

STUDY GUIDE

FIVE SESSIONS

CHRYSTAL EVANS HURST

THE 28-DAY

Prayer

JOURNEY

ENJOYING DEEPER

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

CHRYSTAL EVANS HURST

THE 28-DAY

Prayer

JOURNEY

ENJOYING DEEPER
CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

STUDY GUIDE | FIVE SESSIONS

 ZONDERVAN
BOOKS

ZONDERVAN BOOKS

28-Day Prayer Journey Study Guide

Copyright © 2020 by Chrystal Evans Hurst

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

ISBN 978-0-310-12184-8 (softcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-12185-5 (ebook)

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.Zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org).

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Any internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Cover design: Studio Gearbox

Cover illustration: Ullithemrg / Shutterstock

First Printing June 2020 / Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

<i>A Word from Chrystal Evans Hurst</i>	v
<i>How to Use This Guide</i>	vii
SESSION 1: Introduction: The Practice of Prayer	1
SESSION 2: Offering Thanksgiving & Praise	29
SESSION 3: Turning to God in Repentance	57
SESSION 4: Requesting with Confidence	81
SESSION 5: Yielding to God	107
<i>Small Group Leader's Guide</i>	125

A WORD FROM CHRYSTAL EVANS HURST

Have you ever wanted to deepen your prayer life and be more consistent in your conversation with God? I've been there too. A few years ago, I was really struggling with my prayer life. I felt guilty about a lack of consistent and fervent prayer. That's when I decided to challenge myself with 28-day prayer prompts for accountability. And then I opened the challenge to my closest friends as well as my online community. Much to my surprise, I actually finished the challenge and invigorated my prayer life in doing so. Those who joined me for that first 28-day challenge said the same thing. After doing this challenge a few times, I discovered that slow and steady wins the race when it comes to forming new habits, especially with prayer. I had to take it one day at a time to make prayer a consistent practice in my life.

We know from Scripture that prayer is essential to an intimate and thriving relationship with God, but often we simply don't know how or what to pray. Many of us feel inhibited with group prayer or praying aloud. But I've experienced both the freedom and literal blessing of establishing and growing my prayer life, and I want you to experience the freedom and blessing too. We all know how difficult it can be when prayer itself feels a bit foreign. But that's why we're here, *together*. This is my girlfriends' guide to praying together.

Over the course of five sessions of video teaching, group discussion, and personal study exercises, we're going to dive into the basic tenets of prayer practice and establish a realistic and doable pattern of prayer to be applied to our daily lives for at least 28 days. We will explore the four postures of prayer that can increase our

communication and relationship with God—why a practice of prayer is worth the effort, how to cultivate a heart of gratitude, what repentance offers us, how to ask God boldly and humbly, what it means to surrender to God, and knowing why surrender to God is satisfying.

After you have prayed weekly through one of these postures in your personal study time, we will break it down and walk through the biblical references that support the posture to draw the connections between your growing relationship with God and the practice of prayer in the video teaching.

My prayer for you throughout this study is that God will become more real to you than ever before as you spend time with Him in conversation. And my hope is that the *28-Day Prayer Journey* will have a deep and lasting impact over the course of your lifetime, because I'm living proof that the right priority of prayer in our lives can change *everything*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Crystal". The script is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The *28-Day Prayer Journey* video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. Each session begins with a welcome and a few questions to review your personal prayer practice from the previous week. You will then watch the video teaching from Chrystal Evans Hurst and engage in small-group discussion and prayer.

Each person in the group should have his or her own copy of this study guide and a Bible. Multiple translations will be used throughout the study, so whatever translation you have is fine.

It is important to note that the Personal Study Exercises between each session are preparation for the *next* session and allow you to experience each posture of prayer *before* Chrystal breaks it down and shares her own experiences. This study guide is designed with intention to inspire personal prayer conversations with God driven by the Holy Spirit and is what makes this study so unique.

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, so much growth in this study will happen during your small-group time where you will process together your personal prayer experiences, the content of the teaching for the week, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, build confidence, and grow deeper in their

conversations with God. For this reason, seek to make your group a safe place. This means being honest and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, be open to the working of the Holy Spirit and resist the temptation to challenge one another, but rather in love, be an example of love and encouragement in all ways. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

As you go through this study, be open and listening to what God is saying to you as you discover various postures of prayer on your *28-Day Prayer Journey*.

