

PRAISE FOR *TEN TREASURES OF LEARNING TO PRAY*

Jones combines a survey of the practice of praying in both the Old and New Testaments with a practical address of the questions and challenges that arise out of the Christian practice of conversation with God in our day. His insights guide and move readers into a more active and lively habit of chatting with and responding to our Creator and Lord. This is a book to be read again and again to enrich the believer's life in prayer.

Robert Kolb, professor of systematic theology emeritus, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

With this book, Andrew Jones has once again succeeded in weaving together experiences from everyday life, a deep insight into the biblical message, and a true appreciation of the Lutheran legacy. For anyone seeking a new approach to prayer from a Lutheran perspective, a treasure trove opens up here. In the process, the reader is not only guided to reflect on prayer but also introduced to the practice of prayer.

Prof. Dr. Christoph Barnbrock, chair of practical theology, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Oberursel, Germany

Ten Treasures of Learning to Pray is a kind invitation into a richer life of prayer. Written with the heart of a pastor and the insight of a writer, Andrew R. Jones helps readers see prayer not as performance, but as relationship. With biblical wisdom, hopeful honesty, and gentle encouragement, this book helps us become more fluent in the language of eternal life. Whether you are new to prayer or have spent years walking with Christ, this book offers treasures worth returning to again and again.

Tanner Olson, author of *Getting Through What You're Going Through* and *All the Things I Say to God*, writtentospeak.com

Ten Treasures of Learning to Pray provides lessons of faith that edify and inspire. With deep biblical insights and thoughtful practical applications, Andrew Jones helps us see Jesus through the gift and blessing of prayer and, in so doing, opens the breadth and depth of God's Word for us to pray as Jesus has taught us. This book is a seamless marriage of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and practical application, crafted to be read and reread. By God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, this wonderful book will deepen the faith and strengthen the prayer life of all who read it. Thank you, Andy, for completing your brilliant and powerful trilogy with this work.

Rev. Dr. Brian L. Friedrich, president, Concordia University,
St. Paul, Minnesota

I have folded my hands in prayer and lifted my cares to the Lord for as long as I can remember, but only as I read this outstanding prayer resource did I more fully understand prayer as the treasure that it is! *Ten Treasures of Learning to Pray* has profoundly impacted my prayer life! Unlike other books about prayer, *Ten Treasures* taught me that prayer is incomparably more than a humble act of obedience with a checklist of requests. My Creator and Redeemer invites me into ongoing conversation and communion; He delights to hear from me! Every treasure—every way—that Jesus teaches us to pray leads us into stronger relationship with Him. Andrew Jones skillfully provides a close-up look at these ten treasures of faith that come from praying, as revealed in Scripture and illuminated across this excellent resource. What fruits grow through the treasure of talking with God? You'll be amazed at all the ways He is working in you, for growth and for good, even as you continue to learn more about the character and promises of God!

Deb Burma, Christian speaker and author of *Joy: A Study of Philipians* and *Be Still and Know: A Study of Rest and Refuge*

If Andy wrote it, I'm reading it! Andy genuinely knows and loves Jesus deeply, which is why he is such an effective writer and communicator. If you are looking to renew, refresh, and deepen your prayer life, this book is for you! You will be reminded of the beauty of Jesus' invitation to pray and the rich treasures of taking Jesus up on His offer. This is more than a how-to book; it's a book that will transform you by opening your eyes and your heart to the simple but profound beauty of prayer.

Pastor Paul Schult, executive director, Redeemer School,
Redwood City, California

In a world that often treats prayer as passive, *Ten Treasures of Learning to Pray* reminds us that prayer is one of the most powerful ways faith moves into action. Jones shows how prayer connects us to God, to one another, and to the world around us. Rooted in Scripture and relevant to everyday life, this book will encourage, strengthen, and deepen your walk with God, whether prayer is already part of your daily rhythm or something you are just beginning to explore.

