very nature to sin. (Psalm 139) In baptism, Christ cleanses us of *original* sin and we enter into covenant to trust that He does it. As such, Christ's Spirit continues to cleanse us of *actual* sins, concluding that sin no longer has power over us. Now, some denominations choose to baptize infants because of this doctrine, and this book is not attempting to argue one way or the other. What's most important is that we understand baptism is sign of the covenant in which we enter with Jesus and the promise of His cleansing of our *original* and *actual* sin.

*ACTUAL SIN IS EXACTLY* what it sounds like: it is the *real* sin in our lives. These are the sins we listen to the Spirit to reveal to us. I know where my heart is prone to wander. I know what my heart tends to worship. I know how my heart will get there. It's because we're born into a sinful nature that is

both a curse and a blessing. It's a curse that's been defeated by Christ, yet still persists. It's a blessing that the Spirit graciously reveals our sin, if we take time to listen. Do not rush through this part. Ask the Lord to reveal your *actual* sins. Ask the Lord to help you visualize specific examples, and write that mess down! I write my actual sins down usually with one word to represent the whole of it, and I write one word on top of another until it looks like a jumbled mess. This is the time we lay down our sins and get them off of our backs and out of our hearts.

AS WE LAY down our sins, remember the role of Jesus, the High Priest, is acting on our behalf. His blood will cover the sin, but carrying our sin willingly is no way to live. Sin is short lived and stinks of death. Jesus is eternal and gives life abundantly. Remember, the High Priest returns with peace.

AFTER YOU WRITE down your *actual* sins it is now time to let Jesus take care of that mess. So, join Him in the Spirit by scratching (by moving your pen/pencil repeatedly left and right) and praying this prayer that I learned from one of my mentors, Dr. Bob Stamps:

“LORD JESUS OF NAZARETH, High Priest of Heaven, I lay down my sins before you today and I lay them on the cross and in the grave where they belong.”

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AS WE END this part of the prayer, we then make the vertical beam of the cross. Moving your pen/pencil up and down, continue praying:

“I RISE in Your victory over sin and death.”

WE NOW HAVE the cross we'll carry, and it's now time we pray for others.

CHAPTER 4  
WE RISE IN VICTORY



“**T**rise in Your victory over sin and death.”

AS WE FINISH CONFESSING our sins and marking through them to make the horizontal beam of the cross, we also must receive His grace and forgiveness and rise in His victory. The confession of sins is not meant to leave us with a posture of sadness, fear, or worry. Encounters with Jesus often begin with a person hopeless and head down, but they almost always rise with a victorious spirit. The woman with the blood disorder came falling down and trembling before Jesus after touching His garment’s hem. Though she was healed, she was still fearful and most likely her posture was submissive and downtrodden. Jesus assures her that faith healed her and to go in peace. I can only imagine her standing to her feet and moving forward. In the same paragraph, Jesus overhears that someone’s daughter is dead, and when He goes to the house, He tells the girl to “arise.”<sup>1</sup>

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ON RESURRECTION DAY, the women make their way to the tomb only to find the stone door moved, two angels in shining garments, and not the body of Jesus. The women's posture modeled their feelings of fear, bowing down all the way to the ground. The angels remind them that, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." They rise and go tell the apostles, and Peter's response is to rise and see for himself<sup>2</sup>.

LATER IN THIS chapter there are two walking to Emmaus, and Jesus joins them, even though they did not realize it was Him. Jesus asks them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" I imagine these disciples walking slowly with their heads down, hands in their pockets, and their hearts feeling sad. As the three of them continue, they stop for the evening, and Jesus reveals Himself in the breaking of bread. After Jesus immediately vanishes, their response was, "they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!'"<sup>3</sup>

WHEN PRAYING THE CROSS, we can't forget the empty tomb. Praying the cross on this historical side of the Resurrection means we trust in the work done on the cross is then confirmed with the work done through the grave, by Jesus rising. Now, sin no longer has dominion over humanity. So,

when we confess those sins that try and hold us down to the ground in fear and trembling, or leaving our hearts sad, deflated, and deprived of hope, we must remember that communion with the Risen Lord Jesus compels us to stand up and receive the new daily mercies and manna from heaven.