Note: If you are a group leader, there are additional resources provided in the back of this guide to help you lead your group members through the study. Also, if some of your group members are reading the *28-Day Prayer Journey* book while doing this study, please explain to them that the book is about practicing multiple postures of prayer throughout the day, while the study focuses on just one posture each week for a more in-depth experience of each posture of prayer.

THE FULL PRAYER EXPERIENCE:

This is your suggested guide to using both the *28-Day Prayer Journey* book and video curriculum for an in-depth experience of the postures of prayer as they are introduced by Chrystal. You can read the book *before* or *after* the video Bible study. The choice is up to you or your group leader. They are designed to be done in succession rather than simultaneously for the greatest benefit. The full prayer experience is the most comprehensive way to make prayer a consistent practice and to solidify conversation with God in your daily life.

Pray without ceasing.

—1 THESSALONIANS 5:17 NASB

THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE	
28-Day Prayer Journey book	Read through the entire book, practicing the postures of prayer each day and taking notes as you go.
28-Day Prayer Journey video Bible study	Gather a group of friends and spend one week in each posture of personal prayer. After you complete the 5 week video Bible study, pray for someone you hope to experience the same renewal of conversation with God. (Send her the book if you are compelled and able.)
If you do the video Bible study first, read the book after!	

SESSION *One*

INTRODUCTION: THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

They all joined together constantly in prayer.

—ACTS 1:14

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Before Session One Group Meeting	Spend some time considering where your prayer life is currently and what your prayer experiences have been.
In Your Group	Watch Video Session One: <i>Introduction: The Practice of Prayer</i> and take notes Complete Group Discussion Questions Pray Together
At Home	Personal Prep for Session Two: Day 1: Where You Are Now Day 2: Going to the Word Day 3: Journal It Out Day 4: Going with God Day 5: Act on It
Before Session Two Group Meeting	Answer the tracking chart questions about your experience in this week's posture.

Welcome

Have you ever felt nervous about praying out loud in front of a group of people? Believe it or not, me too. And I think those kind of nerves simply come from being human. But nerves also surface when we think prayer is more about a performance than a practice with God. Any athlete, musician, pastor, teacher, writer—anyone committed to their craft—will tell you it takes *practice* to do what they do so well. It takes practice until something becomes a skill; it takes practice until something becomes a habit, or a consistent rhythm. And the same goes for prayer. Prayer is a practice with God, not a performance. And the more we practice our prayer, the more natural our conversation with God will be. That's why I wrote the *28-Day Prayer Journey*, because I knew I wasn't the only one who needed the consistency and accountability of time in prayer with God. Over the course of the next few weeks, we're going to experience different practices of prayer as a way to deepen our relationship with God. Some practices will probably feel more comfortable than others, and that's okay. But the goal is to be consistent with prayer as you develop your own rhythm and routine—your own practice of prayer.

Share

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, briefly discuss one of the following statements:

- Share *one* word you would use to describe your conversation with God right now.

—*or*—

- Where are you in your conversation with God?

Read

Invite someone to read aloud the following passage as “heart prep” for Chrystal’s teaching. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then briefly discuss the questions that follow.

Mary’s Song

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

—LUKE 1:46–56

- Why do you think Mary sings a song of thanksgiving and praise to God when her life has been completely disrupted in this moment?

- Can you relate at all to Mary’s song or response to her situation? If so, in what ways? If not, what strikes you about Mary’s response?

Consider as you listen to Chrystal’s teaching, where do you long for freedom or consistency in your prayer life with God?

Watch

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Notes

Prayer as a Key

“Prayer is the key to conversation with the Creator of the Universe.”

“If prayer unlocks our intimacy with God, why don’t we use it more?”

The Relational Benefits of Prayer

- Prayer requires confidence in God.
- Prayer requires consistent discipline.
- Prayer is more than a practice.
- Prayer is to be a priority.
- Prayer includes breathing.

Scripture Used This Session:

All Scripture is NIV unless otherwise noted.