Rev. Nicholas O. González, pastor, The Lutheran Church of
St. Andrew, Silver Spring, Maryland

I always want to read what Andy Jones has to write, and *Ten Treasures of Learning to Pray* is no different. His writing continually teaches and equips me in knowing Jesus more. So many young adults I work with want to know how to do the things of faith that we talk about so much, such as prayer. This book gives Christians an accessible structure to put into practice, with great riches in sharing the biblical stories and gifts prayer brings. It is a book both to share and return to over and over again. I know I will.

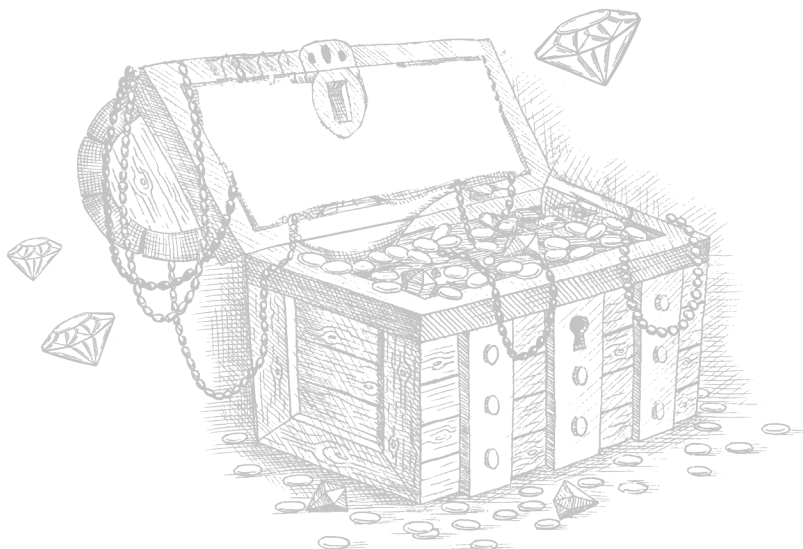
Shelly (Schwalm) Schultz, DCE, MFA, professor and director
of the DCE Program and Pre-Deaconess Program, Concordia
University, St. Paul, Minnesota

Andrew's book is most certainly a treasure for those who are looking for new ways to understand more deeply the invitation that Jesus gives us to pray. Through personal stories, fresh perspectives, and a solid biblical foundation, *Ten Treasures of Learning to Pray* invites readers to discover the richness of a life shaped by prayer. This book is for all who desire a better understanding of the gift of prayer and our heavenly Father, who invites us into it.

