



First Friday of the Month Call to Prayer March 2016

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
Philippians 4:6 ESV

Welcome to our March 2016 First Friday Call to Prayer. Our aim is to provide you with teaching that we trust will be an encouragement to you. We will also provide you with praise items and prayer requests coming from within ANiC, ACNA and the Anglican Communion.

We encourage you to set aside **the first Friday, March 4th**, as a day of prayer and fasting for the Church in these critical days, ideally gathering with other believers in your parish or region for corporate prayer at some point in the day.

Prayer Quotes

Our duty is to seek a prepared heart in waiting, longing, and praying and in studying, gazing, loving, worshipping, and believing that the wonderful vision of Christ is the promise of what we can be. Then, putting aside all that can distract, in stillness of soul, silent unto God, we allow His Light to do the work. Andrew Murray 1828 - 1917

7 Ways to Fight Distraction During Prayer

by Gavin Ortlund

<http://gavinortlund.com/2016/01/24/7-ways-to-fight-distraction-during-prayer/>

I've been trying to pray more this year. But prayer does not always come easily to me. I often find that I sit down to pray with the best of intentions, only to suddenly catch myself, a few moments later, daydreaming about yesterday's conversation, tomorrow's meeting, or next week's vacation.

Distraction can be a huge hindrance in our prayer life, but I am also discovering that it provides an opportunity for growth. Here are seven strategies for fighting distraction, and harnessing it to deepen and direct our prayers.

1) Pray with Scripture

I remember hearing somewhere (I can't remember where) that Scripture teaches us how to pray as a mother teaches a child how to talk. God speaks to us through his Word, and then we speak back to him in response, much as a child listens to his parents and then responds. As the father of soon-to-be-3-year-old who is talking more and more, and saying some truly hilarious things, this is an illustration that resonates with me! And I find it true in my prayer life.

The point of the metaphor is that just as none of us are born already knowing how to talk, none of know how to pray on our own. We *learn* how to pray, and more often by observation/imitation than by direct instruction. As I look to Scripture to develop and mature my praying instincts, I find it not only informs the content of my requests, but also helps me cultivate the impulses and appetites undergirding them.

There are so many things in Scripture that my flesh would never think to ask for. I usually don't ask for boldness when I'm persecuted (Acts 4:29), or interpret my grief in light of God's honour and redemptive plan (Nehemiah 1:5-11), or say things like "teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). But again and again, Scripture rebukes my shallow, self-oriented prayers and summons them upwards into the larger context of God's glory, the church, eternity, and the advance of the gospel.

Some biblical prayers that may be especially worth meditating on to focus our minds and hearts:

- Nehemiah 1:5-11: Nehemiah's prayer when he hears the walls of Jerusalem are still fallen down
- Daniel 9:1-19: Daniel's prayer for God's people during exile
- II Chronicles 20:1-12: Jehoshaphat's prayer for deliverance from attack
- Ephesians 3:14-21: Paul's prayer for spiritual strength to grasp Christ's love
- Matthew 6:9-13: The Lord's Prayer (this is often a great one to start with)

2) Prayer with a Pen

I find it helpful on occasion to write out a prayer. Written prayer should not be a replacement of vocal/mental prayer—but I find it works very effectively as a supplement to it. When you are writing, there is a kind of mental discipline and intentionality that is often absent in vocal communication. It's harder to get distracted, and it enables you to channel and structure your prayer a bit more.

An added benefit is being able to go back, even years later, to see how God has answered your prayers—or (more commonly, in my experience) changed what you pray for!

3) Pray with Fasting

Prayer and fasting are healthy practices in themselves, but work especially well together. When our stomachs are empty, it reminds us to pray, “Lord, fill my soul!” When we are earnest in prayer, it helps us deal with the hunger pains.

I find one of the areas I need to fast is with social media. Social media changes the way our brains function. It speeds up information flow, clutters our consciousness, and reduces our ability for things like meditation, reflection, quiet. It's not an easy transition from surfing Facebook and Twitter for hours to lingering before the Lord in prayer.

When Jesus prayed, for instance, he often went out to “a desolate place” (Mark 1:35). Like him, we need to cultivate the discipline of solitude, the discipline of stillness before the Lord. We should not be surprised if we are scattered and distracted in prayer if we are scattered and distracted all the time.

4) Pray with People

I believe corporate prayer and private prayer fuel one another (kind of like prayer and fasting). The corporate prayer is all the more powerful if we've already been praying on our own; and the private prayer is instructed and encouraged by how we've seen God at work in the prayers of others.

Not only is it harder to get distracted when you're not out there on your own, but Christ promises his provision (Matthew 18:19) and his presence (Matthew 18:20) to the prayers of “two or three.”

5) Pray with Purpose

Distraction flourishes with the amorphous, the ambiguous, the under-defined. I find it helps me maintain focus if I structure my prayer time in specific ways. For instance, I might structure a prayer around one particular aspect of God's character. “Lord, today I have seen your faithfulness through....” Or I might focus on a particular area of need: “Lord, lately my heart has been cold because”

It's hard to drift off when there is a theme or some kind of orienting structure to the prayer.

Also, if you are consistently getting distracted by the same things, you might consider praying about those very things, whatever they are, that are distracting you. Convert the distraction into an opportunity; leverage its grip on your mind and heart to intensify your prayers. “Lord, I am distracted today by _____. I give this to you”

6) Pray with Emotion

There is a kind of unhealthy manipulation that can occur in trying to stir up emotions that we think we should be feeling through an act of the will. On the other hand, it is also unhealthy to let our emotions have untouched sovereignty over our will. There is a way to actively engage our emotions (rather than passively experience them) that is entirely appropriate, and can help us fight distractions.

