PRAY 4·40

Be careful what you ask for. You just may get it.

Forty Bible stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, each with a short prayer to make that quality your own.

40 PRAYERS · 8 WEEKS · 4 THEMES

WWW.PRAY440.COM · REECE B. MORREL, JR.

PRAY 4·40

Forty Prayers · Eight Weeks · Four Themes

Reece B. Morrel, Jr.

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Believe in **PRAYER**.
More importantly, believe in the **POWER** of prayer.
Most importantly, believe in the power of prayer to change **YOUR LIFE**.

But, what exactly is prayer?

At it's most basic, prayer is nothing more than a conversation with our Heavenly Father - and His answer to this question is quite simple: "Let's talk about whatever is on your mind. Let's talk about whatever is on your heart. Let's talk about **YOU**."

4·40

Be careful what you ask for. You just may get it.

This simple proverb is even more profound when you deal with supernatural forces.

The Bible is a collection of great stories - and scattered throughout are countless snippets, glimpses and vignettes of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Pray 4·40 is a simple collection of **40** noteworthy qualities. After reading each story, you are encouraged to **Pray 4** that quality - to make it your own.

But, be careful what you ask for. You just may get it.

THE 8-WEEK PLAN

Five prayers a week, Monday through Friday, from Genesis to the letters of Paul. Check the box at the end of each prayer as you go.

Pray 4 A Closer Walk · Pray 4 Strong Character · Pray 4 A Heart for Others · Pray 4 Hard Times

WEEK 1

Day 1	Daily Walks	*Enoch*
Day 2	Obedience	*Noah*
Day 3	Faith	*Abraham*
Day 4	Patience	*Job*
Day 5	Persistence	*Jacob*

WEEK 2

Day 1	Favor	*Joseph*
Day 2	Leadership	*Moses*
Day 3	Strength & Courage	*Joshua*
Day 4	Endurance	*Caleb*
Day 5	Confidence	*Gideon*

WEEK 3

Day 1	Noble Character	*Ruth*
Day 2	Hope	*Hannah*
Day 3	Listening	*Samuel*
Day 4	Friendship	*David & Jonathan*
Day 5	Joy	*David*

WEEK 4

Day 1	Wisdom	*Solomon*
Day 2	Rest	*Elijah*
Day 3	Humility	*Naaman*
Day 4	Second Chances	*Jonah*
Day 5	A Willing Heart	*Isaiah*

WEEK 5

Day 1	Deliverance	*Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego*
Day 2	Faithfulness	*Daniel*
Day 3	Purpose	*Hadassah (Esther)*
Day 4	Determination	*Nehemiah*
Day 5	Trust	*Mary, mother of Jesus*

WEEK 6

Day 1	Teamwork	*The Four Friends*
Day 2	Compassion	*The Good Samaritan*
Day 3	Devotion	*Mary of Bethany*
Day 4	Prayer-Ability	*The Disciples*
Day 5	Gratitude	*The Tenth Leper*

WEEK 7

Day 1	Tears	*Jesus*
Day 2	A Changed Heart	*Zacchaeus*
Day 3	A Generous Heart	*The Poor Widow*
Day 4	Self-Forgiveness	*Peter & Judas*
Day 5	Encouragement	*Barnabas*

WEEK 8

Day 1	Forgiveness	*Stephen*
Day 2	Boldness	*Philip*
Day 3	Kindness	*Tabitha (Dorcas)*
Day 4	Hospitality	*Lydia*
Day 5	Serenity	*Paul*

FOUR WAYS TO PRAY

Every prayer also belongs to one of four themes, ten prayers each. Looking for something specific? Start here.

PRAY 4 A CLOSER WALK

Your walk with God, one step at a time.

Daily Walks
Obedience
Faith
Listening
Joy
A Willing Heart
Faithfulness
Trust
Devotion
Prayer-Ability

PRAY 4 STRONG CHARACTER

Who you become when you keep showing up.

Persistence
Leadership
Strength & Courage
Endurance
Confidence
Noble Character
Wisdom
Humility
Determination
Boldness

PRAY 4 A HEART FOR OTHERS

How you love the people around you.

Friendship
Teamwork
Compassion
Gratitude
A Changed Heart
A Generous Heart
Encouragement
Forgiveness
Kindness
Hospitality

PRAY 4 HARD TIMES

For the days when life hurts.

Patience
Favor
Hope
Rest
Second Chances
Deliverance
Purpose
Tears
Self-Forgiveness
Serenity

Pray 4

DAILY WALKS

Enoch

It's strange. I can't explain it. You have probably noticed it as well.

Whenever two people walk side-by-side, they synchronize their gait. Regardless of the differences in their height, leg length or any number of other factors, the beat of their steps become one. In fact, the closer they walk together, the more likely they will be "in-phase" – left, right, left, right – together. It is truly a unique form of intimacy.

Now just imagine what it would be like to walk daily with our Heavenly Father – to be synchronized, to be "in-phase", to be spiritually intimate with Him.

Well, we don't have to imagine very hard. Enoch already found out. "He walked faithfully with God for 300 years, then he was no more, because God took him away." In other words, Enoch never experienced death.

Maybe God's proposal went something like this: "My goodness, Enoch. I didn't realize it had gotten so late. I have truly enjoyed our conversation today. I wish we could continue it forever. Hey, maybe we can? Since we are closer to My home than yours, why don't you just come home with Me?"

[Hmmm. Dramatic pause.]

I think I know somebody that is waiting to go on a walk with you right now. Have a great time. See you when you get back. Maybe.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for walking with me each and every day. Thank you for helping me synchronize my life with You and keeping it in-phase with You. Thank you for this intimate time we can share together. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Enoch (ancestor of Noah)

Look-It Up:

Genesis 5:18-24

> When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.
>
> When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Hebrews 11:5

> By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

Free Bonus:

Daily walks make you smarter – just ask Albert Einstein. During his tenure at the Swiss patent office, he would frequently walk home from work with his friend and sounding board, Michele Besso, while he worked out his theory of relativity.

Walking together keeps you in step – just ask a metronome. Set a few dozen metronomes on a light board resting on two soda cans and start them ticking at random. Within a few minutes, they are all swinging in perfect time. The secret is the board. Each swing nudges the board, and the board nudges every other metronome, until they all fall into step. Put the same metronomes on a solid table, and they never sync. In 1665, Christiaan Huygens noticed the same thing with two pendulum clocks hanging from one beam. He called it "an odd kind of sympathy." (Search "32 metronomes synchronization" to see it for yourself.)

Stay connected, and you'll fall into step.

We actually know very little about Enoch. We do know:

1. Enoch was the Great Grandfather of Noah.
2. This made Enoch the 7th patriarch from Adam.
3. Enoch was the father of Methuselah, the man reported to have lived the longest – a total of 969 years.
4. One of only two people reported by the Bible as not Experiencing death. The other person was Elijah.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

OBEDIENCE

Noah

Every parent knows the word. It's usually the very first question a child asks after being told to do something.

"Why?"

"Because I said so."

Now imagine God telling you to build a boat. Not a little fishing boat. A boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and three stories tall. On dry land. Nowhere near the water.

Your neighbors would have a few questions too.

That was Noah's assignment. God told him a great flood was coming, and gave him detailed instructions for an ark: what kind of wood, how to seal it, how big to make it, where to put the door.

And here is what the Bible says about Noah's response: "Noah did everything just as God commanded him."

Not some things. Not the parts that made sense. Everything.

He didn't form a committee. He didn't ask for an environmental impact study. He just picked up his tools and started building.

So, what is obedience? Obedience is doing what God asks before it makes sense.

For Noah, it didn't make sense until the day the rain started. Then it made perfect sense.

Noah, his family, and a boatload of animals rode out the flood safe and dry. And when it was all over, God put a rainbow in the sky as a promise that He would never flood the whole earth again.

Is God asking you to build something in your life that doesn't make sense right now? Grab your hammer. One day, you'll understand why.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your instructions, even when I don't understand them. Thank you for giving me the obedience of Noah, so that I will do everything just as You command. Thank you for the rainbow and every promise You keep. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Noah, Noah's Ark, Genesis flood narrative

Look-It Up:

Noah's story is told in Genesis 6–9.

Genesis 6:22

> Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

Hebrews 11:7

> By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

Genesis 9:13

> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Free Bonus:

The Bible gives the ark's dimensions as 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high. A cubit is roughly the length of a man's forearm, about 18 inches, which works out to about 450 by 75 by 45 feet.

Noah was 600 years old when the flood came (Genesis 7:6). So much for retirement.

Noah was the great-grandson of Enoch, who walked with God (see *Pray 4 Daily Walks*). Walking with God evidently ran in the family.

In 2016, a full-size replica of Noah's Ark, the Ark Encounter, opened in Williamstown, Kentucky.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

FAITH

Abraham

We have all heard it. That calm, polite voice from the GPS: "Recalculating."

Now, imagine God gave you directions like this: "Pack up everything. Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house. Go to the land I will show you."

Wait. What land? Where? How far? What's the address?

No answer. Just "go."

That is exactly what happened to Abram. He wasn't a young man looking for adventure, either. Abram was 75 years old when he set out. Most people his age are thinking about retirement, not relocation.

But Abram went.

Later, God made Abram another promise: his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky. One small problem. Abram and his wife, Sarai, had no children, and they were getting older by the day.

So, what did Abram do? "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Any accountant will tell you that's a remarkable entry. Abram didn't deposit a single good deed. He just believed, and God credited his account in full.

Abram had to wait 25 years for that promised son, Isaac. Along the way, God changed his name to Abraham, "father of many nations." Today, more than half the people on earth belong to faiths that trace their roots back to him.

So, what is faith? Faith is following God when the only directions you have are "go."

You don't need to see the whole map. You just need to trust the One giving directions.

And when life says, "Recalculating"? God already knows the way.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for leading me even when I can't see where I'm going. Thank you for giving me the faith of Abraham, so that I will go when You say "go" and believe when You make a promise. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Abrahamic religions

Look-It Up:

Genesis 12:1, 4

> The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." ... Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Genesis 15:5-6

> He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Hebrews 11:8

> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Free Bonus:

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born, and Sarah was 90. When she first heard the news, Sarah laughed. So they named the baby Isaac, which means "he laughs."

