

TO REIGNITE YOUR 5 ideas PRAYER LIFE

By Janel Breitenstein

MY HUSBAND, JOHN, AND I bumped along the iron red of a back road in Uganda, pausing for a herd of longhorn cattle. The couple weathering these potholes with us spoke of the path they'd taken to be there. They hadn't both grown up in Christian homes, yet here they were. I wanted to know more. What was the final circumstance God used to waken them? The wife recalled a neighboring family. "It was how they prayed," she said. "I'd never heard anyone pray like that before."

It was as if they personally knew God, she explained. As if He was there.

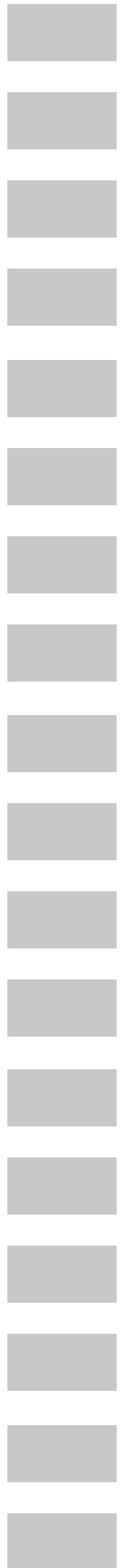
Decades later, she was in Uganda, serving God's people because of the way a family prayed. Talking with God should not be a periodic act but a constant, intimate conversation. Natural, rather than stilted. Prayer changes us. It shapes our hearts when we're trying to forgive someone. It may even lead to ideas of how to serve. As we see our prayers for ourselves and each other kick-start change in our own lives, we can say, "Hey, I love seeing you do that. We've been praying for that!"

Praying for each other is ultimately a form of love.

Professor Peter Kreeft wrote, "I strongly suspect that if we saw all the difference even the tiniest of our prayers to God make, and all the people those little prayers were destined to affect, and all the consequences of those effects down through the centuries, we would be so paralyzed with awe at the power of prayer that we would be unable to get up off our knees for the rest of our lives."

Praying below the surface

Prayer can be so much more than the equivalent of making sure we dictate the entire grocery list to Siri. Take my conversations with my husband. Certainly, there are business matters for us to discuss. But if all our talks concern a discipline issue with one of the kids, or a call from the bank, or a message someone asked me to pass on, I go away feeling like we conducted a business transaction, as if my husband were a great ATM. And he doesn't experience a closeness, the sense of my receiving his thoughts and emotions, or the esteem or nurture that helps him thrive.



When we don't speak at the heart level of what's really on our minds, if there's not a flow of relationship, I don't come away connected. I could communicate the same about prayer. Yes, we can of course talk with God about the practical. But are we relating with Him? Chatting about deeper things? Listening to Him? Experiencing Him in relational interchange?

The Bible portrays prayer as a continuing dialogue (Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17), almost like a conversation you'd have with a family member throughout the day, with an added emphasis on listening and responding.

St. Benedict often said, "Ora et labora"—translating to the command, "Pray and work." In what ways can prayer work its way into your day, as if God were working alongside you?

Prayer creates a real-time, conscious awareness of God's response to our world, listening to how God might be moving in us to follow Him—and then respond to Him.

So how can you move your prayer time from “checking the box” to a more intimate time?

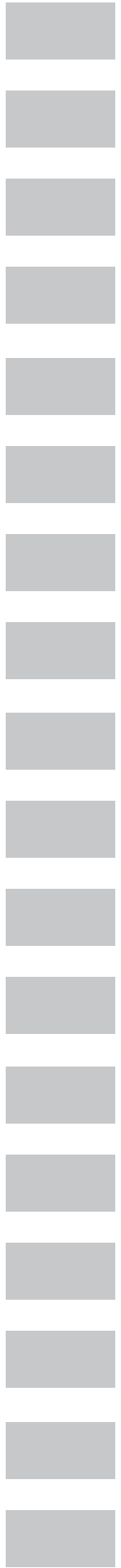
MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD THE NEUROPSYCHOLOGY ADAGE that neurons that fire

together, wire together. It's why you could smell cinnamon and associate it with the warm feelings of your grandma's house or see a hairstyle that transports you back to the feelings of high school.

