

Prayer Objectives For January 2017 - Daily Inspiration

January 1-3: Saved by Grace

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8

Salvation is a gift from the heavenly Father to us. It cost him everything — the death of his beloved only Son. It costs us nothing. Hard work cannot earn it; neither can good behavior or sterling character. The only way we can enjoy a relationship with God is by coming to Jesus Christ, our hands outstretched and empty, and saying, "Lord, I want to follow you. Please take me into your family, scrub me, give me new clothes and make me like you." And Jesus will do exactly that. He will take us as we are and assure us that we are his forever. Then — slowly at first, but surely — he will mold us and shape us until we resemble him.

APPLY: *Are you confident that you have a relationship with God through the grace of Jesus Christ? If so, thank him for loving you enough to accept you despite your sin. If you have never accepted Christ, decide now to do whatever it takes to earnestly seek him and come into relationship with him.*

Living in God's Presence

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

JOHN 15:5 NRSV

How can we abide in Christ, and bear spiritual fruit? Reading God's Word and spending time in prayer are good first steps. Prayer is a way to maintain constant communion with God the Father and God the Son through God the Holy Spirit. It is the means of living out the intense relationship Jesus described.

We're called to abide in him, but God also promises that he will abide in us! Awareness of God's presence comes as the result of taking time to speak and listen to him. When you practice being aware of God's presence, you pick up His signals all throughout the day. At work, at home, in your car or wherever you are, you begin to dialogue with the Lord. It has nothing to do with being in a church building or on your knees. It has to do with God's presence in and around you — "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

APPLY: *Do you experience the presence of God in your daily life? Promise yourself that you will use this time to more deeply abide in God's presence.*

January 4: A Glimpse of God's Plan

Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent.... I am slow of speech and tongue." The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

EXODUS 4:10-12

Vision is the God-given ability to catch a glimpse of what God wants to do through your life if you dedicate yourself to him.

In the story above, Moses had no vision of how God could use him. Some people share Moses' problem. They feel their life is not earmarked for greatness. There is no aura of drama about it. They feel plenty ordinary most of the time, and often wonder if they matter at all. But every occasionally, when you tune into the Lord, the Holy Spirit whispers, take your blinders off. Where's your vision? You may think you are not much, but God is. And you matter to him. Why don't you just believe?" God will give you the courage to keep following him.

PRAY: Pray a listening prayer. What is God whispering to you about his plan for your life? Let go of the objections that fear or lack of vision cause you to raise.

January 5: Bars or Stars?

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

PROVERBS 29:18 KJV

The story is told of two prisoners in one small cell with no light except what came through a tiny window three feet above eye level. Both prisoners spent a great deal of time looking at that window, of course. One of them saw the bars — obvious, ugly, metallic reminders of reality. From day to day he grew increasingly discouraged, bitter, angry and hopeless. By contrast, the other prisoner looked through the window to the stars beyond. Hope welled up in that prisoner as he began to think of the possibility of starting a new life in freedom. The prisoners were looking at the same window, but one saw bars while the other saw stars. And the difference in their vision made a huge difference in their lives. Likewise, our vision will affect our whole life.

APPLY: Are you focusing on the bars in your life, or looking to the stars? Do you have a vision for what God wants to do in your life? Have you considered that you and the people around you will be given life through your vision?

January 6: Following God

Simon and his brother Andrew [were] casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

MARK 1:16-18

At some time in your life you must have sensed God saying to you, "It's time to start going in a new direction. I want you to change vocations (go back to school, strike up a friendship, get a job, go to the mission field), because you matter to me. I have great plans for you, and I'm going to work in your life. If you'll just take those blinders off, I'll use you." Just for a moment you felt a flutter in your heart, and you thought, "Maybe that was God's voice." But then instead of looking at stars, you focused on bars.

Be more willing to say, "God, here I am. Use me. Lead me. If you have something significant planned for my life, count me in. I'll follow you the best I know how — trembling, but trusting. I want to see stars, not bars. I want to grow in vision."

APPLY: Do you sense God leading you in a new direction? Are you willing to grow in vision and follow him?

