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HOLINESS TODAY

SPECIAL ISSUE

HALF-MILLION
MOBILIZATION
PRAYER INITIATIVE



CALLED TO PRAYER

PROTECTION P. 10
Selena Freeman

DIRECTION P. 13
Gregg Chenoweth

REVELATION P. 17
Kerry Willis

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SPECIAL EDITION OFFER

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A SEASON OF PRAYER

DEAR FRIEND,

Welcome to a special edition of *Holiness Today*! In March/April, we are partnering with the USA/Canada Regional Office to bring you this issue, the subject of which is PRAYER.

Let's be honest: prayer can be a guilt-inducing word.

Over the years, in my time working with the book program at The Foundry Publishing, I have invited many, many people to write books on prayer. Most of the time, the response was the same: the person would look away for a few seconds, shake his or her head apologetically, and murmur something like this: "Prayer? Oh no . . . not me. I'm not qualified to write a book on prayer."

In the early 2000s, we published two fine volumes, *Simply Praying* by Patsy Lewis and *When You Can't Pray* by Al Truesdale. After that—a drought. As a result, I had no luck acquiring a book on prayer for more than 15 years.

Interestingly, in the last 18 months or so, that's changed. I have received more than a half-dozen proposals or manuscripts having to do with prayer. Very curious, indeed! Further, in October 2021, I had the privilege of meeting with Stan Reeder (USA/Canada Regional Director) and Mark Brown (The Foundry Publishing CEO) to brainstorm ways our entities could collaborate. Stan shared in the meeting that God had ignited a vision in his heart for inviting half-a-million Nazarenes to unite in prayer for the future of the Region. Out of that meeting,

an exciting new partnership was born, the result of which you now hold in your hands.

PRAYER: suddenly, everywhere I turn, Nazarenes are thinking about prayer, talking about prayer, writing about prayer. I get the distinct feeling that the Holy Spirit may be doing something brand new. Could it be that in the midst of these crazy and unprecedented days, a fresh wind of renewal is blowing? Are you feeling those same stirrings?

What I am learning from the writers in this issue of *Holiness Today* is that prayer is an invitation to celebrate the most exciting and life-giving relationship we will ever enjoy! No guilt necessary. No inadequacy involved. I love the way David Busic describes it: "To pray is to give attention to our most vital relationship. . . Creator to creation—Person to person—Friend to friend—Father to child—Beloved to beloved" (p. 7).

The pages in this issue are rich with encouragement from seasoned pray-ers. I know you will enjoy the opportunity to join with Selena Freeman, Gregg Chenoweth, and Kerry Willis in praying (via QR code) for protection, direction, and revelation for the church. As Sam Barber reminds us: "Prayer cultivates our vision to see what God is doing in the world . . ."

Lord, teach us to pray!

Bonnie Perry is editor in chief of *Holiness Today*.

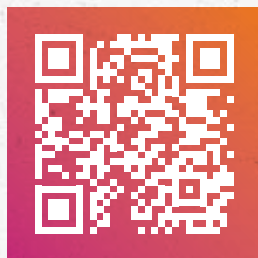


A WORD FROM . . .
T.A. NOBLE

PRAYER

*“He calls us into that
unique, intimate
relationship by placing
on our lips His words
and telling us to pray,
‘Our Father...’”*

—Dr. T. A. Noble



Scan the code to hear T. A. Noble
introduce the concept of prayer.

THE SWEET AROMA OF PRAYER

by DAVID GRAVES

One of the greatest honors of my life has been to represent the Church of the Nazarene around the world. I have finished 12 years as a General Superintendent and have been in jurisdiction on all of our six global regions. It has been a thrill to personally witness what God is doing through our leaders, pastors, laity, and churches.

During these last twelve years, I have had the privilege of attending one regional conference on the Eurasia Region. A regional conference is an event where district superintendents, pastors, missionaries, and key lay leaders come together for a time of training, fellowship, vision casting, inspiration, and spiritual growth. As one of six Global Missions regions of the Church of the Nazarene, Eurasia encompasses 93 sovereign nations or distinct areas across Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, North Africa, and the CIS.



Because the Eurasia Region is vast and spread out, the decision was made to have one conference in the Turkish Republic of Cyprus in November 2019, and a second conference in India in January 2020. Each conference was unique and a blessed experience.

The regional conference in the Turkish Republic of Cyprus began with a meeting of the Field Strategy Coordinators. A theology conference that followed included presentations by some educators and theologians from the region. The presentations were thought-provoking, discussion-producing, and theologically-sound.

Additionally, the general sessions of the conference brought anointed and joyful times of worship, celebration, and preaching from God's Word. Individuals from the different fields on the region led

**PEOPLE GATHERED AROUND THE
MAPS AND FERVENTLY PRAYED . . .
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LIFTED TO HEAVEN WAS A SWEET
AROMA TO THE FATHER.**

the music in each session. What a blessing to worship together and be ushered into God's presence as God's family! The corporate prayer times were heart-warming. In one of these prayer times, large maps representing each field were laid on the floor around the conference room. People gathered around the maps and fervently prayed for each country on that field. I believe the volume of prayer lifted to heaven was a sweet aroma to the Father. This experience reminded me of the golden bowls in Revelation 5:8, which says:

"And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

Many of the conference participants came from areas where evangelical Christians are a small minority. Some had never been with so many Nazarenes. The freedom to openly worship with other believers was a joy to them, and they loved the fellowship. During one of the services, I was honored to present district

minister's license to two pastors who live in a Creative Access Area. The two pastors, like many others, serve in places where Christian persecution and hostility are prevalent. However, they remain faithful and continue to preach the Good News. I praise God for them and pray for their safety and fruitfulness.



Our people and their stories captured our hearts. Did you know that we have ministry among those who have been sex trafficked? In one of our fields in Eurasia, the local pastor's wife has a burden for young girls sold into a life of bondage and abuse. With the help of the local officials, girls are rescued. The pastor's wife provides a house for the girls to live in and a chance for a new life. They can finish their education, be trained for a career, find employment, and experience the love of Jesus.

OUR PEOPLE AND THEIR STORIES CAPTURED OUR HEARTS.

One young lady who had been rescued attended the conference with the pastor's wife. She had previously been to the conference hotel in Cyprus while being trafficked. Now she was back; however, this time she was free and a new creation, transformed by the love of Christ. The old had gone, the new had come. As she walked the grounds, she rejoiced in her new life. She was overwhelmed by the love and acceptance of the people she had never met but who loved Jesus. God is now using her to mentor and disciple other women who have been rescued from that life of bondage.

Another very meaningful time for Sharon and me was the opportunity to share meals with different individuals. The fellowship in a large cafeteria was joyful and full of laughter and conversation.

It is always amazing to watch and listen as Nazarenes share their life and enjoy fellowship. The conference reminded me of the early churches recorded in Acts 2:46-47 (The Message): "They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God."

Sharon and I were overwhelmed by the friendship and genuine love we felt from our Nazarene family in Eurasia. The beauty of the Lord was seen in the smiles on their faces, felt in the hugs that were given, and heard in their passionate prayers. In the way they live and love, they truly reflect Jesus. This is what we felt. This is what we cherish.

David Graves is a general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene.



WHY
PRAYER
MATTERS

by DAVID BUSIC



To pray is to give attention to our most vital relationship. It is giving prioritized time to align our hearts to God's heart. I like Clement of Alexandria's definition of prayer, "Prayer is keeping company with God."¹

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, lightheartedly suggests that prayer is putting yourself *where God can get at you*. When asked by an interviewer why someone should pray if God is present throughout the day to help us anyway, the Archbishop paused, and then said with a twinkle in his eye, "When you're on holiday with the family they are with you all day. You are aware of it. But it would be a very bad family holiday if you didn't sometimes just sit down across the table with children or spouse and say, 'Well, here we are. Let's enjoy the moment, not just running around. And I think that's part of where prayer fits in. It's sitting across the table and saying [to God], 'Well here we are. Let's enjoy this moment together.'"²

Creator to creation—Person to person—Friend to friend—Father to child—Beloved to beloved. Prayer is about coming to know God. But there is more. As we come to know God, we also come to know ourselves. When we pray, we realize we're not talking to ourselves in this inner dialogue. The Spirit of God is praying within us, communicating the will of the Father and laying bare the deepest secrets of our hearts. In truth, prayer may be the only reliable entryway into genuine self-knowing.

Flannery O'Connor, the famous

PRAYER IS ABOUT COMING TO KNOW GOD. BUT THERE IS MORE.