- Genesis 1:27
- John 3:16
- 1 John 5:14
- Joshua 1:9
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 NKJV
- Philippians 4:4–7

28-Day Prayer Journey

Biblical Examples of Prayer:

Abraham (Isaiah 51)

Moses (Exodus 34)

Hannah (1 Samuel)

David (Psalms)

Mary the Mother of Jesus
(Luke 1)

Jesus:

- prays at His baptism
(Luke 3:21–22)
- prays after healing the sick
(Mark 1:29–35;
Luke 5:15–16)
- before for His friends
(Luke 6:12–13)
- before the transfiguration
in the garden of
Gethsemane (Matthew
26:36–39)

The Four Basic Tenets of Prayer:

1. Prayers of Thanksgiving and Praise (Gratitude)
2. Prayers of Repentance
3. Prayers of Request (Asking)
4. Prayers of Yielding

Prayer is the way you communicate with God.

*“Prayer is the way you can plug into
the power, perception and purpose that
can only be found in God’s presence.”*

Prayer Is the Key that Unlocks:

- connection
- belonging
- wisdom
- counsel
- help

Discuss

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. What are some of the struggles or roadblocks we face when it comes to our prayer lives today?
2. Which struggle is most prominent in your life right now?
3. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–17.** How would you rate yourself on practicing the kinds of prayer listed in this passage? What does it mean for you to *pray without ceasing or pray continually*, and how does praying constantly strengthen your relationship with God?
4. Is there someone in your life who genuinely models conversation and connection with God through prayer? If so, what do you admire most about this person's relationship with God and what have you learned from their example?

5. **Read Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1:1–20.** What does this passage tell us about Hannah's prayer life? How can you identify with Hannah's story or with God's response to Hannah?

6. Chrystal said, *"Prayer is the key that unlocks connection, belonging, wisdom, counsel and help from God."* Which one of these actions do you need most from God right now and why? How do you want your relationship with God to be strengthened and deepened through prayer?

Practice

Today we learned about **Breath Prayer** (or Prayer as Breathing). Breath Prayer is simply praying as we breathe in and out. Breath Prayer reminds us that God is the oxygen for our souls. Just as we can't live on one single breath of air, we can't live on one single breath of God. We need to breath God in all day long. This kind of prayer reminds us that God's presence through the Holy Spirit is a gift in our lives.

Discussion Leader: Take a moment of silence with your group. Set a timer for 1 minute. Have everyone close their eyes and place their hands and feet in a comfortable, relaxed position. Begin timer and guide the group through the prayer using the following prompts.

0:00	Breathe in slowly for 5 seconds. Think of God's presence as you fill your lungs with air.
0:05	Breathe out slowly. Let your thoughts flow from your head to your heart as you breathe in and out.
0:15	If you're distracted by your own thoughts, then try repeating these words in your head as you breathe in, " <i>Lord Jesus</i> " and then breathe out, " <i>have mercy on me.</i> " Or these words in your head as you breathe in " <i>Jesus</i> " and breathe out, " <i>I am here.</i> "
0:30	Breathe in slowly "Lord Jesus." Breathe out slowly, "have mercy on me."
0:45	Breathe in slowly "Jesus." Breathe out slowly, "I am here."
1:00	Now just take a moment to listen.
1:15	Open your eyes.

- **Practice Question:** What was that experience like for you? How do you feel more connected to God through this time of prayer?

Pray

Pray as a group before you close your time together. Use this space to keep track of prayer requests and group updates.

PERSONAL STUDY TIME

PREPPING FOR SESSION *Two*

Thanksgiving & Praise Prayer Exercises

Start your *28-Day Prayer Journey* by spending some time with God each day this week. Reflect on the material we covered in session one, and stay open to learning about and practicing the different postures of prayer explained in the following personal study exercises. Over the course of the next few weeks, we're going to practice different postures of prayer from each of the Four Tenets of Prayer as a way to strengthen and deepen your relationship with God. The more we practice this prayer, the more we start to see things from God's perspective. Our focus shifts from ourselves to God and God's perspective on our lives. Take a few notes in your guide about the experience as you explore these postures of prayer. At the start of the next session you will have a few minutes to share any insights you learned. But remember, the primary goal of these personal study exercises is for your own spiritual growth and personal reflection, not so you have the perfect answer for group discussion. Let's get started with prayers of **Thanksgiving and Praise**.

