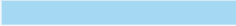


just talk.



God's listening.

Prayer without the performance — how to start, what to say, and what to do when heaven seems quiet.

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Sunday Worship: Crossland High School, 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748. Sundays at
10:00 AM www.hiphopenation.com · Facebook @CmtyofHope · YouTube @hiphopenationtv
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You Good?

For real: how are you doing? Maybe you picked this up because life feels heavy right now. Maybe you typed "how to pray" into a search bar at 2 AM. Maybe you grew up around church but never felt like you belonged in one. Or maybe you've been walking with God for years and your prayer life just feels dry. However you got here: welcome. You're not too late, and you're not too far gone. We don't care how you come to this little book.

We only care about the way you leave: encouraged, hopeful, and talking to God. Here's what this book isn't: a set of religious rules, a guilt trip, or a course in fancy church words. Prayer doesn't require a robe, a stage, or a perfect life. It requires you, being honest, with a God who already loves you. Our church was born in a nightclub in 2006 because we believe God meets people where they actually are. This book works the same way.

Start where you are. Use the words you have. God can work with that. God's been waiting on you.

Rev. Tony Lee

SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

The Road Map

1 · Prayer Is Just Talking

2 · God Actually Wants to Hear From You

3 · Come As You Are

4 · How to Start: Four Simple Moves

5 · When Life Is Heavy

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Prayers You Can Borrow

Your 7-Day Prayer Starter

You're Invited

"The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."

PSALM 145:18 (NIV)

Prayer Is Just Talking

Let's clear something up right away: prayer isn't a performance. It's a conversation. A lot of people think prayer has a dress code. That you need special words, a certain posture, a religious résumé. That God only listens to people who have their lives together. None of that's true. Prayer is simply talking with God, the same God who made you, knows you, and wants a real relationship with you. Not religion. Relationship. You can pray in a car, in a shower, on a bus, in a hospital waiting room, at 3 AM when sleep won't come. Out loud or in your head. Long or short. Polished or messy. Jesus Himself said the fancy stuff isn't the point:

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

MATTHEW 6:7-8 (NIV)

Read that again. God already knows what you need before you say a word. So prayer isn't about informing or impressing God. It's about connecting with God. The words don't have to be right. They just have to be real.

The Bible puts it like this:

"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

PSALM 62:8 (NIV)

Pour out your heart. Not "recite the correct formula." Not "clean yourself up first." Pour it out, the fear, the anger, the questions, the hope, all of it. God can handle your honesty. God would rather have your real than your rehearsed. If you've never prayed before in your life, here's the whole

starting line: talk to God like you'd talk to someone who loves you and isn't going anywhere. Because that's exactly who God is.

TRY IT: 30 SECONDS

Wherever you are right now, say this: out loud or silently: "God, I'm here. I don't have fancy words. This is me, being honest with You. Thank You for listening." That's it. That counted. You just prayed.

Prayer isn't a performance. It's a conversation.

God Actually Wants To Hear From You

Maybe the harder question isn't "how do I pray?" It's "why would God listen to me?" We get it. When life has knocked you around enough, it's easy to believe God has better things to do: bigger problems, holier people. But that's not what God says.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

JEREMIAH 29:11 (NIV)

This is our church's anchor verse, and here's why: God spoke those words to people in exile: people far from home, wondering if they'd been forgotten. God's answer? I know the plans I have for you. Hope. A future. God doesn't just tolerate hearing from you. God has plans for you. You can't have plans for someone you're ignoring. And when you cry out, God's not far off:

"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

PSALM 34:17-18 (NIV)

Close to the brokenhearted. Not disappointed in the brokenhearted. Not waiting for the brokenhearted to pull it together. Close. Jesus made the invitation even plainer:

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

MATTHEW 7:7-8 (NIV)

Everyone who asks. Not everyone with perfect attendance. Not everyone who never messed up. Everyone. That doesn't mean prayer is a vending machine: put in the right words, get out whatever you want. (We'll talk about unanswered prayer in Chapter 6, because we don't dodge hard things around here.) It means the door is never locked from God's side. When you knock, something opens.

TRY IT: NAME ONE THING

Tell God one thing that's weighing on you today. Just one. Name it specifically: "God, this is what's heavy: _____. You said You're close to the brokenhearted. I'm asking You to be close to me in this."