So this begs the question: What does your brain associate with prayer?

Does your body remember slugging it out to stay engaged and pay attention to a list? Do you think of your time with God and remember calmness, like an embrace?

God made us people attached to bodies. God created seven sensory-stuffed feasts for the Old Testament Hebrews, occurring in the same seasons every year like Christmas or Easter do for us. He connected himself with sensory pleasures. Remember: Jesus' big debut was making wine from water for the celebration of a wedding. The Bible ends with His own wedding. God's the pinnacle of our joy, of our feasts and revelry. And He uses our senses, as He does in Communion or the Eucharist, to cement our minds to what we can't see. In the past, I've needed to rewire my time with God to help my brain associate Him with the delight He is, not drudgery or (always) discipline.



For me, this started with fixing myself a latte and slathering on lavender lotion during my prayer time—things I didn't have time for otherwise. I also needed to get in touch with my energy levels throughout the day. I'd been going for prayer time after the kids were in bed, but my husband could see I needed to “not do” once we'd reached the kid-finish-line. I needed to remind my body and my self that God was a get-to rather than a have-to.



RETHINK YOUR PRAYER TIME
#2
IDEAS AND GOALS

YEARS AGO, A FRIEND TOLD ME that rather than a time amount or certain activity in prayer, he simply decided to have time with God until he felt like he'd heard what God wanted to say to him.

Maybe I'd refine my friend's concept to first being with God, being present with Him. Like I might with my husband on a date night. (To be clear, it's entirely possible for me to “hear” what my husband says, but miss his heart or boil it down to a to-do—lacking the relationship.) Using a concept from author

Skye Jethani, I want to be with God, not just be an instrument for God.

But just like knowing my husband, I've had to remind myself time with God isn't a goal to be achieved. I might know my husband's favorite kind of pie and his Starbucks order and his favorite shoe store, but not realize what makes his shoulders lift or sag when he comes in the door from work.

Personally, my goals can get in the way of knowing God and spending time with Him. To open myself to Him. He already knows what I need: “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:7-8).



KNOW THE WAYS YOU MOST
#3
NATURALLY WORSHIP

Sometimes, prayer time looks like going on a walk with God, listening to worship music, playing the piano, or sitting with my eyes closed, breathing a prayer in and out. I also use colored pens and a blank journal to create Scripture art, chewing on a verse.

I'M FASCINATED BY SOME OF THE PATHWAYS author Gary Thomas has identified for each of us to best connect with God—sort of like our unique worship personality.



Think of these pathways like a love language. Perhaps you're a naturalist who loves God best outdoors, or a sensate, who experiences God through art, music, or smells. Maybe you love God through religious rituals or sacraments, like liturgy. Or you're an ascetic who cherishes God in solitude and simplicity. You might be an activist, a caregiver, or a displayer of great passion. You might be contemplative or intellectual—or a mix of any of these. Perhaps prayer time for you is occasionally best spent in a physical posture on your knees, or walking through the woods, or lighting candles and praying from books like *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Everyday Radicals*. Perhaps you're inspired in prayer when passionate about a cause, or interceding for others using worship music. If you find others affect your enthusiasm or you need the discipline of structure, invite a friend to pray with you regularly.



PAY ATTENTION TO
YOUR SOUL'S REALITY
#4

I BEGAN NOTICING TIMES WHEN I'D GET UP from my prayer time and later find myself crying or feeling angry, not having even engaged with those emotions in my time with God.

Pastor and author Peter Scazzero takes time to acknowledge where he's at emotionally before God. Because "When we do not process before God the very feelings that make us human, such as fear or sadness or anger, we leak. Our churches are filled with 'leaking' Christians who have not treated their emotions as a discipleship issue." Rather than

seeing my emotions as something to look beyond in my prayer time, instead, I now attempt to bring my whole self into the sanctuary. You could say I'm trying to love God with all of my heart, soul, and mind.