Weekly Reflection: Session One

- Before you begin the personal study exercises, briefly review your video notes for session one. In the space below, write down the **most significant point** you took away from this session.

DAY ONE: *Where You Are Now*

TWO KINDS OF COMPLIMENTS

Without giving away too much of our teaching for session two, I want you to think about your relationship with God in comparison to your friendships. Do you spend time in conversation with God the same way you do with your close friends? Have you ever considered why or why not? For many of us, our experiences with family relationships or friendships influence the way we interact with God. Because of those experiences, we either draw close to God or keep God at a distance. Today, I want you to make your best attempt at drawing close to God like you would a close friend. If this feels unnatural for you, that's okay; just stay with me. And if this is natural for you, then lean into this exercise anyway. As women, we love to give and receive compliments. Am I right? But have you ever stopped to consider the two different kinds of compliments? The first is when we compliment someone for what they *do*, and the second is when we compliment someone for who they *are*. Let me give you an example: "*You are such a great cook, and your food always tastes so good!*" and "*You are such a great friend, and your presence means so much to me.*" Hear the

Introduction: The Practice of Prayer

difference? Now it's your turn to give it a try. Write down a few thoughts, focusing only on complimenting God.

- **Read Psalm 135.** Reflect on *what* God has done for you as you read this passage, and write down a few compliments for God:

- **Read Psalm 100.** Reflect on *who* God is in your life as you read this passage, and write down a few compliments for God:

- In what ways are your compliments the same? In what ways different? Why?

CHARACTER STUDY: *King David*

Throughout the Psalms, King David writes prayers of thanksgiving and praise to God. Read a few of these passages as examples of King David's prayers.

- Psalm 9
- Psalm 16
- Psalm 28
- Psalm 30
- Psalm 40
- Psalm 57

Skim the remaining book of Psalms.

- Are there other prayers of praise and thanksgiving that stand out to you? What can you learn about God by seeing and hearing the way King David prayed to God?

Take Action

Notice how you give compliments over the next twenty-four hours. Just as you complimented God for *who God is* and *what God has done for you*, be mindful to give similar compliments to your friends, family, coworkers, classmates, and so on. Do you tend to give one type of compliment more than the other? Are you thanking people for what they do most often or praising them for who they are? *Try giving both kinds of compliments* and see what, if anything, changes for you and for the recipient of your compliments.

Make a quick list of people who may need to hear a compliment from you today, and what you're going to do to compliment them: give them a verbal compliment, send a quick message over text or email, or write a handwritten note.

NAME:	THE COMPLIMENT THEY NEED TO HEAR FROM ME TODAY:

- *What happened when you gave compliments to these individuals?* Use the chart below to jot down their responses:

NAME:	THEIR RESPONSE TO MY COMPLIMENT:

- What did you learn today as a result of this exercise—about God, yourself, and others?

PRAY

Take a 3-minute pause to reflect again on the idea of *who God is* and *what God has done for you*. Find a quiet place (maybe even in your car) and turn your compliments to God into a prayer conversation with Him. Tell God what you love about who He is and what He's done for you. Let this be your prayer today.

DAY TWO: *Going to the Word*

SLOWING DOWN

Most of us spend our days moving quickly from one thing to the next. We have full work schedules, family lives, volunteer commitments, church responsibilities, community service, and relationship connections. And we're working hard to give our best in each one of these areas. We get so busy and preoccupied with what comes next that we forget to experience what's happening *now*. When was the last time you stepped outside just to take a deep breath and look at your surroundings? When was the last time your day seemed calm, slow, and peaceful instead of rushed, full, and overextended? Slowing down is one way we can honor our own limits and honor the fact that God is found in the present moment. When we start to slow down, we have more margin to stay open and aware of the present. And when we're aware of the present, we are more mindful to thank and praise God for who He is and not just what He's doing in our lives. But this kind of intentional living and the shift in our focus from ourselves to God takes practice.

- **Read Matthew 26:36–46.** This is your pulse check. Have you been more like Jesus lately who takes time to pause, pray, and acknowledge God in the present? Or have you been more like the disciples, falling asleep out of exhaustion anytime you unplug from your full schedule? What do you think it's like for God in those moments—when we are either focused and attentive or sleepy and distracted?