David, for instance, will interrogate his emotions, “why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” (Psalm 42:5); he will call upon his emotions, “all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Psalm 103:1); he will reason with his emotions, “the Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1).

If there are particular emotions that are leading to distraction (boredom? anxiety? self-concern?), talk back at them, as David does—engage them with the counter-emotions called for by truth.

7) Pray with the gospel

Spurgeon once advised preachers, if they ever lose their place in their sermon and/or don't know what to say next, to go straight to the gospel. That is a good instinct, and I believe it can help us in our prayer

life as well. If all else fails, if distraction keeps seeping in, keep circling back to the gospel. I often find it helpful to pray with this kind of framework:

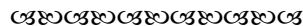
1. Lord Jesus, this is where I would be without you _____.
2. Lord Jesus, this is where I am now with you in my life _____.
3. Lord Jesus, this is what you went through to do this _____.

The gospel never runs out of gripping, awful, wondrous power. Jesus has rescued us from sin, death, and eternal ruin. He has adopted us into the heavenly family, clothed us in his righteousness, and invited us to share in his eternal glory. And he has done so at infinite cost—as the blood drained slowly from his veins, as he sunk down into death and defeat, as friends fled and enemies mocked, as (worst of all) the love between the Father and the Son that had reverberated for all of eternity was now ruptured and severed.

It's hard to daydream when our hearts and minds are focused on the great truths of heaven, hell, and Calvary. Make them the North Star of your prayer life, and it will help you fight distraction.

Gavin Ortlund, the author of this blog article (gavinortlund.com), describes himself as “a Christian trying to live in light of what Jesus has done for me. I'm also a husband, father, associate pastor at Sierra Madre Congregational Church in California (www.smccnet.org), and PhD candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary.” We trust that this simple yet highly practical message will be a blessing to your prayers.

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Praise God ...

- For **faithful Anglican primates, bishops, clergy and laity** – throughout the Communion – who are standing for truth even when their stand for Christ and His Word makes them targets of attack. Especially we praise the Lord for the faithful witness expressed by the GAFCON primates at the recent Canterbury meetings.

Please pray...

- That God would **teach us how to prayer**. That we would have the discipline to focus, to “come apart”, and to learn from Scripture how to conquer our distractions.
- For God’s will to be done and for His Name to be glorified in the ongoing aftermath of the **Primates’ meetings** in January.
- For our primate **Archbishop Foley Beach** (& Allison) - Pray for great wisdom, discernment, courage and strength as he gives leadership to ACNA in the days and months ahead.
- For **Bishop Charlie Masters** (& Judy) – Pray for our diocesan bishop as he leads ANiC. May God give him wisdom and vision for what the outcome of the primates’ meetings means for ANiC. Pray also for spiritual protection, and spiritual and physical renewal.
- For **Bishop Don Harvey** (& Trudy) – Pray for Bishop Don in his roles as ANiC’s episcopal vicar and senior chaplain to the ACNA College of Bishops.
- For **ANiC’s suffragan bishops**: Stephen Leung (& Nona) and Trevor Walters (& Dede). Pray for discernment, energy and grace as they care for their clergy and congregations. Also pray for Bishops Ron Ferris (church planting in Langley, BC) and Malcolm Harding (retired in Brandon, MB).
- For our **Archdeacons**: the Venerables Ron Corcoran (Vancouver Island), Dan Gifford (BC), Bruce Chamberlayne (Alberta & BC Interior), Paul Charbonneau (Ontario), Tim Parent (Ottawa Valley), Paul Crossland (Prairies), Michael McKinnon (New England, USA), and Darrell Critch (Atlantic Region & Quebec) – and our Dean of Multicultural Ministries, the Very Rev Dr Archie Pell.

- For a **major awakening**, a sovereign move of God in our churches and across our nations like has not been seen in our lifetimes. **Rise Up, O God** we pray. Intervene, O Lord, in the midst of our decaying culture and society! Raise up **an army of intercessors** who will call out to you for a mighty visitation of your power and presence!
- For all **ANiC clergy** and families, especially those experiencing spiritual and physical attack.
- For the **ANiC congregations** that are meeting in temporary rental facilities. May God encourage them and pour out His blessing on them, giving them solid hope for the future. Pray also for those congregations bravely exploring the possibility of eventually acquiring a church facility.
- For the **Anglican Relief and Development Fund Canada (ARDFC)** as it raises funds for farming tools, seeds, goats and agricultural training to address malnutrition and extreme poverty in three villages in Burundi – as well as for emergency aid appeals for Syrian refugees and earthquake relief in Nepal.
- For the **Canadian federal government** as it considers the question of assisted suicide. Pray that the voices speaking on behalf of Life rather than death, such as the palliative care doctors, will be heard. Pray for legislation that is pleasing to God and a blessing to our nation.
- For **Canon Andrew White** and his ministry team in the Middle East. Pray for courage, safety and the provision of basic needs for them and the people that they serve.
- For **those who serve us and are in authority over us** – our police forces, our armed forces, our emergency responders, our municipal elected officials, our provincial MLAs, MPPs and premiers, and our federal MPs and Prime Minister as a new government is formed.
- For **God's wisdom for world's leaders** with regard to the Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and other troubled nations. Pray for the hundreds of thousands of refugees who are seeking safety and asylum in Europe and here in Canada. Pray for those churches and communities that are welcoming refugees that they may be a witness to God's compassionate care, both by what they say and do.
- Pray for **protection of innocent civilians** – adults and children – who so often are the victims in today's warfare. Pray especially for the many Middle Eastern, Asian and African Christians who are brutally persecuted for their refusal to renounce their faith in Jesus.