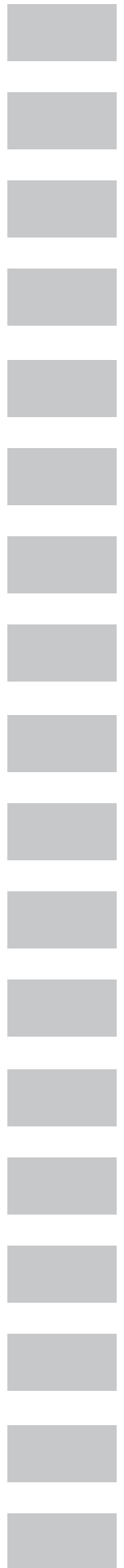
It's still critical I preach truth to my soul, too—to say, "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God" (Psalm 42:5). But like the Psalmists, when tears are my food (Psalm 42:3), that depth of feeling receives facetime with God too.



HOLD THEM IN GOD'S
PRESENCE & LISTEN
#5

I HAVE A WONDERFUL PRAYER APP I USE to keep track of things I'd like to pray for. It helps me pray specifically and meaningfully for the relationships in my life. But every now and then, I get the idea prayer for other people should be more than just this.

Ruth Hayley Barton writes in *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*:



I am...careful about how I use prayer lists. Now, as I sit quietly in God's presence daily, I see who God brings to mind and heart. As they come into my awareness, I invite them into that place where God's Spirit and my spirit are communing, and we sit together with that person. If I have a list or if there are people and concerns weighing on me, I bring those, too, and we sit together with them. I don't feel burdened by the need to figure anything out or to say words that indicate that I somehow have a handle on the situation. It is enough to share the love, the rest and the care of God with them in this way. She loves people in prayer and presents them to God's presence in a way that I somehow imagine Jesus interceding for me.

This concept frees me—shifting my focus from getting my prayer “right” for this person, and allowing the Holy Spirit to intercede for me and for them (Romans 8:26). Sometimes I want to pray so I can be “that person” who people can trust to pray for them, who remembers them. Of course it's good to establish goals for the kind of woman I want to be, but would you want to be the one I pray for so that I'm a better person?

Me neither. I want to be diligent in both love and prayer.

We pray for others in order to love them; to stand in the gap for them, like Abram for Sodom, or Moses, or David, or Esther, or Ezekiel. In fact, consider praying God's own words for others, in the form of Scripture—which tends to meld our hearts with His.

And we pray to interact with God; to know Him. And to be the daughters and sons who ask.

Portions of this article are adapted with permission from Permanent Markers: Spiritual Life Skills to Write on Your Kids' Hearts (Harvest House, 2021), as well as “[Ideas for When Quiet Time is Hard](#),” and “[This Could Be More: Praying Beyond the List](#)” from janelbreitenstein.com (July 29, 2022 and April 4, 2019).

Prayer Walk: 12 Prayers for Your Community

LOOKING TO REIGNITE YOUR PRAYER LIFE? Maybe it's time to lock arms with others, pooling your energy and vision. Consider a "prayer walk" around your neighborhood, lifting it to God with community members.

Using the prayers and verses below, maybe you'll experience the power of praying Scripture aloud on behalf of others, experiencing God's own passion and words for your neighborhood. Maybe you'll enjoy a cup of coffee afterward together, to revel in each other's enthusiasm. Then, consider starting a group text to exchange answers to prayer and continue to pray more specifically for unique requests around you.

1. Open up ways for us to introduce our community to You! Show us new, relevant ways to meet the needs of our community on Your behalf. Give us wisdom, the ability to see people and their needs, hearts that hear You, and holy creativity.

"I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." 1 Corinthians 16:8-9

"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Ephesians 5:2

2. You've placed me and these community members here on purpose. Expose my personal hurdles to building relationships and talking about the hope I've found. Help me change.

"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us..."
Acts 17:26-27

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience..."
1 Peter 3:15-16, NIV

3. Make Yourself famous here. Make Yourself known for who You really are—not false ideas.

"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ... Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!'" Psalm 96:3, 10

4. Reveal to my community the ways we need You and long for You—the ways we're unsatisfied at the soul level.

“They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

Jeremiah 2:13

5. Activate and motivate Christians in our community. Give us vision and passion for those around us.

“Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Matthew 9:38

“And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left...?”

