

That's what happens when we center our lives on the living Christ.

The wife of a missionary in Singapore once asked an elderly man who'd become a Christian after living most of his life as a Buddhist: "Mr. Lim, what difference do you find between being a Buddhist and being a Christian?"

"That's easy," he answered. "Since I've found Jesus as my Saviour, I have such a peace in my heart."

New believers are often asked, "Now that you are living a Christian lifestyle, what difference do you notice in your life?"

The most common answer is: "I've found peace in my heart."

This guide and the six guides which follow, showcase the Christian lifestyle; they reveal the secrets of a happy Christian life. They will help you build a stronger relationship with God and a healthier Christian life. So begin fixing your eyes on Jesus today and you can be part of that final victory celebration when Christ's peace reigns unchallenged.

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DISCOVER

THE SECRET OF ANSWERED PRAYER

Anatoli Levitin, a Russian writer and historian, spent years in the Siberian Gulag where petitions to God must have seemed frozen to the ground. But he came back quite spiritually fit. "The greatest miracle of all is prayer," he wrote. "I have only to turn mentally to God and at once I feel a force that pours into me from somewhere, into my soul, my whole being. What is it? Psychotherapy? No,

it's not psychotherapy, for where would I, an insignificant old man and tired of life, get this strength which renews and saves me, elevating me above the earth? It comes from outside me—and there is no force in the world which could ever resist it."

In this guide we're going to look at how prayer, "the breath of the soul," can help us build a stronger relationship with God and a healthier Christian life.

1. CONVERSATION WITH GOD

How can we be sure God hears us when we pray?

"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. Then you will call upon me and come and PRAY TO ME, and I WILL LISTEN TO YOU. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'"—**Jeremiah 29:11-13.** *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

What assurance did Jesus give that He will hear and answer our prayers?

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."—**Luke 11:9.**

Prayer is a two-way conversation. Jesus promises,

"Here I am! I stand at the door and

Scripture here uses the imagery of a great athletic arena in which the Christian runs a spiritual race. The spectators in the arena, the "great cloud of witnesses," include all the great men and women of faith featured in the previous chapter (Hebrews 11). We are the contestants.

As Christians we are to "throw off" everything that slows us down and put all our energies into winning the race. To insure victory, we must "fix our eyes on Jesus," and "consider him"—model our thoughts and actions after Christ. His lifestyle and His gift of eternal life are made possible because He "endured the cross" and became the Conqueror over sin and death on our behalf.

What can we learn from this "great cloud of witnesses" from Old Testament times? At your leisure, read Hebrews 11, and note how "faith" enabled these great men and woman to overcome every obstacle and every trial. Their victories can be yours—even amid the worst that life can dish out. As you read chapter 11, notice the words that suggest resolute decisiveness and determined action.

These men and women succeeded against the odds through "faith" in the coming Messiah. The key to their success, as well as our success as Christians, is to "fix our eyes on Jesus," since He is the focus of our faith. Christ is the motivating power in the Christian life. He gives us faith, an essential quality in the Christian lifestyle, and a motivating factor for healthy human growth.

Through faith in Jesus the Christian lifestyle results in perfect peace, and a perfect sense of security and well-being.

"You [God] will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast [stayed on thee, KJV], because he trusts in you."—**Isaiah 26:3.**

THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

This guide and guides 15 to 20 showcase the Christian lifestyle.

Does the Bible delineate a distinct Christian lifestyle?

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to PUT OFF YOUR OLD SELF, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to PUT ON THE NEW SELF, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”—Ephesians 4:22-24.

The Christian is to “put off” the “old self” that resulted from “deceitful desires,” and “put on the new self” that is “created to be like God.” At the new birth we are “created” to be a different kind of person with a distinct Christian lifestyle..

The Bible urges us to continue putting on this new life as the Holy Spirit works to transform our characters:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and LET US RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE THE RACE marked out for us. LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. CONSIDER HIM who endured such opposition from sinful men, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT GROW WEARY AND LOSE HEART.”—Hebrews 12:1-3.

knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”—Revelation 3:20.

How is it possible to sit down and have a nice evening of dinner conversation with Christ? First, by telling Him everything that’s on our hearts in prayer (not just making nice, pious speeches). Second, by listening carefully. As we meditate in prayer, God can speak to us directly. And as we read the Word of God devotionally, God will speak to us through its pages.

Prayer can become a way of life for the Christian.

“Be joyful always; PRAY CONTINUALLY; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

How can we “pray continually”? Do we have to stay on our knees all the time or constantly repeat phrases of adoration or petition? Of course not. The Bible has in mind a life so closely in touch with Jesus that we feel free to speak to Him anytime, anywhere.

