

# STATIO

## 21 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Sunday, January 1**

**Read: John 15:3-10**

As we start the new year, these words hold what may be the ultimate exhortation for the believer in Jesus Christ: "Abide in me."

This word, "abide," appears in other places in the Bible and has been translated by scholars as: "remain," "tarry," "stay," "to stay at someone's house," and "continue."

God's exhortation to us is to remain in him. To tarry with him. To stay with him as if we were staying in the house of someone who loves us deeply. It is a call to experience deeper intimacy with him – more than we have ever experienced.

John 15 describes God's best plans for our lives, made possible through this call to abide.

Bearing good fruit is possible through abiding in Him. Fruit like peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control comes through abiding in Christ and his abiding in us.

The fruit of impacting the lives of others, of helping strengthen other believers in their faith, of planting seeds of the gospel with those who don't know him yet comes through such abiding.

Bringing Glory to God is not just possible but promised to all who would abide in him.

Experiencing the Love of our Savior is promised to all who would abide in him.

Think of a season in your life when you did not abide in Christ. In hindsight, you might remember that season resembling verses 4-6, characterized by spiritual dryness and a lack of fruit. Those are seasons we wish not to revisit. If you are in such a season now, it is a season in which you are most likely ready to depart.

In Verse 10, Jesus reminds us of the path toward abiding, *"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."*

The call toward "keeping my commandments" is not the secret to salvation. Instead, the proclamation directs the already saved person toward an abiding relationship. Saving faith in Christ allows believers to trust God's commands for their lives. In Matthew 22, Jesus said that

his commandments are summed up: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... [and] You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

As we start our **21 Days of Prayer** and a new year, may we remember God’s exhortation to abide. It is an encouragement and a command to love the Lord with all we have. It is an encouragement and a command to love whomever he might put around us. And it is an encouragement and a command to remain in him, to tarry with him, to continue with him, to stay with him as if we were staying in the house of someone who loves us deeply.

It is a call to run after God’s best plans for our lives.

It is an appeal to abide.

Today, ask God, who abides in you, to work in you in a new way, empowering you toward new depths of abiding in him.

**Monday, January 2**

**Read: Romans 8:18-30**

Wouldn't it be nice if your refrigerator replaced your groceries whenever they were used up? Just think of it: You're in the middle of preparing a delicious meal for your family when you suddenly remember that you're out of a crucial ingredient. No worries! Your refrigerator knows what you need, so you continue cooking even though you weren't fully aware of your need.

While this is a silly illustration (but it would be nice if it were real!), it's true spiritually! If you've turned from your sin to trust in Christ, you've been adopted into the family of God and filled with the Holy Spirit. Think of it: God the Holy Spirit lives inside of you! Even so, we still wrestle with sin and feel the effects of living in a fallen world. Because we struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil, it can be difficult at times to know what exactly we should be praying for. Sometimes life leaves us speechless and leads us to feel prayerless. But thanks be to God; the Spirit himself prays for us! He knows what we need *and* what the Father has planned for us. And the Father always answers "yes" to the Spirit because he prays according to his will.

This truth should encourage us, especially if we don't think we're very "good" at praying. In the end, prayer is an invitation to commune with God as we communicate with Him, and this happens best when we meditate on God's Word. The Spirit works through Scripture to convey God's heart and will, and as we stop to consider it, the language of prayer begins to grow.

Still, knowing how to pray in every circumstance can be difficult. Once again, however, the Spirit always gets it right. Knowing this, we should give ourselves to prayer more, no matter how unspiritual it may sound (see Matthew 6:7-9 to find out how Jesus felt about super "spiritual" prayers). As Bishop J.C. Ryle put it, "Fear not because your prayer is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you. Just as a mother understands the first lisping's of her infant, so does the blessed Savior understand sinners. He can read a sigh, and see meaning in a groan." (J.C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer*, Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002, 23.)

As awkward as it may seem, take a moment to talk to God (or even journal a prayer to God) about your struggle to pray. Maybe you need to tell him about your frustration over a particular issue you don't know how to pray about. As you do, keep Romans 8 open before you, remembering the Spirit is helping you.

