

# Take the Panic Out Of Prayer

**Learn how to pray more effectively when you or your friends are in crisis.**

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I can remember years ago when we had our television program on the air when a woman called in a state of panic. She was a regular caller to the program and we had become friends.



The caller sounded frantic. Her life was in crisis. Impossible deadlines loomed. Family needs, like ominous waves, were crashing upon her, leaving her feeling breathless and helpless. If something didn't change soon, she knew she'd go under.

"Pastor, pray hard," she gulped.

I felt for my friend—deeply. But the urgency of this need almost made me panic. My feelings dictated I pray, "Father, this is serious. Really bad. Do something for my friend now. Save her from disaster." But would such a prayer help her? It would certainly validate her fears, but would it strengthen her confidence in a loving heavenly Father?

How would Jesus pray for my friend? In a recent study of Jesus' prayers I'd been amazed to learn that although at times He mentioned the gravity of a situation, He never emphasized fear. Hearing Him pray generated hope. It brought people into the very presence of a God who hears, who cares, and who's active in His children's lives.

I wanted my prayers for my friend to give such encouragement: to provide sure footing for her to stand on.

## **Crisis Prayers**

How did Jesus pray in a crisis situation? Jesus is standing in a small garden, facing a boulder which seals Lazarus's tomb. The sisters of the dead man are silently weeping. Professional mourners wail a death dirge. Friends of the family crowd into the garden in stunned grief. Whispers fly, "**He should have come earlier.**"

Jesus had been called to this scene to help, but He waited too long. By now Lazarus's body is decaying.

Deeply moved in spirit, Jesus begins to pray.

**"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know 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" (John 11:41–42).**

Incredible! When faced with a mind-boggling crisis—not only was His friend dead, but the credibility of His entire ministry was at stake—Jesus calmly addresses His Father, gives thanks, and makes one bold affirmation: You always hear Me.

Jesus and His disciples are sitting in the Upper Room. They've just had their last meal together. Judas Iscariot has jumped to his feet, bolted across the room, and, with one furtive glance at the Master, fled into the night. Jesus knows His time of betrayal has come.

A few hours from now He'll be arrested, tortured, crucified.  
And His disciples? Like frightened sheep, they'll scatter.

How does Jesus pray now?

**"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify You" (John 17:1).** Then He speaks of His Father's love, **"You loved Me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24).**

All hell is about to break loose. Yet, Jesus sends no frantic SOS call for help. No fearful elaborations of impending disaster. No mention of what He would soon have to endure. In fact, despite the grave situation He and His disciples are in, Jesus boldly affirms God's love for Himself and them. Jesus' prayer is like a call home, **"Father, I trust Your love even now. I've finished the work You gave Me to do; I'm about to leave this planet and come home to glory. But I am concerned about those I'm forced to leave behind. I want them to be safe, to be full of joy despite the fact that the world hates them, and eventually to be with Me where I am and to see My glory" (John 17).**

Jesus' prayer doesn't discredit their heavy hearts. He doesn't belittle their fears. With infinite understanding He gives them what they need: hope for the future and resources to cope with the present. He speaks of joy, love, truth—all that will come to them through their union with Him and the Father.

How I've longed for this kind of praying!

Unlike Jesus, so much of our praying—either for ourselves or others—is an outpouring of fear or self-pity. In small prayer groups, we invite people to give detailed prayer requests. After all, how else can we pray for specific needs? Often the prayers that follow are a frenzied petition for God to do something.

Many times, I've left a prayer group feeling deeply disappointed. In the telling of requests and even in prayer, we've dwelt more on the problems than on our awesome God. Or conversely, in our valiant attempt to be positive at all costs, we belittled the problems, adding the burden of misunderstanding to an already wounded spirit. We've neglected to affirm God and the person in need.

In prayer—either for Himself or for others—Jesus made bold, declarative statements. Although He spoke of His feelings realistically ("**My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death**" [[Mark 14:34](#)]) He reasoned with almighty God. In every problem, He saw God as a loving Father who wants the best for His child, an able Leader who's in control at all times.

For Jesus, prayer was an opportunity to affirm His faith in God, to make certain affirmative statements about His Father and the people He was praying for. Prayer became His audible expression of trust, a chance to place the problem into God's able hands. His prayers always seemed to say to God, "I love You. I know I can trust You with this."

## **Affirmative Praying**

How can we change our negative, fear-filled prayers into joyous affirmative praying?