January 7-8: Working Toward Vision

My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

PSALM 25:15

Vision is on my endangered character quality list, along with courage and discipline. The reason is simple: it takes too much work to be a visionary. It's much easier just to go with the flow and do what's expected. It takes courage to break out of conventional thought patterns. It takes confidence and daring to risk failure with a new idea or a new approach. Visionaries tend to fail many times before they ever succeed, and most people would rather be safe and secure. It also takes a lot of old-fashioned perspiration to be a visionary. It takes discipline to sit down with a pencil and paper and vow not to get up from your desk until you come up with five new ways to do something. It takes endurance to get on your knees and stay there until God supernaturally ignites a fresh thought in your mind. It takes hard work to plan for what could happen in five years in your business, family, marriage or ministry. But developing vision deepens and strengthens our faith.

APPLY: What prevents you from keeping your eyes on God and following him? Where do you need a new, visionary approach? Ask God for a vision and the courage to carry it out.

January 9: Radical Love

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

MATTHEW 22:37-39

As Jesus clearly taught, the highest priority in the life of every believer should be to love God. Our second-highest priority should be to love people, all of whom matter to God, in a radical, nonretaliatory, second-mile way.

For two thousand years' people, have read and reread Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, asking the Spirit of God to help them understand and apply its wisdom. Believers have drawn a wide range of conclusions. But these stories have some general applications that are as plain as can be. There's no mystery about them.

One obvious principle is that retaliation is a dead-end road. Revenge only perpetrates and escalates animosity. Somebody must stop the senseless escalation — and God wants that someone to be you and me.

JOURNAL: Write about your reaction to Jesus' three illustrations of radical love in Matthew 5:38-42. What do you think God is calling you to do? What barriers stand in your way of loving people in a radical, nonretaliatory way?

January 10: Breaking the Hostility Cycle

You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

MATTHEW 5:38-39

I think that when Jesus preached these now-familiar words, he was trying to startle his disciples into taking the next step in their understanding of Christian love.

Can you imagine how hard it must have been for the disciples to hear Jesus' challenge? Born and raised in a revenge-oriented culture, they knew all about male honor, bravado and machismo. Turn the other cheek? A crazy idea like that shakes us from our complacency. Even as your enemy slaps you, God is trying to reach out to him. In fact, he is looking for someone through whom he could love this guy. So, dig down deep into the foundations of your faith and love him. Do something radical that will mark his life. If turning the other cheek to him for a second slap will make a mark on the man's soul, turn the other cheek.

APPLY: Who do you have a difficult time loving — someone who insults or cuts you down? What would it look like for you to "turn the other cheek" in your relationship? What about that person who cuts you off while you are driving? Can you love and forgive them?

January 11: Loving Your Enemies

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.

LUKE 6:27-29

In the culture of first-century Jerusalem, receiving a slap in the face was considered the ultimate degradation. Even today when we are insulted, we say, "That was a real slap in the face." There's no doubt about it — you have been publicly humiliated by an arrogant, opinionated ignoramus. You can still feel the sting of his slap on your face. Your adrenaline is flowing; your anger level is skyrocketing. Your honor is at stake. You know you could knock this guy into the middle of next week if you wanted to. And inside your head, voices are saying, "Rocky, Rocky, Rocky..."

The moment of truth has arrived. What are you going to do? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commands his followers to show radical love. Don't slap them back. Don't scream at them. Don't kick them in the shins. Don't curse them under your breath. Instead, look them straight in the eye and remind yourself that, despite their arrogance and anger, they matter to God.

PRAY: *Bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you.*

January 12: An Amazing Command

If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

MATTHEW 5:40

In New Testament times, people wore an inner garment and a heavy, warm outer garment that served as a coat during the day and a blanket at night.

In that climate, a man without an outer garment for warmth at night was in a bad way. It was common for men to hold each other's garments as collateral in trading deals until the goods were delivered. Usually the inner garment was demanded, because most people would have an extra one. Ordinarily the outer garment was not used, because it was illegal to keep another man's outer garment overnight, even if the man reneged on his part of the deal. The cloak had to be returned at sunset, because without it he would have nothing to protect him from the night's chill.

In view of this, Jesus' command is amazing. If you are making a deal with someone and can't come through with your end of it, and if that man demands an inner garment as overnight collateral, give it to him. But go a step further. Offer him your outer garment as well. That's sacrificial love.