Sarah Crowder, theology teacher, Faith Lutheran High School,
Las Vegas, Nevada

TEN TREASURES OF LEARNING TO PRAY

ANDREW R. JONES



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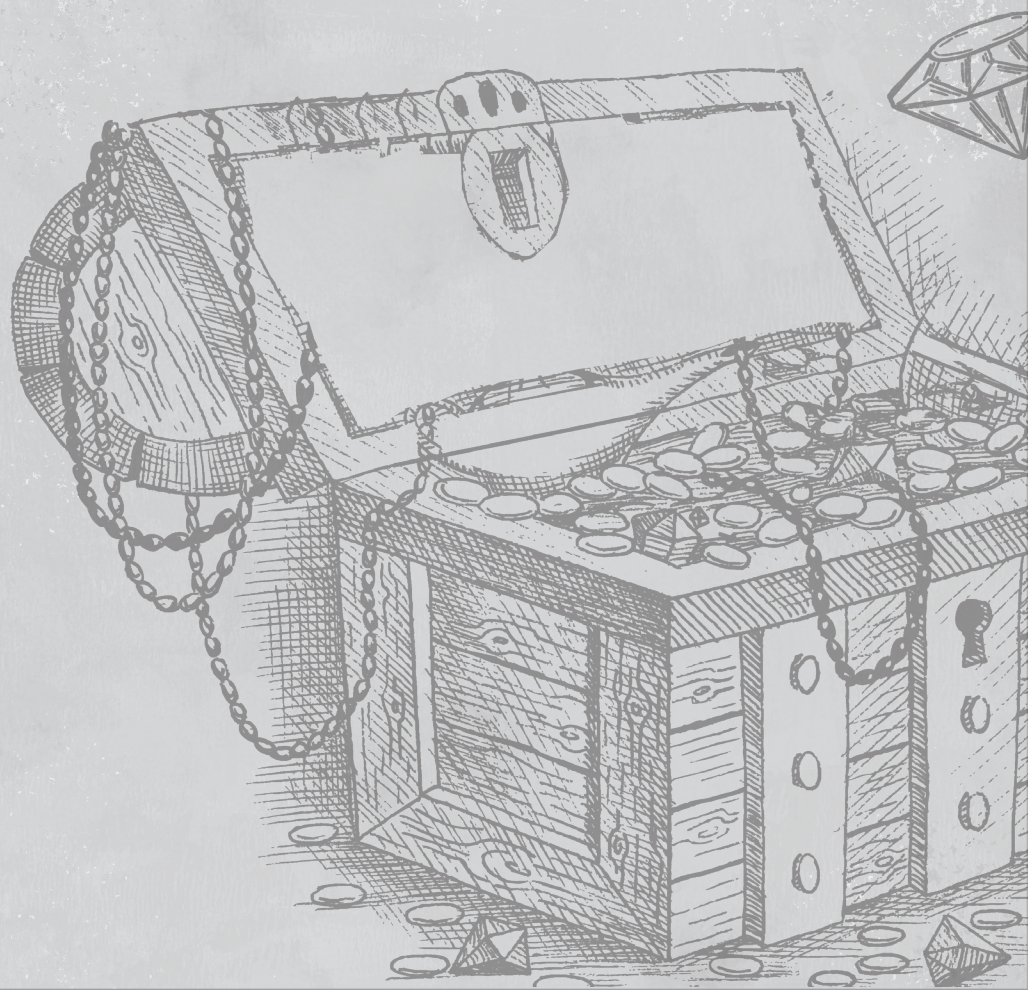
Manufactured in the United States of America

To my godfathers, Randy Jones
and the now-sainted Timothy Jones.
Thank you for fulfilling the promise you
made at my Baptism to pray for me.



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INTRODUCTION

AN

INVITATION

TO TALK

WITH GOD

Sports cards were the treasured collectible of choice when I was in grade school. I loved the excitement of buying a new pack and dreaming about what cards were inside. Maybe contained within the shiny plastic wrapping was one of my favorite players, like Kirby Puckett or Barry Sanders, or a rookie card of some future hall of famer that would be worth loads of money one day.

Shortly after I started my collection, my grandpa informed me that he had a collection of sports cards from the 1970s hidden away in the upstairs closets of their house. My grandparents' house was on the same farm as ours, so I had unfettered access and an open invitation to go search for these treasures. One of the first cards I unearthed was a 1971 Roberto Clemente from Topps. When I looked it up in my Beckett magazine (the standard authority on such matters), it was valued at one hundred dollars—an absolute fortune to a six-year-old. I made it my entire life's mission to dig up every card in that house. Over the next several years, I searched through every room, every closet, every box and drawer and cedar chest. I was so intent in the search that I found one card being used as a bookmark, so I flipped through the pages of every single book in their library. Over the course of several years, I found hundreds of cards.

The best part of finding a new card was racing downstairs to tell my grandpa what I had found. To hear his laugh. He always wanted to know the value of each one, so he'd send me off to look up the price. The collection included cards featuring Johnny Unitas and Fran Tarkenton, Carl Yastrzemski and Frank Robinson. As the treasured collection grew, I meticulously encased the most valuable cards in hard plastic cases. Others I placed in plastic sheets within a massive three-ring binder. I'd pore over this collection all the time, memorizing statistics on the backs of the cards.

When my grandpa died, the collection became my inheritance. As I look through the collection now, the value is not in the cards themselves. I could sell the whole collection on eBay for a thousand dollars

or so, but I'm never going to sell it. The true value is in the memory of my relationship with my grandpa. This card collection represents a thousand treasured moments with him.