Come As You Are

Whatever you did. Wherever you've been. Whoever you've become. You can still pray. Some of us carry a quiet belief that we've disqualified ourselves. Too many mistakes. Too much time away. Too many doubts. So before we talk to God, we figure we need to fix ourselves up first, like cleaning the house before the housekeeper comes. Jesus told a story that demolishes that idea. Two men went to pray. One was a religious professional who listed his accomplishments. The other was a tax collector, in that world, a walking scandal. Here's how the second man prayed:

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'"

LUKE 18:13 (NIV)

Eight words. No polish. All honesty. And Jesus said that man, not the polished professional, went home right with God. At Community of Hope we say it like this: we are all flawed and struggling in different areas of our lives. Every one of us. The person praying next to you on Sunday? Flawed and struggling. The pastor? Flawed and struggling. Prayer isn't for people who have it together. It's for people who know they don't.

So drop the disqualifications. God has a personal message for you, and it isn't "clean up first." It's this:

It's never too late to start over, begin, or keep going. Never too late to pray for the first time. Never too late to pray again after years of silence. Never too late to come to Christ and live in your purpose. That's not a slogan on a wall for us: we've watched it happen in thousands of lives, and it can happen in yours. And if you're carrying something you've never said out loud to anybody? Prayer is the safest place on earth to put it down. God isn't shocked by your story. God was there for all of it, and God stayed.

TRY IT: THE EIGHT-WORD PRAYER

Borrow the tax collector's prayer, exactly as he said it: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." If "sinner" feels like a heavy word, understand what it really means: someone who's missed the mark and knows it. That's all of us. This prayer has been enough for two thousand years. It's enough today.

How To Start: Four Simple Moves

Even Jesus's closest friends had to ask Him how to do this.

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'"

LUKE 11:1 (NIV)

So if you feel like you don't know how: you're in good company. The disciples walked with Jesus every day and still asked for lessons. And Jesus didn't hand them a seminary textbook. He gave them a short, simple model we now call the Lord's Prayer:

"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.'"

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (NIV)

Look at what Jesus packed into a prayer you can say in twenty seconds: honoring God, inviting God's will, asking for daily needs, dealing with forgiveness, asking for protection. Simple on the surface. Deep enough to spend a lifetime in.

From that model, here's a pattern anybody can use: four simple moves. No acronym to memorize. Just a flow:

MOVE 1: THANK GOD

Start with gratitude, even if it's small. "God, thank You that I woke up today. Thank You for the people who love me." Gratitude shifts the whole conversation.

MOVE 2: BE HONEST

Tell the truth about where you are, the good, the bad, the stuff you'd rather hide. "God, I'm angry." "I'm scared." "I messed up, and I need Your forgiveness." God already knows. Saying it's how you stop carrying it alone.

MOVE 3: ASK

Ask for what you need, for yourself and for others. Daily bread. Direction. Healing. Help forgiving somebody. Nothing is too big to ask, and nothing is too small.

MOVE 4: LISTEN

Sit quietly for a moment before you rush off. God often speaks through a settled thought, a scripture that comes alive, a nudge toward the right next step. Give God room to get a word in.

Thank God. Be honest. Ask. Listen. Twenty seconds or twenty minutes, the four moves work at any length. Simple.

When Life Is Heavy

Feeling anxious? Overwhelmed? Afraid? This chapter is for you. Some seasons don't need a prayer routine, they need a lifeline. The diagnosis. The layoff. The relationship that fell apart. The anxiety that sits on your chest before your feet even hit the floor. What does prayer look like then?

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 (NIV)

Notice the promise. It doesn't say God will instantly delete every problem. It says God's peace will guard your heart and mind: peace that doesn't even make sense given what you're facing. Peace that transcends understanding. People who pray through hard seasons will tell you: it's real. The man who wrote those words, by the way, wrote them from a prison cell. This isn't advice from somebody who never struggled. It's testimony from somebody who prayed in the dark and found God there.

And on the days when it's so heavy you can't even find words? God covered that too:

"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 through wordless groans."

ROMANS 8:26 (NIV)

Sit with that. When all you've got is tears, a sigh, or silence, the Spirit of God takes what you can't say and carries it to the Father. A groan can be a prayer. A breakdown in your car can be a prayer. You showing up with

nothing left is a prayer. One more thing, and we mean this: prayer and professional help aren't rivals. God works through counselors, therapists, and doctors too. If the weight you're carrying feels like more than heaviness, if you're in crisis, reach out for help today. Praying people get counseling. That's not weak faith. That's wisdom.