WHAT ARE we rising to do? We are raising our heads to continue in prayer because we have a purpose. Over the years, I have noticed the social cue from anyone leading a corporate prayer to invite folks in bowing their heads. While I respect the gesture, I am not sure that we are to *only* bow during prayer. We eventually have to rise and go on with the day. Even in scripture, kneeling seems to be more common than bowing. While kneeling may assume bowing, it may not always be the case. I kneel and bow down in prayer beside my bed every evening, so please don't think I'm saying we should not bow during prayer. I believe we must realize that we will eventually raise our heads. But what if we bow and raise our heads during the same prayer? What if after confessing our sin before the Great High Priest, we continue in communion by looking around to where He may be leading us to pray? To be quite honest, closing my eyes and bowing my head during prayer makes the discipline more difficult to be authentic. Therefore, I focus on something with my eyes open. In this case, I focus on the cross that I am praying. For communion with Jesus does not end in this prayerful moment. We are making ourselves aware of His presence so that we continue throughout the day in a posture of prayer: a posture of communion with Him, loving our neighbor as ourselves.



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WE ARE RECEIVING the grace and forgiveness from Jesus and rising in His victory over sin and death, and we are rising to a specific purpose in prayer: and that is to pray for others. To love Jesus is to love others, and Jesus illustrates this in a very graphic parable in Luke.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN<sup>4</sup>

Jesus tells the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” as a response to a lawyer asking Him, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus immediately asks the lawyer, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” The lawyer repeats the commandment found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 to love God and neighbor. This is when the lawyer wants to know the exact identity of his ‘neighbor.’ Jesus then tells this parable about a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who then gets mugged and beaten by thieves, “leaving him half dead.”

A PRIEST and a Levite pass by the wounded man on the opposite side of the road without offering to help. A Samaritan, though, shows compassion to the man, and not only helps him but offers extensive long-term care. Who acts as a neighbor to the wounded man? The Samaritan. The one who showed mercy. Jesus tells the lawyer, “Go and do likewise.”

THE SURPRISING ELEMENT in this story obviously is the Samaritan’s act of generosity and compassion. However,

there is one more layer to Jesus' parable: the story is told while Jesus is *in* the region of Samaria. <sup>5</sup>(See Luke 9:51-52, 17:11) Jesus is in enemy and hostile territory, as Jews and Samaritans did not get along. Their racial and ethnic differences caused quite the riff-raff between them. The Samaritan in this parable is more than likely caring for a Jew traveling from Jerusalem, and Jesus illustrates His current surroundings of Samaria with a nail-biting and surprisingly unlikely parable. Could we do the same?

COULD we recognize our current surroundings, culture, world, and realize we are in hostile territory? Every day it seems that humanity further polarizes one another with a multitude of differences. We're all hurt in some way, and everyone seems to pass by us on the opposite side of the same road we all travel. So, could we do the same as the Samaritan, which is to love and care for our enemies? Sure we can because it's no different from Jesus coming to humanity to love and care for us, caught in the trespasses and death of sin. It is no different from Jesus coming to us in our hurt, and now constantly mediating on our behalf as the Great High Priest. It is no different from Jesus telling a criminal on a cross beside Him, "today you will be with Me in Paradise."

AS SURPRISING AS this may have sounded to the lawyer and others listening to Jesus' parable, it is not the first time Jesus insists on a radical way of encountering our neighbors. Jesus already told the disciples to "love your enemies" earlier, and again, Jesus displays this action on His own

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cross beside the criminal. We can and we will “do likewise.” The question is how?