Jonah 4:11

6. Create genuine connections between us.

“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10

7. Move the hearts of our leaders. Use them for Your perfect plans.

“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.” Proverbs 21:1

8. Defeat existing spiritual powers here. Remove everything keeping people from following You.

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Ephesians 6:12

9. Fuel our work and effectiveness with Your Holy Spirit.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

10. Work around and in the hearts of our community. Please go before and within and after us.

“As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” Matthew 13:23

“No one can come to me unless Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:44

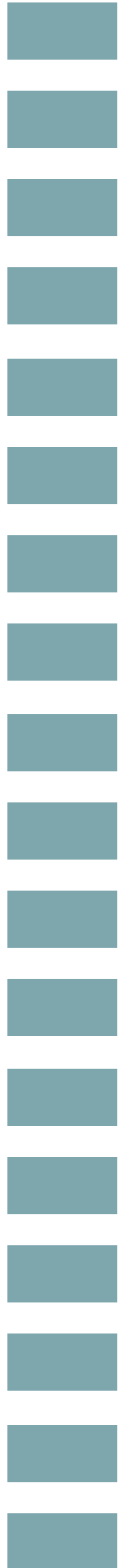
11. Let our love for You and others make us brave.

“Keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication ... that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel ... that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” Ephesians 6:18-20

12. Amplify what You’re doing inside of us. Draw attention to Yourself in this place. Help people see You’re our true motivation and the true source of love, hope, and change.

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

Need a reminder that God is working even when we can’t see it? Print out the next page as a memo that God cares for us even when the answer to our prayers is “no”.



5

MEMOS

TO

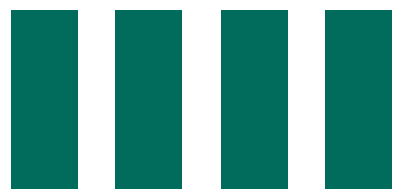
MYSELF

WHEN

GOD

SAYS

NO



1

He withholds no good thing. His goodness is more pure and true than I can comprehend.

With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending His own Son, is there anything else He wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? Romans 8:31-32 MSG

2

I can't trust my reason more than God.

We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know... Job 42:2,3

3

A lot of things aren't right here. But this isn't the end.

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die... Jesus wept.

John 11:25-26,35

4

Many who God loves have suffered. Pain is not a sign of His lack of affection.

...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured...so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:2-3

God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? Hebrews 12:7

5

He compassionately hears you.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18

Cast all of your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7

When God Says No

By Janel Breitenstein

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME you wondered if God really was good?

I can't say I remember the first. But I have to admit that it's a constant decision: to choose truth and trust.

It was Eve's issue too, right? Questioning the purity of God's motives, her God-created brain and heart tossed around an insidious idea: Maybe He's the one who's lying.

And honestly, there are too many parts of me that are false and undeveloped and limited in sight: "Let God be true, and every human being a liar" (Romans 3:4, NIV).

Struggling with Faith? You're in Good Company

I'm writing for those of you who identify with Thomas more than Peter. Who peer at the Bible with head cocked, your mouth a line of thoughtfulness. Who tend to uncover more questions than answers when you're struggling with faith. Whose pain has resulted in a series of unsteady steps backward, confused but holding on.

And I'm writing to myself, as I'm confused by some prayers of mine and others God hasn't visibly answered... Yet.

But in the Bible, I see God:

- *Beckoning Zacchaeus, who climbed a tree to see Him.*
- *Conceding to a red-eye rendezvous with Nicodemus.*
- *Whispering to Elijah in a cave.*
- *Answering his cousin John, who was questioning his life's work—maybe even its soon-to-be martyred end—in a dank, infested cell.*
- *Sheltering Mary Magdalene's weathered, raw soul when He might have been winning the approval of piles of Pharisees.*
- *Meeting Hagar in the desert as life evaporated from her, body and soul.*
- *Delivering a lone, long-tortured demoniac to liberty at last.*

God has this way of gentle, all-seeing, arresting questions that cut right to what's sacred in us. How does God respond when it's hard for me to believe?

When we're struggling with faith, He leans in: "A bruised reed [God] will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench" (Isaiah 42:3).

To an abandoned, pregnant Hagar: “Where have you come from and where are you going?”

And the blind Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?”

To the disciples: “What are you looking for?” and, “Who do you say that I am?”