APPLY: *How would keeping your end of a bargain in business, even when it causes you discomfort or inconvenience, help you to build a courageous faith?*

January 13: The Second Mile

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

MATTHEW 5:41-44

In those days, Israel was ruled by Rome. A Roman soldier had the legal right to approach any civilian at any time of the day or night and impress — that is, coerce — him into service. The Jews particularly hated it when a Roman soldier made them carry baggage. Whenever troop assignments were shifted, soldiers would appear, tap Jewish men on the shoulder with spears, and say, "Carry that suitcase." No matter what the civilian was doing — sleeping, plowing a field, selling his wares — he would have to quit and do as the soldier said. There was a limit, however. Roman soldiers could force a Jewish man to carry baggage for no more than a mile at a time.

So, suppose a Roman soldier grabs you by the scruff of the neck, hands you a heavy duffel and says, "Carry this." How does Jesus say to respond? When you get to the end of the obligatory mile, instead of slamming the suitcase to the ground hoping to break something fragile inside, instead of spitting on the ground to show your contempt for this pagan soldier, show him radical love.

PRAY: *What second mile is God asking you to go? Listen to God's direction on this question.*

January 14-15: The Power of Love

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

JOHN 13:34-35

God challenges us to become radical, nonretaliatory, second-mile lovers because nothing leaves a deeper mark on the lives of spiritually hardened men and women than seeing radical love in action.

If you know the love of Jesus Christ in a personal way, you may sometimes lie awake nights thinking of ways to make a mark on people's lives so that they too will come to enjoy what you have found. Should you wear a little lapel pin? Put a bumper sticker on your car? Display a large Bible in your office? Tell people that you don't go to movies or buy sexually explicit rock albums?

Jesus says, if you really want to make a deep, lasting mark on someone, demonstrate radical love. There is so much compelling power in that kind of love that it makes callous people's heads spin. They cannot figure out why you are giving up your rights and letting someone take advantage: of you. But that kind of radical love gets people asking questions — questions that often lead them to God.

PRAY: *Ask God to give you the power to love others in a radically unselfish way.*

January 16: Distorted Vision

When he had spit on the [blind] man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

MARK 8:23-25

Some people after becoming a Christian realize that they need a lot of softening. They may need help in becoming kind, gentle and tenderhearted toward others.

Re-read this passage above. Feast on the words, "I see men; but they look like trees, walking."

When we get truthful with ourselves, sometimes we might think, "That's my problem too. I don't see men very clearly. People, as far as I'm concerned, are just part of the landscape.

When we look around and see other people, do we think, 'Wow, this person is a custom-designed creation of the almighty God. He has God's image stamped on him. He is the object of God's greatest affection. Jesus shed his blood for him.' We often don't think like that.

Sometimes, people are like trees, walking." And when we realize how far our view of people was from Jesus' view, we know we need our vision changed.

JOURNAL: *Write about your current view of people and how God might want to change it.*

January 17: Extraordinary Treasures

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So, don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

MATTHEW 10:29-31

Hardhearted people tend to divide the world into winners and losers, heavyweights and lightweights, survivors and basket cases, sharp and two cents short of a dollar. It is hard for them to realize that they have never bumped into just an ordinary person — that every living, walking, breathing human being is an extraordinary treasure in God's eyes. It is hard for them to grasp that losers and basket cases matter to God every bit as much as winners and survivors; that Russians, Cubans, Libyans and Palestinians are just as important to God as Americans; that God loves prisoners, street walkers and bag ladies as much as he loves stock brokers, dental students and seminarians. Everyone matters to God. Often, hardhearted people can begin to see this only when God begins to soften their heart.

PRAY: *Thank God that he values every human being on the planet, including you. Pray for the people you might think of as "losers," and ask God to bless them. Ask him to help you see the value of each person, no matter what.*

January 18: Accept Others

Accept one another, then, just as Christ has accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

ROMANS 15:7

All human beings are God's beloved creations, and all are invited to receive forgiveness at the cross. Because God has invited everybody into his family through Christ, every person we meet is a potential brother or sister. When we grasp this truth, and begin to see people for what they mean to God, we begin to soften up and treat people tenderly.