This book is about the treasure of talking with God that we call prayer. Prayer's value is not measured in dollars according to the stuff we gain through prayer. Nor is prayer's value measured in how many of our prayers God answers just as we want. Prayer's value comes from the relationship we have with our God, the unfettered access and open invitation.

*Prayer's
value comes
from the
relationship
we have with
our God.*



WHY DO WE PRAY?

How would you answer that question? Why do you pray? For some people, prayer is therapeutic. It helps them feel better. It allows them to release their fears, anxieties, and struggles, giving those over to God.

For some people, prayer is routine (and that is not a bad thing). Praying out of habit upon waking, at mealtimes, before bed, and for other occasions is a worthwhile practice. It might even be the same prayer repeated every single day, and there is nothing wrong with that. Repetition does not impede God from hearing our prayers. God does not get bored of hearing us pray.

Others pray in a desperate hope. Upon offering all our strength and knowledge and skill in order to change something, we inevitably hit a wall of helplessness, where the only thing left we can offer is a prayer, a plea to the all-powerful God of the universe to do what we cannot do.

All these are valid, and I'm guessing most of us pray for a variety of those reasons. But I think the answer I would give to the question Why do you pray? is this: Because Jesus invited me to pray.

INVITATION

What is the most exciting invitation you have ever received? Maybe it was to a destination wedding. Maybe it was to join a friend at a sporting event you both loved. Or maybe it was an invitation to a birthday party for someone you really wanted to be friends with. Whatever the case, I want you to remember the excitement of that treasured invitation. That invitation represented a request for a deeper relationship with you, for more time spent together, for getting to know each other better.

The Bible is full of invitations from God to His people. Jesus invites His disciples to follow Him (Matthew 4:19). He invites the little children to come to Him (Matthew 19:14). He invites us to come to Him when we are weary and heavily burdened, and He promises to give us

rest (Matthew 11:28). Jesus invites us to ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7). And Jesus invites us and teaches us how to pray (Luke 11:1–4).

God extends all these invitations for the purpose of conversation and deeper relationship with us. They are invitations to listen and invitations to pray.



*Jesus
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WHAT IS PRAYER?

At its simplest, prayer is talking to God. Learning to pray, then, is not particularly complicated.

Step 1: Address God.

Step 2: Share.

Despite the simplicity of prayer, God's people have been learning, practicing, and teaching it for centuries because it is not only simple—it is also deep.

Our prayers take a wide variety of forms and types. Prayers might be written, spoken, sung, whispered, shouted, or silent. Prayers can be offered by thousands of people gathered together and by a solitary person. Prayers can be repeated time and again, and prayers can be unique, original material. Prayers can express every emotion under the sun, from anger to sorrow to joy to thanksgiving to feeling simply okay. Prayers can be short or long, eloquent or ordinary. Prayers can be offered by all people regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or language. We can pray for ourselves and others, for family and friends, for strangers and enemies, for trees and planets and pets.

When God invites us to pray, He invites all of these.

In this book, the primary goal is not building prayer habits. Readers may learn such lessons as we take time to practice praying at the end of each chapter, but the how and habits of prayer are not our main aim.

The primary goal of this book is to examine the treasures of faith that come from praying. As we examine these treasures, we will look at their sources in the Bible. We will consider what praying teaches us about God and about ourselves. We will consider what fruit grows in our lives of faith through the treasure of talking with God. As we examine these treasures, we will continually learn what it means to pray.

The ten treasures in this book are not comprehensive. There are more prayer treasures worth mining than many books could examine fully. I chose these ten treasures because I see them repeatedly in the Scriptures, and I see all ten treasures revealed by Jesus Himself. You

*I see all
ten treasures
revealed
by Jesus
Himself.*



may find other treasures from the great prayer guides of the Scriptures. I hope you share those treasures with me and others.

WHY IS PRAYER A TREASURE?

I believe that prayer is a multifaceted treasure. We are invited to speak with our God—our Creator and Lord. We are invited before His throne of grace to make our requests known to Him. The invitation alone is a treasure.