Southern writer, was only twenty-one years old when she began keeping a prayer journal. As a Christian, she learned to pray her feelings through writing them down. Tim Keller reflects on his study of her journey of prayer: "O'Connor learned that prayer is not simply the solitary exploration of your own subjectivity. You are with Another, and he is unique. God is the only person from whom you can hide nothing. Before him, you will unavoidably come to see yourself in a new, unique light."³

Self-realization (or actualization) is a popular spirituality today. A quick Google search of "how to get in touch with my inner self" yielded 683,000,000 results (in 0.64 seconds). Scanning a few of these sites, I was encouraged to spend time in nature, schedule solo dates, take yoga classes, meditate, travel, take long walks, and keep a soul journal. But here's the problem: Transcendental meditation and other Eastern religions that invite me to get in touch with my true self will never succeed, because the only voice speaking is my own—a perpetual echo chamber. Christian prayer, on the other hand, offers me the possibility of actually hearing from Another who is not me, but who knows me. "Prayer," Keller concludes, "leads to a self-knowledge that is impossible to achieve any other way."⁴

There is a difference between knowledge and knowing. Few people have expressed the difference more poignantly than C.S. Lewis. For me, his writings on pain, joy, and prayer are unsurpassed in distinguishing the thin space between knowing God and thereby knowing oneself. Lewis maintains that we are completely

1. Clement of Alexandria, quoted in Simon Tugwell, *Prayer: Living with God* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1975), 35.

2. Rowan Williams Interview with Aled Jones for "Songs of Praise," first broadcast March 7, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1RvKQU78zQ>. Accessed July 28, 2022.

3. Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awes and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 12.

4. Keller, *Prayer*, 12.

known by God—not just known as things like God has knowledge of “earthworms, cabbages, and nebulae,” but known as persons. In that sense, being known completely by God “is our destiny whether we like it or not. But though this knowledge never varies, the *quality* of our being known can.”⁵ Therefore, Lewis contends, the prayer preceding all prayers should be, “May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou that I speak to.”⁶ Only in this way will our prayers preserve the proper order of adjusting us to God than adjusting God to us.

During an extended period of personal theodicy, where Lewis was straining under the burden of God’s silence in the face of heartrending tragedy, he came to this conclusion: “I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?”⁷

When we come face to face with God, we are confronted with what is most true about us; in those moments, we can experience deep change. Like Moses’ encounter in the wilderness, prayer is the holy ground where the bush of God’s glory burns with most radiant brilliance. From there ensues the follow up to complete commitment: a life of dependency framed in a disciplined pursuit of intimacy with God. This disciplined dependency will require always consulting with God instead of relying on my own ideas and decisions.⁸

WHEN WE COME FACE TO FACE WITH GOD, WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH WHAT IS MOST TRUE ABOUT US.

Our resolve to a surrendered life can be renewed with each new moment, each new event, and each new need to abandon independent thinking and to finally treat God as God. Such a posture invites God to direct each moment in lieu of my frenetic efforts to justify my ministry by hyperactively doing things instead of waiting on God to lead. May we live as praying Christians, even when it “seems to be a distraction from so much that needs doing.”⁹

David Busic is a general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene.



5. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1964), 20, emphasis added.

6. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, 109.

7. C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (New York: HarperCollins, 1956, 1984), 351.

8. Glaphr  Gilliland, *When the Pieces Don't Fit: God Makes the Difference* (Bethany, OK: Prayerlife Ministries, 1984, 2004), 125-126.

9. Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979, 1992), 137.

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

Luke 11:1



PROTECTION

by SELENA FREEMAN

I WAS DONE,

overwhelmed, and afraid of the future. My kids were nine and seven years old, and I felt as though everything that Jon and I were doing as parents was failing. The pressures our children were facing to excel in academics, sports, and social endeavors seemed daunting, and all I wanted to do was protect them. My instinct was to hide them away from the world, give them whatever they wanted, and keep them safely in my care.

Late one evening, I found myself especially worried. Jon was out of town, and the kids were asleep in

their rooms. I desperately needed something to calm my nerves and my restless soul, so I quietly left the house. I drove the short trip to McDonalds to pick up a Big Mac and Fish Fillet, and then on to Dairy Queen to grab an Oreo blizzard. I hurried home and made my way up the stairs to my bedroom with bags in hand. The children never knew I was gone. I sat in the middle of my bed, tears streaming down my face, food surrounding me as I tried to find comfort and relief, one French fry at a time. In the midst of my midnight fast food feast, my mind went to a book that

my mother-in-law had given me several months earlier. *Fasting* by Jentezen Franklin had been sitting unopened on my shelf for months, but for some reason that night, I had to know what it said. I cleaned up my food wrappers and went to find the book. As I began

to pour through its pages, I felt I finally had found the answer. Like most believers, I prayed multiple times daily, truly seeking the Lord's will and direction for my life and family, but I had never prayed and fasted for

God's protection over our children. That night in 2009 forever changed my life, the lives of our children, and the future ministry of our family. Every January for the 12 years since, our family has started the year with 21 days of prayer and fasting. Beginning in 2016, when The Well church was planted, our congregations has also begun each year with prayer and fasting.

A passage in Ezra ultimately led me to begin praying and fasting for

God's protection over my life, my children, and the church. At the beginning of the Jews' second return from Babylonian captivity, Ezra declared: "And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before

our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer" (Ezra 8:21, 23, NLT).



Protection is a complex concept with many nuances. Simply defined by the Oxford dictionary, protection is "A person or thing that prevents someone or something from suffering harm or injury." While it is completely appropriate and commendable to pray that our children, homes, communities, and the church would not suffer harm or injury, it is not always wise to seek that they do not endure pain. Pastor Craig Groeschel reminds us,

**PERHAPS
OUR FIRST
PRIORITY AS
WE PRAY
FOR GOD'S
PROTECTION
SHOULD BE
THAT HE
PROTECT
HIS PURPOSE
IN AND
THROUGH US . . .**

“We will grow at the rate in which we can endure pain.” If the goal is for our children, families, and churches to avoid pain at all cost, the cost will be no growth. For all things in life to grow healthy, they must endure pain, (aka) “growing pains.” Perhaps our first priority as we pray for God’s protection should be that He protect His purpose in and through us, through future generations, and ultimately through the church. I have experienced many times that God’s purpose is revealed through painful situations, just as we read in Jeremiah 18:4, “But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over.”

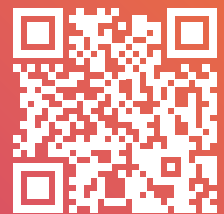
As we consider the future of the church, some of us may be in a place similar to where I was with my children years ago. We feel overwhelmed, afraid of what the future might bring, and maybe even done. We want to hide the church from the cruel world, give our people whatever they want, and keep them safely in our care. But this is not what the church is called to be or do. Praying God’s protection over His church, not ours, is not a prayer for ease and comfort; in fact, it is quite the opposite. We don’t pray God’s protection so that the church might survive but that the church will thrive. Just as we desire that God’s protection will allow our children to grow strong and fulfill God’s purpose for their lives, our prayer for God’s church must be the same.

I have heard it said that, “A comfort zone rarely produces growth and a growth zone rarely produces

comfort.” One of the most uncomfortable things I have ever done as pastor is lead people through 21 days of prayer and fasting. I believe that it has been in a collective posture of humility, hunger, discomfort, and pain that God has poured out His protection, purpose, unity, and growth, individually and corporately upon our body.

As I reflect again on Ezra’s prayer for protection, I am reminded that his journey begins with a heart and posture of humility, and is accompanied by fasting. Ezra’s cry to God is not for the individual, but for the whole community—for his generation and for future generations. He prays that the Israelites would be delivered from captivity and fulfill God’s purpose for them as a people. What if we joined together in prayer for that kind of protection—imagine what God might do in and through the people called Nazarenes!

Selena Freeman is the lead pastor at The Well Church with campuses in Springfield, Aurora, and Marshfield, Missouri, USA.



Scan the code to join with Selena Freeman in praying for God's protection.



DIRECTION

by GREGG CHENOWETH

IMAGINE YOURSELF

standing outside with a friend, staring at the night sky.

“Look at those beautiful stars!” you say, with wonder.

“I know,” he replies, “The constellation Orion is stunning!”

“Huh?” you squint.

Clear to one. Veiled to another.

When Jesus said some see while others actually perceive (Matthew 13:16), He wasn’t talking about physical objects but spiritual

reality. The artifacts surrounding our lives point the way, but do we see the larger constellation? Such discernment is an often-uncultivated faculty from God, a needed “competence” in the spirit (2 Corinthians 3:3-6).