The next time you're rude to someone because he or she is only a waitress, only a parking lot attendant, only the butcher or baker or candlestick maker — stop! There are no "only's" in God's eyes. These people may be doing humble work, but each one is extraordinary to God. Each one matters. Employers, if you must give an employee a pink slip, don't just "fire" them. Remember that they matter to God. Single people, if you feel you should break up with the person you are dating, don't just "dump" them. Remember that they matter to God. Drivers, next time someone shakes his fist at you in traffic, don't snarl back. Remember that even hotheads matter to God. And God's treasures should be treated tenderly.

APPLY: What does it mean to accept people the way that Christ accepted you? What might you need to change about your attitudes toward others?

January 19: Other People's Shoes

Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.

ISAIAH 53:4

Have you ever heard of the movie *Sophie's Choice*, a psychological drama set in a World War II extermination camp? The movie was intense. Holding her two children in her arms, Sophie had to decide which one to hand over to the Nazis for sure incineration.

Can you imagine having thirty seconds to choose which one of your children was going to live and which one was going to die. How in the world would you ever make that choice? Can you put on Sophie's moccasins and walk a mile in her shoes?"

Or would you stay outside the characters' skins and simply observe. Empathy does not always come naturally, but thankfully, it can be developed.

APPLY: Are you hardhearted or tenderhearted? Are you empathetic? Do you show empathy when someone else is hurting? Or do you say "stinks to be you?"

January 20: Treat Others Like Jesus Would

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

MATTHEW 7:12

It's vital to start seeing people as God's treasures. It's important to learn to empathize with them. But how should these feelings be expressed? Should you slobber all over people? Should you sell your house and join the Peace Corps? What does a tenderhearted Christian do? Treat people the way Jesus Christ treats you, and the way you'd like to be treated. When you pray, the Lord listens attentively to every word you say. Why not treat your spouse, your children, your friends, your church members and your coworkers the same way? Slow down, turn off the television, close out any distractions and say, "I'm going to listen, because I really want to hear what you have to say."

When you make a mistake, Jesus lifts you up, forgives you, and continues to treat you with love and respect. Why not do the same for the people with whom you live, work and worship? When you feel lonely and insecure, the Holy Spirit stays by your side and assures you of God's love. Why not comfort the people you love when they are going through difficult times?

JOURNAL: *Write about how you would ideally like people to respond to you in various circumstances. Keep that list in mind when you're dealing with other people.*

January 21-22: Express Affection

You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.

ISAIAH 43:4 NRSV

I have called you friends.

JOHN 15:15

No believer ever has to doubt God's affection. If God does not want his children wondering whether they are loved, why not express your own affection regularly so that your family, friends and coworkers know how you feel about them?

What will happen if we begin to see people as they are in God's eyes, walk in their shoes and treat them the way Christ treats us? The results will be unbelievable. After their initial shock, our spouses and children will go wild with joy. Our coworkers will shake their heads and say, "The whole atmosphere around here has changed — I wonder what has happened to old Harry Hard-heart?" Our superficial friendships will deepen into warm brotherly or sisterly relationships. Our churches will multiply in effectiveness as people discover they can find love where Christ is worshiped.

PRAY: Ask God to help you to treat others the way Christ has treated you. Start with your family, and ask God to show you how to empathize and be kind to them. Notice how praying for others changes the way you treat them.

January 23: Grow in Prayer

I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

PSALM 34:4-5

Prayer may not have always been your strong suit. You may know more about prayer than you ever practiced in your life. You may have a racehorse temperament, and the tugs of self-sufficiency and self-reliance may be very real to you.

Don't be like some who have a causal relationship with God. You don't spend time together and talk very much. You, however, should get together a lot more, not talking on the run but carrying on substantial, soul-searching conversations every morning for a good chunk of your time.

As you grow in prayer, God will reveal more of himself to you, breathing more of his life into your spirit. This will be the most fulfilling and rewarding part of your experience with, more so even than the answers to prayer you are sure to receive. Fellowship with God, trust, confidence, peace, relief — these wonderful feelings will be yours as you learn how to pray.

JOURNAL: Describe your current relationship with God. Is it as close and intimate as you desire? Journal about what changes you'd like to see in your relationship with him.