Also, the conversation is a treasure. We are subjects of the King of kings, and He is willing and eager to listen to us from His throne room day and night. We are never truly alone because we can always enter God's throne room and start chatting His ear off.

Think of prayer like a treasure chest. God invites us to open it. When we open it, we get to examine what's inside. That examination is the conversation with God.

Yet inside the treasure chest are pearls, jewels, and gems of all sorts and shapes and sizes. We get to pick up each one and examine it, feel its weight and shape and texture. Show it to God and ask about it. This book is a guide for examining what's inside the treasure chest of prayer. We can return to these treasures again and again because we have unfettered access to our God. And each of these treasures is worth examining for a lifetime.

Imagine a child learning to pray. As they learn to pray for their family, friends, and teachers, they are learning the treasure of community. When the beloved family pet dies, they learn to lament. When they repeat the same prayers night after night, they learn persistence and simplicity. When they're invited to a friend's birthday party, they rejoice. From an early age, they become familiar with all the treasures we will consider in this book, but they are not done learning. Each treasure can be picked up throughout our lives. And every time we pick up these treasures, we will discover that they are deeper and more beautiful than we had ever realized.

The invitation from God, conversation with God, and lessons taught by God are all part of the multifaceted treasure of prayer.

Jesus says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). This is true of us. What we treasure the most in life is what we will set our hearts on, for good or ill. I invite you to consider that this is true of God as well. His heart is set on you. You are God’s treasured possession. He treasures you and invites you to speak with Him.

Jesus also says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). In our lives of faith, fruit does not come from some massive effort on our part to try to bear fruit. We cannot produce a greater harvest of fruit through our own efforts. Fruit comes from abiding in Jesus. Prayer is how we abide. In prayer, we abide in Jesus, and Jesus abides in us. In that abiding, Jesus teaches us these ten treasures. And these treasures bear fruit.

*In prayer,
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MEET THE PRAYER GUIDES

Within the Bible, dozens of people talk to God. As we read their stories and hear their prayers, we can learn much from God’s people who went before us. We can see how their relationship and interactions with God played out. We can overhear their prayers, eavesdrop on God’s responses, and listen to how their stories turned out. Those who pray teach us something about human experience, about God, and about the sacred space of conversation between God and His people.

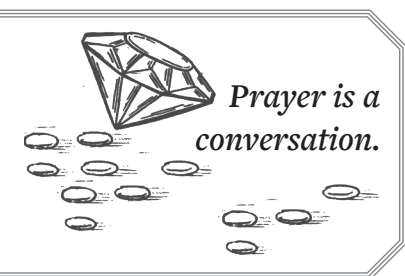
In the Bible, we find hundreds of prayers. Whole books are collections of prayers, such as Psalms and Lamentations. Dozens of books contain

prayers, including nearly every book of the New Testament. And the Bible also contains stories in which characters have direct conversations with God. The Bible is teeming with prayers and petitioners.

Many of the prayers we will examine come to us from people you likely expect: David, Moses, Mary, and Jesus. We will also learn from people whose names and prayers might be less familiar, such as Hannah, Habakkuk, and the sons of Korah.

These prayer guides give us words to pray when our grief, anger, or indifference robs us of our own words. Such prayers written in the pages of the Scriptures are repeated across time and space by multiple generations and myriad geographical occupants. As these biblical prayers are repeated, they inspire new generations to write their own prayers, and the treasure of talking with God continues and multiplies.

WHAT IF GOD DOESN'T ANSWER MY PRAYERS?



One of the challenges with praying is that sometimes it feels like it doesn't do anything. We receive the invitation. We show up and start speaking with God . . . but our senses cannot tell if He is listening or if He is even there.

We live in an instant-gratification world.

When I flip a light switch, I expect the light

to turn on instantaneously . . . not hours or days or years later.

But prayer does not work like this because God is not a light switch, and we do not control Him.