These “stars” are spiritually-loaded experiences, begun in or confirmed by Scripture, impressions of mind in prayer, and counsel from mature believers. Some stars are unmistakably bright—real-time, supernatural miracles. Others are more opaque, seemingly arranged by God for our direction, yet

without clarity. The dimmest stars remain unlocated or are sometimes dismissed as coincidence.

Still, God guides and directs. This elemental declaration is straight-forward and audacious. My star talk isn't a gimmick. It's earthy language for spiritual reality that should incite a riot in your mind and burn a believer with conviction.

Oddly, sometimes seekers more ardently believe that God actively directs people than do malnourished disciples, whose disappointments may have warped their faith along the way. Leonard Sweet reminds us in his book, *Nudge*, how Christians struggle to believe in an omnipresent God. We think of the Father "in" the garden, Jesus "in" heaven, and the Spirit "in" our hearts, without discerning His activity in our circumstances.

To search for sacred content in the visible circumstances of our lives isn't hopeful illusion. It locates a God already there! Our response to the claim, "God guides," sets a trajectory for a household, a city, a nation, and yes, a denomination.

We can document the proof of God's active guidance in Scripture from Genesis through Revelation, and in echoes across billions of testimonies over 2,000 years. A primary example is the Apostle Paul, who, just like us, never met the material Jesus and had to learn to discern God's direction in real time, on high-stakes issues.

Paul explained that an essential function of the believer's life was to "steward the mysteries of God" (1



Corinthians 4:1). To "steward" is to serve as a treasurer, to assume responsibility for assets of the faith and utilize them as needed. The mysteries Paul refers to are two-fold: the upper-case "M" mystery is that we can have eternal peace with God through faith in Christ; the lower-case "m" mysteries are an array of discernments that biblical figures model for us.

What did these biblical characters model that is useful for us today? Scripture teaches us that even the words and actions of Jesus Himself were guided by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14; Acts 1:2). Then Paul says, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1), and "Keep your eyes on those who live as we do" (Philippians 3:17). He encourages us to discern the guidance of God and "fathom all mysteries" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

For example, Paul was "kept by the Holy Spirit from" some ministries (Acts 16:6) and "compelled by the Spirit" to others (Acts 20:22). The direction Paul received from God was not only personal but

sometimes corporate: "It seemed good to the Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28; 16:10).

Let me guess: perhaps you are doubtful that we can be guided by the Spirit like Paul was. Sure, in some ways, Paul was a figure of unrepeatable, divine necessity. I will never be like Paul in the same way I will never ascend the Supreme Court bench or hit a Major League knuckleball over the fence. But I don't believe Paul was an alien super-apostle, whose experience with God is outside our reach.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE CLAIM, "GOD GUIDES," SETS A TRAJECTORY FOR A HOUSEHOLD, A CITY, A NATION, AND YES, A DENOMINATION.

Paul didn't spread the Christian faith from private insights unavailable to us. In Jerry Sumney's book, *Steward of God's Mysteries*, he demonstrates that although Paul was special as a spokesman and missionary, he was not necessarily a diviner of new things. More accurately, Paul assembled and

articulated beliefs already inspired by the Spirit across the regions where he traveled. Paul was quite human, full of insecurities, faced with uncertainties, and in need of clear direction from God on timely issues (Romans 9:2; 2 Corinthians 2:4). Sound familiar?

As we discern God's guidance, I offer three cautions and commissions:

CAUTION 1: Don't assign supernatural agency behind every natural thing. God is omnipresent and aware of all things, not pantheistic and embodying all things. We are not mystics who believe we create unfiltered communion with God. The billboard, song, or coffee cream design in your cup is likely . . . just that.

CAUTION 2: Don't worship signs from God but only the *Signer* (Matthew 16:4). While driving down the highway, you may see a placard that reads, "Chicago 60 miles ahead." But why pull over and admire the sign? Instead, use it to grow confidence in the path you are on. Accelerate to where God leads!

CAUTION 3: Don't speak for God with unreserved confidence, such as, "He told me ...!" Private experience is mediated through fallible awareness, experience, and knowledge. Your impression of mind should be viewed as a perspective or interpretation. In human communication, we say a speaker "implies" something and a listener "infers" it. When God directs, you infer.

COMMISSION 1: If you see a pattern of "stars," confirm your inference in Scripture. God will not direct anything that contradicts the Word, for He cannot be divided against Himself. The same Paul

who was "kept" and "compelled" by the Spirit, also studied the sacred text for three years following his conversion, under the premier teacher of his time, Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3). It is little wonder that Paul taught, "watch your doctrine closely" (1 Timothy 4:13-16).

COMMISSION 2: Confirm in prayer. God draws near every time we pray (Deuteronomy 4:7) and listens to the righteous but not those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12). Paul prayed "continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), sometimes in "wrestling prayer" (Colossians 4:12). In prayer we tell God things, but also hear from Him. Paul prayed, "Give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so we know Him better" (Ephesians 1:15-23). When our impression links to Scripture, our confidence grows to deduce God's direction.

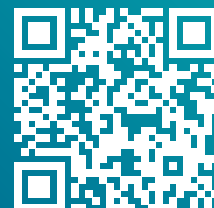
COMMISSION 3: Confirm through the counsel of mature believers. Does your discernment "seem good to the Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28)? Scripture does not require 100 percent unanimity but blesses a corpus of unity. When unity comes, "there the Lord bestows His blessing" (Psalm 133:1-3). If mature believers doubt your inference, listen to them and keep seeking.

As we discern the constellations of our lives, the task isn't looking but rather seeing and perceiving in the competence of the Spirit. God guides and directs. Yes, He does.

Gregg Chenoweth is the president of Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois, USA.



**IN PRAYER
WE TELL
GOD THINGS,
BUT ALSO
HEAR FROM
HIM.**



Scan the code to join with Gregg Chenoweth in praying for God's direction.

“Prayer is where the action is.”

—John Wesley



REVELATION

by KERRY WILLIS

**WHEN YOU ASK,
ASK SPECIFICALLY.
WHEN YOU SEEK,
SEEK DILIGENTLY.
WHEN YOU KNOCK,
KNOCK BOLDLY.**

I was raised on the southern shores of North Carolina in the 1960s and 70s. Those were the days when parents more often locked their children outside of the house than inside. At least, that was my praying mom's regular routine. My precious mother, who many call "Lady Melba," understood that her three sons needed time to play and that she needed time to pray. So as we went out for healthy, physical recreation, she stayed in for holy, spiritual revelation. While we ran and played with our friends in the backyard, she wept and prayed with The Friend at her bedside.

**BECAUSE
SHE BELIEVED
GOD, SHE
HAS BEEN
BEAUTIFULLY
ENGULFED
IN WONDER,
LOVE, AND
PRAISE FOR
ALL OF HER
DAYS.**

Unless we had some emergency, the door of the house would not be unlocked until mom sensed the Lord had revealed Himself to her in some way. It was a faith-filled and sacred time of fervent seeking on mom's part that ultimately kept the lives of her loved ones from coming apart. I remain to this day a great and grateful debtor. Though mom is now 80 years old, and her three preacher-sons are all grown men, she continues her relationship routine as always. Recently, she testified to me on a phone call saying, "The Lord couldn't be more real to me than He is when I pray."

Some may refer to Lady Melba as radical, or even mystical. She would consider such titles as high compliments. If taking God at His word makes one a radical mystic, then a radical mystic is indeed who Lady Melba is. Mom believes that a Holy God would never invite us to look for Him wholeheartedly unless He wanted to be found. She not only believes God's word; she believes God. Lady Melba's approach to prayer is thoroughly scriptural; she believes the ultimate goal of prayer is The Lord Himself. For God to reveal Himself is the highest good of all praying. In the end, it's why we pray—because God promises, "I will be found by you" (Jeremiah 29:14).

Jesus taught His believers simple yet profound lessons on prayer in the New Testament. "Keep on asking," He says in Matthew 7, "and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking and you will

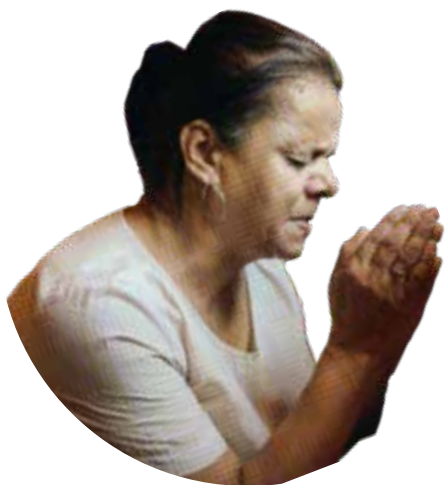
find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks" (Matthew 7:7-8, NLT).

