

# Recommended Reading: Books on Prayer

November 13, 2015

by David Schrock

Sunday I preached on the church's calling to "[pray for one another](#)" (James 5:16). Among the seven points of application "seven ways to improve your pray life today" one of them had to do with learning how to pray.

In truth, nothing teaches you how to pray like praying, and especially by praying with others who know how to pray. The disciples asked Jesus "to teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). The assumption is that both John and Jesus prayed with and before their disciples, hence prompting their question.

Theologically, it is the Spirit who directs our prayers (see Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18; and Jude 20). But practically, like Jesus' twelve disciples, we too need to learn from our Lord how to pray. Certainly, the Scriptures are the place to learn what it means to "pray in the Spirit," "by the will of God," "for his glory," and "for our joy." But if you are like me, you are helped when men and women gifted to teach and gifted to pray write books that relate Scriptural truth to real life.

Therefore, if you are earnestly desirous of learning how to pray, consider these five books on prayer. I have found them helpful and encourage you to check them out too.

[For a longer list of books on prayer, see Pastor David's blog, '[Recommended Reading: Ten Books on Prayer](#).'

## Recommended Reading

### 1) [A Call to Spiritual Reformation](#) by D. A. Carson

Now updated and titled [Praying with Paul](#), Carson's book is both exegetical and practical. He examines the prayers of Paul and shows the kinds of things we ought to pray. When I read this book many years ago, two things stood out. Theologically, Paul repeatedly prayed for people who knew God to know him more. This apostolic pattern ought to have a profound impact on us and what we pray for. Sure, we can and must pray for healing and temporal needs, but all the more we ought to intercede for the power of God to open hearts to the depths of his love for them in Christ (cf. Eph 3:14-21). Practically, this book taught me how to pray for people I don't know, for members of my church whose particular needs were not known to me. If you wonder how to pray through a church directory for people you don't (yet) know, this book is especially practical.

### 2) [A Praying Life](#) by Paul Miller

If you feel bad about your prayer life, this is the place to begin. Instead of giving strenuous disciplines for improving your prayer, he reminds us that prayer flows out of an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father. Just as a child begins to "talk" to their parents through

means of guttural gibberish and playful (and ignorant) imitation, so we begin to speak to our heavenly father. He concludes with practical applications for prayer, but it is the beginning of the book that is most encouraging to those who have a hard time getting into their prayer closet.

### 3) [Praying the Bible](#) by Donald Whitney

Donald Whitney is well-known as an expert in practicing the "Spiritual Disciplines." His book by that title ([Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#)) on that subject are required reading in many seminaries. Not surprisingly, his book on prayer is equally valuable. And because of its size, it is more accessible. In less than 100 pages, Whitney teaches you how to use Scripture as a means of prayer. He argues that we never grow tired of praying for the same things; we grow tired because we pray for the same things *in the same way*. His solution? Pray the words of the Bible. If you have ever wondered what to say in prayer, this book will be a great help. Or if you are looking for freshness in your prayer life, *Praying the Bible* is must-read.

### 4) [The Valley of Vision](#) by Arthur Bennett ([bonded leather also available](#))

To say that Arthur Bennett is the author of *The Valley of Vision* is a bit of misnomer. Bennett collected a wide variety of Puritan prayers and arranged their content under a variety of headings and titles. These prayers are a goldmine of biblical theology, but even more they are a shaft of light that shines on parts of our darkness we rarely uncover (or even know we have). Better than any other source I know, *The Valley of Vision* teaches us how to pray like David in Psalm 51. It brings us into the depths of our sin and lifts us the heights of God's grace and mercy. If your prayer lacks gravity and importance, a daily reading from this book is what you need.

### 5) [Operation World](#) by Jason Mandryk

Q. What do you get when you mashup a prayer book with exhaustive data about world mission? A. *Operation World*.

*Operation World*, now in its seventh edition, the essential resource for praying for God's kingdom to come. Mandrake, following in the footsteps of Patrick Johnstone, provides national, political, and religious demographics for every country in the world. If your heart yearns for Christ to be made famous among the nations - or especially if it doesn't! - pick up a copy of this book or use its online website to pray for the nations to come to Christ. (There is also a shorter, more readable version, [Pray for the World: A New Prayer Resource from Operation World](#)).

## Post Script on Prayer

The worst thing you could do with this list is race off to Amazon and buy them all. The second worse thing to do is to ignore them all.

To repeat what I said at the beginning, we learn to pray by praying - not by reading books about praying. However, since we are to pray according to the will of God (i.e., the Word of God), prayer is also something we must study.

Right after Paul prayed for the Ephesians to "have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth . . . the love of Christ that surpasses

knowledge" (Eph 3:18-19), he reminded the church that God had given them pastors and teachers to equip them for every good work (Eph 4:11-12).

Wherever you find yourself today, learn to learn from the teachers of the church. As it concerns prayer, pray with one another and learn from those who know how to pray. As it concerns a biblical understanding of prayer, avail yourself of these helpful resources. These teachers are not infallible, but as they hold fast to the Bible in their instruction, they will equip you for every good work, for all kinds of prayer.

*To that end may we be a people who pray, who pray for one another, and who pray according to God's Word.*

For His Glory and your joy, Pastor David