IF OUR PURPOSE is to love God and our neighbor, then how do we love our neighbor? I believe we begin in prayer. We pray for our neighbors, whether they are our actual neighbors or even our enemies. They are both our neighbors, and our purpose is to love them. So we begin by praying for them, and this is a continuous commandment throughout the New Testament.

IN PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7, Paul encourages the church to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

IN 1<sup>ST</sup> THESSALONIANS 5:17, 25, Paul tells the church to “pray without ceasing,” and finally asks the church to pray for them.

JAMES 5:16 says to “confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you [we] may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

WHEN WE RISE IN VICTORY, we raise our heads, engage our hands for writing names and join our hearts with Jesus, the Great

High Priest in prayer. For Jesus meets us at our cross, and invites us into paradise, His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, while we take up the work of praying for our neighbors: You know, the other 'criminal' just on the other side of the cross.

CHAPTER 5  
WE ASK ON BEHALF OF  
OTHERS



**H**as anyone ever randomly come to mind during the middle of the day or night and you suddenly felt compelled to pray for them? I have and quite often. I have also missed opportunities to minister to someone by not praying for them, or calling them, or even going to see them when the Lord places certain people on my mind. If anyone ever comes to mind, I take that as the Lord placing them specifically on my heart and mind and I take responsibility for caring for them. I hope you will consider doing the same.

IN THIS NEXT to last chapter, we're going to talk about how to pray for people and for ourselves at each of the four points on the cross. I truly believe the Lord will impress certain people on your heart and mind during this time of communion with Him. The people He recalls maybe folks you see every day, or they may be folks you have not seen in years. Sometimes there are people on my prayer cross I have never met, but I feel led to pray for them such as the President of

the United States of America, the Governor of my home state, the Queen of England, and the Prime Minister of England. I will probably never meet them, but if by chance I do, I'll be sure to let them know I have been praying for them.

I AM GOING to describe the different categories of my specific prayers as a way for you to model or for you to develop yourself. I claim no 'right' way of doing this, and I hope you will develop it further! I begin by praying on the top point of the cross, and then I move counterclockwise. I have no scriptural, historical, or theological reason for praying in this direction other than this: all four points of the cross cover the burdens of all people in all four directions of the earth. Therefore, in praying to the north, west, south, and east, we pray for the Kingdom of Heaven on all of the earth.

BEGINNING with praying to the north, I dedicate this spot to random and general prayers for people. For me, I simply write down the first letter of the name or situation for whom I am praying, because I will draw a circle around them all before moving on. Feel free to write out an entire name if that's what will help you focus. The most important thing is to be with the Great High Priest and join Him in prayer. He will call to your mind a number of people and situations. Remember, you are in His presence now. He *will* be with you, and He *will* lead you in prayer and worship of God the Father through the power and presence of His Holy Spirit.

. . .

## PRAYER

I CANNOT TELL you how many times the Lord has brought some of the most random people to mind during this part of the prayer. To be honest, they are sometimes people I have wronged or have been wronged by. I pray. I obey. Sometimes I feel led to reach out to them and let them know I have been praying for them. This action is sometimes awkward, especially if I have not talked to a specific person in a very long time. But, almost 99.9% of the time, the Lord does amazing work through this act of faith. The person will tell me how much it means to them, or relationships are rekindled. It is honestly amazing, and you will be amazed too.

AS YOU WRITE names or abbreviations, compile them in a way as though you were going to draw a circle around them. Why? Because you are! You will write down other names and situations and draw a circle around them at all points of the cross. Draw the circle repeatedly as you pray these words I learned from my mentor, Dr. Bob Stamps:

“Lord Jesus of Nazareth, High Priest of Heaven, hold these persons (or situations) in the strength of Your prayers. Hold them in the Father’s love. Amen.”

LIKE I SAID, sometimes the Lord may lead you pray for someone you have not seen or met. Obey and pray. Sometimes the Lord may call to mind someone throughout the day, at which point, use this prayer above wherever you may be.