My mentor, Rev. James Spruill, taught me a deeper and more beautiful way to understand this teaching by Jesus. Spruill says, "When you ask, ask specifically. When you seek, seek diligently. When you knock, knock boldly." As he shared these inspiring instructions, I remembered this is also the way my mom prays. The encouragement is simple but profound.

I asked mom a few years back what she asked God for as she prayed (in addition to seeking His presence to be revealed to her). This is what I learned. Lady Melba prayed many specific prayers over many years, but the two reoccurring prayers she always prayed specifically, while continuing to seek diligently and to knock boldly, were:

1. Lord, help us to reach lost souls before it's too late.
2. Lord, please make something out of my three sons.

She smiled as she told me: "I didn't know God would answer my first specific prayer with my second specific prayer. Now, all three of my sons are preachers." Lady Melba has experienced the revelation of the Lord, and she also has lived to see her specific prayers become reality. Her approach may seem radical,



been beautifully engulfed in wonder, love, and praise for all of her days. Age and circumstance are no obstacle—she prays on.

What might happen in our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our schools, and, our local churches if we would simply and profoundly come together to seek God's revelation through prayer?

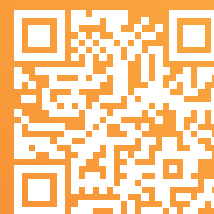
What if we begin anew trusting God and believing that what God has said “*would* happen”; “*will* happen”?

but it's real. It may seem mystical, but it's marvelous. Among the lost souls that were reached before it was too late were her husband, our dad, shrimp boat Captain Billy Willis; and her three sons, Kerry, Billy Joe, and Stephen. Lady Melba's passion for prayer reminds me of what the writer of Hebrews said about Noah: “It was by faith that Noah built an ark to save his own family” (Hebrews 11:7, NLT). When Lady Melba locked her sons outside the house to play because she wanted to spend time seeking God's revelation, the souls of her own family and many others were saved.

Lady Melba's desperate hunger and thirst to wholeheartedly look for Almighty God to reveal Himself to her in her humble home became the driving desire of her devotion to Him in prayer. Because she believed God, she has

Dearest Lord, let the marvelous mystery of Maranatha (O Lord, come!) begin happening even now. Come, Lord Jesus! You have said in Jeremiah “In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for Me wholeheartedly, you will find Me. I will be found by you” (Jeremiah 29:12-14a). Lord, let “those days” be “these days.” Reveal Yourself to us, within us, among us, and beyond us, as we ask specifically, seek diligently, and knock boldly in Your Holy Name. Amen.

Kerry Willis is the district superintendent of the Philadelphia District Church of the Nazarene.



Scan the code to join with Kerry Willis in praying for God's revelation.



The HALF-MILLION MOBILIZATION *Prayer Initiative*

FAST FACTS

WHO:

The short answer is everyone! The Half-Million Mobilization unites the entire Church of the Nazarene in the USA/Canada Region, some 500,000 people, to rally together in prayer for the hope and future (Jeremiah 29:11) of churches on the region.

WHAT:

The Half-Million Mobilization is *A Call to Pray* about and a *Call to Speak* for the future of our denomination and our local churches in Canada and the United States. God is leading us to pray for the *protection, direction, and revelation* of the Spirit on our ministries together. Our prayer is to see *renewal* and a *resurgence* of the Church of the Nazarene and holiness message in our people. The *Call to Speak* is a prayer response survey to gather feedback on what the Spirit says to the church during this time of prayer (see pages 22-23 for more details)!

WHEN:

Dr. Stan Reeder, USA/Canada regional director, has developed a prayer plan to guide Nazarenes through a time of focused seeking and listening. From May 1st through Pentecost (June 5th) you can join in a daily time of prayer using the *Praying Our Way to Pentecost* Prayer Journal. The prayer journal is packaged with this issue of *Holiness Today* and also available online. Plan to follow along and invite your friends! We anticipate a great outpouring of the Spirit during this season.

To launch *Praying Our Way to Pentecost*, on May 1st churches around the region will pray together in our morning services. In preparation, from January through April, days of prayer were designated around the region:

- January 11: 50 Regional leaders
- February 1: 500 District leaders
- March 1: 5,000 Lead pastors
- April: 50,000 Church boards, staff, and ministry leaders
- May 1-June 5: 500,000 Nazarenes at every church in the United States and Canada

On Sunday, May 1st, our hope is that 500,000 Nazarenes will be praying together in USA/Canada as we begin our daily journey *Praying Our Way to Pentecost*!

WHY:

We need God's plan and God's purpose to be fulfilled in our lives and in our churches! As we turn to God for His leading, we will seek His will in prayer together. This time of prayer will be unifying for the USA/Canada Region. God says when we seek after Him with all our hearts, He will be found (Jeremiah 29:13).

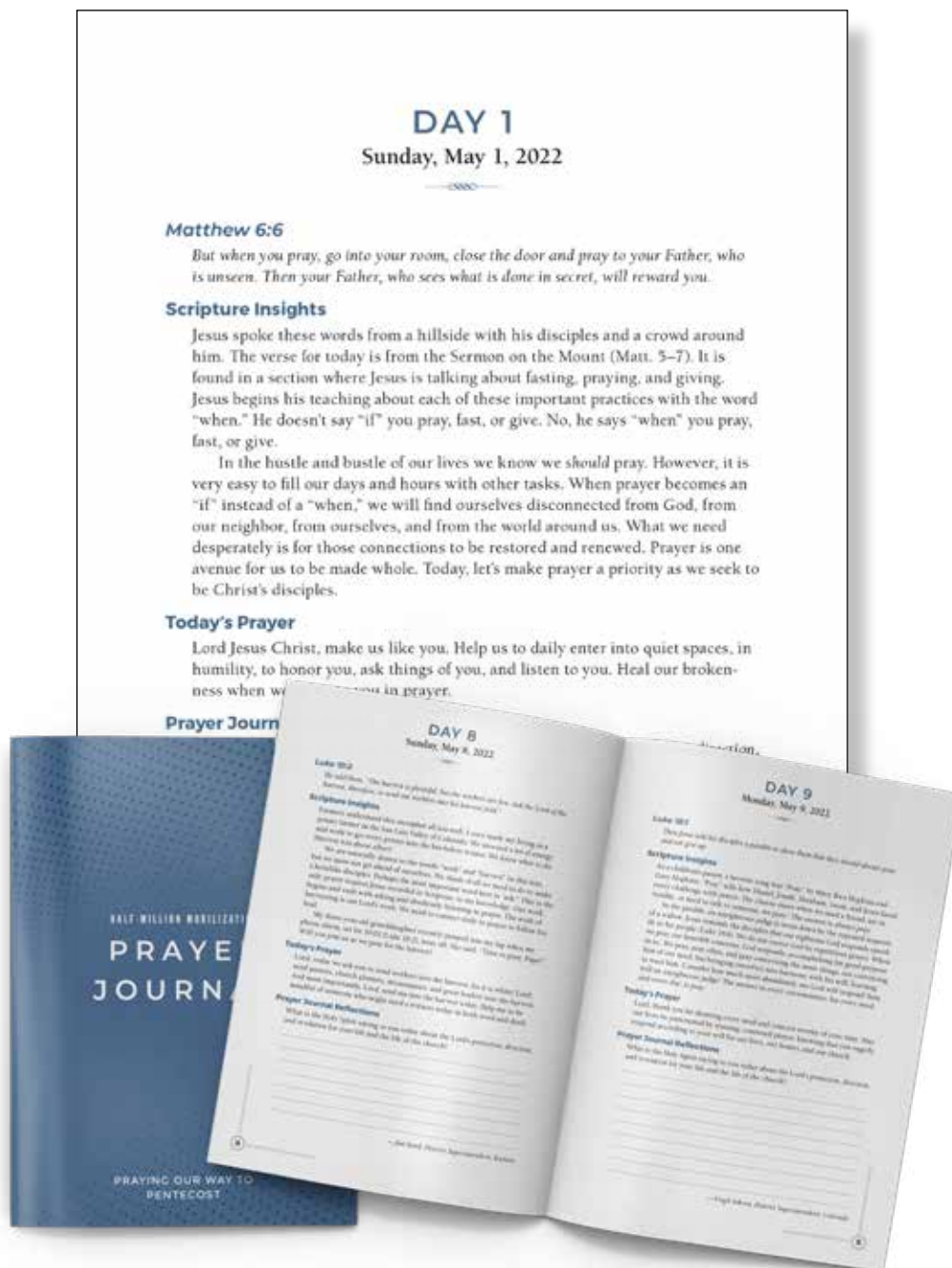
The dream of the USA/Canada Regional Office is that through the Half-Million Mobilization prayer initiative, we will experience unity as a region, we will hear from the Spirit in our times of prayer, we will share with each other what the Spirit is saying, and that ultimately we will discover His plans for our hope and future.