Genesis 15:6 is quoted three times in the New Testament: in Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23.

Leaving everything behind takes faith – just ask the cast of Casablanca. In the movie's famous café scene, German officers gather around the piano and sing "Die Wacht am Rhein." Victor Laszlo walks over to the band and asks them to play "La Marseillaise." Rick nods, and the whole room rises and sings the French anthem until the Germans are drowned out.

The movie was filmed in Burbank, California, in the summer of 1942, and several of its actors had fled the Nazis themselves. They left their homes, their families and everything they knew.

When Yvonne sings with tears running down her face and cries "Vive la France!", those are real tears. Madeleine Lebeau, the young actress who played her, had escaped Paris with her husband just two years before.

Like Abram, they went, even though they did not know where they were going.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

PATIENCE

Job

We've all been there. On hold. Again.

"Your call is important to us. Please continue to hold." Then, more elevator music.

Patience is hard. That's why we have an expression for people who seem to have an endless supply of it: "He has the patience of Job."

But here's a little secret. If you actually read the book of Job, he wasn't all that patient.

In a single day, Job lost his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his camels, his servants, and worst of all, all ten of his children. Then he lost his health, breaking out in painful sores from head to toe.

At first, Job handled it remarkably well: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

But then the days dragged on. And Job let God have it. He cursed the day he was born. He complained. He argued. He demanded a hearing. For about 35 chapters, Job asked, "Why?"

So, why do we still talk about "the patience of Job"?

Because through all the complaining and all the questions, Job never let go of God. Not once. He may have shaken his fist at heaven, but he never turned his back on it. And right in the middle of his misery, Job said something remarkable: "I know that my redeemer lives."

That's what patience really is. Patience is not keeping quiet. Patience is holding on.

God can handle your questions. He can handle your complaints. He just wants you to stay on the line.

And how did Job's story end? God restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before.

So, the next time you find yourself on hold with heaven, don't hang up. Your call really is important to Him.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for listening to all my questions, even the angry ones. Thank you for giving me the patience of Job, so that I will hold on to You no matter how long I have to wait. Thank you that my Redeemer lives. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Job (biblical figure), Book of Job

Look-It Up:

Job 1:21

> Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.

Job 19:25

> I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

Job 42:10

> After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before.

Free Bonus:

The phrase "the patience of Job" comes from the King James translation of James 5:11. The NIV calls it "Job's perseverance."

Look closely at the ending. Job's sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys were all doubled. But he received the same number of children as before, seven sons and three daughters. Many have noted that his first ten children weren't really lost. They were waiting for him.

Job's three friends did their best work at the very beginning. They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights without saying a word (Job 2:13). It was when they started talking that the trouble began.

The famous aria "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" in Handel's *Messiah* is taken from Job 19:25.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

PERSISTENCE

Jacob

Wrestling is hard work. Just ask anybody who has ever been on a wrestling team. No timeouts. No substitutions. Just you, your opponent, and the mat.

Now imagine a wrestling match that lasted all night long. Against God.

Jacob was on his way home after 20 years away. The next day, he would face his brother Esau, the brother he had cheated out of his birthright and his blessing. The last time Jacob saw him, Esau wanted to kill him. Esau was now coming to meet him with 400 men.

So Jacob sent his family across the river and spent the night alone. And that's when a mysterious man showed up and wrestled with him until daybreak.

When the man saw he couldn't win, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Most of us would tap out right there. But not Jacob.

"Let me go, for it is daybreak," the man said.

And Jacob answered, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

That's persistence.

So the man blessed him, and gave him a new name: Israel, meaning "he struggles with God." Jacob realized he had been wrestling with God Himself, face to face.

Jacob walked away from that match with a limp. But he also walked away with a blessing and a brand-new name. And the next day, Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.

Jesus said we "should always pray and not give up."

So hang on. Keep wrestling. Don't let go until you get your blessing. You might walk away with a limp, but you will never walk away the same.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for letting me wrestle with You in prayer. Thank you for giving me the persistence of Jacob, so that I will hold on and not let go until You bless me. Thank you for the new name You have given me. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Jacob, Jacob wrestling with the angel, Esau

Look-It Up:

Genesis 32:24-28

> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Luke 18:1

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

Free Bonus:

Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning "face of God," saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Genesis 32:30).

The entire nation of Israel takes its name from this wrestling match.

Jacob was the father of twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel. His favorite son was Joseph (see *Pray 4 Favor*).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

FAVOR

Joseph

Every family has one. The favorite.

In Joseph's family, it wasn't even a secret. His father, Jacob, gave him a fancy, one-of-a-kind robe. His ten older brothers got... well, nothing.

Then Joseph made it worse. He told his brothers about his dreams, where all of them bowed down to him.

You can guess how that went over.

The brothers threw Joseph into a pit, sold him to slave traders, dipped his fancy robe in goat's blood, and told their father he had been killed by a wild animal.

So much for being the favorite.

But here's the thing. Joseph had lost his father's favoritism, but he had never lost God's favor.

In Egypt, Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh. And "the LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered." Before long, Joseph was running Potiphar's entire household.

Then Potiphar's wife falsely accused him, and Joseph landed in prison.

Pit. Slavery. Prison. Not exactly a winning streak.

But even in prison, "the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor." Before long, Joseph was running the prison too.

Finally, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, and in a single day he went from prisoner to second in command over all of Egypt. Years later, during a great famine, his brothers came to Egypt begging for food and bowed down before him. Just like the dream.

So, what is favor? Here is what Joseph learned: God's favor doesn't keep you out of the pit. It keeps you from being *defeated* by the pit.

Favor is God's presence in your circumstances, even when your circumstances haven't changed yet.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your favor in my life, in the good times and in the pits. Thank you for being with me wherever I go, and for turning what others meant for harm into good. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Joseph (Genesis), Jacob, Potiphar

Look-It Up:

Joseph's story is told in Genesis 37–50.

Genesis 39:2

> The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

Genesis 39:21

> the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

Genesis 50:20

> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Free Bonus:

Most of us grew up hearing about Joseph's "coat of many colors," the King James wording. The NIV calls it an "ornate robe."

Joseph's story inspired the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Their first version was written in 1968 for a school choir.

Dolly Parton's song "Coat of Many Colors" takes its name from Joseph's coat. It tells the story of a coat her mother sewed for her from rags.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

LEADERSHIP

Moses

Moses had a problem. He was doing everything.

Every morning, he sat down to settle the people's disputes. And every evening, the line was still out the door. Morning to night, day after day, Moses was the judge, the jury, the counselor and the complaint department for a nation of hundreds of thousands.

Then his father-in-law, Jethro, came for a visit. He watched Moses for one day and gave him some free management consulting:

"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone."

Jethro's advice was simple. Teach the people God's ways. Then choose capable, trustworthy men and put them in charge of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them handle the small cases, and bring only the hard cases to you.

Moses listened. And it worked.

It's worth remembering that Moses never wanted to be a leader in the first place. When God first called him from the burning bush, Moses gave excuse after excuse. "Who am I?" "What if they don't believe me?" "I'm not a good speaker." And finally, "Please send someone else."

But God sent Moses anyway. And the reluctant leader became one of the greatest leaders in history.

So, what is leadership? It isn't doing everything yourself. It isn't being the smartest person in the room. Leadership is listening to good advice, raising up other leaders, and sharing the load.

A great leader doesn't just get things done. A great leader helps others get things done.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for every opportunity You give me to lead. Thank you for giving me the leadership of Moses, so that I will listen to wise counsel, raise up others, and never try to carry the load alone. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Moses, Jethro (biblical figure), Burning bush

Look-It Up:

Jethro's advice is found in Exodus 18:13-26.

Exodus 18:17-18

> Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone."

Moses' excuses at the burning bush are found in Exodus 3–4.

Free Bonus:

Jethro was a priest of Midian. He is also called Reuel in Exodus 2:18.

Business schools still teach Jethro's idea. Today, they call it "delegation" and "span of control."

Old-timers will remember Charlton Heston as Moses in Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 film, *The Ten Commandments*.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

STRENGTH & COURAGE

Joshua

Quick question. What is the hardest job in the world?

Brain surgeon? Rocket scientist? Kindergarten teacher the week before Christmas break?

Nope. The hardest job in the world is following a legend.

Just ask Jay Leno. In 1992, he took over *The Tonight Show* from Johnny Carson, who had been the King of Late Night for 30 years. No pressure.

Now imagine following Moses.

The man who stood up to Pharaoh. The man who parted the Red Sea. The man who came down the mountain carrying the Ten Commandments. The man who talked with God face to face.

Then Moses died, and God turned to his assistant: "Okay, Joshua. You're up."

What came next was one of the shortest pep talks in history: "Be strong and courageous."

Then God said it again. And again. Three times in nine verses. Then the people chimed in and said it a fourth time.

When a coach says something four times, he means it.

Why the repetition? Because God knew exactly what Joshua was walking into: walled cities, giants in the land, and a nation of grumblers who had given Moses fits for 40 years.

But look closely at where the strength and courage were supposed to come from: "...for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

You see, courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the presence of God.

And how did Joshua do? Not bad for an understudy. The walls of Jericho came tumbling down, the Promised Land was conquered, and in his farewell address Joshua gave us one of the most quoted lines in the Bible: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

So, is there a job in your life that feels too big? Shoes that seem impossible to fill? God's pep talk hasn't changed one bit.

Be strong and courageous.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for going with me wherever I go. Thank you for giving me the strength and courage of Joshua, so that I can face the walls and giants in my life. Thank you for reminding me again, and again, and again, that I am never alone. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Joshua, Moses, Battle of Jericho, Book of Joshua

Look-It Up:

Joshua 1:9

> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:6-7

> Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Deuteronomy 31:6

> Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Joshua 24:15

> But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

Free Bonus:

Joshua wasn't always named Joshua. His original name was Hoshea, meaning "salvation." Moses renamed him Joshua, meaning "the LORD is salvation" (Numbers 13:16). In Greek, the name Joshua becomes *Iēsous*, the same name as Jesus.

Joshua was one of only two spies, along with Caleb, who brought back a good report about the Promised Land. Forty years later, they were the only two adults from that generation who got to enter it.

Old-timers may remember the spiritual, *"Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho."* And the walls came a-tumblin' down.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

ENDURANCE

Caleb

How old is too old?