**1. Get to know God intimately, as Jesus did.** But is this possible for us? After all, Jesus was God's unique Son who'd been with the Father from the beginning. Let's see what Jesus says.

Early one morning a woman stands by the open tomb in Joseph's garden. She is weeping. Her hot tears fall on the jar of ointment she's prepared to anoint the body of Jesus. But somebody has taken the body of her Lord away. The tomb is empty.

Suddenly the Lord Jesus Himself stands before her. When He calls her name, "**Mary!**" she recognizes Him and wants to grab Him. But Jesus pulls back. "**Do not hold on to me,**" He says, "**for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'**" ([John 20:17](#)).

I wish I could have seen Jesus' radiant face. I wish I could have heard the triumph in His voice as He said, "**From now on, My Father is your Father; My God is your God. Go tell them.**"

Imagine mortal, sinful human beings having the same intimacy with Father-God as Jesus did! That's exactly what Jesus meant. Our salvation is that complete.

Although this Father-child relationship is a glorious fact for each of us, we must nurse this relationship into intimacy. Jesus did. He often went to a lonely place to pray ([Mark 1:35](#); [Luke 5:16](#); [Luke 6:12](#)). He spent time with the Father. For us, also, there's no shortcut to moving into intimacy with God: We must spend time in prayer and Bible reading. In prayer we interact with the Father. In Bible reading we learn to know His character.

**2. Include God in your daily living.** A modern-day man who's excited about God's presence in every detail of his life is author Phillip Keller. He points out in *Pleasures Forevermore* that in every mountain crag or flower, in every animal or bird, he can see the hand of his Father. A broken electric garage door becomes an occasion to consult the Father's advice; so does building a patio with glacial gravel. Unexpected company? A trip to the country fair? Whatever the day brings, Keller includes his Father in joyous affirmation. No wonder this man, who's practiced the presence of God for over 70 years, is still full of exuberant life and joy.

**3. In every prayer make at least one affirmation about God.**

"Father, I know You are here in this very room."

"Father, You always hear me."

"Father, I know I can depend on You."

Using a Scripture or hymn as a basis for prayer has often helped me focus on God in this way. I've memorized "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "This Is My Father's World," "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee," and other hymns. As I walk down our sidewalk, I sing or recite these affirmative words. In no time, spontaneous praise wells up within my heart. As my eyes scan the Los Angeles mountains that surround our city, I exclaim, "God, You did a great job with that mountain. Thank You." Then it becomes possible for me to pray, "I know You can make something as beautiful with the raw elements in my friend's life" (or my own, for that matter).

**4. When praying for others, thank God for His work in their lives.**

Eleven frightened disciples cluster around Jesus as He prays for them one last time. His voice cracks as He speaks of His concern for their safety and well being. But throughout His prayer, He speaks courage into their hearts. He confidently declares, **"Glory has come to me through them. Others will believe in me through their message; Father, you have loved them as you have loved me. I myself will be in them"** ([John 17](#)). Hearing these words of confidence, strength flows into their troubled hearts: "He believes in us! No matter what happens, we'll make it."

From experience I know the emotional boost such affirmative prayers bring. Like my friend who felt herself engulfed in family crises, I too have floundered under incredible burdens. Pain's extremity has forced me into the arms of God.

## **A Prayer of Encouragement**

Recently, the events of my life left me deeply troubled. I felt attacked by Satan himself. Fear squeezed my heart. Panic began to rise. The day was slipping into evening, and I wanted a good night's rest. I called a pastor friend of mine.

He and his wife listened empathetically. Then he said, "Eddie, I see the grace of God in you. Like Peter, you're walking on water. You've done it for many years, and we're proud of you. Keep on looking to Jesus and you won't sink." God's love radiated from this kind man's face as he spoke. It swirled around me, warming my spirit. Then the

pastor's eyes twinkled merrily as he added, "But even if you do feel yourself sinking, don't worry; Jesus won't let you drown."

Then followed a brief prayer of affirmation: "Jesus, you're Eddie's protection. Cover him and this entire house with your precious blood. Now give him peace and a good night's sleep."

Immediately I felt comforted. I felt refreshed, a bit more confident. His affirming words hugged me and let me know God is still with me. He loves me, and all's well. On that pillow, I laid my head and went to sleep.

And now it's time for me to pray for my friend as Jesus would in this affirmative way. "Shall we pray right now on the phone?" I asked.

"Will you?"

I did. "Father, You live with this family. You see the need; You understand the urgency. We know we can trust You. . . ."