His questions tell me of a careful knowledge of and nurture for troubled, confused souls.

When God says “no”

I DON'T KNOW WHAT PRAYERS OF YOURS FEEL UNANSWERED, or in which you've received a flat-out no. But as I continue to come back to my questions of unanswered prayer—things I was so certain God would want too—I'm scrawling some memos to anchor me when I just want to lean on my own seven-pound brain understanding of the world.

Jesus asks in The Message paraphrase of Matthew 7, “If your child asks for bread, do you trick him with sawdust? If he asks for fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing. You're at least decent to your own children. So don't you think the God who conceived you in love will be even better?” (verses 9-11).

Looking throughout the Bible, I witness several circumstances appearing carefully coordinated for despair: the beleaguered, terrified disciples in a sleepless, storm-thrashed night, bailing water for hours from a boat. Hezekiah, watching the Assyrians that sacked Israel and the vast majority of the known world, closing in around his people. The sun descending on a dead man sagging from a cross, whom everybody hoped would change everything forever.

Yet rather than despair, these situations were masterfully strategized and written for astounding triumph. For glory. To say, Behold: Our God.

God is not a crafty fiction writer, endeavoring to gather us in suspense with the proper plot twists. He is not a vindictive Greek deity, crossing His arms with an eyebrow raised: You'd better pick the right prayer.

He's the Shepherd who knows His sheep, knows how to get their attention. His glory can't be teased apart from His profound, tenacious love for us and our welfare. Like the rest of history, He only leverages prayer for our good.

Struggling with faith: the climb

THREE TIMES, MY HUSBAND HAS ASCENDED all of Kilimanjaro's 19,341 feet. Though a non-technical climb, it required a lot of fitness. He and his groups proceeded among eight different biozones among all the switchbacks and cliffs, through eight strenuous days.

But only recently did I make the association with our breathless, arduous pursuit of intimacy with God: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psalm 24:3).

Timothy Keller points out about Psalm 24 in *The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms*, "To know his presence ... is to 'ascend' a hill or mountain ... and doing so is always a struggle. You must repent, seeking a clear conscience (verse 4). You must know your idols and reject them (verse 4). And you must wrestle in prayer to seek God's face, as did Jacob (verse 6), who said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me'" (Genesis 32:26).

Perhaps, like my husband's climb, rigor is required. But each trail unfolds more of the greatness of an inscrutable God: "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

And there's satisfaction in the ascent. There remains a level of contentment and adventure in the struggle itself, even in having not yet fully summited, not yet reaching the fulfillment of our clawing hunger, not yet seeing all he sees from his elevation.

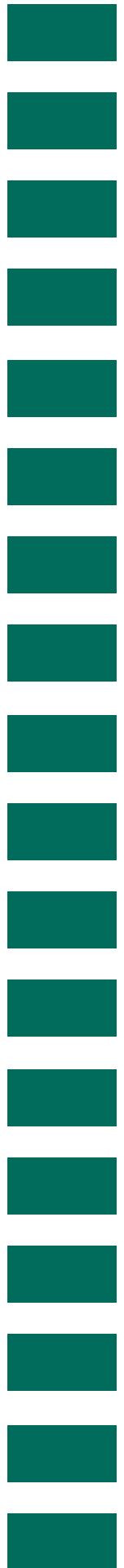
Your name is struggle

I'VE WRESTLED WITH GOD. Examining Jacob's story, I was intrigued all over again that God engaged in the emotional-turned-physical wrestling with Jacob, and chose not to overpower him. Then He honored Jacob's brazen request by granting the requested blessing. Jacob renames the place "Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered'" (Genesis 32:30).

His struggle leads to worship.

Pastor and author Chris Hodges points out that Jacob's fierce determination for God's blessing did cost him, leaving him with a limp. Like Jacob, my struggle with God has left parts of me dislocated now and again, struggling through a night where sunrise seems elusive. But in this story, Jacob does not seem to hijack a blessing like he'd tried before—pretending he was someone he wasn't (Genesis 25:27-34). This time, through a striving of years that culminated in a long night, Jacob finally seized the identity God had intended for him: Israel.

It would become the name of God's people: "struggles with God".