At 65, most people are planning retirement. At 75, they're working on their golf game. At 85, they're happy to find their reading glasses.

At 85, Caleb asked for a mountain.

Caleb's story starts 45 years earlier. Moses sent twelve spies to scout out the Promised Land. Ten of them came back terrified: "The people are giants! We looked like grasshoppers!"

Only two spies disagreed: Joshua and Caleb. "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

But the people listened to the ten. And because of their unbelief, that entire generation wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, until all of them had died. All except Joshua and Caleb.

God said of him, "My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly."

Forty-five years later, the Israelites were finally in the Promised Land, and it was time to divide it up. Caleb walked up to Joshua and said, "So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out... Now give me this hill country."

And which hill country did he want? The one where the giants lived.

Caleb didn't ask for the easy property. At 85, he asked for the hardest assignment on the map.

That's endurance. Endurance isn't just surviving the wilderness. It's coming out the other side still believing, still strong, and still ready for a fight.

Caleb took the mountain.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for renewing my strength, day after day and year after year. Thank you for giving me the endurance of Caleb, so that I will follow You wholeheartedly all the days of my life. Thank you for the mountains You still have for me. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Caleb, Twelve spies, Hebron

Look-It Up:

The story of the twelve spies is told in Numbers 13–14.

Numbers 14:24

> But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

Joshua 14:10-12

> Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day.

Isaiah 40:31

> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Free Bonus:

The hill country Caleb asked for included the city of Hebron, and he received it as his inheritance (Joshua 14:13-14).

The King James Version renders Caleb's request as, "Now therefore give me this mountain." It has inspired many sermons and songs.

Caleb's partner in the good report was Joshua (see *Pray 4 Strength & Courage*).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

CONFIDENCE

Gideon

Gideon was hiding.

The Midianites had overrun Israel. Every harvest, they swept in like a swarm of locusts and took everything. So Gideon was threshing his wheat in a winepress, down in a pit where the enemy couldn't see him.

That's when the angel of the LORD showed up, sat down under a nearby oak tree, and said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

Mighty warrior? Gideon must have looked around to see who the angel was talking to.

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Gideon wasn't exactly brimming with confidence. He asked God for a sign. Then another sign. Then another. He put out a wool fleece and asked God to make it wet while the ground stayed dry. Then he asked for the opposite. God patiently did both.

Then God did something strange. Gideon gathered an army of 32,000 men. God said, "You have too many." So Gideon sent home everyone who was afraid, and 22,000 left. God said, "Still too many." In the end, Gideon was left with just 300 men.

Three hundred men against an army as thick as locusts. Armed with trumpets, empty jars and torches.

In the middle of the night, Gideon's men surrounded the enemy camp, blew their trumpets, smashed their jars, and shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" The Midianites panicked and fled.

So, where does real confidence come from? Not from the size of your army. Not from your family tree. Real confidence comes from knowing that God is with you.

God called Gideon a mighty warrior before he ever did anything mighty. God sees what you can become, too.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for seeing more in me than I see in myself. Thank you for giving me the confidence of Gideon, so that I will trust in Your strength instead of my own. Thank you for being with me, mighty and strong. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Gideon, Midianites, Gideon's fleece

Look-It Up:

Gideon's story is told in Judges 6–7.

Judges 6:12

> When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

Judges 6:15

> "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Philippians 4:13

> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Free Bonus:

When people "put out a fleece" today, asking God for a sign before making a decision, they are borrowing from Gideon.

Gideons International, the organization that places Bibles in hotel rooms, was named after Gideon. It was founded in 1899 by traveling businessmen in Wisconsin.

How did God pick the 300? He had Gideon take the men down to the water to drink. Those who lapped water from their hands stayed. Those who knelt down to drink went home (Judges 7:5-7).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

NOBLE CHARACTER

Ruth

Ruth is a rock star.

How so? Well, of the 39 books of the Old Testament, 24 are named after people. Only 2 are named after women – Ruth and Esther. The genealogy of Jesus only identifies 4 women. Ruth is one of the four. Evidently, somebody thinks Ruth is a rock star.

But why?

Well, after Ruth's husband died, she stayed with her mother-in-law and continued to show her great kindness. When necessary and at great personal peril, Ruth took a job as a common laborer and worked long hours. Not anything particularly newsworthy or epic. Just day-by-day, month-by-month, year-by-year, and the word got out – Ruth was a "woman of noble character."

Let's face it. One of the hardest things about life is that it can be so boring, so tedious, and most of all so daily. The challenge becomes meeting each day with "noble character" – no matter what.

Yes, the little things matter – and build character.

Who knew?

Ruth, the rock star, knew.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father. Thank you for the opportunity of each day, and for filling each day with little things that matter. Thank you for giving me the "noble character" of Ruth. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Ruth (Biblical figure)

Look-it Up:

1. Ruth's story is fully told in the 8th book of the Old Testament.
2. The genealogy of Jesus is given in the 1st Chapter of the New Testament book, Matthew.

Free Bonus:

The Hebrew word for "noble character" (*ishah hayil*) is only used 4 times in the Old Testament. Besides the passage in Ruth 3:11, the other 3 times are in the book of Proverbs (a collection of religious wisdom and values attributed to King Solomon). The passages are:

Proverbs 12:4

> A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, But a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

Proverbs 31:10

> A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

Proverbs 31:29

> Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

HOPE

Hannah

We use the word "hope" all the time. "I hope it doesn't rain." "I hope the car starts." "I hope there's some pie left."

Usually, we mean "I wish." But in the Bible, hope means something much stronger. Hope is confident expectation.

Hannah knew all about hope.

Hannah wanted a child more than anything in the world. But year after year, she couldn't have one. To make matters worse, her husband's other wife, Peninnah, had plenty of children and never let Hannah forget it. Year after year, she taunted Hannah until she cried and couldn't eat.

One year, at the temple, Hannah poured out her heart to God. She prayed so hard that only her lips moved, and no sound came out. The old priest, Eli, watched her and decided she must be drunk.

"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied. "I was pouring out my soul to the LORD."

Eli blessed her: "May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

And then comes my favorite verse in the whole story: "Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast."

Hannah wasn't pregnant yet. Nothing had changed. But her face had. She had left her burden with God, and she walked away with hope.

That's what hope does. Hope changes your face before it changes your circumstances.

The next year, Hannah held her baby boy, Samuel. And Samuel grew up to become one of Israel's greatest prophets.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for hearing the prayers I can't even put into words. Thank you for giving me the hope of Hannah, so that I can leave my burdens with You and walk away with my head held high. Thank you for being the God of hope. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Hannah (biblical figure), Samuel, Eli (biblical figure)

Look-It Up:

Hannah's story is told in 1 Samuel 1–2.

1 Samuel 1:15

> "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD."

1 Samuel 1:18

> She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Romans 15:13

> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Free Bonus:

Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 is very similar to Mary's song of praise, the Magnificat, in Luke 1:46-55. Mary may well have known Hannah's song by heart.

Hannah kept her promise to dedicate Samuel to the Lord. Every year, she made him a little robe and brought it to him at the temple (1 Samuel 2:19).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

LISTENING

Samuel

"Did you hear what I just said?"

Every husband, wife, parent and child has heard that question. And most of us have had to admit, "Uh... no."

Selective hearing is a real condition. It affects millions.

Young Samuel lived at the temple with the old priest, Eli. Back then, the Bible says, "the word of the LORD was rare." God wasn't speaking very often. Or maybe nobody was listening.

One night, Samuel was lying down when he heard someone call his name: "Samuel!"

He jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am; you called me."

"I didn't call you," Eli said. "Go back and lie down."

It happened again. And then a third time.

Finally, Eli figured it out. It was God calling the boy. So Eli told him: "If he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'"

And when God called again, that's exactly what Samuel said.

Now think about how most of us pray. "Listen, Lord, for your servant is speaking."

We bring our list. We talk. We ask. We say "Amen." And then we get up and leave before God has a chance to say anything at all.

So, what is listening? Listening is prayer with the volume turned down. It's giving God the chance to get a word in.

Samuel learned to listen as a boy, and he kept listening his whole life. He became the prophet who anointed Israel's first two kings.

God is still speaking. Are you listening?

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for speaking to me. Thank you for giving me the listening ear of Samuel, so that I will be quick to listen and slow to speak. Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Samuel, Eli (biblical figure), Books of Samuel

Look-It Up:

The story is told in 1 Samuel 3.

1 Samuel 3:10

> The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

James 1:19

> My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Free Bonus:

Samuel was the answer to his mother's prayer (see *Pray 4 Hope*).

Samuel anointed both of Israel's first kings, Saul and David.

The Greek philosopher Epictetus is credited with saying, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

FRIENDSHIP

David & Jonathan

What is a friend?

Someone who helps you move. Someone who shows up at the hospital. Someone who knows all about you and likes you anyway.

But the friendship between David and Jonathan took friendship to a whole new level.

Jonathan was a prince, the son of King Saul, and next in line for the throne. David was a shepherd boy who had just become a national hero by killing Goliath.

By all rights, Jonathan should have seen David as a threat. Instead, the Bible says, "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself."

Jonathan took off his royal robe and gave it to David, along with his tunic, his sword, his bow and his belt. In a single gesture, the crown prince handed over the symbols of his royal future.

When King Saul became jealous and tried to kill David, it was Jonathan who warned him. The two friends worked out a secret signal: Jonathan would shoot arrows in a field, and the way he called out to his servant would tell David whether it was safe to come home.

It wasn't. So the two friends said goodbye, and wept.

Think about it. Jonathan knew that if David lived, Jonathan would never be king. And he helped David anyway.

That's what true friendship is. A true friend cheers for you, even when it costs them something.

Years later, after Jonathan died, King David found Jonathan's son, who was lame in both feet, and gave him a permanent seat at the king's table. A true friendship outlives the friends.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the friends You have placed in my life. Thank you for helping me be a friend like Jonathan, loyal and generous even when it costs me something. Thank you for Jesus, the friend who sticks closer than a brother. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: David and Jonathan, Jonathan (1 Samuel), Mephibosheth

Look-It Up:

The story of their friendship is told in 1 Samuel 18–20.

1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4

> Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ... And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

Proverbs 18:24

> One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

John 15:13

> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Free Bonus:

The story of David's kindness to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, is told in 2 Samuel 9.