**Tuesday, January 3**

**Read: Psalm 37:1-11**

Context is a very important thing. For example, a lawnmower is a wonderful tool, but not if it's used on the living room carpet. Having coffee or tea to begin the day is nice, but only if it's in a mug, not on your shirt. A stroll down the beach is nice... unless, of course, there's a hurricane. You get the point. To truly enjoy or understand something, we must know its purpose and proper context. Otherwise, we'll find ourselves frustrated and disappointed.

So, when Psalm 37:4 tells us that God intends to give us the desires of our hearts, it's most certainly true! But we must understand the context. If we read the whole psalm, we see that the person whose desires are met is the person who treasures the Lord, obeys the Lord, and *waits* on the Lord. The psalmist knows it's tempting to emulate the ways of the wicked in order to prosper. But the godly person commits himself to walk the narrow road even when it's difficult and unpopular, even when it doesn't have immediate benefits, and even when the unrighteous seem to prosper. Why? Because his delight is in the Lord, not the stuff he can get from him.

You see, when Christ is our greatest treasure, our desires correspond with his will. In that case, we can rest assured that God takes pleasure in whatever we ask. To put it another way, Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7)." Abiding in Christ means living in a moment-by-moment relationship with Christ, where we meditate on his words (see Psalm 1), holding fast to them like costly jewels. Thus, this "treasuring" dictates the decisions we make and the way we live. So, whether we get what we asked for or not, because we have Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3)," we have everything we could possibly need.

"In short," Tim Keller states, "God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knew. More than that, however, we know as we pray for good things that we already have the ultimate good thing. In God himself we have the headwaters and source of all we desire, even if one of the tributaries of our joy, something in this world that we love, goes dry. 'For though all things fail us, yet God will never forsake us, who cannot disappoint... since all good things are contained in him and he will reveal them to us... when his Kingdom will be plainly manifested.'" (Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, New York: Penguin Books, 2016, 228.)

Are you delighting yourself in the Lord or in the things you want from the Lord? Do you find yourself consistently disappointed with God? If so, why? Take some time to consider what you treasure most.

**Wednesday, January 4**

**Read: Philippians 4:4-7**

You've probably seen a dad standing in the pool and encouraging his child to jump to him. You know the parent will catch him, the parent knows he will catch him, and the child has no reason to distrust his father. Nevertheless, the fear of the moment clouds sound reason, and the child refuses to leap to his father.

The same is true for God's children. Christians are called to live with hope-filled contentment ("joy") and to walk in loving wisdom toward others ("reasonableness"). But we often live with anxiety and fear rather than trusting that the Lord is near us now and will soon return to rescue his children ("the Lord is at hand"). Of course, there may be multiple reasons why we feel anxious. Anxiety can stem from chemical factors you had nothing to do with, traumatic circumstances you didn't ask for, sinful choices you've made along life's journey, or all the above. Thankfully, God has supplied us with lots of common grace resources that we may benefit from when used wisely.

That being said, we must understand the crucial role of prayer when we are tempted to give way to anxiety. Prayer focuses the soul on the one who is sovereign over all things. Combined with intentional thanksgiving for the various ways God has shown himself faithful, the power of anxiety begins to weaken. "In prayer," says Alec Motyer, "anxiety is resolved by *trust* in God. That which causes the anxiety is brought to the One who is totally competent and in whose hands the matter may be left. In thanksgiving, anxiety is resolved by the deliberate *acceptance* of the worrying circumstance as something which an all-wise, all-loving and all-sovereign God has appointed." (J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians: Jesus Our Joy*, in *The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. John R. W. Stott, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984, 211.)

Knowing *who* our Father is, leads us to a greater sense of contentment when we face trials and circumstances that typically provoke us to feel anxious. In him, we rest knowing that whatever we're facing is a part of his good plan for our lives. Thus, when we run to the Lord in prayer, God's peace cuts through the fog of our fearful unreasonableness and guards our hearts and minds so that we can see our Father's loving arms reaching out to us and hear his voice say, "I'll catch you."

