

Did You Get What You Prayed For?

STORIES *and* INSPIRATIONS
for an ABUNDANT PRAYER LIFE



Nancy Jo Sullivan
and Jane A.G. Kise

DID YOU GET
WHAT YOU
PRAYED FOR?

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and JANE A. G. KISE



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WHAT IS PRAYER?

The homeless woman stood on the busy downtown corner, the noontime sky darkened with heavy clouds. A damp wind blew through her buttonless coat, while rain soaked the worn canvas of her shoes. Her eyes gazed about aimlessly, dark and empty with despair.

Professionally dressed people rushed toward the surrounding office buildings and restaurants, shielding themselves from the rain with leather briefcases and designer umbrellas. Well-groomed women toting glitzy shopping bags walked a wide perimeter around the lonely woman, not one giving her more than a glance.

Please, Lord...I just need someone to notice me, the woman prayed as raindrops pelted the pavement where she stood. *That's all I'm asking, just someone to notice me.* Secretly she wondered if the petition of a poor, penniless soul like hers could even reach heaven. *Lord, are you still there? I've lost everything. Have I lost You, too?*

At the same time, another woman gripped the steering wheel of her car as she maneuvered through the slippery streets. As she did every day, she prayed, *Please, Lord, let me be the face of Jesus to someone today.* From her car window, she saw the sad-eyed woman standing alone in the downtown throngs, wet and shivering. Without a second thought, she parked her car and ran to the corner. With tenderness she clasped the nameless stranger's hand and looked deeply into her eyes. "How can I help you?" she asked.

The woman's eyes shimmered with tears. "You...you just did," she replied.

Do you wonder if God is hearing your prayers? Do you sometimes feel like that homeless woman, a street-corner stranger

on earth, a spiritually poor soul searching for help in your time of need? How can you be sure that an unseen God hears your prayers and surrounds you with His love?

Prayer, conversation with God, *can* provide that assurance. Prayer is the place where you can meet God each day. Prayer is the corner of hope where the words of your heart fly straight to heaven. Prayer is an umbrella of peace. Under its covering, God looks into your eyes and holds your hand and says, “My child, you are precious in My eyes, and I love you.”

Over and over, the Bible urges us to pray, yet too often we’re stymied by fears that we’ll ask for the wrong things or use the wrong words. God doesn’t want us to feel alone, homeless, and soaked to the skin as troubles storm around us. He does want us to know that He is always with us, protecting us with His loving presence.

In prayer, God accepts us just as we are. He honors the pleas of His children when we tell Him, “I need You.” We do not need perfect petitions in order to move the hand of God. There is no magic formula that will bring answers to our prayers. We can simply follow the lead of the homeless woman: admit we’re helpless, be receptive to God’s presence, and wait for Him to answer—perhaps in a sudden parting of the clouds, perhaps in the quiet voice of a stranger.

In the pages that follow, you will meet real people who through prayer discovered God on the sacred street corners of their lives. Their varied stories show that every prayer, even the humblest one, holds great power. Prayer is the key that unlocks the door to an abundant spiritual life—not wealth or riches or easy living, but contentment in God no matter what may come.

Our prayer is that this book will enrich your prayer life in a way that lets you *know* that God is listening. That lets you *know* there is always hope in Him. May you discover anew that prayer is the unbreakable cord that connects your heart to heaven.

NANCY AND JANE

CHAPTER 1

WHO HAS TIME TO PRAY?

“The king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions’ den.”

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

DANIEL 6:7, 10



Dear Daniel,

How did you find the courage? If I knew my enemies were waiting to catch me on my knees so they could throw me into a den of hungry lions, I don't know if I could have done what you did. I'd like to believe I'd keep praying, but either I'd make sure I was out of sight, or I'd combine my prayer time with my daily commute so no one could know what I was doing.

At least tell me that you were afraid as you climbed the steps to your upper room, your sanctuary for prayer. Why was it so important? You could have prayed while strolling toward the palace, rolling up your bed mat, or peeling figs. Instead, you went to pray in the one place where they knew they could find you.

And you prayed three times a day. Sometimes I forget to pray at all. I mean to—I even set my alarm clock early to make time for God before the race of the day traps me in its chaos, but somehow my time for Him often gets cut short. Isn't it okay if I pray while tending to chores, driving in the car pool, providing for my family's needs? Isn't God always ready to listen?

Or, Daniel, are you trying to tell me that I don't know what I'm missing? That snatching bits of prayer here and there isn't the same as consciously making room for God? When you climbed those stairs, did you feel as if you were climbing toward God? Maybe you knew that God was waiting to enfold you with love as you expressed your praises and concerns, hopes and sorrows.