A God big enough for my questions

SEE, GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN BIG ENOUGH for all my questions— questions which so often reveal more about me than they do about Him. As I comb through the tangles in my thoughts, there is peace to be found. In struggling with faith, I need not abandon truth until all my questions have been answered. He’s still the God hiking up His robes to run toward me (Luke 15:20), far from hiding or reluctance. And all the things I can’t wrap my mind around are simultaneously the reasons He is so much bigger, so other, so worthy of worship. There is too much evidence that God is who He says.

Here’s to you, strugglers. And to the God who welcomes us with open arms.

Showing Up: Tips on Being Fully, Powerfully Present with God

YOU’VE BEEN THERE: whirling into a coffee shop or dinner with friends. Or talking on the phone while your kids fight in the other room and you try to remember whether you’ve added salt to the recipe you’re cooking, doggone it.

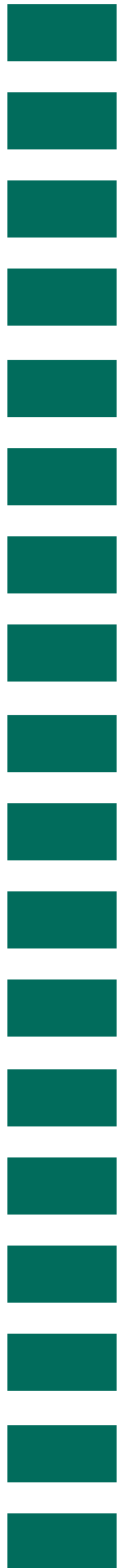
But somehow, the person looking you in the eyes, or on the other end of that phone call, can just ... be there. Ever conversed with a person who just really makes you feel heard and received? Who’s undistracted, and all there?

Real presence with other people directly begins with the way we’re present with God. Take Paul’s words: “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy ... Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:1-4).

Our ability to be truly present with other people—undistracted, wholly there—begins first in having comfort and affection from God. We’re able to set aside image management (which to me, can be more consuming than my phone) to be focused and with someone.

Even more, as I’ve thought about presence, I’ve been curious as to how present I am in my most central, overarching relationship. My attention is sucked away by schedules and material stuff and worry: “The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

The noise in my life chokes God’s presence in my life; my ability to listen.



How can we be “all there” with God?

1. Don't be duplicitous.

THIS ONE CAN SEEM ALMOST LAUGHABLE—who would try to fake it with God? Even when I'm alone, the “outside” of my mind can be participating in a spiritual discipline, but the inside isn't engaged.

Sometimes I pull out my Bible and spend time in prayer, but remain preoccupied with what I need to do for work, my anxiety about one of my kids, or wondering about a social situation. Rather than bringing those things to God and allowing him to interact with me, I'm pretending to be there.

This may even go deeper if I'm ruminating on my resentment toward someone or presuming God takes my side in judging them.

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being two-faced: They spackled up the outside, “but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27).

It's the beauty of the Psalms, to me, that the Psalmist can be both completely with God and completely himself. He both listens to his soul and preaches to it in light of who God is. The Psalmist prays, “Unite my heart to fear your name” (Psalm 86:11). I wonder if I was on God's mind when He penned this one... because my heart can be going in about 167,856 directions at once.

I'm just not all there. I've got conflicting desires (check out James 1:5-8 on this one). Scattered attention. My heart isn't “pure” in the sense of being of one substance, of being undivided. But it's the pure in heart who see God (Matthew 5:8): in one sense, those whose hearts are all there with Him.

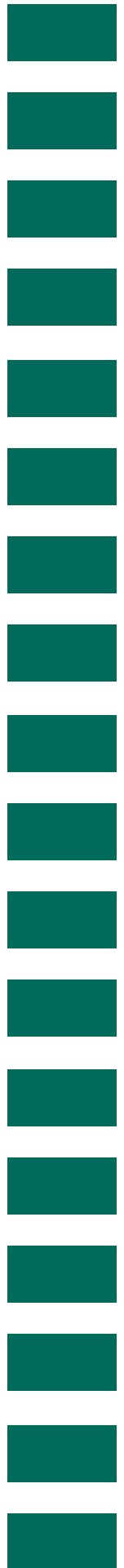
But as for God? The Lord our God, the Lord is One. I need Him to bring the broken pieces of myself together, under the leadership and worship of One.