Scan the code to
access additional
Half-Million Mobilization
resources.

A CALL TO PRAY

Join 500,000 other Nazarenes across the USA/Canada Region in prayer. From May 1st through Pentecost (June 5th) you can join in a daily time of prayer using the *Praying Our Way to Pentecost Prayer Journal*. See a sample of the prayer journal below. Plan to follow along and invite your friends!



A CALL TO SPEAK

The *Call to Speak* is a prayer response survey meant to be taken one or more times after you hear from the Spirit in your time of prayer. You can respond after a designated day of prayer or anytime the Lord calls you to prayer and speaks to you about the future of the church.

The prayer response survey is short and can be completed in five minutes. The survey includes an open-ended question where you can respond with what the Spirit is saying to you. Additionally, there are two questions where you can rank and prioritize our ministry focus areas. See a sample of the survey below.

The image shows a desktop browser window and a smartphone displaying the same survey. The desktop view shows a question: "What are you discerning that the Spirit is saying to the Church?" with a large text input area. Below that is another question: "With what key areas can the USA/Canada Regional Office help your church to thrive? (Choose up to 5; place the most important first.)" with a list of ministry focus areas on the left and a right-hand list to drag items into. The mobile view shows the same survey but with a different layout, including a header for "HALF-MILLION MOBILIZATION" and a "Prayer Response" title.

https://surveys.nazarene.org/s3/HalfMillionMobilizationSurvey

What are you discerning that the Spirit is saying to the Church?

With what key areas can the USA/Canada Regional Office help your church to thrive? (Choose up to 5; place the most important first.)

Mobile users need to check the items in the priority order wanted.

Drag items from the left-hand list into the right-hand list to order them:

- Identify and develop innovative leaders
- Resource small group and discipleship ministries
- Equip leaders to plant churches
- Increase leadership development opportunities
- Engage missionally with the community
- Reach the younger generation for Christ
- Reach people disconnected from Christ
- Resource inspiring worship services
- Develop ways for different cultures to worship together
- Enhance our use of technology
- Navigate questions regarding equity, social justice, and race
- Navigate questions regarding human sexuality
- An area not listed here (please add a comment below)

HALF-MILLION MOBILIZATION

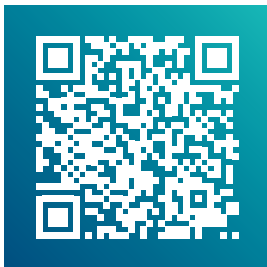
Prayer Response

With what key areas can the USA/Canada Regional Office help your church to thrive? (Choose up to 5; place the most important first.)

Mobile users need to check the items in the priority order wanted.

- ☐ Identify and develop innovative leaders
- ☐ Resource small group and discipleship ministries
- ☐ Equip leaders to plant churches
- ☐ Increase leadership development opportunities
- ☐ Engage missionally with the community
- ☐ Reach the younger generation for Christ
- ☐ Reach people disconnected from Christ

Survey created by Research Services



Be sure to record your answers by accessing the survey online via desktop or mobile:
<https://surveys.nazarene.org/s3/HalfMillionMobilizationSurvey>

***“Then Jesus told his disciples
a parable to show them
that they should always
pray and not give up.”***

Luke 18:1

CULTIVATING EYES TO SEE

by SAM BARBER



HE BLINKED

his bleary eyes open, trying to determine if the sound that woke him was real or only a dream. He pulled the blanket up around his shoulders and crept toward the entryway. Peering out into the dim light of dawn, he watched his worst fears come true—they were surrounded! Tiptoeing back, he shook his companion awake—his panicked whisper describing the horses, chariots,

soldiers, and swords he saw outlined against the horizon. His fears were met with words of comfort as his mentor prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, that he may see.” Almost like magic, the servant could see the provision of God and the “hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17, NIV).

PRAYER CULTIVATES OUR VISION TO SEE WHAT GOD IS DOING IN THE WORLD AROUND US.

The story of Elisha and his servant reminds us that prayer is the prerequisite to witnessing God's activity in our world. When we pray, we invite the Holy Spirit to join with us in our experience, reframing our perspective and bringing the resources of God to bear on our circumstance. I wish that God always worked as He did in the story of Elisha and his servant. I wish that a quick prayer of, "Lord, open my eyes that I may see," would peel the scales from my humanity-dimmed perceptions and enable me to see the provision of God for my life. Sometimes God works in this way, but not always. God desires to be more than our last resort in desperate circumstances.

More often, God invites us into a meaningful relationship, where consistent and transparent prayer shapes us more and more into the likeness of Christ. The practice of prayer sharpens our perception, and we begin to see what God is doing in our lives and in the world around us.

The process sounds so simple, but simple doesn't always mean easy. Anyone who tries to pray consistently quickly discovers that praying requires disciplined persistence. As we consider the challenges of praying, imagine the

work of the farmer. The design of our creator God ensured that the earth would produce life, but the fall of humanity changed the manner of the soil's production. Genesis 3:17-18 says, "...through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life...by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food..." (NIV). In other words, if we hope to eat the fruit of the soil, we will need to cultivate it.

Cultivate is a good metaphor for developing eyes to see God's activity in the world around us. The farmer breaks up the soil, making it fit to receive the seed. The farmer carefully sows and waits. The farmer waters and weeds, then nurtures the seedlings until finally a harvest is produced. It's hard work. It takes time. It requires faith and discipline.



Perhaps this is our model for prayer if we want to see what God is doing in our world. The soil of our hearts can become hard packed by the pace and brutality of our culture. Spending intentional time in prayer can break up the soil and prepare it for the seeds God wants to sow. Jesus teaches us to prepare our hearts to be the good soil (Matthew 13), receptive and fertile—not filled with weeds or stones. Prayer helps us avoid the weeds that can subtly creep into our lives and choke out the seedlings of God's new work. Prayer develops our faith and teaches us the patience required to remain on God's timetable and not our own.

I'm not a farmer, but I have planted a garden or two across the years. Each time I do, I get so excited when, after weeks of no visible change, the tender shoots of new life push their way up through the stubborn soil. When we learn to pray consistently and sincerely, it isn't very long until we begin to see what we might have missed without prayer—the new life that God brings about in us and all around us.

Prayer cultivates our vision to see what God is doing in the world around us. If you struggle to get started, if you can't imagine what you would say, why not begin with the prayer Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:9-13? As you approach this prayer, don't imagine it as a few verses to be recited, but rather as a trellis upon which new life can attach itself and grow. Remember, the same Spirit that opens your eyes empowers your resolve to pray. Why not pause for a moment right now and ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you to pray like a farmer?

Sam Barber is the pastor of Central Church of the Nazarene in Lenexa, Kansas.





INTERCESSION

by SIMONE TWIBELL

THE BIBLE RECORDS

many great accomplishments for the kingdom of God that came as a result of fervent, faithful, intercessory prayer. Prayer is not only a weapon, a force, and a sign; it is also the language of our soul. Without prayer, our spirit is at risk of becoming frail, weak, powerless, and cold.

God has given us the keys to the Kingdom, and His kingdom blessings can only be unlocked by intercessory prayer. There are no shortcuts to seeing His kingdom come on earth other than through prevailing prayer. Today, much

discussion takes place among church leaders about prayer strategies. If we pray this way, we will see these walls come down. Pray that way, and you will get your breakthrough. But there are no right ways to pray, except for one—prevailing prayer. Throughout history, men and women who turned their world upside down for Christ were gripped by a vision for prayer.

Initially, prayer will require discipline because it does not come naturally to any of us. Therefore, a conscious effort must be made to practice it. The more we practice

prayer, however, the easier it gets. This is because we begin to peel away the layers of our self-interest until prayer becomes the language of our soul as we connect with God. In this way, we will learn to make prayer a rhythmic dance.