I'd like to find an "upper room" in my life, a quiet sanctuary where I could kneel and close my eyes and feel the warm breezes of God. I want to be like you, Daniel. How do I make prayer a priority?

What would our lives be like if we considered prayer as essential as Daniel did? The following stories offer some ideas on how to integrate prayer into our daily lives. The writers discovered that God honors our willingness to set aside time for Him and that “upper rooms” can be found almost anywhere in our lives.



*As every day demands its bread, so every day demands its prayer.
No amount of praying, done today, will
suffice for tomorrow's praying.*

E. M. BOUNDS

Being with God

JEAN SWENSON

You will never walk again.”

I was twenty-eight when I first heard those words. A collision with a semi truck left me paralyzed from the shoulders down. No longer would I be able to engage elementary-age students in exciting learning activities. My hands would never again create works of art, play the piano or guitar, prepare delectable meals, or paddle a canoe. Perhaps most difficult was losing my independence—I now required other people and equipment just to survive.

Lying in bed or sitting in my wheelchair, unable to move, I poured out my heart to God. *Why did this happen? What good is my life now? It's over! I can't do a thing for myself or for anyone else. All I can do is just sit here.*

At times, the grief over my loss seemed overwhelming, but through God's grace and the loving encouragement of family and friends, I continued to believe that God loved me. I clung to the verse, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”¹

Okay, God, I prayed, I believe that You can still use my life.

I set about filling my mind with truths from Scripture, especially about God's unconditional love for me. A couple of years after my accident, a friend gave me an audio tape on this very subject. Over and over the speaker emphasized, “You need to know that you know that you *know* God loves you. If you're not sure, ask Him to show you...and He will.”

All right, God, I prayed. If You want to speak to me about this, I'm open. Help me to know that I know that I know You love me.

Once out of my mouth, that prayer was all but forgotten until a couple of months later. While at a camp for people with

disabilities, I met a little girl who was paralyzed and unable to speak. Her soft brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail. She sat rather stiffly—as if she were wearing a brace—in a very small wheelchair that was always maneuvered by the same friendly attendant. Whenever I saw her, I greeted her with a smile.

One afternoon between activities, we had both parked our wheelchairs in a grassy area to enjoy the warmth of the sun. I smiled and nodded at her, and I couldn't help but wonder what she was thinking. How did she view this life that allowed other children to run and play, while she sat motionless in her chair?

On an impulse, I asked her attendant, "May I hold her in my lap?"

"Sure, she's not very heavy."

The attendant gently placed her in my lap, still supporting her, as I didn't have the ability to do so. This precious little girl looked up at me with her big, brown eyes. Suddenly I was overcome with an overwhelming sense of love and compassion toward her. My eyes filled with tears.

I prayed silently. *Lord, this is crazy. Why am I feeling such love for this little girl who can't do a thing for me? All she can do is just sit here.*

Then, clear as day, this thought came into my mind: "Jean, this is exactly how I love *you*."

I then remembered my prayer to know absolutely that God loves me. My Creator heard me and answered by allowing me to feel for this little girl a portion of His divine love for me. I'm learning that God doesn't care what I can or cannot do—He simply loves me and loves being with me.



Jean is still traveling life's journey in her wheelchair but has found it to be an incredible platform for sharing God's love and faithfulness.

She also believes that someday, through God's miraculous touch and through spinal cord injury research, she will once again be able to do those things she previously enjoyed. But either way, she still loves spending time with her Lord more than anything.

A Cheerios Revelation

JANE KISE

Being a mother of one does not necessarily prepare you to be a mother of two.

As a mother of one, I'd had plenty of time to pray. Little Danny slept late almost every morning and took long naps.

But those moments for prayer disappeared when our daughter, Mari, arrived. She simply loved being with people and didn't want to miss a moment of fun, even as an infant. If I arose at 6:30 to snatch a few precious moments of quiet time, Mari awoke at 6:35. I tried getting up at 5:30; at 5:35 I heard her soft coos, which soon became insistent calls. So much for early morning time with God. Afternoons didn't work either since, of course, my children never napped at the same time.

Somewhere during that first year of being a mother to two, my regular time for prayer disappeared. I stayed active in church and joined a once-a-week prayer group, but my daily devotions turned into a reading marathon on Saturdays to catch up with a week's worth of entries. I was sure that God didn't expect more of me, especially since I still volunteered for things like staffing the church nursery for Vacation Bible School.