When David heard that Jonathan had died in battle, he wrote a lament that includes the famous line, "How the mighty have fallen!" (2 Samuel 1:25-26).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

JOY

David

Have you ever been to a wedding reception where somebody's uncle hit the dance floor? No rhythm. No shame. Just pure, unfiltered joy.

King David was that guy.

For years, the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred chest that represented God's presence, had been kept far from the capital. Finally, David brought it home to Jerusalem.

And David was so happy he couldn't stand still.

With trumpets blaring and the people shouting, the King of Israel stripped off his royal robes and, wearing a simple linen garment, "danced before the LORD with all his might."

With all his might. Not a polite little shuffle. Not a dignified sway. All. His. Might.

Not everyone was impressed. His wife, Michal, watched from a window and "despised him in her heart." When David got home, she let him have it: "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today!" Translation: "You embarrassed yourself."

David's answer is one of the best comebacks in the Bible: "I will become even more undignified than this."

That's joy. Joy doesn't care who's watching. Joy isn't about being cool or dignified. It's about being so glad that God is near that you can't help but celebrate.

And here's the thing. Happiness depends on what happens. Joy depends on Who is with you.

So go ahead. Dance like David. Somebody may roll their eyes. That's okay. You're not dancing for them.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your presence in my life. Thank you for giving me the joy of David, so that I will celebrate You with all my might, no matter who is watching. Thank you that the joy of the Lord is my strength. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: David, Ark of the Covenant, Michal

Look-It Up:

The story is told in 2 Samuel 6.

2 Samuel 6:14-15

> Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

2 Samuel 6:22

> I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes.

Nehemiah 8:10

> Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

Free Bonus:

David wrote many of the Psalms. The very last one, Psalm 150, calls for praising God with trumpet, harp, lyre, timbrel, strings, pipe, cymbals, and dancing.

The Ark of the Covenant got a Hollywood makeover in the 1981 movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

David's best friend was Jonathan, Michal's brother (see *Pray 4 Friendship*).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

WISDOM

Solomon

If a genie popped out of a lamp and gave you one wish, what would you ask for?

Money? A long life? Revenge on your enemies? And of course, the smart-aleck answer: "More wishes!"

King Solomon got that exact offer. Except it wasn't a genie. It was God.

Solomon was young, and he had just inherited the throne from his famous father, King David. One night, God appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Whatever. You. Want.

Solomon didn't ask for gold. He didn't ask for a long life. He didn't ask for victory over his enemies. Instead, he said, "Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."

God was so pleased with the answer that He gave Solomon wisdom AND riches AND honor. Talk about a bonus.

It didn't take long for Solomon's wisdom to be tested. Two women came before him, both claiming the same baby. No witnesses. No DNA tests. Just two mothers, one baby, and a very difficult decision.

So Solomon called for a sword: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other."

One woman said, "Fine." The other cried out, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" And right then, Solomon knew who the real mother was.

Remember the Pray 4·40 motto? *Be careful what you ask for. You just may get it.*

Solomon asked for the right thing.

And here's the good news. You don't need a dream or a genie to get the same offer. God says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God." That's it. Just ask.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the wisdom You give so generously to all who ask. Thank you for giving me the discerning heart of Solomon, so that I can tell right from wrong and make good decisions every day. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Solomon, Judgment of Solomon, Book of Proverbs

Look-It Up:

The story of Solomon's request is told in 1 Kings 3:5-28.

1 Kings 3:9

> So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?

James 1:5

> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Free Bonus:

Solomon is credited with speaking 3,000 proverbs and writing 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32). Many of them are collected in the book of Proverbs.

Today, a wise and fair decision between two parties is sometimes called a "Solomonic" decision.

Solomon's wisdom was so famous that the Queen of Sheba traveled all the way to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions (1 Kings 10). She left impressed.

Even the wisest man in the world had to keep choosing wisdom. Late in life, Solomon's many foreign wives turned his heart toward other gods (1 Kings 11:4). Wisdom isn't something you get once. It's something you ask for every day.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

REST

Elijah

Your phone tells you when it needs a rest. "Battery at 1%."

People aren't quite so obvious.

Elijah had just had the greatest spiritual victory of his life. On Mount Carmel, he challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a contest: whose god would send fire from heaven? The prophets of Baal danced and shouted all day long. Nothing.

Then Elijah prayed one short prayer, and fire fell from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and even the water in the trench.

What a day!

Then came the next day. Queen Jezebel sent Elijah a message: by this time tomorrow, you're a dead man.

And the great prophet, who had just called down fire from heaven, ran for his life. He went a day's journey into the desert, sat down under a broom bush, and prayed, "I have had enough, LORD. Take my life."

Battery at 1%.

So, what did God do? Did He lecture Elijah? Did He give him a pep talk? Did He tell him to have more faith?

No. He let him sleep.

Then an angel woke him up and said, "Get up and eat." There was fresh bread baked on hot coals and a jar of water. Elijah ate, drank, and went back to sleep. Then the angel woke him again: "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."

Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap and eat a good meal.

Afterward, God met Elijah on the mountain. Not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in a gentle whisper.

Rest isn't laziness. Rest is how we hear the whisper.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for caring for me when I am tired and worn out. Thank you for giving me the rest of Elijah, so that I can be refreshed and renewed. Thank you for speaking to me in the gentle whisper. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Elijah, Jezebel, Mount Carmel

Look-It Up:

The contest on Mount Carmel is told in 1 Kings 18, and Elijah's escape in 1 Kings 19.

1 Kings 19:5-7

> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."

1 Kings 19:12

> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

Matthew 11:28

> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Free Bonus:

Elijah was one of only two people in the Bible who did not experience death. He was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). The other was Enoch (see *Pray 4 Daily Walks*).

At the Jewish Passover meal, a cup of wine is traditionally set out for Elijah, and the door is opened to welcome him.

Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, first performed in 1846, tells his story in music.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

HUMILITY

Naaman

Naaman was a big deal. And he knew it.

He was the commander of the army of Aram, a mighty warrior, and highly respected by his king. But Naaman had a problem that no amount of power could fix. He had leprosy.

In Naaman's house was a young servant girl, captured in a raid on Israel. She told her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

So Naaman loaded up his chariots with ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing, and headed to Israel to see the prophet Elisha.

He pulled up to Elisha's house with his whole entourage. And Elisha didn't even come out to meet him.

Instead, Elisha sent a messenger: "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored."

Naaman was furious. He had expected the prophet to come out, wave his hand, and call on the name of the Lord. Instead, he got a messenger and instructions to go take a bath in a muddy little river. "Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?"

So he stormed off in a rage.

But his servants were wiser than he was: "If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!"

So Naaman swallowed his pride, went down to the Jordan, and dipped himself seven times. And his skin became like the skin of a young boy.

So, what is humility? Humility is being willing to do the small, simple thing God asks, even when you think you deserve something bigger.

Sometimes the biggest step of faith is climbing down off your chariot.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the simple instructions You give me. Thank you for giving me the humility of Naaman, so that I will swallow my pride and do whatever You ask. Thank you for lifting me up when I humble myself before You. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Naaman, Elisha, Jordan River

Look-It Up:

The story is told in 2 Kings 5.

2 Kings 5:13-14

> Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

James 4:10

> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Free Bonus:

The unsung hero of the story is the young servant girl. She had been taken captive from her home, yet she cared enough about her master to point him to God's prophet. We never learn her name.

Jesus mentioned Naaman in His first sermon in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:27). It didn't go over well.

Elisha refused to take any of Naaman's gifts. His servant, Gehazi, ran after Naaman and took some anyway. It didn't end well for Gehazi.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

SECOND CHANCES

Jonah

Golfers have a wonderful word: "mulligan." Hit a bad shot off the first tee, and your buddies might let you take it over. No penalty. A second chance.

Jonah needed a mulligan. A big one.

God told Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it." So Jonah got up and went... in exactly the opposite direction. He bought a ticket on a ship headed for Tarshish, about as far from Nineveh as a person could get.

Jonah didn't like the Ninevites. They were the enemies of Israel, and they were famous for their cruelty. Jonah didn't want to warn them. He wanted them to get what they deserved.

You probably know what happened next. A violent storm. A frightened crew. Jonah thrown overboard. And then, a huge fish swallowed him whole.

For three days and three nights, Jonah sat in the belly of that fish. That's a long time to think. So Jonah prayed. And the fish spit him out onto dry land.

And then comes one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible: "Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time."

A second time. God didn't fire Jonah. God gave him a mulligan.

This time, Jonah went to Nineveh. He preached. And the whole city, from the king on down, turned to God. So God gave Nineveh a second chance, too.

Jonah, by the way, was not happy about that. He went outside the city and sulked.

But God's message was clear: He is the God of second chances. For runaway prophets. For wicked cities. For you. Even for the people we don't think deserve one.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being the God of second chances. Thank you for not giving up on me when I run the wrong way. Thank you for helping me give second chances to others, just like You give them to me. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Jonah, Book of Jonah, Nineveh

Look-It Up:

The whole story is told in the four short chapters of Jonah.

Jonah 1:17

> Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 3:1-2

> Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Free Bonus:

Was it a whale? The Hebrew simply says a "great fish." The idea of a whale comes from the King James Version of Matthew 12:40, where Jesus compares His own three days in the tomb to Jonah's three days in the "whale's belly."

Jonah sailed from the port of Joppa, today part of Tel Aviv, Israel.

The ruins of ancient Nineveh lie across the Tigris River from the modern city of Mosul, Iraq.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

A WILLING HEART

Isaiah

Remember back in school when the teacher asked for a volunteer? Suddenly everybody found their shoes very interesting.

"Anyone? Anyone?"

Isaiah had a vision that would make anyone's knees knock. He saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Above Him were seraphim, angels with six wings, calling out to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

The doorposts shook. The temple filled with smoke.

And Isaiah's first reaction? "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips."

In other words: "I'm not good enough to be here."

Then one of the seraphim flew to Isaiah with a live coal from the altar and touched his lips: "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

And then Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord asking a question: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

Isaiah didn't look at his shoes. He said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Notice what God didn't ask. He didn't ask, "Who is qualified?" He didn't ask, "Who has the right experience?" He asked, "Who will go?"