Intercession is a specific type of prayer that involves, at its core, carrying other people's burdens and laying them at the foot of the cross. Intercession most clearly reveals to us the depth of God's own compassion for us; He is the one who summons us and deposits its specific burdens in our spirit that must continually be released back to Him through prayer. Often, God's calls to intercession are that believers will ask for justice to prevail. Isaiah the prophet declared: "The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intercede" (59:15-16, NRSV). The word "intercede" in Hebrew is the word *paga*, which literally means to "strike the mark" (Job

36:32). There are two basic meanings for the word *paga*: (1) to intervene and (2) to carry a burden.

An intercessor is one who connects with God, intervening on behalf of the needs of

others, carrying their burdens as if they were his or her own.

Interestingly, the word for sin in Hebrew is the word *hata*, which

means to "miss the mark." So when we

pray for others, we strike

the mark, but when we become too self-focused, we miss the mark. In the process of learning how to hit the mark, we will develop strong spiritual muscles.

The burdens we receive in our spirit must be continually released through prayer lest they become so heavy that they end up unintentionally crushing us. The closer we are to God, the more we feel His heartbeat for the world. Thus, intercession implies listening to the heart of God on behalf of the world, a world that is often marred by its own deceitfulness and darkness.



**THE CLOSER
WE ARE TO
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HEARTBEAT
FOR THE
WORLD.**

Rees Howells, founder of the Bible College in Wales and a powerful intercessor during World War II, suggested three levels of intercession. The first level is *identification*. We might identify with the needs or pain of others because we understand what their pain feels like. Perhaps we have been there or shared a similar experience and can relate. At other times, it may be that we identify with the sufferings of Christ so deeply that we are connected to the larger experience of humanity through many shared contexts and experiences. Regardless of the reason we sympathize with a specific burden or need, this first level (identification) allows us to be truly connected to the other and, therefore, be able to stand in the gap for the person or situation.

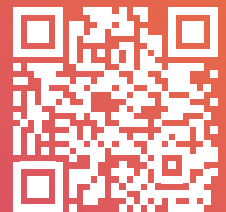
The second level Howells identified is *agony*. When we begin to intercede for others at a deep level, we might feel the heaviness of the situation so deeply that it is as if we were carrying a weighted bag of cement on our shoulders. Our agony might be expressed through groans, tears, sighs, or silence. We truly feel the full weight as if the burden were contained deep inside us, and we may pray with cries, words, or wordless sounds.

The third level of intercession is *authority*. At this juncture, we not only connect and feel the weight of

the situation, we take a position of victory over the need and burden presently being carried through prayer, and we release it when the burden lifts. We come to that place of authority when we rest in the assurance that we will see the result of our prayer, even though it might take years before we receive confirmation that the prayer has been answered, see its full evidence in the physical realm, or even experience it in the way we thought the answer might come.¹

As we learn and practice prayers of intercession, our own relationship with God is transformed in wonderful and mysterious ways that we cannot understand. His compassion changes us and makes all things new.

Simone Twibell is director of intercultural studies and missions at Olivet Nazarene University.



Scan the code to hear Simone share insights she gained while writing this article.

1. Norman Grubb, *Rees Howells: Intercessor* (Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1997), 81.

*“Love to pray. Feel often during
the day the need for prayer,
and take trouble to pray.
Prayer enlarges the heart so
that it is capable of containing
God’s gift of Himself.”*

—Mother Teresa

***LISTENING
TO THE
SPIRIT
IN PRAYER***

by STEVE OTTLEY



AS A BOY,

when mom or dad used the full version of my first name, I knew a serious conversation was coming. “*Stephen. Listen to me.*” is one of the lines I remember all too well. “*Stephen Benjamin!*”—when I heard that, I knew I was in real trouble. The truth is, most of the conversations I remember from my childhood are the loving tender conversations my parents frequently had with us kids as we sat around the dinner table or played Yahtzee. Those were precious moments. Even those “Stephen Benjamin!” conversations stemmed from love, catching my attention, steering me away from harm.

Our heavenly Father deeply desires to have intimate, loving, tender conversations with us. He longs to commune (there’s an old word!) with His children. However, the challenge is that we live in an age of constant distractions: emails, text messages, Facebook feeds, Instagram, phone calls, 24/7 news casts. All these are at the top of a long list of communication tools at our disposal, but they often act as distractions. Despite the distractions, our heavenly Father stands ready to speak as we make ourselves available to listen.

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is that of a communicator. God’s love is His primary message. He also discloses God’s purpose and direction for His children

and His church. We have a front row seat in Scripture, observing how Jesus related to the first and third persons of the Trinity. Immediately after His wilderness temptations, “Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit’s power” (Luke 4:14, NLT). He heads to His hometown, Nazareth, and begins teaching in the synagogue where He reveals what He is all about. Can you hear the voice of Jesus echoing through that hall?

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free . . .” (Luke 4:18).

Jesus recognized His purpose on earth and understood that, although “he gave up his divine privileges . . .” (Philippians 2:7a), He was empowered by the third person of the Trinity. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” He declares. Jesus later tells His disciples He only did and said what the Father told Him to do and say. His discernment was fueled by His intimacy with His Abba. Jesus practiced spending time with His Father. Despite the intensity of the crowds pressing in to touch Him, to hear His teaching, to be healed—all very important work—Jesus “often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer” (Luke 5:16). This was Jesus’ power source—His intimacy with the Father through prayer. There Jesus received direction and power. Can you imagine those intimate moments between the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

**OUR HEAVENLY
FATHER DEEPLY
DESIRES TO HAVE
INTIMATE,
LOVING, TENDER
CONVERSATIONS
WITH US.**

ALLOWING THE SPIRIT TO HELP US DEVELOP A RHYTHM OF PRAYER IS ESSENTIAL.

As God's children, we are invited to linger with the Triune God. Imagine that. The Creator, the Great I Am, desires to meet with us, to commune with us. He stands ready to let us know our next steps as we abide with Him. I'm finding more and more my need to be intentional about sitting with Him, stepping away from the distractions and noise around me and withdrawing to the sacred wilderness of prayer.

Isn't it comforting to know that we can come to God with anything? "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7). Even more amazing is the truth that we can also sit and listen to the Spirit of God. But learning to still our hearts and minds to listen takes practice and time. Particularly in this season of a global pandemic and so many cultural challenges, I am finding that making space to daily sit and listen to the Spirit is vital. None of us has been down this road before; in our own wisdom, we can't know the next step in dealing with the complexities of situations we face in these days. Hearing from the Father is the only way. My Lord knows the way through the wilderness. I am learning to follow.

Allowing the Spirit to help us develop a rhythm of prayer is essential. Finding the time to sit and pause is not easy, but the benefit is our being refreshed and empowered for everyday life. Because I am so easily distracted, I have

implemented some strategies that are helpful to me. While practicing the presence of God happens throughout the day, dedicating the same time each day to linger in His presence is a helpful part of my rhythm. Meditating on Scripture keeps me focused and allows the Spirit to then take my thoughts wherever He pleases. Additionally, I am rediscovering the discipline of fasting as part of my rhythm of listening.

The Spirit is eager to help us find and develop our own rhythms. The triune God stands ready to enjoy sweet communion with us and speak into our ears.

Steve Ottley is the district superintendent of the Canada Central district Church of the Nazarene.



A STORY OF FAITH

by PATSY LEWIS

Pastor Becky encountered Sam's* family at a community gathering. Against seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Becky sacrificed time and energy to bring Sam with a group of children to church camp. I am still baffled at how our hearts were divinely intertwined.

My church partners with Pastor Becky's congregation two hundred miles away. In 2021, I began praying for them although we had never met. Surprisingly, God had a faith-to-faith encounter awaiting.

It had been years since I volunteered at children's camp; however, in July 2021, I found myself teaching "Adventures in Prayer and Praise" at Junior Camp. On the second day, as 21 rambunctious boys entered, I began telling the story of my friend Bud, who first heard there was a God when he started school. One day while lying in a field, he looked into the heavens and said, "They tell me there's a God; if there is, where are you?" He reported clearly hearing: "I'm here! I'm all around you! I'm everywhere!"¹

As I continued telling how Bud became a Christian, eight-year-old Sam* asked, "How hard is it to become a Christian?" I answered his question with the story of Dorie who heard that God loved her in an orphanage when three university students shared their testimonies. Sam listened intently. When I finished the story, another camper spoke up: "I got baptized in the creek a couple of weeks ago."