- **Read Acts 2:42–46.** The early church developed several practices out of their devotion to God and to the teachings of Jesus. What were some of those practices? And how do you think those practices contributed to *slowing down* and experiencing a deep, rich relationship with God as individuals and as a community? Which of their practices surprise you and which can you see as a part of your life?

Take Action

Now it's your turn to practice *slowing down*. When we slow down to pay attention to our lives—spiritually, physically, relationally—we begin to notice who God is and all that God has provided for us. And we have the opportunity to give God thanks. But slowing ourselves down doesn't happen automatically. We actually have to be conscious about our decision by putting some practices into place. Here are a few suggested practices to help you slow down and provide relief from the frantic pace of life. **Circle the practices you will try today:**

CHARACTER

STUDY: *Moses*

Talk about slowing down, Moses spent months in the wilderness, including forty days and nights on the top of a mountain with God, *twice*. Read the following passages regarding the stone tablets to understand the reason for praise and thanksgiving in these particular stories of Moses and the Israelites:

- Exodus 24
- Exodus 33–34
- What can you learn about God by the way Moses prayed and communicated with God, and the way God responded to Moses?

- drive in the slow lane
- leave 10 minutes earlier
- schedule an extra 15 minutes between meetings or appointments
- sit down to play or talk with your kids
- get out of your car to watch the last few minutes of your teen's practice
- take a walk outside everyday
- crawl into bed a little earlier than usual
- practice breath prayer
- think before you speak, and speak more slowly
- stop and look people in the eyes during conversation
- savor meals and chew your food slowly
- sit longer at the table after a meal
- silence your cell phone during walks, meals, conversations, and at night
- get enough sleep

Use the chart to list the practices you participated in, and note how these simple acts helped you focus more on God as you slowed down:

PRACTICE (FROM THE LIST ABOVE):	THE RESULT OF SLOWING DOWN IN THIS WAY:

PRAY

Take 5 minutes to reflect on the ways you slowed down today, or the ways you intend to slow down this week. Reflect prayerfully on the ways these practices helped you focus on God. If there are other ways you sense God asking you to slow down, jot them down here and ask God to give you clarity on specific ways to put those practices into action. Use the remaining space to write a few prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God, specifically for His presence in your life at all times, even when you are in a rush.

DAY THREE: *Journal It Out*

GRATITUDE JOURNALING

While this study guide experience takes a slightly different approach from the book if you have or are reading it as well, the practices are all meant to guide your journey, strengthen your prayer life, and encourage your relationship with God. Today we're talking about gratitude journaling. Now, I have no doubt that once Oprah started keeping a gratitude journal a few years ago, many of the rest of us did too. And research has actually demonstrated how we can transform our attitudes—toward God, toward others, even toward ourselves—when we practice gratitude. But gratitude isn't something new. We see and hear the practice of gratitude all throughout Scripture. God is a God of gratitude.

CHARACTER STUDY: *Abraham*

Talk about slowing down, Abraham was at the point in his life when he was up in years and yet God blessed Abraham in this season of life by answering Abraham and Sarah's long-ago prayer for a child. Read the following passages to understand the reason for praise and thanksgiving in Abraham's story:

- The Story of Abraham and Sarah: Genesis 17:1–18:15
- The Promised Children of Abraham: Isaiah 51:1–3
- What can you learn about God by seeing and hearing the way Abraham prayed to God and the way God responded to Abraham and Sarah?

- **Read Colossians 3:1–17.** How did these early Christians express gratitude to God? What other attributes, virtues, and practices accompany the practice of gratitude in this passage? How are these practices part of the way you connect with God and worship Him too?

- **Read Psalm 136.** Here we get a sneak peek into King David's "gratitude journal." According to this passage, what is the main reason to give thanks to God? How have you experienced the enduring love of God? What other reasons for giving God thanks listed in the passage stand out as reasons you give thanks to God too?