Running that nursery was no easy task. I was rather proud of my track record of successfully calming every child I'd cared for in church nurseries throughout the years. Infant, toddler, forlorn preschooler—all you have to do is read to them, stack blocks for them to knock down, or bounce them on your knees.

But Vacation Bible School was different. Since most of the VBS teachers were stay-at-home moms, the children in my charge had one thing in common: They were not used to being away from Mommy! On Monday the sobs that filled the air as mothers left were enough to break your heart, but my high school assistant

and I had every eye wiped and hand busy by nine-thirty. Tuesday I came prepared with activities, but little spats broke out all morning long.

On Wednesday, despite my best efforts, half of the toddlers were sitting by the door, asking for their mothers, while the other half crowded around my lap, sobbing. I looked at my watch, the clock on the wall, then my watch again. Not yet ten o'clock. I wondered if I'd finally met my match.

As their fussing increased, I brought out my best weapon of defense: snacks. Today's offering was a large bag of Cheerios. The children rushed to sit at the tables as we placed handfuls of Cheerios on napkins in front of each chair. Their little piles disappeared in record time.

"More."

"All gone!"

"Where mine?"

I moved quickly from child to child, replenishing their cereal as fast as I could. In their anxiety over yet another morning at church, had none of them eaten breakfast? I doled out the last of the little o's and sent up a quick prayer. *God, this is turning into a terrible morning. Help!*

Less than a minute later, in walked Corey, the teenage brother of one of the little girls. "I forgot to tell you about the Cheerios in my sister's diaper bag. Since she's already eating, you can share them with the other kids if you want."

With twelve toddlers screeching for more, I found that diaper bag in record time. Inside were as many Cheerios as I had brought for the whole group! I didn't stop to ponder why any mom would pack so much for just one child; I simply started handing them out. Just as I neared the end of that supply, the children gradually slowed in their eating, then wandered away from the tables, ready to play.

A happy hum filled the room where just minutes before

screams had echoed. And in that hum God seemed to say to me, “This morning is like your life: chaos...unless you take time to feed your soul, unless you take time for Me.”

But when? How? I prayed for an answer.

Early the next morning when Mari awoke full of smiles and chatter, I pulled her high chair up next to me at the kitchen table. In front of her I placed a handful of Cheerios. In front of me, I opened my prayer journal. She ate, I wrote. Ten minutes for prayer!

The next day I hunted for a new daily devotional that I wouldn't want to skip and placed it by the television. Twenty minutes of *Sesame Street* became twenty minutes of reading and prayer.

I tried taking my journal on trips to the playground. Sure enough, the toy cranes in the sandbox kept my children busy enough for me to pray for a quarter of an hour.

For a few years, I lost the stillness of total solitude in my time with God. Yet with the help of Cheerios and a little creativity, I found that God was *always* waiting for me no matter how I carved out time for prayer.



Now that Jane's children are teenagers and prone to sleeping late, her favorite place and time for prayer is the family room window seat, first thing in the morning. Still, Jane tries to be creative with her prayer life. She keeps a shelf full of different books and journals to maintain variety in her devotional choices. What doesn't change, however, is a mug full of coffee and moments spent simply gazing in thankfulness at God's creation.

One Circle at a Time

EVELYN D. HAMANN

I sat on a padded chair toward the front of our church, praying straight from my heart. *O Lord, I love You. I want so much to trust You completely.* I shook my head slowly and tried to inconspicuously wipe a tear that was sneaking out of the corner of my eye. *Even as I speak these words, I still struggle with fear. Please help me to trust You, please!*

As I prayed, I heard the rich harmonies of the visiting musical group up on stage. They were singing a praise song, a melody of joy, but there was no joy in my heart, only pain. I let my hand rest gently on my abdomen. *O Lord, I don't think I can take losing another baby.*

When I first learned of this pregnancy, I was too excited to hold back the news. Out went all the cute little ideas I had dreamed up to reveal my secret to my husband, Scott, and our boys. Instead, I blurted out the news, and we all spent the evening smiling, laughing, and making plans. We were ecstatic.

Scott and I had prayed long and hard about whether to add to our family of four. I yearned to once again feel the soft tender skin of a new little miracle, despite all the work that comes with a baby. But once we'd made the decision, struggles with infertility and two miscarriages followed.

My first doctor visit for this pregnancy had revealed that my hormone levels were low, putting me at high risk for another miscarriage. Several days later, I felt some cramping. The doctor said not to worry; all was probably fine. Since I was in my first trimester, he couldn't do anything other than recheck my hormone levels the following Monday. My anxiety and fear were leading me into feelings of despair and hopelessness.