That's a willing heart. God isn't looking for the most qualified. He's looking for the most willing. He took care of Isaiah's qualifications with one coal from the altar.

The next time God asks for a volunteer, don't look at your shoes. Raise your hand.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for taking away my guilt and making me clean. Thank you for giving me the willing heart of Isaiah, so that whenever You ask, "Whom shall I send?" I will answer, "Here am I. Send me!" In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Isaiah, Book of Isaiah, Seraph

Look-It Up:

Isaiah's vision is described in Isaiah 6:1-8.

Isaiah 6:5

> "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Isaiah 6:8

> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Free Bonus:

The seraphim's song, "Holy, holy, holy," inspired the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty," written by Reginald Heber.

Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament more than any other prophet. The Ethiopian official was reading Isaiah 53 when Philip ran up to his chariot (see *Pray 4 Boldness*).

The contemporary hymn "Here I Am, Lord," written by Dan Schutte in 1981, is based on Isaiah 6:8.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

DELIVERANCE

Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego

Get ready for the best story ever told. Are you ready?

> Once upon a time ..... they lived happily ever after!

How about that? What do you think? Wasn't that great?

What? You don't like it? Why not? Oh, I see. It didn't have a middle.

Well then, how about this story?

> **Once upon a time** there were 3 men that disobeyed the wicked king's command to worship a false god. So they got invited to a barbecue-theirs! After being thrown into the fiery furnace, the king decided to see how the ribs were doing. Much to his surprise, he saw 4 men in the flames walking around-with the 4th man having the form like the Son of God. The king then commanded the 3 men to come out of the fire. And, when they did, they did not smell like smoke and no part of their body or clothes was singed by the fire. Then Nebuchadnezzar praised God, and promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and then, **they lived happily ever after!**

A much better story, but why?

It's easy. God was praised after the miraculous deliverance from the fiery furnace of our 3 heroes.

So, here's the deal. No praise without a deliverance. No deliverance without a test. No test without a test subject. And guess who gets to be the test subject? That's right, you.

So the next time you find yourself in a "fiery furnace," just remember what a great story you will have to tell after your deliverance. Praise God!

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, Once upon a time I didn't have any stories to tell. Thank you for the tests you give me. Thank you for visiting me while I am in the fiery furnace. Thank you for delivering me so that You are glorified by my stories. Thank you for letting me live happily ever after with You. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Look-It Up:

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is told in the 3rd Chapter of Daniel.

Free Bonus:

In 1939, Fred Leary recorded this song about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Here is Johnny Cash's version of the story of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego.

The identity of the 4th person in the fiery furnace is the subject of much theological debate. The two most common candidates are Michael the archangel and Jesus Christ. Whatever the answer, the 4th person was most certainly a divine being.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

FAITHFULNESS

Daniel

Imagine being audited. Not just your taxes. Your entire life.

That's what happened to Daniel.

Daniel was a top official in the empire, and King Darius planned to put him in charge of the whole kingdom. The other officials were jealous, so they went looking for dirt on him.

They dug. They searched. They found nothing. The Bible says "they could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent."

So they set a trap. They convinced the king to sign a law: for the next 30 days, anyone who prayed to any god or man except the king would be thrown into the lions' den.

Now watch what Daniel did. When he heard about the new law, he went home, opened his windows toward Jerusalem, and got down on his knees to pray, three times a day, "just as he had done before."

Just as he had done before.

Daniel didn't start praying because of the crisis. He had already been praying three times a day for years. The new law didn't change his habit. His habit carried him through the new law.

Of course, his enemies caught him, and Daniel was thrown to the lions. The king didn't sleep a wink all night. At dawn he rushed to the den, and Daniel called out, "My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions."

So, what is faithfulness? Faithfulness is what you do every day, long before you need it. It's built in ordinary moments, so it's ready for extraordinary ones.

Be faithful in the little things. Then, when the lions show up, you'll already know what to do.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your faithfulness to me, every single day. Thank you for giving me the faithfulness of Daniel, so that my daily habits will carry me through whatever comes. Thank you for shutting the mouths of the lions in my life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Daniel (biblical figure), Daniel in the lions' den, Darius the Mede

Look-It Up:

The story is told in Daniel 6.

Daniel 6:4

> At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.

Daniel 6:10

> 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 6:22

> My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions.

Free Bonus:

Daniel was taken to Babylon as a young man. By the time of the lions' den, he was most likely in his eighties.

Daniel's faithfulness started early. As a teenager in the king's court, he asked to eat vegetables and drink water instead of the king's rich food. After ten days, he looked healthier than everyone else (Daniel 1).

Daniel's three friends were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (see *Pray 4 Deliverance*).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

PURPOSE

Hadassah (Esther)

Through out all the stories in the Bible, there is one one thing that you will never, ever find. Nope not once. Any guesses what it might be? Give up? It is [drum roll, please] – Luck.

Good Luck. Bad Luck. Dumb Luck. Random Luck. Pure Luck. Luck in any form or fashion is just not found anywhere in the Bible.

Sure they "cast lots" here and there. But that was merely a short-cut system for asking God what to do.

So, without "luck" what do you have?

Purpose.

Everything in the Bible happens for a purpose. But here is where the suspenseful, trusting, confidence-building part comes in. When things happen, you may not immediately know what the purpose is. You way not know in a month, or a year, or even in your lifetime.

Don't believe me? Just ask the young orphan girl, Hadassah.

Hadassah won a national beauty contest of sorts, and changed her name to Queen Esther.

But why?

Five years later she got her answer.

A bad-guy by the name of Haman, convinced her husband, King Xerxes, to issue a royal command to exterminate all the Jewish people in his Kingdom – including Queen Esther. You see, Queen Esther had kept it a secret from everyone including King Xerxes that she was Jewish.

Now she had a purpose, and a pretty good one at that – to save herself and her people.

Her cousin, Mordecai recognized it. He even told Queen Esther, "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

I am happy to report that through divine intervention everything worked out for the better – except for Haman – and Queen Esther and the Jewish people were purposefully saved.

So too, in your life. The day will come when you ask yourself, am I in this situation "for such a time as this?" And then you will remember, that everything happens for a purpose.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank your for having a purpose for my life. Thank you for putting me right where I need to be, when I need to be there. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Esther, Xerxes, Mordecai, Haman, and the Feast of Purim.

Look-It Up:

The seventeenth book of the Old Testament is named after Esther and tells the full story of how Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai worked together to save the Jewish people from extinction, and how the Feast of Purim was established to celebrate their deliverance.

When Jesus was crucified, they cast lots for his clothes. Not only was this reported by all four gospels. but it was also prophesied in the Old Testament **TEN** centuries before by King David, an ancestor of Jesus.

Matthew 27:35

> When they had crucified him [Jesus], they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Mark 15:24

> And they crucified him [Jesus]. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

Luke 23:34

> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots."

John 19:23-24

> When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom."Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."This

> happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,"They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."So this is what the soldiers did.

And King David's prophecy is found in Psalm 22:18

> They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

Free Bonus:

Traditionally, the leaves of a four-leaf clover, one of the most popular good-luck charms, represent faith, hope, love, and luck. 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 talks about faith, hope and love.

For more information about purpose, please refer to Rick Warren's best-selling book, The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For? Five stars. Highly recommended.

Old-timers may remember the bad-luck jingle from the TV show, Hee-Haw entitled, "Gloom, Despair & Agony on Me."

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

DETERMINATION

Nehemiah

We all have them. Projects that never get finished. The garage that never gets cleaned. The book that never gets written. The diet that starts every Monday.

Starting is easy. Finishing is hard.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, a trusted position in the royal court. One day, he got some terrible news from home: the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down, and its gates had been burned with fire.

Nehemiah sat down and wept. For days he mourned, fasted and prayed.

Then one day, the king noticed his sad face and asked what was wrong. Nehemiah shot up a quick prayer to God, took a deep breath, and asked the king for permission to go rebuild the walls.

The king said yes.

When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem, the work began. And so did the opposition. Two local officials, Sanballat and Tobiah, mocked the workers: "If even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"

When the mocking didn't work, they threatened to attack. So Nehemiah put half the men to work and the other half on guard. The builders worked with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other.

Then the enemies tried a trick. They invited Nehemiah to a meeting, hoping to harm him. Four times they asked, and four times Nehemiah gave the same answer: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down."

And the wall was finished. In just 52 days.

So, what is determination? Determination is refusing to come down off the wall until the job is done.

Whatever great project God has given you, don't come down. Finish it.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the great projects You have given me. Thank you for giving me the determination of Nehemiah, so that I will keep building no matter who mocks or opposes me. Thank you for helping me finish what You have started. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Nehemiah, Book of Nehemiah, Artaxerxes I

Look-It Up:

Nehemiah's story is told in Nehemiah 1–6.

Nehemiah 4:6

> So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

Nehemiah 6:3

> so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"

Nehemiah 6:15

> So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

Galatians 6:9

> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Free Bonus:

As cupbearer, Nehemiah's job was to taste the king's wine to make sure it wasn't poisoned. That made him one of the king's most trusted men.

Nehemiah's quick prayer before answering the king (Nehemiah 2:4-5) is often called an "arrow prayer," a short prayer shot straight up to heaven.

And with that, the Pray 4·40 list is complete. Forty noteworthy qualities. Forty prayers. *Be careful what you ask for. You just may get it.*

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

TRUST

Mary, mother of Jesus

Have you ever done a "trust fall"? You stand with your back to a group of people, cross your arms, close your eyes, and fall backward, trusting they'll catch you.

It's a lot harder than it looks.

Now imagine the ultimate trust fall.

Mary was a young girl, probably a teenager, engaged to a carpenter named Joseph in the little town of Nazareth. One day, the angel Gabriel appeared and told her she would give birth to a son, and He would be the Son of the Most High.

There was just one problem. Mary wasn't married yet.

So Mary asked a very reasonable question: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

Notice, she didn't ask *whether* it would happen. She asked *how*. Trust doesn't mean you have no questions.

Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would come upon her. And then he added, "For no word from God will ever fail."

Think about what Mary was risking. Her reputation. Her engagement. Maybe even her life. Nobody in Nazareth was going to believe her story.

And yet, Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

That's trust. Trust is falling backward into God's arms, even when you can't see how He'll catch you.