With Philippians 4 in mind, write out the things that tempt you to feel anxious. Now, write next to each item an attribute of God (power, love, faithfulness, etc.) that will help you meditate on him and experience his peace. Do you see these items any differently, considering who God is?

**Thursday, January 5**

**Read: Psalm 32:1-11**

Kids don't like getting splinters pulled out (whether the kids are young or old!). As uncomfortable and painful as it is to have a splinter sticking in your skin, there's just something about knowing there will be more pain before there's relief. "It'll only hurt for a second" or "It will be over before you know it" doesn't really compute in a child's mind. Nevertheless, there won't be any relief apart from removing the foreign object.

Similarly, many people are living with unconfessed sin in their lives. They long for relief from their emotional and spiritual pain but are unwilling to expose their sin to the light of God's holiness. They want to experience fellowship with God, but the sin they're "hiding" from God is a barrier to real communion. As J.C. Ryle put it, "Praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer." (J.C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer*, Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002, 9.)

Maybe you find yourself in such a situation. There's no doubt that exposing sin to the light of God's holiness and to the accountability of others is painful, but there's good news: God promises to forgive and cleanse you if you confess your sin to him! In fact, like the Prodigal Son's father (Luke 15:20), our heavenly Father longs for you to come home. And he is willing and able to forgive you because of the sacrifice of his own Son, Jesus. In fact, the apostle Paul states, "... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)." The cross of Christ stands as the eternal reminder that a holy God has made a way for sinners to be right with him.

God desires for you to walk with him in the light of his holiness and to know the freedom that's found in obedience. He's guaranteed that he'll accept you, sinful past and all. But you must be willing to hold out your proverbial hand to let him remove the splinter. Will you let him? Will you trust him? Yes, it will be painful for a moment, but joy, gladness, and peace will follow. Consider rereading Psalm 32 and reflect on how David felt before and after he confessed his sin.

**Friday, January 6**

**Read: Psalm 25**

January is the month of resolutions. With the hope of a new year, we make plans to lose weight, read more, wake up earlier, etc. Before long, however, we find ourselves struggling to stay motivated to carry on the new and healthy habits we started such a short time ago. We know they're good for us, but the effort we must put forth to maintain them leaves us looking for ways to quit or, at least, to start again next year...

Simply put, we can talk about prayer, but the only way to learn to pray is to, well, pray. In fact, we are to "...pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)." As Paul told the Colossians, we are to "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2)." Further, we are to "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Romans 12:12)." Clearly, prayer is something we're supposed to keep up... for the rest of our lives!

Of course, this can seem daunting. But prayer only feels unsustainable when we're more convinced that it is merely another habit to maintain rather than an invitation to spend time with the Lord of the Universe. Put simply, the more we grow to see and feel the greatness of God, the more consistently we will pray. Yes, we'll still have set times of prayer, but we'll also find ourselves running to God in prayer throughout the day. In other words, it's the *fear of the Lord* that leads to prayer. But we shouldn't think of the fear of the Lord in the sense of cowering before God because we're afraid he'll strike us dead. No, the fear of the Lord is "the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10) because it allows us to see God in his holiness, us in our sinfulness, and Christ in his righteousness. And when this begins to happen, we can't help but bask in the beauty of the gospel and run to God in prayer.

"The living God," says Michael Reeves, "is infinitely perfect and quintessentially, overwhelmingly beautiful in every way: his righteousness, his graciousness, his majesty, his mercy, his all. And so we do not love him aright if our love is not a trembling, overwhelmed, and fearful love. In a sense, then, the trembling 'fear of God' is a way of speaking about the intensity of the saints' love for and enjoyment of all that God is." (Michael Reeves, *Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021, 52.)

As you begin a new year, make knowing and fearing God your greatest pursuit by meditating on his Word. And as you do, the desire to pray and the language of prayer will begin to grow to your soul's delight *and* the glory of God.

**Saturday, January 7**

**Reflect**

Take some time to pause and think about each of the devotionals from this week.

What has the Lord revealed to you?

Respond to the Lord in prayer today.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you today (2 Cor. 13:14).

Amen.