“There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. There is nothing that can prevent us from lifting up our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer. In the crowds of the street, in the midst of a business engagement, we may send up a petition to God and plead for divine guidance. . . . We should have the door of the heart open continually and our invitation going up that Jesus may come and abide as a heavenly guest in the soul.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 99.

One of the best ways to develop this kind of intimate relationship is to learn to meditate as we pray.

“May my meditation be pleasing to

him, as I rejoice in the LORD.”—Psalm 104:34.

“Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them.”—1 Timothy 4:15, KJV.

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”—Psalm 1:2.

Don’t just rush through a list of requests when you pray. Stick around. Listen. A little prayerful reflection can greatly enrich your relationship with God.

“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”—James 4:8.

The closer we come to Jesus, the more we’re able to experience His presence. So keep within speaking distance of Jesus, never beyond the reach of His influence. Don’t worry about saying the right words. Just talk honestly and openly. Talk about everything. He’s gone through the agony of death itself in order to become your Intimate Friend.

2. HOW TO PRAY

When we engage in formal prayers in public or in private, we may wish to follow the outline of the prayer Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. He taught His disciples the Lord’s Prayer in response to their request: “Teach us to pray.”

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be



delivered me from all my fears. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.”—Psalm 34:4, 7.

After forty days of temptation, in answer to Jesus’ prayer, “the devil left him, and angels came and attended him” (Matthew 4:11). When we pray, God sends angels to answer our prayers.

Scripture suggests that each Christian has an accompanying guardian angel.

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that THEIR ANGELS in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.”—Matthew 18:10.

Exodus 23:20; Hebrews 13:2; Psalm 91:11, 12; and Acts 5:19 all speak of angels ministering to those whose lifestyle included prayer.

Prayer is one of the grandest experiments we can engage in as human beings. So begin building up your personal experiences today; make your own discoveries. Because of our prayers:

“The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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 4:5-7.

Father in heaven: I want to know You more intimately. I want to keep in constant touch with You through prayer. Please teach me how to pray more effectively. Show me how to listen better, how to aim better, how to respond better. In Jesus’ name I ask it. Amen.

the judge said in exasperation,

“Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!” And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?’”—Luke 18:5, 7.

Don’t just throw up a casual, just-in-case request to God. Discuss all your needs, your hopes, and your dreams with Him. Ask for particular blessings. Call for help in time of need. Keep seeking, and keep listening, until you learn something from God’s response.

6. ANGELS MINISTER TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO PRAY

When we pray, God sends angels who seem not to be bound by limitations of speed and distance to answer our prayers.

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”—Hebrews 1:14.

The Psalmist rejoiced that through the ministry of the angel of the Lord his prayers were answered:

“I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he



your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”—Matthew 6:9-13, margin.

According to the pattern Jesus provided in His prayer, we are to come to God as our heavenly Father, asking that His will take charge in our hearts just as His will prevails in all of heaven. We seek Him for our physical needs, for forgiveness and for a forgiving attitude. We always remember that our ability to resist sin comes from God. Christ’s prayer concludes with expressions of praise.

On another occasion Jesus instructed His disciples to pray to the Father “in my name” (John 16:23)—that is, to pray in harmony with Jesus’ principles. That’s why Christians usually close their prayers with the words: “In Jesus’ name, Amen.” Amen is a Hebrew word that means “Let it be so.”

Sometimes Christians refer to the Lord’s Prayer as a model prayer. They often memorize it and repeat it in public. Although the Lord’s Prayer gives guidelines on what to pray for and how to formulate a prayer, our communication with God works best as a spontaneous composition of the heart.

A look at the various prayers of men and women in the Bible teaches us one basic lesson: pray about everything. God invites us to pray about critical matters: forgiveness for our sins (1 John 1:9), increased faith (Mark 9:24), the necessities of life (Matthew 6:11), healing from suffering and disease (James 5:15). At the same time He assures us that

we can take all our needs and cares to Jesus; nothing is too small to pray about.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”—1 Peter 5:7.

Our Saviour is interested in every detail of our lives. God delights in our prayers. His heart warms when our hearts reach out to Him in love and faith.

3. PRIVATE PRAYER

Most of us have things we hesitate sharing even with our closest friends, things we keep hidden away in a corner of our minds. God wants us to unburden ourselves completely in private prayer: one-on-one with Him. It's not that He needs any information. The Almighty knows our secret fears, hidden motives, and buried resentments better than we do ourselves. But we need to open up our hearts to the One who knows us intimately and loves us infinitely. Healing can begin only when Jesus can touch the wounds. We need to admit our problems and recognize our needs. Growth can come only when Jesus can reach our greatest weaknesses.