Sam sincerely asked, "What does it mean to be baptized?" I explained the significance of baptism and prayed, giving the children a chance to ask Jesus to forgive their sins and invite Him into their hearts. Afterwards, I asked if anyone had invited Jesus into his heart during chapel or our class, and Sam longingly said, "Well, I want to!" I encouraged him to talk to Jesus, and he prayed aloud, pouring out his heart, oblivious to all the older boys around him who were raptly listening. When he finished, I said, "Now you are a Christian; let's celebrate!" The group began to clap, stomp, beat the table, shout, and rejoice with Sam, who soon afterwards found Pastor Becky to tell her he wanted to be baptized.

Only four months later, Pastor Becky passed away unexpectedly. Who will hear and respond to a prompting in prayer to mentor and disciple Sam with a faith-to-faith calling? This precious child's faith journey is being woven with thread coming directly from God's throne. As we learn to listen in prayer and move at the prompting of the Master Weaver, He enlarges our faith adventure in surprising and meaningful ways. God is always sending us to one another.

Patsy Lewis is the author of *Simply Praying, Simply Listening, and Simply Rejoicing*. She lives in Oklahoma City with her husband, Curtis.

*Real name changed



1. Patsy Lewis, *Simply Rejoicing* (The Foundry: Kansas City, 2013), 49-50.

A STORY OF FAITH

by CHERYL ROLAND

There was no question; she was trying to carve out a path for Tippy, whose big brown eyes and tail wagging tactics were irresistible. However, the freezing temperatures and ankle-deep snow were too much for my mom's willowy 82-year-old frame. With shovel in hand, she collapsed under the stress of a stroke.

Alice was a snappy beautiful soul, a faithful Christian. It didn't take long for the ICU waiting room to overflow with friends and family.

Prayers shot up like arrows. With unified voices, we held hands and recited Psalm 23: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Soon, mom was absent from her body and present with the Lord.

Even though I lived states away, I was named executor of her will. For 40 days following her funeral, I returned to my childhood home and earnestly worked to fulfill her wishes.

Although a flood of memories brought laughter and a deep sense of love, I soon realized that my siblings didn't share the weight of the financial challenges before us. Disunity mounted. It was painful but necessary to sell the modest homestead. I asked God for His peace that passes all understanding . . . and misunderstandings.

In His great faithfulness, God drew me to Psalm 91. Night and day He whispered, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (v.1). His blessed assurance strengthened me for the mammoth tasks ahead.

Our parents had worked hard, protected family relationships, and preserved a lifetime of treasures yet to be distributed. I prayed the process of settling their small estate wouldn't divide us. As I look back, it seems incomprehensible but at one point, tempers

flared, angry words were spoken, and fists raised. During that moment, in a flash, God gave me a vision of a strong warrior angel who stood beside me. Instead of wings, two glistening swords were crossed against his back and his arms tightly folded over his chest. Amazingly, this heavenly presence brought immediate peace, and my angry sibling walked away. God's promise was fulfilled, "He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:11).

With a heart of praise and petition, I bowed before the Father. Only He could resolve our family differences. Several days passed before we were able to speak again. My words were halting, but I was able to express my concern and my sibling responded in love.

God heard my cry. His protective presence hovered over us as apologies brought comfort and joy.

Although there were still difficult days ahead, the Prince of Peace, Jesus, met every need. "I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand" (Isaiah 51:16).

In the midst of our family conflict, God heard my desperate prayer for help. What is there to fear when we walk in the shadow of God's love? Behold the glory of God Almighty. "Because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 57:1).

Cheryl Roland is the wife of David Roland, recently retired district superintendent of the North East Indiana district, Church of the Nazarene. The Rolands now reside in Oklahoma and serve their community through MarketPlace Chaplaincy and Dividing Bread Ministry.



***“Who gives you the day
will also give you the things
necessary for the day.”***

—Gregory of Nyssa

HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR

by JILL BARBER

MY EYELIDS

felt like weighted blankets. The beeping sound in the room punched my thoughts as I tried to clear the fog from my mind. I marked the mumbled voices as my destination and struggled through the anesthesia following surgery. My GI doctor and surgeon stood over me in disbelief. As I opened my eyes, I could hear the surgeon explaining what transpired as he executed his skillful craft on my body. At one point he said, “We were planning to do two small surgeries on you, instead we did six major surgeries. You are not to move.” Tears welled up in my eyes and made their way

down my cheeks. I was so thankful to wake up. Both the doctor and the surgeon stood there wide-eyed as they continued talking. “We had no idea how diseased you were inside. Your discipline with your medications and your attention to diet masked your true condition. You’re so cheerful, and none of the tests we put you through led us to believe your body was in this condition. How were you being held together?”

Have you ever wondered how some people hold life together through challenging situations?

And have you ever wondered how your pastor is being held together? Maybe not, but the life of ministry, especially that of a pastor, comes with many “surgeries,” most of them unexpected and unwelcome. Pastors, at all levels of pastoral leadership, tend to face unjust and sometimes daunting criticism. Often, careless words and actions can leave scars on a pastor’s emotions, confidence, and abilities—scars that can take years to heal. Unbeknownst to others, your pastor may receive an incision on Monday, get poked at on Wednesday, all the while having no idea what is coming on Friday.

Sometimes these wounds can cause a leader to question his or her call to ministry. In those moments, the devil strategically sticks his foot in that open door and starts throwing around “what ifs” in the thoughts of your pastor. Such blows to the mind, heart, and emotions may define the life of your pastor in these difficult and unprecedented days. Prayers for your pastor? They are a must.



I have partnered in ministry with my husband for over 30 years, which has given me a ringside seat; I’ve watched these surgeries play out repeatedly. Prayers for your pastor? Please.

You may not know where to start.

Start with his or her name. By bringing that name before our Lord, you can be sure that the power of the Maker of Heaven and Earth will provide for and protect your pastor.

Pray that your pastor will sustain the everyday discipline to find Jesus in Scripture and through prayer. There are only so many days that a person’s own talents and strength can sustain them. To pastor, to shepherd, to lead, to disciple, and to love others well will require an everyday meeting with Jesus. Pray mightily for your pastor in this way.

Pray for your pastor’s marriage and family. Married life can be hard enough without the complications of pastoral ministry. But

PRAYERS FOR YOUR PASTOR? THEY ARE A MUST.

“HOW ARE YOU EVEN BEING HELD TOGETHER?”

PRAYER.

your pastor's marriage and family life can thrive with work and much prayer. Pray with vigor for your pastor's marriage. For when a marriage is strong and healthy, a ministry can be, too.

Pray that your pastor will stay in tune with God's call; your pastor directs his or her life by that call. Pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit to be present daily, even in tasks that may seem small. God's leading in life transitions will define the family's direction for a lifetime. When the hard days come, assurance of God's call is an anchor that holds your pastor securely. Pray that your pastor will have great clarity and fresh experiences of his or her calling.

When your pastor prioritizes daily Scripture and prayer, guards carefully his or her relationship with spouse and family, and keeps the

call clearly defined, effective ministry is preserved. The kingdom of God advances. Yes, your prayers matter.

When we don't pray for our pastors, the role of pastoral leadership can be dehumanized. A lack of prayer support sends the message that a pastor is just a position to be filled, not a person to be supported. The reality is that pastors are people, too, complete with good days and bad days, strengths, and weaknesses.

Praying for your pastor is a gracious response to the ministry you receive. Sometimes we are aware of the ministry of our pastors, and sometimes it goes unseen. Praying for your pastor is a thankful response. Praying for your pastor provides the strength that he or she needs to minister.

As my surgeon asked, “How are you even being held together?” Prayer.

I promise you; your pastor is being held together by prayer. Smiles may be on the outside, but the prayers of the faithful are healing the inside.

“...the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

Jill Barber is the administrative coordinator for the USA/Canada Regional Office and is married to her favorite pastor.



“This, then, is how you should pray:

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

Give us today our daily bread.

*And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”*

Matthew 6:9-13

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Panama church uses soccer, dance to reach community

The Pan de Vida Iglesia del Nazareno in Panama City, Panama, is using soccer and dance to provide wholesome recreation alternatives for the youth in their community. The church leaders hope that their work spreads from the youth into the broader community.



SCAN NOW
to read the
full story



Nazarene Archives to undergo leadership transition

Ryan Giffin has been hired to be the manager of Nazarene Archives, effective 1 March 2022. He replaces Stan Ingersol, who retired in February after more than 35 years as Archives manager.



SCAN NOW
to read the
full story



Ministry of Boston Chapel comes full circle

What began as a small seed in an impoverished area of Boston, Massachusetts, has blossomed into a story of God's faithfulness and grace almost 65 years later.