I tried to pull myself back to the present, to the worship ser-

vice. One of the women in the group began talking about the children of Israel and their triumph at the wall of Jericho. I had heard this story countless times, but something in her particular description caught my attention.

“God commanded the people of Israel to march around the wall of Jericho once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they were to do it seven times in total silence. Jericho was a large city, and their march would have taken them the better part of a day. They had plenty of time to think as they walked. Perhaps they thought about how much this command didn’t make sense. But they knew God, they trusted Him, and they obeyed and walked it one circle at a time....”

One circle at a time! Looking down, I again gently touched my abdomen. *Lord, I think I can do that. I can pray those words every day, like the children of Israel.* Closing my eyes, I made a commitment to spend time in prayer each day, “one circle at a time.”

The next morning, I awakened in the calm of prayer. While Scott and the kids slept, I slipped down the hall into the living room and turned on a small light. *One circle at a time, Lord. I can do this. I know You’re with me.*

Later that morning, I stopped by the doctor’s office for the blood test but had to wait until afternoon for the results. *One circle at a time.*

When the office called with the news that my hormone levels had increased, I could barely find words to reply. As I fumbled to hang up the receiver, new hope grew inside me. *Does this mean I will keep this child, Lord?* One circle at a time. *Okay, Lord, I can do that.*

The next few days I continued to begin my day in prayer, before doing anything else. In the quietness of the living room, I asked God for peace. *I don’t understand why You have asked me to walk this road, but if You will help me, I can trust You one circle at a time.* The days turned into a week, and I allowed myself to dream

just a little of holding a newborn once again.

Then one evening I headed to a meeting at church. Just as the speaker was about to start, I felt that familiar abdominal tightening. *One circle at a time.* I excused myself to the rest room and saw the first signs of life lost. Instead of bursting into inconsolable tears, I felt calm, with no thought other than to get home.

As I drove, the contractions grew stronger. When I walked in the door, I told Scott what was happening. Concern washed over his face, and he wrapped his arms around me. Then he drew back and looked at me. “Are you all right?”

One circle at a time. “I’ve been asking myself that all the way home, honey. At first I thought maybe I was in shock or denial. But—I can’t explain it because I don’t understand it myself—but, yes, I am doing fine.” I sensed the comfort of my daily prayer time surrounding me.

It was a long night. With the sunrise, both my baby and my dreams of what might have been were gone. The following days were filled with doctor appointments, tests, and phone calls, but in the midst of it all, I took time to pray. *One circle at a time, one day at a time.* Even my doctor questioned me about my apparent calm throughout the ordeal. I tried to explain to him, but how do you explain something that is just, well, unexplainable?

It’s been several years since that miscarriage, but I haven’t forgotten its lessons. God knows what tomorrow holds. And daily prayer helps me trust Him “one circle at a time.”



After trying for a third child for a few more years, Scott and Evelyn decided that God wanted them to concentrate on being great parents to their two little boys. But God had a special surprise in store. Son number three, Kael Hamann, was born August 12, 2002. They’re enjoying this unexpected blessing one circle at a time!

KEY:

An abundant prayer life starts with making myself available to God.

Prayer can be as vital for us as it was to Daniel if we find ways to anticipate our times with God the way Daniel did. Habit turns prayer into something essential.

But where do we begin? If your days are already so full that getting up earlier seems genuinely impossible, be creative in finding time for prayer. What pockets of time have you overlooked? For example, when do you wait? Could you bring a devotional to the bus stop or a sports practice? How about putting your Bible near the telephone so you can read it when you're placed on hold?

Try praying as you gaze at your schedule for the day, whether it's on an electronic planner or a crowded kitchen calendar. Could reading your Bible take the place of watching television news or sports? Or at least a portion of that time?

Not all of us have a particular room designated for prayer, but perhaps something else could call you to be present with God. As a reminder to be still, you might place something near your desk or on your dashboard: a picture, a Scripture, a symbol of seeking the heart of God. A friend of ours posts a new verse above her sink each day. Usually, she can pray without interruption as she scrubs away, and she can often memorize the verse before the evening dishes are done.

Take time. Then say, "Lord, I'm here..."

Lord, so many days I hit the ground running, never stopping until my mind and soul are so weary that they've forgotten how to be still, how to wait for You, how to find hope in You. Help my longings for You to become stronger than anything else that clamors for my attention. Remind me to be still, to know that You are my God. Amen.