When we pray, Jesus our High Priest is near to help us in every time of need:

“We do not have a high priest who is unable to SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, but we have one who has been TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”—Hebrews 4:15, 16.

HEART, the Lord would not have listened.”—Psalm 66:18.

Known sin short-circuits the power of God in our lives; it separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2). This doesn't mean you have to be perfect in order to get an answer to prayer. It simply means you can't hang onto sin with one hand and reach out for divine help with the other. Sincere confession and repentance solves the problem.

If we're not willing to allow God to free us from evil thoughts, words, and deeds, our prayers won't be effective.

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”—James 4:3.

God isn't going to answer “yes” to selfish or mean-spirited prayers. Keep your ears open to God's law, His will, and He will keep His ears open to your petitions.

“If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.”—Proverbs 28:9.

6. FEEL THE NEED OF GOD.

God responds to those who ask for His presence and power in their lives.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”—Matthew 5:6.

7. PERSIST IN PRAYER.

Jesus illustrated the need to persist in our petitions by telling the story of a very stubborn widow who kept coming to a judge with her request. At last

3. SURRENDER CALMLY TO GOD'S WILL.

"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.**

Remember that God wants to teach us, as well as give us things, through prayer. So sometimes He says, "No"; sometimes He turns us in another direction. This can help us pray more "on target" in the future. Prayer is a means of getting more and more in synch with God's will. So we need to remain sensitive to God's responses and learn from them. Keeping track of your specific requests and what happens as a result can be a great help.

The Bible reveals God's will to us (Psalm 119:105, 133), and the Holy Spirit helps us zero in on the right mark: "The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:27). Remember that our will would always coincide with God's will if we could see as He does.

4. WAIT PATIENTLY ON GOD.

"I WAITED PATIENTLY for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry."—**Psalms 40:1.**

The main point here is to keep your focus on God, keep your focus on His solution. Don't just send out a quick plea and then stare in horror at the problem, letting it overwhelm you. Don't ask God for support one minute and then try to drown your troubles in frenzied pleasure-seeking the next. Wait patiently on the Lord. In our age of microwave dinners and remote control entertainment we badly need that discipline.

5. DON'T HANG ON TO ANY SIN.

"If I had CHERISHED SIN IN MY

Do you feel anxious, stressed-out, guilty? Lay it out before the Lord. Prayer brings us within the circle of Christ's mercy and grace. He can then supply our every need.

Should we have a special place for private prayer?

"When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."—**Matthew 6:6.**

In addition to praying when walking in the street, working on the job, or enjoying a social gathering, every Christian should have a time set aside each day for personal prayer. Daniel, the top government official in Babylon and a mighty man of God, prayed three times a day—morning, noon, and night. Almost all growing Christians have a set time and place to spend with God in Bible study and prayer. Make your daily appointment

with God at the time when you feel most alert and can concentrate the best.

4. PUBLIC PRAYER

Joining with others in prayer creates a special bond and taps God's power in a special way.

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”—Matthew 18:20.

Remember that the Lord's Prayer takes less than a minute to repeat. Public prayers should be brief. Don't turn them into speeches that make it seem you're really talking to an audience, not to God. Don't feel you have to speak in unnatural or theatrical tones; simple reverence and humility are much better ways to approach the King of kings and Lord of lords.

One of the greatest things we can do as a family is to develop a prayer life together. Show your kids that we can take our needs to Him directly. They'll get excited about God as they see Him respond to prayer in the practical details of life. Make family worship a happy, relaxed time of sharing.

5. SEVEN SECRETS OF ANSWERED PRAYER

When Moses prayed, the Red Sea parted. When Elijah prayed, fire came down from heaven. When Daniel prayed, an angel shut the mouths of ravenous lions. The Bible presents us with many exciting accounts of answered prayer. And it recommends prayer as the way to tap into the mighty power of God. Consider Christ's great promise:



“You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”—John 14:14.

Jesus “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). God promises, “Call to me and I will answer you” (Jeremiah 33:3). And yet some prayers seem to go unheeded. Why? Are any conditions attached to prayer? Here are seven principles that will help you pray more effectively.

1. KEEP CLOSE TO CHRIST.

“IF YOU REMAIN IN ME and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”—John 15:7.

When we make our relationship with God a priority and keep in touch with Him, we'll be listening and looking for answers to our prayers that, otherwise, might go undetected.

2. KEEP TRUSTING GOD.

“If you BELIEVE, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”—Matthew 21:22.

Faith means that our prayers are more than just knocking on wood; we're really looking to our Heavenly Father to supply our need. If you're troubled by a lack of faith remember that our Saviour performed a miracle for the man who pled in desperation:

“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”—Mark 9:24.

Just concentrate on exercising the faith you DO have; don't worry about the faith you DON'T have.