That said—

2. Don't cover up.

IT'S INTERESTING TO ME how many of God's questions to humans seem to beckon them toward engagement (What do you want me to do for you?), and sometimes—like Adam and Eve in the Garden—out of hiding, (Where are you?).

This fascinates me because God knew exactly where they were. Again, He knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8). So He's asking not for information, but to relate to us.



I tend to hide from God what I'm uncomfortable with: anger, fear, sadness. But presence means surpassing my first inclination of shame, of hiding when I'm with God. Jesus is my shame-lifter. So I don't have to hide anymore.

3. Don't just exchange information.

DATE NIGHTS ARE ONE OF MY FAVORITE THINGS. But what would be a really bad date night? To spend the entire time just exchanging information, checking off the list of things we need to cover as parents and people who administrate the same household.

If my husband and I don't enjoy each other and receive each other and connect, what's the quality of our date night? We had a business meeting with good food. Or we sat beside each other to experience a movie.

I want more than this with my man. And I want it with God, too.

If I'm coming to God's Word just for knowledge, I'm missing the one who wrote it. It's become more important than Him. (Again, the Pharisees were legendary with this.)

4. Allow your core to be affected.

SIMILARLY, THERE ARE TIMES when I'm going through the motions, yet not emerging having interacted with the most high God.

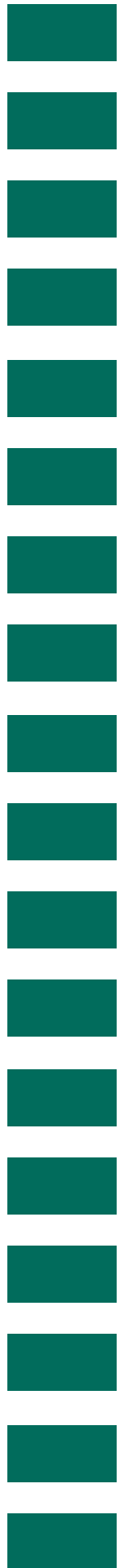
Maybe in that date night scenario, it's the picture of the man or woman who's with their spouse but doesn't go away having been impacted at all by the relationship. We'd see a husband or wife in those circumstances as being cold or detached.

But all of us have had "time with God" in which nothing really penetrates us. It's where we complete the task, but don't allow ourselves to know and be known. Remember what God says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ... And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21-23, emphasis added).

I'm in no way comparing a "meh" prayer time with eternity away from God! But is our time with God characterized by knowing His voice (John 10:27-28)?

5. Be aware of presence everywhere.

THERE HAVE BEEN VALLEYS IN MY LIFE where sensing God's presence has been marked by doubt and distance.



But God tells me He's everywhere: "Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit? to be out of your sight? ...Then I said to myself, 'Oh, he even sees me in the dark! At night I'm immersed in the light!' It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you; night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you" (Psalm 139:7-12, MSG)

So part of our task is simply to see Him, having the eyes of my heart enlightened (Ephesians 1:18).

Keeping a gratitude journal or lists of thankful things is one of the best ways to turn my eyes upward—to realize the goodnesses of God piling up around me.

I also like the Prayer of Examen for this—quieting my heart to comb through my day at its end, considering where I've seen God's presence and how I've responded to it (or failed to). What am I thankful for? What brought me closer to God's presence, and what pushed me further away?

6. Be willing not to grasp.

PHILIPPIANS 2:6 MENTIONS Jesus didn't count equality with God as something to be grasped—a distinct contrast to the narrative of Lucifer, who wanted to make himself like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14).

I'm reminded that in the Lord's Prayer, before we ask for anything, we acknowledge God's presence and identity: "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done..." (Matthew 6:9-10).

We come to God like Jesus in Gethsemane: completely transparent about what we want, but holding it with open hands. "not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

I choose to be with You, Lord, and not because of what I get from You.

Portions of this article are adapted with permission from ["This Could Be More: Praying Beyond the List"](#) and ["Struggling with Faith? You're in Good Company"](#) from janelbreitenstein.com (April 4, 2019 and January 29, 2022).