Prayer is a conversation. In conversations, we may ask for something from our conversation partner, but we cannot force them to do what we want. (And if we try to, that can cause great harm.) We ask and wait for a response. Sometimes the response time is quite quick. Other times it is not. If a child asks a parent for a new bike, the

parent might buy the bike immediately or wait until the weekend or wait until the child's birthday or Christmas. The child might be upset at not being instantly gratified in their request and having to wait, but their face will light up all the same when they open the gift.

When we pray, we are like the child asking. We may hate the waiting we have to do, but when God does answer our prayer, hopefully our face lights up all the same.

Of course, the parent may also choose not to buy the bike, just as God may choose not to answer our prayer in the way we want. We may childishly then ask, "What was the point of asking?" The answer I'd like you to consider is this: a constantly deepening relationship with God.

The relationship between God and His people is such that He wants to hear our prayers, not out of ego, not because He requires a certain amount of homage and sacrifice before He will answer our prayers, but because He loves us. God wants to hear our prayers simply because we are His preoccupation. God is thoroughly interested in you and in all you have to say. He will never grow tired of what you are asking for or wrestling with or wondering about.

WHAT DOES PRAYER DO?

Prayer doesn't manipulate God into doing what we want. He may answer our prayers exactly how and when we want. He may not. Sometimes God gives us what we desire before we think to pray for it. God has surprised me on countless occasions by giving me a delightful gift I had not even thought to ask for. I'm guessing He has done the same for you.

Prayer doesn't grab hold of God and shake Him so as to shape Him into what we want Him to be. Prayer shapes us to be God's people. Our conversations with God form us into His beloved children.

*Prayer
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people.*



Just as a child will learn language from their parents, we learn the language of eternal life from God. We learn this language through conversation. Prayer is our part of the conversation. God's Word, which comes to us in its various forms, is His part of the conversation. God speaks through the Scriptures, through His people, through the forgiveness offered in the Words of Absolution, through the word of Baptism that claims us as His beloved children and places on us His name, through the Lord's Supper, in which we receive the Word made flesh and blood, given and shed for us. We listen to those words of God. We receive them. They shape us and form us. Prayer is our part in the conversation. It likewise shapes and forms us.

When a child learns to speak, their ability to learn the language depends on both listening and attempting to speak. Both are necessary for fluency. We listen to God's Word, and we also attempt to speak. Both teach us the language of eternal life. Both form us into God's people. Both show us what it means to live in God's kingdom.

As we enter this conversation with God, back and forth between prayer and God's Word to us, an unwelcome conversation partner tries to butt in: Satan. Satan seeks to gain our attention so that we will stop listening to God's side of the conversation and cease speaking on our side of the conversation. Satan will harass, accuse, lie, and deceive with whatever he can find to pull us out of conversation with God. Satan wants us in conversation with his lies, which will make a god out of anything other than the one true God. Satan wants our hopes and desires set on money, the world, power, and ourselves.

Martin Luther called this cycle by the Latin phrase *oratio, meditatio, tentatio*, which means "prayer," "meditation on the Scriptures," and "the assaults of Satan." Luther found this to be the formula for how theologians were formed and shaped.

Before we meditate on God's Word, we pray. Luther advises, "Pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear

Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding.”¹

Then we open the Scriptures and find that “the Holy Scriptures constitute a book which turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because not one teaches about eternal life except this one alone.”²

But as we seek to learn about eternal life in this conversation with God, Satan stands ready to disrupt the dialogue. Thankfully, no matter what Satan does or whatever lies he speaks, God uses those instances to point us back to Himself, to bring us back into the conversation with Him, where we will always find that the words of eternal life prove true.

This book is the third and final installment of my series on this cycle of spirituality. The first was on *meditatio*, titled *Ten Questions to Ask Every Time You Read the Bible*. The second was on *tentatio*, titled *Ten Lies Satan Loves to Tell*. This book on prayer, or *oratio*, completes the trilogy. Yet the order in which you read these books is not important. We are simultaneously praying, reading the Scriptures, and being attacked by Satan. That is the life of faith for a follower of Jesus. Whatever order you choose, all three have the same goal of pointing us toward Jesus and the words of eternal life.