. . .

Now, I pray to the west (or to the left of the cross). At this point, I pray specifically for my immediate family and closest of friends. Again, feel free to adapt according to your context. Maybe this point is specifically for your small group, Sunday School class, or maybe even your work or school colleagues. This point, as well as others, may change over the years. Simply spend time with the Lord, and He will be faithful to guide you. After you feel as though you have prayed for everyone that comes to mind, repeatedly draw the circle and pray the “High Priest” prayer.

Now, we move to the south (or to the bottom point of the cross). Here, I pray for personal things, such as my education, career goals, or decisions I’m discerning. There have been things I thought I wanted or needed and began praying for only to find out days later I only prayed for that once or twice. Then, I discovered that maybe those things weren’t as important to me as I thought. I’ve prayed for some things in my life thinking it would be my next step. Then, I find out, it’s not. I’ve felt led to pray for things and to take action only to receive a “no” from the outcome of the situation. While a “no” can be discouraging, it can also be clarifying. The Lord has literally directed and guided me into places and situations because of a “no.” I am grateful for His faithfulness. You will see the same work in your life. Remember, obey and pray. When you feel as though you have written down every situation in your life here, repeatedly draw the circle and pray the “High Priest” prayer.

FINALLY, I pray for my wife and children, and only them in this final point. I pay attention to what they are experi-



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encing in life, and I listen to the Lord's direction in what to pray. Sometimes they need healing or confidence. Sometimes they just need to know the Lord loves them. Whatever the case may be, I pray specifically for them at this point. Again, you do not have to pray the exact way I do. Allow the Lord to guide you in who and how to pray. Finally, I repeatedly draw the circle around them and pray the "High Priest" prayer.

WE COME to the point in which you will begin your own prayer journey, moving from conversation to communion with Jesus Christ, the High Priest of Heaven. Like I said earlier, I've never missed a day of prayer in several years. I've prayed on my sickest days, my worst days, and my best days. I've prayed when I am the most tired, and when I am most busy. The point is that I don't want to miss the moment of communion with the High Priest, and He doesn't either. But, if you're ready to move from conversation to communion with the Lord, now is the time. Watch what He will do in your life and in the lives of others. Go where your best prayers lead you. Obey and pray. And most importantly, *love* the Lord and your neighbor.

CHAPTER 6  
**DAILY DISCIPLINE  
PRACTICE**



**H**ere we will put into practice all the words you have read, pondered, and taken to heart. The outline below gives thirty days of scripture reading and praying the cross. Items needed: Bible, journal notebook, writing pen/pencil, your whole self, and the Triune God!

READING five Psalms a day will enhance your mind in the historical view of one spiritual journey in our day-to-day lives. This will take some time to create this discipline and it might seem like a lot. But stick with it, and it will be glorious to see what the Lord does during this time. Reading the verse out loud or listening to the verse via a Bible application on your smart device is helpful to stay on track and the mind focused (especially when you get to Psalm 119!)

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## PRAYER

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING to Luke will be the other area of focus for the next thirty days to take a journey through the life of Jesus and his disciples. Take the readings from Luke each day and write down the thoughts, words, or any new findings, that come to mind when reading. If nothing comes to mind, simply write down the verses you read and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind something from the reading throughout your day. Don't forget to record what the Lord is showing you in his Word.

TAKE the chapters you have read and put them into practice when it comes to praying the cross. Start with confessing sin and laying down your sins. Rise in victory and begin your prayer time around the cross. Personalize this journey. Make it as simple or as creative as your soul needs during this time. Feel free to use the images of the cross within the daily reading plans as a template to pray or feel free to draw a bigger one in your prayer journal.

YOUR DISCIPLINE TODAY will form others for tomorrow.

\*\*KNOW that we have prayed for you and this journey you are about to enter with our Lord Jesus Christ.