January 24: A Channel for God's Power

What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

PSALM 77:13-14

Why pray? People are drawn to prayer because they know that God's power flows primarily to people who pray.

The Scriptures overflow with passages teaching that our almighty, omnipotent God is ready, willing and able to answer the prayers of his followers. The miracles of Israel's exodus from Egypt and journey to the Promised Land were all answers to prayer. So were Jesus' miracles of stilling storms, providing food, healing the sick and raising the dead. As the early church grew, God answered the believers' continual prayers for healing and deliverance.

God's power can change circumstances and relationships. It can help us face life's daily struggles. It can heal psychological and physical problems, remove marriage obstructions, meet financial needs — in fact, it can handle any kind of difficulty, dilemma or discouragement. Someone has said that when we work, **we** work; but when we pray, *God* works. His supernatural strength is available to praying people who are convinced that he can make a

difference. Skeptics may argue that answered prayers are only coincidences, but as someone once observed, "It's amazing how many coincidences occur when one begins to pray."

PRAY: Spend time this week asking God to work powerfully in a challenge you are currently facing. Remembering when you rest in God after praying, God can work on our behalf.

January 25: Help in the Battle

Moses said to Joshua... "Go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." So, Joshua fought the Amalekites... and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

EXODUS 17:9-11

Moses discovered that day that God's prevailing power is released through prayer. When you pray in earnest, you will discover the same thing. It boils down to this: if you are willing to invite God to involve himself in your daily challenges, you will experience his prevailing power — in your home, in your relationships, in the marketplace, in the schools, in the church, wherever it is most needed.

That power may come in the form of wisdom — an idea you desperately need and can't come up with yourself. It may come in the form of courage greater than you could ever muster. It may come in the form of confidence or perseverance, uncommon staying power, a changed attitude toward a family member, changed circumstances, maybe even outright miracles. However, it comes, God's prevailing power is released in the lives of people who pray.

JOURNAL: Are you weary of praying? Write a prayer asking God for his strength and power in your life.

January 26: Keep the Power Flowing

When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up — one on one side, one on the other — so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So, Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

EXODUS 17:12-13

Once Moses made the connection between prayer and God's power, he determined to spend the rest of the day praying for God's involvement in the battle. But his arms grew weary. He knew better than to drop them to his sides; he had done that and watched his troops get wiped out. So, the two men who accompanied him up the hill found a stone he could sit on. Then each man crawled under an arm and helped Moses hold his arms up. What a picture — Moses being

supported by caring people who wanted to help him keep the power flowing! Israel won the battle that day.

APPLY: Identify one or two people who could "hold you up" and encourage you to keep praying. Make a phone call or an appointment to ask the person you identified to partner with you in encouraging one another to keep praying and to keep growing closer to God.

January 27: Prevailing Power

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

PROVERBS 3:5

It is hard for God to release his power in your life when you put your hands in your pockets and say, "I can handle it on my own." If you do that, don't be surprised if one day you get the nagging feeling that the tide of battle has shifted against you and that you're powerless to do anything about it.

Prayerless people cut themselves off from God's prevailing power, and the frequent result is the familiar feeling of being overwhelmed, overrun, beaten down, pushed around, defeated. Surprising numbers of people are willing to settle for lives like that. Don't be one of them. Nobody should have to live like that. Prayer is the key to unlocking God's prevailing power in your life.

PRAY: Spend some time praying about a specific situation where you want to unlock God's power in your life.

January 28-31: A God Who Is Able

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to you. But ask in faith, never doubting... for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

JAMES 1:5-8 NRSV

Is God able? Is he omnipotent? If you don't own that doctrine, you might as well stop praying. If your prayers have clouds of doubt hanging over them, they won't get anywhere. Before getting down on your knees, review God's past acts of faithfulness and power in Scripture and in your own life. Tune your mind properly so that when you finally pray, it will be to a God who is able. The more you are convinced of God's ability, the more he demonstrates his ability to you. Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him" (Mark 11:23). Believe that God will not only hear you, but answer!

PRAY: Ask God to remove the clouds of doubt that get in the way of your prayers. Review your own personal history with God, and thank him for his past power and help.