And He did. God spoke to Joseph in a dream, and Joseph took Mary as his wife. And Mary gave birth to the Savior of the world.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that no word from You will ever fail. Thank you for giving me the trust of Mary, so that I will say "yes" to You even when I don't understand how. Thank you for always catching me when I fall. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Mary, mother of Jesus, Annunciation, Gabriel

Look-It Up:

The story is told in Luke 1:26-38.

Luke 1:37-38

> "For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Proverbs 3:5-6

> Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Free Bonus:

Mary's song of praise, beginning "My soul glorifies the Lord," is known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). It echoes the prayer of Hannah (see *Pray 4 Hope*).

Mary was there at the very end, too. She stood near the cross when Jesus was crucified (John 19:25-27), and she was with the disciples praying in the upper room after He rose (Acts 1:14).

The Christmas song "Mary, Did You Know?" was written by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene, and first recorded in 1991.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

TEAMWORK

The Four Friends

Have you ever tried to move a couch up a flight of stairs? It takes teamwork. Somebody lifts. Somebody steers. Somebody yells, "Pivot!"

Four men in Capernaum had a much bigger moving job.

Their friend was paralyzed. He couldn't walk. He couldn't work. He couldn't get to Jesus on his own.

So they put him on a mat and carried him.

When they got to the house where Jesus was teaching, they hit a wall. Literally. The house was packed. People were crowded around the door. There was no way in.

Most of us would have said, "Well, we tried," and gone home.

Not these four. They climbed up on the roof, dug a hole right through it, and lowered their friend on his mat right down in front of Jesus.

Imagine being the homeowner.

And here is the key verse: "When Jesus saw *their* faith, he said to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"

Their faith. Not just the paralyzed man's. The faith of his four friends.

Then Jesus told him, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up, picked up his mat, and walked out in full view of everyone.

So, what is teamwork? Teamwork is carrying someone who can't make it on their own. And sometimes, it means your faith carries them, too.

Every one of us will be on the mat someday. And every one of us can be one of the four.

Grab a corner.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the people who have carried me when I couldn't make it on my own. Thank you for giving me the faith and teamwork of the four friends, so that I can help carry others to You. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Healing the paralytic at Capernaum, Capernaum

Look-It Up:

The story is told in Mark 2:1-12.

Mark 2:3-5

> Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

> Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

Free Bonus:

Houses in Capernaum often had flat roofs made of wooden beams covered with branches and packed clay, which you could dig through. Luke's version of the story says they lowered him "through the tiles" (Luke 5:19).

The same story is also told in Matthew 9:1-8.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

COMPASSION

The Good Samaritan

It all started with a lawyer's question.

An expert in the law asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus turned it around: "What is written in the Law?" The lawyer gave the textbook answer: love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

"Correct," said Jesus. "Do this and you will live."

But like any good lawyer, he wanted the terms defined. "And who is my neighbor?"

So Jesus told a story.

A man was traveling the dangerous road from Jerusalem down to Jericho when robbers jumped him, stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead.

A priest came along. He saw the man… and crossed to the other side of the road.

A Levite, a temple worker, came along. He saw the man… and crossed to the other side of the road.

Then a Samaritan came along. Jews and Samaritans despised each other. If anyone had an excuse to keep walking, it was him.

But the Samaritan "took pity on him." He bandaged the man's wounds, poured on oil and wine, put him on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and paid for his care. Then he told the innkeeper, "Look after him, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense."

Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which of these three was a neighbor to the man?"

The lawyer couldn't even bring himself to say "the Samaritan." He just said, "The one who had mercy on him."

Notice what Jesus did. The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered a different question: "Who acted like a neighbor?"

Compassion isn't about deciding who deserves our help. It's about seeing someone in need and refusing to cross to the other side of the road.

"Go and do likewise."

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your great compassion toward me. Thank you for giving me the compassion of the Good Samaritan, so that I will see the hurting people around me and stop to help. Thank you for showing me who my neighbor is. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Parable of the Good Samaritan, Samaritans, Good Samaritan law

Look-It Up:

The parable is told in Luke 10:25-37.

Luke 10:36-37

> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Free Bonus:

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho drops more than 3,000 feet in less than 20 miles, through rocky, desolate country. It was notorious for robbers.

Every state in the U.S. has some form of "Good Samaritan" law, which protects people who give reasonable help to someone in an emergency.

In a famous 1970s experiment at Princeton, seminary students were sent across campus to give a talk, and on the way they passed a man slumped in a doorway. The students who were told they were running late were far less likely to stop and help. Some of them were on their way to give a talk about the Good Samaritan.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

DEVOTION

Mary of Bethany

Every family gathering has one. While everyone else is in the living room visiting, one person is in the kitchen. Basting the turkey. Mashing the potatoes. Getting more frustrated by the minute.

That was Martha.

When Jesus came to visit the home of Martha and her sister, Mary, Martha did what any good host would do. She went to work. There was food to cook, a table to set, and guests to serve.

Mary did something different. She sat down at Jesus' feet and listened.

Martha finally had enough. She marched into the room and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

You can almost hear the pots and pans banging.

But Jesus answered gently: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Now, let's be fair to Martha. Somebody has to cook. And Jesus loved Martha (see *Pray 4 Tears*). It was Martha who later made one of the greatest declarations of faith in the Bible: "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

But Mary understood something important. Jesus didn't come to be served dinner. He came to be with them.

So, what is devotion? Devotion isn't doing more for Jesus. It's spending time with Jesus.

The dishes can wait. He's in the living room.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for wanting to spend time with me. Thank you for giving me the devotion of Mary, so that I will choose what is better and sit at Your feet. Thank you for helping me be still and know that You are God. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Mary of Bethany, Martha, Bethany

Look-It Up:

Luke 10:38-42

> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Psalm 46:10

> He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Free Bonus:

Mary of Bethany later poured a pint of expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (John 12:1-8). The perfume was worth about a year's wages.

Mary and Martha's brother was Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead (see *Pray 4 Tears*).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

PRAYER-ABILITY

The Disciples

Pop-quiz. [Groans all around.]

Close your books. Take out a sheet of paper and a pencil.

It's time to answer just one question. Are you ready? Here's the question:

If you could ask Jesus to teach you one thing, and only one thing, what would it be? [Music from the TV game show, *Jeopardy!*, plays in the background.]

Time's up. Pencils down. How did you do? Don't worry there are no wrong answers.

Now, open your Bible to Luke 11:1. Here is how one of the disciples of Jesus answered the question: "Lord, teach us to pray."

Wow!

He didn't ask Jesus to teach him how to walk on water. He didn't ask Jesus to teach him how to heal people or raise them from the dead. He didn't ask Jesus to teach him how to perform other miracles like feeding 5,000 people. He just wanted Jesus to teach him to pray.

And, Jesus said to pray like this:

> Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Short. Sweet. To the point. Not pompous, or long-winded. A masterpiece of simplicity.

And, here is the best part. Just like the *Lord's Prayer*, there are only 3 short, sweet and simple rules for "prayer-ability." They are:

1. Just Pray
2. Pray Often
3. Keep Praying

Since prayer is merely a conversation with God, it is really easy. Just talk to him about all the things on your heart. But, if you run out of things to talk about, I am sure that Jesus wouldn't mind if you borrowed His.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for teaching me how to pray. Thank you for letting me share with you all the things on my heart. Thank you for helping me improve my "prayer-ability." In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Gospel of Luke, Gospel of Matthew, Lord's Prayer, and Sermon on the Mount

Look-It Up:

A longer, more familiar version of the *Lord's Prayer* is found in the *Sermon on the Mount* in the 6th Chapter of Matthew (the first book of the New Testament).

> 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,
> for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'
> (New International Version)

Free Bonus:

Busted. Okay, I didn't know what to call it, so I just made up the word "Prayer-Ability." Please, don't tell my high school English teacher.

As you can well imagine, prayer is a popular topic. Here is a short list of some of my favorite books on prayer:

- With Christ In The School Of Prayer by Andrew Murray
- Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Timothy Keller
- Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation by Charles F. Stanley

The recent movie *War Room* has spawned several books on prayer. They are:

- The Battle Plan for Prayer: From Basic Training to Targeted Strategies by Stephen Kendrick and Alex Kendrick
- Fervent: A Woman's Battle Plan to Serious, Specific and Strategic Prayer by Priscilla Shirer

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

GRATITUDE

The Tenth Leper

When we were kids, our mothers made us do it. After every birthday and every Christmas, we sat down and wrote thank-you notes. "Dear Aunt Edna, thank you for the socks."

Saying thank you seems so simple. Yet so many of us forget.

One day, ten men with leprosy saw Jesus coming. Lepers weren't allowed near other people, so they stood at a distance and shouted, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

Jesus told them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." That was what the law required for someone who had been cured. So they went. And on the way, all ten of them were healed.

Imagine the excitement. Clean skin. No more shouting "Unclean!" No more living in exile. Going home to their families for the first time in who knows how long.

Nine of them kept on running.

But one of them stopped. He turned around and came back to Jesus, praising God at the top of his lungs. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him.

And here's the kicker: he was a Samaritan, a foreigner, an outsider.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"

Ten were healed. One said thank you.

That's a gratitude rate of 10%. Ouch.

So, what is gratitude? Gratitude is turning around. It's stopping in the middle of the blessing to thank the One who gave it.

All ten men were healed. But only one heard Jesus say, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Be the one.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you. Thank you for every blessing, big and small, the ones I noticed and the ones I didn't. Thank you for giving me the gratitude of the tenth leper, so that I will always turn around and say thank you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Cleansing ten lepers, Samaritans

Look-It Up:

Luke 17:11-19

> Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

1 Thessalonians 5:18

> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Free Bonus:

Under the Law of Moses, a person with a skin disease had to live outside the camp, wear torn clothes, and cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45-46).

In 1863, in the middle of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national day of Thanksgiving, to be held on the last Thursday of November.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

TEARS

Jesus

"Jesus wept."

Every Sunday School truant recognizes these words as the shortest verse in the Bible.

Ask them why He wept, and they will smugly reply, "Because he was sad."

But really, why did Jesus weep?

Was he a wimp? Not a manly man? Was there another Wal-Mart Grand Opening in town?

His friend Lazarus had died four days earlier. But, here is the mystery – Jesus predicted the death of Lazarus while he was still sick. And, to make the resurrection of Lazarus even more dramatic, Jesus waited an extra two days.