DAY 1:

- Psalms 1-5
- Luke 1: 1-56
- Pray the Cross



Day 2:

- Psalms 6-10
- Luke 1: 57-80
- Pray the Cross



Day 3:

- Psalms 11-15
- Luke 2:1-24
- Pray the Cross

## PRAYER



Day 4:

- Psalms 16-20
- Luke 2:25-52
- Pray the Cross



Day 5:

- Psalms 21-25
- Luke 3
- Pray the Cross



Day 6:

- Psalms 26-30
- Luke 4
- Pray the Cross



Day 7:

- Psalms 31-35
- Luke 5
- Pray the Cross

## PRAYER



Day 8:

- Psalms 36-40
- Luke 6:1-26
- Pray the Cross



Day 9:

- Psalms 41-45
- Luke 6:27-49
- Pray the Cross



Day 10:

- Psalms 46-50
- Luke 7
- Pray the Cross



Day 11:

- Psalms 51-55
- Luke 8
- Pray the Cross



## PRAYER



Day 12:

- Psalms 56-60
- Luke 9
- Pray the Cross



Day 13:

- Psalms 61-65
- Luke 10
- Pray the Cross



Day 14:

- Psalms 66-70
- Luke 11
- Pray the Cross



DAY 15:

- Psalms 71-75
- Luke 12:1-34
- Pray the Cross

## PRAYER



Day 16:

- Psalms 76-80
- Luke 12:35-59
- Pray the Cross



Day 17:

- Psalms 81-85
- Luke 13
- Pray the Cross



Day 18:

- Psalms 86-90
- Luke 14
- Pray the Cross



Day 19:

- Psalms 91-95
- Luke 15
- Pray the Cross

## PRAYER



Day 20:

- Psalms 96-100
- Luke 16
- Pray the Cross



Day 21:

- Psalms 101-105
- Luke 17
- Pray the Cross



Day 22:

- Psalms 106-110
- Luke 18
- Pray the Cross



Day 23:

- Psalms 111-115
- Luke 19:1-27
- Pray the Cross

## PRAYER



Day 24:

- Psalms 116-120
- Luke 19:28-48
- Pray the Cross



Day 25:

- Psalms 121-125
- Luke 20
- Pray the Cross



Day 26:

- Psalms 126-130
- Luke 21:1-19
- Pray the Cross



Day 27:

- Psalms 131-135
- Luke 21:20-38
- Pray the Cross



## PRAYER



Day 28:

- Psalms 136-140
- Luke 22
- Pray the Cross



Day 29:

- Psalms 141-145
- Luke 23
- Pray the Cross



Day 30:

- Psalms 146-150
- Luke 24
- Pray the Cross



# NOTES

## 2. CONVERSATION TO COMMUNION

1. Luke 23:39-43
2. Luke 11:1-4

## 3. WE LAY DOWN

1. James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 47-49.

## 4. WE RISE IN VICTORY

1. Luke 8:40-56
2. Luke 24:1-12
3. Luke 24:13-35
4. Luke 10:25-37
5. Luke 9:51-52, 17:11)



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jonathan and Kristian Crabtree currently live in Bristol, United Kingdom, along with their two children, Danika and Jon Andrew. They are both ordained clergy in the Mississippi Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in the U.S.A. The Crabtree family is on family leave while Jonathan pursues a PhD through the University of Aberdeen (researching on site at) Trinity College Bristol. The family is also researching new forms and expressions of Church by studying and living alongside wonderful folks in the Church of England and Non-denominational congregations.

Apart from researching and children going to school, the family enjoys exploring the U.K. They enjoy all things outside, even though almost every hike ends with someone hungry or tired; probably just like every other family. Every evening they enjoy a meal while watching re-runs of "Boy Meets World" and then celebrating the Lord's Supper and praying the Lord's Prayer every night. Every. Single. Night.

They enjoy recording podcasts and writing blogs, which can be found at their website: [www.amonksthetable.com](http://www.amonksthetable.com)