Take Action

Perhaps you've already discovered for yourself how powerful it can be to make the decision to choose gratitude every day. If so, then I'm cheering you on and have no doubt you're already experiencing the benefits of this practice. If you've paused or haven't started gratitude journaling—or even if you're looking for new ways to approach this

practice—then I want to encourage you today with a few gratitude journaling prompts as a way to focus on God in prayer and thanksgiving. Use the space below, or start a new gratitude journal, to **answer at least two of these prompts today:**

- Thank God for as many things as you can think of in 5 minutes.
- Thank God for a few specific things and take time to tell God what those things meant to you.
- Thank God for the “abundances” in your life. What do you want to say to God about these things?
- Thank God for the people, places, and things that mean so much to you.
- Thank the people who have made a huge impact in your life by sending a note of gratitude to them or hosting a dinner and sharing a few words of gratitude with each person.

- Thank God for answered prayers. Be specific and tell God why you're grateful for those answered prayers.
- Thank God for unanswered prayers. Be specific and tell God why you're glad your prayer went unanswered.
- Thank God for the way prayer has shifted your focus from yourself to God, and for the ability to see your own life and the world around you the way God sees it.

PRAY

Take 2 minutes to reflect on your gratitude list. Read your answers to the prompts and let this be your prayer to God. Follow your gratitude with a 3-minute breath prayer as a way to stay present in the moment with God.

DAY FOUR: *Going with God*

IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Moving toward God with gratitude is easy when things are going well. But how do you move toward God with an attitude of gratitude when you feel like you're at the bottom of a pit? We have a tendency to ignore God, or even blame Him, when things get difficult. We praise and thank God for all of the good things but carry a silent resentment or comparison for the hard things. We ask questions like, "*Again, God? Are you kidding me?*" or "*Why do these things always happen to me, not her?*"

But think about it. When was the last time you stopped to give thanks and praise God for the difficult circumstances and situations you've experienced? I think some of us refuse to thank God for those challenges because we're afraid God will allow more difficulty or we're afraid if we thank God for what we learned from the experience it sounds like we're thanking God for the actual experience. This kind of thinking only gets us all wrapped up in our own pride. I think it's possible for us to move toward God with an attitude of gratitude *in all circumstances*. In doing so, we receive all of the benefits of a grateful heart and create a well-worn path to conversation with God.

- **Read Ezra 3.** Why were some people shouting for joy and some people were weeping? Have you ever been in a place or had an experience where some people were happy and others were sad? How did those experiences affect your focus on God?

CHARACTER STUDY: *Jesus*

Talk about a man who understood praying in all circumstances, Jesus was recorded praying during some of His darkest hours. While these prayers are not necessarily prayers of praise and thanksgiving, they give us a glimpse into the way Jesus communicated with God through prayer:

- Matthew 26:36–39
- Matthew 27:45–50
- What can you learn about God by seeing and hearing the way Jesus prayed to God?

- **Read 1 Thessalonians 5.** Why do you think the author of this passage said it was “God’s will” for the people to give thanks” in all circumstances” (verse 18)? According to this passage, what other practices go along with giving thanks? How are you giving thanks to God with these practices?

Take Action

If you want to claim gratitude as a practice of prayer as you focus on God, then you need to *name the hard parts* too. I know this might not feel so good to you, but please don’t skip this exercise. God welcomes and loves *all* of you—your gratitude, your love, your anger, your fear, your disappointment, your questions, and your doubt. *Take an honest look at the challenging circumstances and situations making it hard for you to express gratitude in this season.* Write it all out before you give it to God in prayer.

- Hard circumstances in your life where you see God’s goodness:

- Hard circumstances where you are still struggling to see God's goodness:

PRAY

Take 5 minutes to give all these circumstances to God in prayer. Ask God for perspective—to see your circumstances the way He sees your circumstances—and for the courage to trust Him in the middle of the difficulty. Remember that any shame or condemnation you may be experiencing right now is not from God. God loves you, forgives you, accepts you, and just want to be with you in the middle of your pain.

DAY FIVE: *Act on It*

WHAT YOU DON'T SEE

Have you ever thought about thanking and praising God for what you don't see in your life? We spend a fair amount of time dreaming about, planning, and preparing for our futures. But I'd be willing to bet that most of us haven't taken much time to pause and pray about those unforeseen details or consider the idea that God is always on the move, working things out for His glory and the good of all people. The apostle Paul writes to the early Roman Christians about this very same idea. He encourages the Romans to pray to God for what they do not see, and in the meantime, Paul encourages them to have patience. Maybe some of you have spent

CHARACTER
STUDY: *The*
Apostles
and the Early
Church

We know from Acts 2 that the apostles and the members of the early church met regularly to pray together. But that's not the only mention of their consistent and constant practices together as a community. There is another mention of their gatherings, as they "raised their voices together in prayer to God."