Knowing that he was going to perform such a wondrous miracle in just a few moments, why did Jesus weep?

The answer is really quite simple. Jesus wept because he loved.

Jesus cared about his friend, Lazarus. Jesus cared about his sisters, Martha and Mary. But before Lazarus was resurrected, death separated Jesus from his friend – and because he loved his friend and could not bear the separation, Jesus wept.

Think of it like this. You can't have a left without a right. You can't have a valley without a mountain top. And, you can't have the gift of love without the gift of tears.

Jesus loves us so much that he weeps when we are separated from him.

Jesus ***can*** weep because he ***has*** love.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of tears. Thank you for the gift of love. Thank you for the gift of eternal life so that I will never be separated from you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Jesus, Jesus Wept, Lazarus of Bethany,

Look-It Up:

John 11:35

> Jesus wept.

Psalm 126:5

> Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.

The complete story of Lazarus is only told in the Gospel of John.

John:11:1-44

> Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."
>
> When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."
>
> "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"
>
> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."
>
> After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."
>
> His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."
>
> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.
>
> Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Free Bonus:

While discussing the two natures of Jesus, Pope Leo I referred to this passage and stated, "In his humanity Jesus wept for Lazarus; in his divinity he raised him from the dead."

The length of time that Lazarus was dead is significant. Many people at that time believed that a person's soul stayed close to their body for three days with the hope of returning. So after four days, Lazarus was really, truly dead.

This prayer is dedicated to the memory of Rachel Courtney Morrel.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

A CHANGED HEART

Zacchaeus

Nobody likes the tax man. Ask anyone in the middle of April.

But in Jesus' day, tax collectors were especially despised. They worked for the Roman occupiers, and they made their living by collecting more than was owed and pocketing the difference. It was legal. It was also legalized robbery.

Zacchaeus wasn't just a tax collector. He was a *chief* tax collector. And he was rich.

He was also short.

So when Jesus came to Jericho, and the crowds lined the street, Zacchaeus couldn't see a thing. Being a resourceful man, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree.

Picture it. One of the richest, most powerful men in town, hanging from a tree limb like a kid at a parade.

When Jesus reached that spot, He stopped, looked up, and called him by name: "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

Out of all the people in Jericho, Jesus picked the most unpopular man in town. And the crowd grumbled.

But something happened to Zacchaeus that day. Before Jesus said a word of correction, Zacchaeus stood up and announced, "Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Nobody told him to do that. Nobody made him. His heart had simply changed.

That's the difference between a changed mind and a changed heart. A changed mind makes promises. A changed heart writes checks.

And Jesus summed it all up: "Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for seeing me, and calling me by name. Thank you for giving me a changed heart like Zacchaeus, so that I will make right what I have done wrong and share freely with others. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Zacchaeus, Tax collector (Publican), Jericho

Look-It Up:

The story is told in Luke 19:1-10.

Luke 19:8-10

> But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Free Bonus:

Generations of Sunday School children have sung, "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he..."

Paying back "four times the amount" was the same penalty the Law of Moses required for stealing a sheep (Exodus 22:1). Zacchaeus treated himself like a thief.

The sycamore-fig is not the same as the American sycamore. It's a type of fig tree with low, spreading branches, perfect for climbing.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

A GENEROUS HEART

The Poor Widow

The race was on.

The collection plates had been passed, and the money gathered-up.

It was now our job to count it as quickly as possible. If we succeeded, the offering would be totaled and the deposit prepared before the worship service finished. If not, three families would graciously wait on us to go to lunch, and we would suffer the worst insult of all – the Baptists would beat us to the restaurants.

One pile for the checks which were quickly copied and totaled. Another pile for the dollar bills. Lot's of $1's – they go here. The $20's go there. Where are the $5's and $10's? Oh look, we got a few $100's. Finally, we start on the coins. Since most adults use paper or plastic, we knew the coins were from the kids. Pennies. Nickels. Dimes. Quarters. Wait, what's this? A golden dollar? No something else.

A game token from Chuck E. Cheese pizza.

At first, we laughed. Then, the three of us stopped and looked at it again, and at each other. The significance of the "gift" caused us to reflect on the moment.

Some child had given everything they had.

The child had probably been invited to a friend's party, and had been given a cup full of tokens. Then, he or she would have played the games hoping to win enough tickets for a prize.

But one token – a token of celebration, friendship, and care-free excitement – had been saved.

And today, this childish token of love was given as a heavenly sacrifice.

Jesus recognized another person just like this child. A poor widow at the temple gave the only two small copper coins she had as her offering. Jesus noticed that she willingly gave from what she had. Here gift was not from some duty or obligation, but from the heart.

I humbly redeemed the token, and we solemnly finished our task.

I learned an important lesson that day. What matters is not the size of the gift, but the size of the heart that gives.

And in case I forget, I still have a Chuck E. Cheese token to remind me.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the countless blessings you have poured out upon me. Thank you for giving me a generous heart so that I may share these blessings with others and bring glory to You and Your heavenly kingdom. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Lesson of the widow's mite

Look-It Up:

The story of the widow's mite is told in:

Mark 12:41-44

> Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."

And in:

Luke 21:1-4

> As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Free Bonus:

It is speculated that the idiomatic expressions "my two cents" or "put my two cents in" is derived from this story of the poor widow.

The coins used by the poor widow were the smallest and least valuable coins in circulation, a lepton.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

SELF-FORGIVENESS

Peter & Judas

What is Hell like?

For many people, images of "fire and brimstone" come to mind.

But in his epic poem, the *Divine Comedy*, the 14th-century poet, Dante, pictured Satan frozen in ice.

At the most intense level of Hell, Dante described a 3-faced Satan forever chewing on three famous traitors-the worst sinners of all. His eternal meal consisting of Brutus and Cassius, the betrayers of Julius Caesar, and Judas Iscariot the betrayer of Jesus.

But shouldn't there be a fourth person? Where is Saint Peter? Saint Peter betrayed Jesus, too. The rooster crowed after Saint Peter denied Jesus three times. Saint Peter ran away in fear when Jesus was arrested. So, why is Saint Peter not considered a traitor?

My guess is that Jesus forgave both of them.

But, Judas Iscariot is in Hell, and Saint Peter is in Heaven.

But, why?

After learning that Jesus was condemned to death, Judas Iscariot repented and returned his reward of thirty pieces of silver.

After the rooster crowed, Saint Peter repented and found a corner somewhere and had a good cry.

So, what's the difference? Why is one guilty, and the other not?

Maybe the answer is really quite simple. Saint Peter forgave himself. Judas Iscariot did not.

Once the stain of our sin is removed, it is gone for good. Forgotten. Never to be divinely remembered again. No need for us to remember, re-remember, and re-re-remember something that has already been erased.

Jesus has forgiven you.

Now be a saint, and forgive you, too.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the stain-removing power of the sacrifice of Jesus. Thank you for Your divine forgiveness. Thank you for allowing me to repent and helping me to forgive myself, too. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Saint Peter, Denial of Peter, Restoration of Peter, Judas Iscariot, Kiss of Judas, Dante Alighieri, Divine Comedy, *Inferno* (Dante), Marcus Junius Brutus the Younger, Gaius Cassius Longinus, Julius Caesar, Assassination of Julius Caesar

Look-It Up:

The Denial of Jesus by Saint Peter is told here:

Jesus predicts Peter's Denial in Matthew 26:31-35, Mark 14:27-31, Luke 22:31-34, and John 13:36-38.

Peter disowns Jesus in Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54-60, John 18:15-18, and John 18:25-27.

Jesus restores Peter in John 21:15-19.

The story of the Betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot is told here:

Judas Iscariot agrees to betray Jesus in Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11, Luke 22:1-6, and John 13:2.

Jesus predicts his betrayal by Judas Iscariot in Matthew 26:20-25, Mark 14:17-21, Luke 22:20-23, and John 13:18-30.

Judas Iscariot betrays Jesus in Matthew 26:47-50, Mark 14:43-50, Luke 22:47-53, and John 18:1-11.

Judas Iscariot repents, but still hangs himself in Matthew 27:1-10.

Free Bonus:

Peter wasn't the only one that forgave himself. So did Paul the Apostle. Before he began his career as a minister, missionary and author, he was better known a Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee of Pharisees. Before his conversion, part of his official duties as a Pharisee included the persecution and execution of early Christians.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

ENCOURAGEMENT

Barnabas

Everybody has a nickname. Some are flattering. Some... not so much.

There was a man in the early church named Joseph. But nobody called him Joseph. The apostles gave him a nickname: Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement."

Now that's a nickname worth having.

How did he earn it? Here's one example.

Saul of Tarsus had spent years hunting down Christians. Then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and became a believer. But when he came to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, "they were all afraid of him." Nobody believed he had really changed. Can you blame them?

Nobody, that is, except Barnabas.

Barnabas took Saul by the arm, brought him to the apostles, and vouched for him. He told them how Saul had met the Lord and how boldly he had preached in Damascus. Because of Barnabas, the church gave Saul a chance.

Saul, of course, became the apostle Paul.

Years later, Barnabas did it again. A young man named John Mark had quit in the middle of a missionary trip. Paul didn't want to take him along again. But Barnabas believed in second chances, and he took Mark under his wing.

It worked. Years later, Paul himself wrote, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

So, what is encouragement? Encouragement is believing in someone before anyone else does, and saying so out loud.

Without Barnabas, we might never have had the apostle Paul. You never know who you might be encouraging.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the people who have encouraged me along the way. Thank you for making me a Barnabas, so that I will see the best in others and build them up. Thank you for second chances, for me and for others. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Barnabas, Mark the Evangelist, Antioch

Look-It Up:

Acts 4:36-37

> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 9:26-27

> When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.

2 Timothy 4:11

> Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Free Bonus:

Barnabas and Saul spent a whole year teaching in the city of Antioch, and "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp disagreement over John Mark that they split up and went separate ways (Acts 15:36-40). Even the best partners don't always agree.

Tradition holds that John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. Not bad for a guy who once quit.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

FORGIVENESS

Stephen

"I'll forgive, but I won't forget."

We've all said it. And if we're honest, most of the time it means, "I haven't really forgiven you at all."

Forgiveness is hard. Especially when the other person isn't sorry. Especially when they're still hurting you.