TRY IT: THE EXCHANGE

Breathe in slow. Breathe out. Then pray: "God, I hand You this: _____ . I can't carry it anymore. You said Your peace would guard my heart and mind. I'm taking You at Your word. Guard me tonight." Repeat as many times as you need. There's no limit.

When God Seems Quiet

Let's be honest about the hard part: sometimes you pray, and heaven feels silent. We're not going to pretend otherwise. You prayed for the healing that didn't come. The door that stayed shut. The person who didn't change. And somewhere in the waiting, a question crept in: is anybody actually listening? Here's what might surprise you, the Bible is full of that exact question. God didn't edit it out:

"How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?"

PSALM 13:1-2 (NIV)

That's King David, a man the Bible calls a man after God's own heart, flat-out asking God, "Have You forgotten me?" And God put it in the Book. Which tells you something: honest frustration isn't the opposite of faith. It's part of it. You can bring God your doubts in prayer. God's not fragile. But look how David's same prayer ends, just four verses later:

"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me."

PSALM 13:5-6 (NIV)

Nothing about David's situation changed between verse 1 and verse 5. What changed was David, because he kept praying through the silence instead of walking away from it. Here's what we've learned in twenty years of ministry: God answers every prayer, but not always the way we ordered. Sometimes the answer is yes. Sometimes it's not yet, the timing isn't right, and you can't see why.

Sometimes it's no, because I have something you couldn't think to ask for. And we won't lie to you: sometimes you won't get an explanation on this

side of heaven. We've buried people we prayed hard for. We've also watched God do things nobody thought possible. Both are true. We keep praying anyway, not because prayer is a formula that always pays out, but because prayer keeps us connected to the One who holds it all.

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

1 JOHN 5:14 (NIV)

God hears us. Silence isn't absence. Waiting isn't rejection. Keep talking.

TRY IT: PRAY THE FRUSTRATION

Stop performing and tell the truth, like David did: "God, I've been praying about _____ and I don't see anything happening. I don't understand. But I'm not leaving. Help me trust Your unfailing love while I wait."

More Prayer, More Power

Here's where prayer stops being a private habit and starts changing the world around you.

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18 (NIV)

Pray continually doesn't mean kneel 24 hours a day. It means prayer becomes the running conversation underneath your whole life. Stuck in traffic, pray. Walking into a hard meeting, pray. Kid finally asleep, pray. Good news, say thank You. It's less like a scheduled appointment and more like staying on the line with someone all day. And here's the part most people never discover: prayer isn't just for your own needs. It's one of the most powerful things you can do for other people.

"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

JAMES 5:16 (NIV)

Before you object: "righteous" doesn't mean perfect. It means made right with God through Jesus, which is exactly what God offers everyone who comes. Your prayers for your kids, your block, your city? Powerful and effective. That's not us saying it. That's God's Word.

At Community of Hope, we've built our whole ministry on this. Prayer is behind everything we do: feeding families, HIV testing, mental health real-talk for men, showing up in dark places to be light. We tell our members plainly: we need God's help to do this work. More prayer = more power. The world doesn't just need more people talking about problems. It needs more people talking to God about them, and then getting up off their knees ready to be part of the answer. Prayer and action aren't opposites. Prayer fuels action.

Pray like it depends on God. Move like God might use you. So start small and start real. Pray for one person by name every day this week. Pray over your home. Pray on your commute. Watch what happens, not just around you, but in you. Because the first life prayer transforms is always your own. You start to leave every conversation with God a little more like the person God made you to be: empowered, hopeful, renewed, and encouraged.

TRY IT: PRAY FOR SOMEBODY ELSE

Think of one person who's struggling right now. Pray: "God, I lift up _____ to You. You see what they're carrying. Be close to them today the way You've been close to me. Show me if there's something You want me to do for them, and give me the courage to do it."

Prayers You Can Borrow

Sometimes you don't need a lesson, you need words, right now. Borrow these. Say them exactly as written, or change them until they sound like you. Borrowed prayers count. Jesus gave us one, after all. WHEN YOU'RE NOT SURE YOU BELIEVE YET

"God, if You're real, and if You're listening, I want to know You. I've got doubts and I've got questions, but I'm bringing them to You instead of running from You. Meet me where I am. Show me who You are. Amen."

STARTING THE DAY

"God, thank You for waking me up this morning. I don't know everything today holds, but You do. Order my steps. Guard my mind. Put me in front of the people who need what You've placed in me, and keep me from what's not for me. Amen."

