



Resources for Church and  
Campus Collegiate  
Ministries

## THE PRAYING COLLEGE MINISTER

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“O You who hear prayer, to You shall all flesh come.” Psalm 65:2

The life of the college minister is founded on and framed by prayer. At its core, prayer is asking. When we pray, we seek to obtain something from someone (God) who can give it; we implore, entreat, petition. We make a request in a humble manner. Our word “pray” comes from root words that basically mean “to ask.”

Jesus invites this interaction when he says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7, 8)

How do we respond to this invitation? Most of us are well-intentioned... and inconsistent, reluctant, and distracted. I cannot think of anyone I know who says that they always pray as they ought, or that they are satisfied with their prayer life. And we know our ministry to others is built on the foundation of prayers. Our prayers attach us to the Lord as branches connect to the vine. To love and serve well, we need to pray; we must pray. We want to pray. What hinders us? What helps us? How do we wear a path to the foot of the Throne with our asking, seeking, and knocking?

### Hindrances and Helps: What keeps us from prayer? What moves us to prayer?

**Hindrance:** Prayer is communication that happens in the context of a relationship. My conversation with another person is influenced by who they are, how well I know them, and the condition of our relationship. One hindrance to prayer may be my lack of acquaintance with God. What to do?

**Help:** Ask the Lord reveal Himself to you, to deepen your acquaintance with Him, to draw you closer. Surely this is a request He delights to grant! (He is a Father who gives good things to His children who ask Him!) Notice how your conversation with Him deepens as you intentionally invest in your relationship with Him. Try this: Read any one of the Gospels and notice those things about Jesus that help you talk with and listen to Him. Keep a list of these insights.

**Hindrance:** Maybe you don't know what to pray. You are in crisis, or unfamiliar territory, or sad, angry, afraid, or ashamed. Maybe you are out of words.

**Help:** Turn to the Prayer Book of the Word. The Psalms have so many starting places (at least a third of them begin in lament) that you can usually find something that speaks for you or to you. Reading the Psalms habitually will help us find the words we need, and assure us that the Lord hears our prayers.

Look for models of those who prayed from circumstances like yours. For example, Jesus prayed when busy, making decisions, leading others, working, distressed, confronting danger and potential impossibilities. He prayed for others and with others. A quick search of “Jesus prays” yields over three million results!



Paul ministered to others through his prayers. Reading his letters provides a tutorial for praying for others requests that are as large as the Kingdom and as lasting as Eternity. Make a collection of the things Paul prayed.

Acquaint yourself with prayers of others. One of the benefits of being in the Body of Christ is having access to the examples of others. Books like *A Diary of Private Prayer* (John Baillie) or *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People* (Upper Room) give us direction and words for our prayers. We live in a time when we are rich in such resources! Seek and find.

**Hindrance:** You don't know where to start or how to begin. Maybe you feel like certain things have to be just right, your motives pure, and your life good enough to be able to pray.

**Help:** Start where you are. Tell the Lord you want to pray and ask for His help. God is always the initiator in prayer, so our desire to pray is the result of God drawing us into prayer Himself. He receives us as we are, and these other matters are dealt with in the intimacy of our relationship with Him in due time. Pray as you can, not as you ought.

**Hindrance:** You know you should pray, yet you cannot seem to move from intending to pray to actually praying. You feel stuck.

**Help:** Pay attention to those people, books, situations, and songs that move you to pray. If something is good for your soul and stirs your affections for God, arrange your life to be influenced by it. Be mindful of how you are impacted by being around nature, music, stories; be confident that God has wired you to respond to Him in prayer. Neglect nothing that inspires devotion.

**Hindrance:** You are distracted, unfocused, unable to concentrate.

**Help:** You may be greatly helped by the simple act of writing your prayers. What do you want to say to God? What do you sense that he says to you?

Involve your body in your praying. The scriptures mention multiple postures for prayer. Stand. Kneel. Sit. Prostrate. Pray as you take a walk. (This can also help you if you are getting sleepy.) Pray aloud!

Find places to be quiet. See if a church will let you use their sanctuary sometime for safe solitude.

Mostly, keep at it. We do not remember what it was like to learn to speak our first language. It took time and practice, living with and through awkwardness, using the language in our ordinary lives and with others. Now, for most of us, it is second nature. This can also be our experience with growing in prayer. Be patient: Praying can and will become a wonderful way to live your life with God and for others.

Remember that you are not alone as you pray. God is for you and with you! The Wind of Heaven is at your back! Note that the Spirit makes sure that your prayers are expressed and heard:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26-27)



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And Jesus Himself is praying for you. Trust that the Father hears and answers the prayers of the Son.

Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:34, 35a)

Strengthening our prayer life is not as much about making decisions as it is forming habits. Persevere! We have the help of One who taught that we ought always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). Lord, hear our prayer!