Stephen was one of the seven men chosen to serve the early church, along with Philip. The Bible describes him as "full of God's grace and power." He performed great wonders, and when he spoke, nobody could out-argue him.

That made some people very angry.

They dragged Stephen before the religious council and brought in false witnesses against him. Stephen answered with a powerful sermon, walking through the whole history of Israel. When he finished, the council was so furious that they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

And while the stones were flying, Stephen fell to his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Not "get them, Lord." Not "make them pay." Just "forgive them." The same thing Jesus said from the cross.

Standing nearby, holding the coats of the men throwing the stones, was a young man named Saul. The Bible says he approved of the killing.

Here's the amazing part. God answered Stephen's prayer. That young man, Saul, became the apostle Paul. The man who held the coats went on to write 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

So, what is forgiveness? Forgiveness is letting go of your right to get even, and asking God to do something better.

You never know what God might do with the person you forgive.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for forgiving me for so much. Thank you for giving me the forgiving heart of Stephen, so that I will let go of my grudges and pray for those who hurt me. Thank you for what You can do with the people I forgive. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Saint Stephen, Paul the Apostle, Christian martyrs

Look-It Up:

Stephen's story is told in Acts 6:8–8:1.

Acts 7:59-60

> While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1

> And Saul approved of their killing him.

Matthew 18:21-22

> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Free Bonus:

Stephen is known as the first Christian martyr. His name comes from the Greek word *stephanos*, meaning "crown."

The Feast of Stephen is celebrated on December 26, the day after Christmas. It's the day mentioned in the Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas."

Stephen served alongside Philip (see *Pray 4 Boldness*). And Saul, of course, became Paul (see *Pray 4 Serenity*).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

BOLDNESS

Philip

Picture this. You're walking through a parking lot, and the Holy Spirit taps you on the shoulder: "See that man in the black limousine? Go walk up to him and talk to him about God."

Gulp.

Most of us would suddenly remember a very important appointment somewhere else.

But not Philip.

One day, an angel told Philip to head south, down a desert road. No explanation. No itinerary. Just go.

So he went. And on that dusty road, he came across a very important man in a chariot: the treasurer to the Queen of Ethiopia. Think Secretary of the Treasury, complete with a royal entourage.

Then the Spirit said, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

And here is my favorite part of the whole story: "Then Philip *ran* up to the chariot."

He didn't stroll. He didn't wait for a better time. He didn't send a memo. He ran.

The Ethiopian official just happened to be reading the prophet Isaiah out loud, so Philip asked a simple question: "Do you understand what you are reading?"

"How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"

That was all the invitation Philip needed. He climbed into the chariot and told the man the good news about Jesus. By the end of the ride, the official spotted some water by the road, stopped the chariot, and was baptized on the spot.

So, what is boldness? It isn't being loud. It isn't being pushy. It isn't having all the right words.

Boldness is simply obedience at a run.

And here's the secret. You don't have to know how the conversation will end. You just have to be willing to start it.

So the next time the Spirit taps you on the shoulder, don't walk. Run.

Prayer:

> Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the people You place in my path. Thank you for giving me the boldness of Philip, so that when You say "go," I will run. Thank you for giving me the right words at the right time. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Philip the Evangelist, Ethiopian eunuch, Isaiah

Look-It Up:

The full story is told in Acts 8:26-40.

Acts 8:29-31

> The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Acts 4:31

> After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Free Bonus:

Don't get your Philips mixed up. This Philip is Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men chosen to serve the early church in Acts 6. He is not Philip the Apostle, one of the twelve disciples.

After the baptism, the Spirit "suddenly took Philip away," and he turned up in the town of Azotus. Talk about express delivery.

Philip later settled in Caesarea, where he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

KINDNESS

Tabitha (Dorcas)

What will people hold up at your funeral?

It sounds like a strange question. But for Tabitha, it's the whole story.

Tabitha lived in the seaside town of Joppa. The Bible doesn't tell us she preached great sermons or performed miracles. It just says "she was always doing good and helping the poor."

Then Tabitha got sick and died.

The believers in Joppa sent for the apostle Peter. When he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room where her body lay. And the room was full of widows, crying and holding up the robes and other clothing Tabitha had made for them.

Think about that. No speeches. No eulogies. Just a room full of grieving women, each holding up a piece of Tabitha's kindness.

Peter sent everyone out of the room. He got down on his knees and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up."

And she opened her eyes and sat up.

The news spread all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

So, what is kindness? Kindness is love with a needle and thread. It's ordinary, practical, everyday help, given to people who can't pay you back.

And here's the thing about kindness. It leaves evidence behind. Long after you've forgotten the casserole you dropped off or the coat you gave away, someone else will remember. They might even hold it up.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your kindness to me, every single day. Thank you for giving me the kindness of Tabitha, so that I will always be doing good and helping others. Thank you for letting my life leave evidence of Your love. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Dorcas, Saint Peter, Jaffa

Look-It Up:

Tabitha's story is told in Acts 9:36-42.

Acts 9:36

> In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.

Acts 9:39

> All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

Ephesians 4:32

> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Free Bonus:

Tabitha (Aramaic) and Dorcas (Greek) both mean "gazelle."

Inspired by her story, many churches formed "Dorcas Societies," groups of women who sewed clothing for the poor.

Joppa, today's Jaffa, is the same port where Jonah once bought a ticket going the wrong way (see *Pray 4 Second Chances*).

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

HOSPITALITY

Lydia

"Y'all come in. Make yourself at home. Can I get you some sweet tea?"

In the South, hospitality isn't just good manners. It's practically a religion.

But long before sweet tea, there was Lydia.

Lydia was a businesswoman. She sold purple cloth, the most expensive fabric in the ancient world. Purple dye was made from sea snails, and it took thousands of them to dye a single garment. In other words, Lydia's customers were royalty, the rich, and the famous.

One Sabbath, Lydia was at a riverside prayer meeting outside the city of Philippi when a traveling preacher named Paul showed up and began to speak. And the Bible says, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."

Lydia and her whole household were baptized. And the very first thing she did as a new believer? She invited the missionaries home.

"If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house."

And then, the Bible says, "she persuaded us." Apparently, Lydia didn't take "no" for an answer.

Later, after Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into jail in Philippi, where did they go when they got out? Straight to Lydia's house.

So, what is hospitality? It's not a fancy house. It's not perfect cooking. It's an open door and an open heart.

Lydia's open heart led to an open home. And her open home became the meeting place for the first church in Europe.

You never know what God might build around your kitchen table.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for opening my heart to You. Thank you for giving me the hospitality of Lydia, so that my door and my table will always be open to others. Thank you for every guest You send my way. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Lydia of Thyatira, Philippi, Tyrian purple

Look-It Up:

Acts 16:14-15

> One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Acts 16:40

> After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Hebrews 13:2

> Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Free Bonus:

Lydia is considered the first recorded convert to Christianity in Europe.

The church that met in Lydia's house later received a letter from Paul: the book of Philippians, often called the "letter of joy."

Purple was so expensive that it became the color of royalty. The phrase "born to the purple" still means being born into a royal family.

☐ Prayed on _____

Pray 4

SERENITY

Paul

"But Dad, I just want to ....."

I quickly interrupted, and warmly answered "My name is not 'Butt Dad.' The answer is still 'no.' "

But the kids persisted.

Recalling one of my favorite one-liners from Duck Dynasty, I then replied, "Let me say it again in Spanish. No."

But the kids persisted some more.

Further improvising, I responded more sternly, "How about French? No! Italian? No! Portuguese? No! German? Nein! Russian? Net! Any questions? No? Good!"

Sometimes "no" just means "no."

How many times have you pleaded with someone to change their mind, and been told "no"?

How many times have you prayed to God to change a situation, and been told "no"?

It doesn't matter how good, or holy, or righteous you are. It doesn't matter how mean, or nasty, or evil the other person or situation is. It doesn't matter if it makes sense or not. Sometimes "no" just means "no," and all you can do is to serenely accept the situation.

This is exactly what happened to Paul the Apostle. After being tormented, Paul "pleaded with the Lord" three times to remove his "thorn in the flesh." But, Paul struck-out when God said, "No, no and no."

Maybe afterwards, Paul the Apostle prayed the Serenity Prayer, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

We do know that Paul wisely and serenely accepted the situation, and recognized it for what it was – a divine opportunity to demonstrate how the grace of God combined with the weakness of a person can bring about perfection.

Could this explain why we are so enamored with Cinderella-type stories? Subconsciously, we recognize the grace of God working through the weakness of the underdog. Think about it. Cinderella wouldn't be much of a story if the evil step-mother had said "yes."

And besides, the Cinderella story had a "perfect" ending anyway – they lived happily ever after.

So when you are told "no," wisely decide whether it is something you should attempt to change. If the answer is "no," serenely accept it and live happily ever after.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the times You tell me "no." Thank you for the comfort, calm and peace of Your serenity. Thank you for your wisdom, and thank you for Your grace which makes me perfect even when I am weak. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wikipedia: Paul the Apostle, Thorn in the Flesh

Look-It Up:

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

> Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I [Paul] was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Free Bonus:

Reinhold Niebuhr is credited as the author of the Serenity Prayer. In 1942, the prayer was brought to the attention of Alcoholics Anonymous. A shortened version was adopted and became an integral part of their 12-Step program. The most well-known, later version reads:

> God, give me grace to accept with serenity
> the things that cannot be changed,
> Courage to change the things
> which should be changed,
> and the Wisdom to distinguish
> the one from the other.
>
> Living one day at a time,
> Enjoying one moment at a time,
> Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
> Taking, as Jesus did,
> This sinful world as it is,
> Not as I would have it,
>
> Trusting that You will make all thing right,
> If I surrender to Your will,
> So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
> And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
>
> Amen.

An Oldie, but a Goodie:

> A proud new father sits down with his dad after the announcement of the new arrival.
>
> "Well son, now that you have a child of your own, it is time I gave you something."
>
> "Dad, you don't mean – ?"
>
> "Yes, I do. You've earned it." Says the father as he passes a copy of *1001 Dad Jokes, 40th Edition* to the son.
>
> "Dad, I don't know what to say. I'm honored."
>
> "Nice to meet you Honored," replies the father. "I'm Dad."

☐ Prayed on _____