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to read the
full story

MOVING MINISTERS

Compiled by the General Secretary's Office from district reports, Moving Ministers is a monthly listing of Nazarene ministers in new assignments on the USA/Canada Region.



IN MEMORIAM

In Memoriam is a listing (updated weekly) of Nazarene ministers and leaders who have gone home to be with the Lord.



To receive stories like these in your inbox each week, sign up at nazarene.org/news

A NAME BORN OF PRAYER

NEAR THE END

of September 1895, Phineas Bresee was dismissed as the preaching pastor at the Peniel Mission in downtown Los Angeles. One year earlier, he had deliberately swerved from a successful career in the Methodist Episcopal Church so that he could preach at the mission. Now, to his great surprise, he was out! Worse, he was dismissed by telegram while conducting revivals in the upper Midwest for the National Holiness Association. No discussion. No negotiation. Just out.

He returned to Los Angeles without a ministry. He remained credentialed as a local pastor in the M.E.C. and could have returned to active Methodist ministry at the next annual conference, but that was many months away.



*Joseph P. Widney (left)
Phineas Bresee (below)*



So friends intervened. They met with him and said they might form a new church. They asked if Bresee and Dr. Joseph P. Widney would consent to be their pastors if the plan proceeded. Bresee and Widney soon agreed.



*Glory Barn: The first building erected
by Los Angeles First Church*

The first worship service was conducted on October 6, and the new church was formally organized on October 20.

H. Orton Wiley, who knew Bresee well, narrates that during the two-week interim a series of proposals were put forward for naming the church. The word “Methodist” occurred in most of them.

The name chosen, however, was one proposed by Widney. A well-known physician in the city, he had recently served as the third president of the University of Southern California. He had followed Bresee to the Peniel Mission, where Widney engaged in giving weekly talks on the life and teachings of Jesus.

Widney had thought hard about the church name and spent an entire night in prayer over the issue. Near morning, a name impressed itself on his mind and in his heart. It was “Church of the Nazarene.” After discussion, the people accepted Widney’s proposal, for this name—born out of prayer—signified the new church’s identification with “the toiling, lowly mission of Christ”—the one who is close to the “sorrowing heart of the world.”¹

Stan Ingersol is the previous manager of Nazarene Archives. He retires in March 2022.

1. Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene* (1995): 191-2; 195-6. And “Church of the Nazarene,” *Herald of Holiness* (Jan. 4, 1933): back cover.



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Understanding tax laws that apply to ministers and churches can sometimes be difficult. We think about such matters more often as April 15 rolls into view.

The good news is Pensions and Benefits USA has reliable resources to help ministers and churches with taxes — available 24/7 — and at no cost.

The *Minister's Tax & Financial Guide* from the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) offers step-by-step instructions to guide ministers through the returns and forms needed for tax filing.

For church treasurers, there's the ECFA's *Church & Nonprofit Tax & Financial Guide*. This manual explains IRS regulations along with forms to be filed and information about taxes that are unique to churches.

At **pbusa.org**, you'll also find tax and compensation memos. These informational booklets can help ministers minimize taxes and better understand IRS regulations that apply to them.

Doing taxes doesn't have to be a source of anxiety for ministers or churches with financial tools at **pbusa.org**. And, if you have specific questions about taxes, compensation, retirement, insurance, or similar topics, we're as close as **888-888-4656** or **pensions@nazarene.org**.

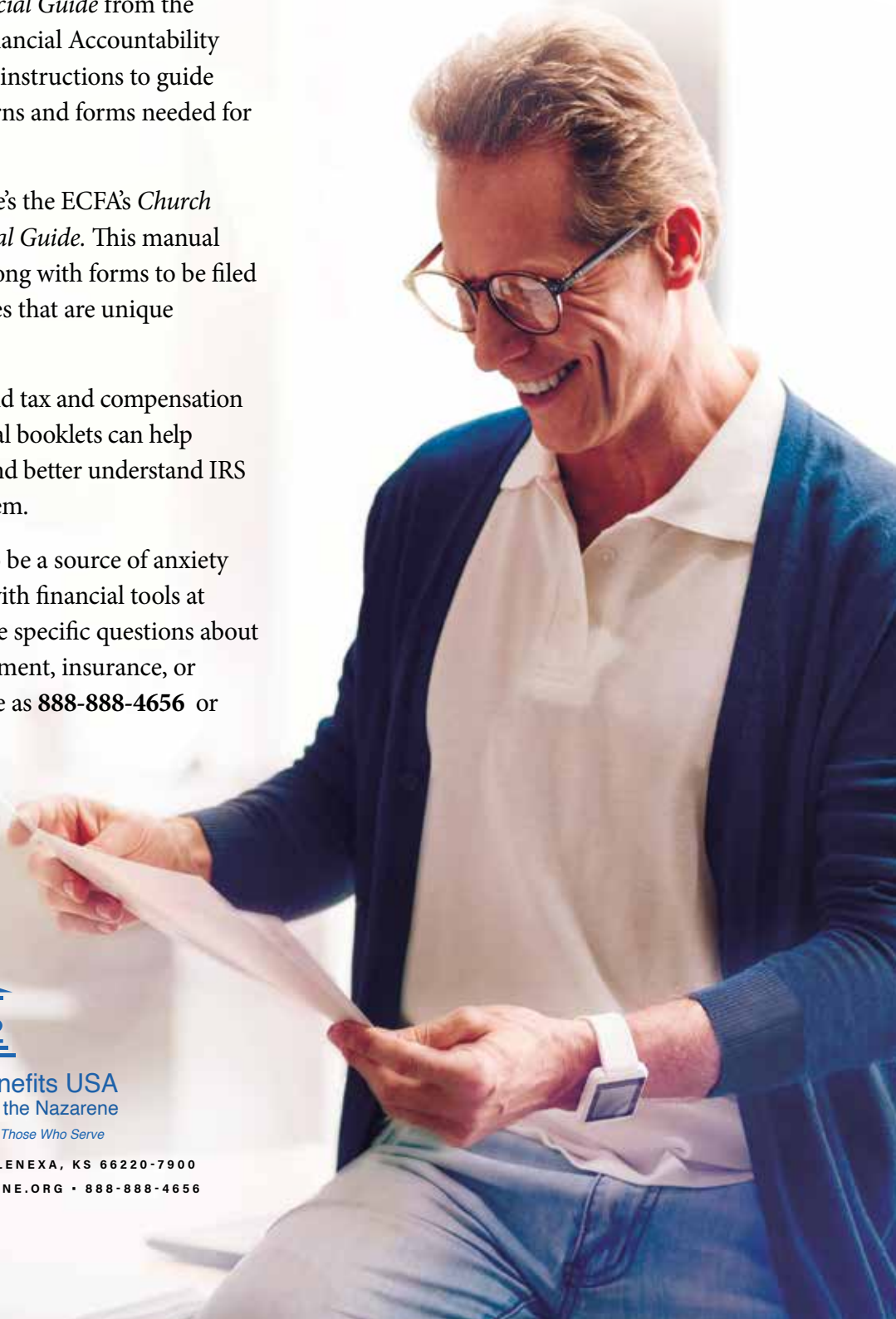
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HOLINESS T O D A Y

Dear Friend,

You are holding in your hand a special edition of *Holiness Today* that is dedicated to the Half-Million Mobilization prayer initiative sponsored by the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada. The purpose for this call to prayer is to connect believers together as we seek the Spirit's *protection, direction, and revelation* for the Region.

From May 1, 2022, through Pentecost, Nazarenes will join together in reading the *Prayer Journal* packaged with this March/April issue and listening to the voice of the Spirit in response. We are praying for a great outpouring of God's Spirit leading up to and including Pentecost Sunday (June 5, 2022).

What will the Spirit say to you during these 36 days? We want to know! To that end, the USA/Canada Regional Office has provided a prayer response survey to capture what you hear the Spirit saying. You can find the survey at www.usacanadaregion.org/pray and also by scanning the QR code on page 23 of this issue.

Please encourage your congregation, small group, family, and friends to join you on this exciting adventure in prayer! Through a partnership with The Foundry Publishing, we are offering a two-piece bundle (which includes the *Prayer Journal* and the accompanying special edition of *Holiness Today*) in sets of 10 for only \$10.00. To order this special package, please contact The Foundry at **1-800-877-0700** or order online at www.TheFoundryPublishing.com/prayerjournal.

Thank you for your commitment to pray.

Anticipating with you a mighty outpouring of God's Spirit!

Dr. Stan Reeder, USA/Canada Regional Director

Dr. Bonnie Perry, General Editor



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