- Acts 4:23–35
- What can you learn about God by seeing and hearing the way the apostles and members of the early church prayed to God together as a community?

years praying for a wayward child, or for a dear friend who has drifted far from faith, or for the freedom and salvation of an older relative who is in hospice. In all of these situations, you've prayed with confidence in God for what you cannot see. This kind of prayer practice increases our patience and encourages us to live with hope as we focus on God's priorities. So, let's continue to develop this practice of praying for what we cannot see on a consistent basis.

- **Read Romans 8:18–30.** What were the Romans were praying for but could not see? How does the Holy Spirit help us when we are praying for things we cannot see, and how does this kind of prayer change our relationship with God?
- **Read 2 Corinthians 4.** Why does Paul tell the Corinthians to "not lose heart" (verse 16)? What do you think Paul means when he says "we are being renewed day by day" by focusing on what is unseen rather than what is seen? How does God renew us on a consistent basis?

Take Action

Make a list of the “unknowns” that consume your thoughts these days. These are the unseen things you think (and worry) about on a consistent basis. Are they fears or future dreams or current concerns for people or areas your life? **Now turn your “unknowns” into prayers of praise to God as a result of God’s promise.** Write a brief praise next to each thought, acknowledging God’s presence and His promises that ensure you have no reason to fear or have concern over these unknowns. Praise reminds us of who God is and for whom nothing is unknown!

MY UNKNOWNNS	MY PRAISE FOR GOD'S PROMISES

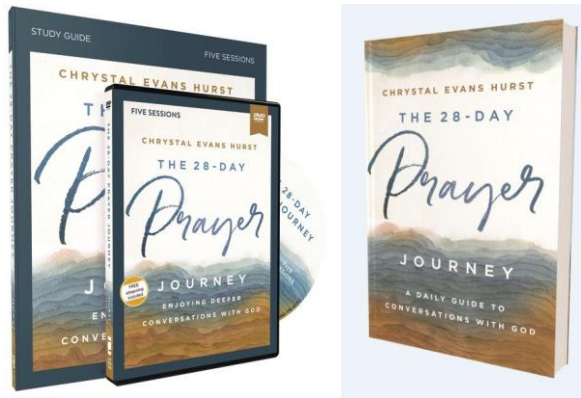
PRAY

Take 5 full minutes to pray through your “unknown” concerns and give God praise for who He is and what He promises. Ask God to give you patience, perseverance, and hope as you trust Him, waiting to see what happens with each unknown circumstance.

For Your Next Group Discussion

Use the tracking chart below to write a short statement about your experience of this posture of prayer in your daily life, including your thoughts and your perspective in all things. Highlight any insights or answers that you may want to discuss at the next group meeting:

PRAYER POSTURE TRACKING CHART	
PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING & PRAISE	WRITE YOUR ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS
What was difficult about this posture of prayer?	
What did I notice most about this week while practicing this posture?	
What was surprising about practicing this posture?	
What changed in my conversation with God through this posture?	



THE 28-DAY *Prayer* JOURNEY

by CHRYSTAL EVANS HURST

We know from Scripture that prayer is essential to an intimate and thriving relationship with God, but often we simply don't know how or what to pray. Many of us feel inhibited with group prayer or praying out loud. Chrystal Evans Hurst knows both the freedom and literal blessing of establishing and growing your prayer life, and how difficult it can be when prayer itself feels a bit foreign.

Chrystal teaches us the basic tenets of prayer practice and establishes a realistic and doable pattern of prayer to be applied to our daily life for 28 days with lasting effect. She then dives deep into four postures of prayers that increase our communication and relationship with God. After you have prayed in one posture for an entire week, Chrystal will break down that posture and walk through the biblical references supporting it to draw the connections between your growing relationship with God and the practice of prayer.

[LEARN MORE](#)