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HOW IS THIS BOOK DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS ON PRAYER?

There is no shortage of books about prayer. This book does not contain the silver-bullet formula for getting God to answer your prayers the way you want. God is not a vending machine. We cannot hit G7 and

¹ *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, pp. 285–86.

² *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, p. 285.

get whatever we want. Learning to pray is not about knowing some secret formula that will force God to do what you want. Any book promising such lessons will be misleading and unfruitful. Furthermore, this book does not seek to teach you practical lessons in developing better prayer habits. Though that is indeed welcome and worthwhile, that is not what we are up to here.

The treasures Jesus and others reveal to us are lessons about who God is and about who we are as God's people. They are lessons of faith—treasures taught in the school of following Jesus.

Perhaps you have had the experience of praying deeply and desperately for something only to have God deny your request. And in that moment, you did not understand God. You could not comprehend why He was withholding. But now, when you look back on that time, you may understand the fuller picture. God was answering your prayer much differently and much better than you were expecting. Such experiences can teach us God's character and goodness as well as increase our trust in Him.

The treasures in this book are much like that. They are retrospective, drawn from servants of God from ages past, helping us as we walk with Jesus now and into the future.

In particular, the ten treasures of this book are somewhat paradoxical pairs. The Christian faith is marked by these sorts of ambiguities, these opposing realities. In the Christian faith, both solitude and community are good. Both rejoicing and lament are appropriate. Our conversations with God can be both simple and filled with all the complexities of awe, wonder, and beautiful language.

The goal I have in mind for you as you read this book is not so much that your prayer life would improve in quantity or frequency (though

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that would, of course, be welcome), but that your faith would be deepened, your relationship with Jesus would be strengthened, and that you would become more fluent in the language of eternal life. I hope that you grow more comfortable speaking with God in all the ways Jesus teaches us to pray.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Each chapter that follows will contain a treasured prayer lesson. We will start by learning the treasure from Jesus Himself, then from other biblical prayer guides. Next, we will consider what each treasure teaches us about our God as well as how this lesson is forming us as God's people. We will consider what fruit grows from each treasure. Finally, each chapter will conclude with some questions for reflection (usable on your own or in a group setting), some Bible passages to read and meditate on, and an opportunity to practice praying. Let's begin that cycle now.

Questions for Reflection

When you pray, how do you typically address God?

At what occasions or times of the day do you typically pray?

Do you typically pray aloud or silently? Alone or with others?

Do you prefer to pray established prayers, such as the Psalms, or speak your own spontaneous prayers?

What treasures have you learned from praying?

Scripture for Meditation

Psalms 4

Isaiah 55:1–13

Ephesians 3:14–21

Matthew 7:7–11

Prayer Practice

A common prayer used in many Christian traditions is called a collect. This type of prayer has five parts:

1. A way to address God
2. A description of God or something God has done
3. A request
4. A desired result
5. A conclusion, often offered in praise to the Trinity

Here, for example, is a collect for an answer to prayer, divided into the sections mentioned above.

1. Almighty God,
2. You have promised to hear the petitions of those who ask in Your Son's name.
3. Mercifully incline Your ears to us who have now made our prayers and supplications to You,
4. and grant that those things that we have faithfully asked according to Your will we may receive to meet our need and bring glory to You;
5. through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.³

Sometimes one of the five sections is skipped, and sometimes two sections converge, but that is the basic pattern. Here is a collect for you, dear reader, as you begin your journey with this book.

³ Collect for "Answer to prayer" (*LSB*, p. 313).

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the teacher of wisdom beyond wisdom. As we follow You, teach us the many treasures of prayer so that we might be formed more and more into Your image, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Now, try writing a collect of your own below. I find it is sometimes easiest to start with the third step—request. Then fill in the others.

1. A way to address God (if you aren't sure, just use "God")

2. A description of God or something God has done

3. A request

4. A desired result

5. A conclusion (if you aren't sure, just use "Amen")