WHEN ANXIETY HITS

"God, my thoughts are racing and my chest is tight. Your Word says not to be anxious about anything, but to bring everything to You. So here it's: all of it. Trade me: my worry for Your peace, the peace that doesn't even make sense. Guard my heart and mind right now, in Jesus's name. Amen."

WHEN YOU NEED A FRESH START

"God, I've made choices I can't take back, and I'm tired of carrying them. Your Word says it's never too late to start over, begin, or keep going. Forgive me. Make me new. I'm giving You the pen: write the next chapter. Amen."

FOR SOMEONE YOU LOVE

"God, You know who's on my heart right now. I can't fix what they're going through, but You can. Be close to them. Protect them. Soften what's hard in their life and heal what's broken. And use me however You want in their story. Amen."

WHEN IT'S TIME TO SAY THANK YOU

"God, before I ask You for one more thing: thank You. For breath. For grace I didn't earn. For the doors You opened and the ones You mercifully closed. For not giving up on me when I gave up on myself. You have been good to me. Amen."

GIVING YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST

"Jesus, I believe You died on the cross for me and rose again. I've been doing life my way, and I'm ready to do it Yours. Forgive my sins. Come into my life. I'm Yours: starting today. Amen."

If you just prayed that last prayer and meant it: welcome to the family. Seriously. Tell somebody. Then come see us Sunday so we can celebrate you. (Details in the back of this book.)

The 7-Day Prayer Starter

Five minutes a day. One verse, one focus, one prayer. That's the whole assignment. Don't aim for perfect: aim for present. Miss a day? Pick up where you left off. It's never too late to keep going.

DAY 1: JUST SHOW UP

"The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.".
Psalm 145:18 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Find two quiet minutes. Tell God honestly why you're starting

this, even if the reason is "I'm not sure."

PRAY: "God, I'm showing up. Meet me here."

DAY 2: SAY THANK YOU

"Give thanks in all circumstances." 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Name five things you're grateful for: out loud. Small things count. Coffee counts.

PRAY: "God, thank You. I see Your hand in more than I noticed."

DAY 3: GET HONEST

"Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." Psalm 62:8 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Tell God the one thing you've been avoiding saying, the fear, the anger, the secret. God can take it.

PRAY: "God, here's the real me. Thank You for staying."

DAY 4: ASK BIG

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find." Matthew 7:7 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Ask God for the thing you've been afraid to ask for. Write it down with today's date, so you can look back later.

PRAY: "God, You said ask. So I'm asking: _____."

DAY 5: PRAY FOR SOMEONE ELSE

"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." James 5:16 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Pray for three people by name. Bonus move: text one of them,

"I prayed for you today." Watch what it does.

PRAY: "God, bless them the way You've blessed me."

DAY 6: PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER

"This, then, is how you should pray..." Matthew 6:9 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly (it's in Chapter 4). Pause after each line and put it in your own words.

PRAY: "Our Father in heaven... Your will be done in my life."

DAY 7: LISTEN

"Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Set a timer for three minutes. No talking, no phone. Just sit with God. If your mind wanders, come back with one word: "Father."

PRAY: "God, I'm listening. What do You want me to know?"

Day 8 and beyond? Run it back. Mix the days. Stretch five minutes into ten. You're not finishing a program: you're building a relationship. Keep talking.

You'Re Invited

Prayer was never meant to be a solo sport. You can absolutely talk to God on your own, this whole book has been about that. But something happens when you pray with people that doesn't happen any other way. Encouragement. Accountability. Family. A room full of imperfect people learning to trust God together. That's what we are.

Community of Hope AME Church started in 2006 in a nightclub with eight people, because we believe church should meet people where they actually live. Twenty years in the making, that hasn't changed. We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically. We go into dark places and call it being the light. And we mean our name: this is a community where everyone, everyone, has a chance. We don't care how you come. Come with doubts. Come with a past.

Come in whatever you wore yesterday. We only care about the way you leave.

PULL UP SUNDAY

Sundays at 10:00 AM Crossland High School 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748

CAN'T MAKE IT IN PERSON?

Watch live on YouTube: @hiphopenationtv Facebook: @CmtyofHope ·
Web: www.hiphopenation.com

NEED PRAYER RIGHT NOW?

Reach us at info@hiphopenation.com or 240-273-9115. Our team prays over every request. That's not a formality: it's the engine of this church.

We'll save you a seat.

— Rev. Tony Lee & the Community of Hope family