

When Words Fail

A PRAYER GUIDE FOR TIMES OF CRISIS



*“The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not over come it.”*

– JOHN 1.5

Introduction

When the World Shakes

There are moments when the weight of the world hits close to home—a news alert, a school shooting, a natural disaster, a war overseas, a senseless act of violence, or a tragedy involving innocent lives. In those moments, it can feel impossible to find the right words to pray.

Prayer is not about saying the right thing—it's about coming honestly before a God who sees, knows, and cares.

This guide is for when your heart is heavy, when your mind is numb, or when your soul feels raw. You do not have to carry the pain alone. You can turn to the God who is near to the brokenhearted and who enters into our suffering—not with quick answers, but with enduring presence.

This is not a guide to explain why bad things happen. We will never fully figure the answer to that question on this side of eternity. This is a guide to help you talk to the God who listens when bad and terrible things do happen . . . because – sadly – they will.

What the Bible Says About Crisis

Biblical truth when tragedy strikes

In the face of violence, grief, injustice, or disaster, the Bible does not offer clichés—it offers truth wrapped in tears. Scripture gives us permission to lament, to cry out, and to groan with all creation for redemption.

Here are a few anchors to hold onto:

- **God is close to the brokenhearted.** *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.” — Psalm 34:18 (NLT)* God does not wait for us to pull ourselves together. He comes near in the brokenness.
- **Jesus wept.** *“Then Jesus wept.” — John 11:35 (NLT)* When His friend Lazarus died, Jesus didn't jump to solutions. He stood beside the grieving and cried. This is the heart of God—with us, even in sorrow.
- **The Spirit helps us when we don't know what to say.** *“The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness... the Spirit himself prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.” — Romans 8:26 (NLT)* When your words run out (and they will), the Spirit intercedes.

- **God hears every cry.** *“You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” — Psalm 56:8 (NLT)* Not one tear is unnoticed. Not one sigh is ignored.
- **God’s justice and peace are coming.** *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” — Revelation 21:4 (NLT)* This world is not the end of the story.

How to Pray in a Crisis

Five simple movements when you don’t know what to say

In moments of tragedy, our emotions can swing wildly—grief, anger, fear, numbness, even helplessness. This section gives you a simple framework for how to talk to God when you don’t have the words. These five prayer movements aren’t formulas—they’re invitations to engage honestly and faithfully with the heart of God.

Each movement includes a brief devotional reflection and a sample prayer in a modern, conversational tone rooted in biblical and Wesleyan theology.

1. Lament the Brokenness

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” — Psalm 13:1

Lament is not complaining—it’s worship that has turned honest. In the Bible, lament is the language of faith when life falls apart. It names the sorrow without turning away from God.

Reflection: God invites us to bring our raw emotions to Him. Lament says, “This world is not as it should be—and God, we’re counting on You to make it right.” As Wesleyans, we believe in both God’s justifying grace and His ongoing redeeming work. Lament gives voice to a world still waiting for full restoration.

Prayer Prompt — “God, this hurts. I don’t even have the words to say what I’m feeling, but I know this is not how You created the world to be. So I bring You my ache. Meet me in it.”

2. Name the Pain

“Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord.” — Lamentations 2:19

Honest prayer names what has happened and dares to say it to God—not to explain it, but to lay it down.

Reflection: We don’t pray in generalities; we bring specifics to a God who knows every detail and holds every story. When we name the people, places, and events before the Lord, we engage in

intercession—standing in the gap for others.

Prayer Prompt: “Lord, I lift up [specific situation, city, school, or group]. Be near to every grieving person. Shelter those who are in danger. Heal the wounded. Comfort those in shock. This pain is real—please hold it all.”

3. Ask for Mercy and Help

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.” — Psalm 46:1

You can ask boldly. Scripture teaches that God is both powerful and merciful. He invites His people to intercede on behalf of the world.

Reflection: In the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition, prayer is never passive—it’s part of how God acts in the world. When we ask for God’s help, we’re joining in His mission to redeem and heal what sin has broken.

Prayer: “God of mercy, act swiftly. Bring peace where there is chaos. Give wisdom to leaders, strength to responders, healing to the hurting, and hope to the hopeless. Show Your mercy in ways we can see.”

4. Pray for Justice and Peace

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” — Amos 5:24

God’s heart is for justice—and He calls us to long for it, too. When tragedy strikes, we pray not only for comfort but for things to be made right.

Reflection: Justice and peace are not opposites—they are partners. The biblical vision of shalom includes wholeness, healing, and righteousness. In the spirit of John Wesley’s activism and compassion, we pray that wrongs would be confronted and made right.

Prayer Prompt: “Lord, bring justice. Where there is violence, bring Your peace. Where systems are broken, bring reform. Raise up people who will act with courage and compassion. Let Your kingdom come.”

5. Surrender the Unknown

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.” — Proverbs 3:5

There will always be parts of the crisis that make no sense. Surrender doesn’t mean giving up—it means releasing what we cannot control into the hands of the One who is faithful.

Reflection: When we surrender, we are not silencing our questions—we’re choosing trust over despair. In crisis, Wesleyans cling to prevenient grace: God was already at work before we even knew to ask.

Prayer Prompt: “God, I don’t understand why this happened. I may never understand. But I choose to trust You. Hold what I can’t hold. Carry what I can’t carry. I give this to You.”

Prayers for Specific People

1. For Victims and Families

“The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” — Psalm 9:9

Reflection: In the wake of tragedy, victims and their families carry unfathomable grief. While we may not know them personally, we lift them to the God who knows every name and every wound. In praying for them, we stand with them in love.

Prayer Prompt: “Lord, wrap Your arms around every victim and every grieving family. Be their refuge. Surround them with people who will carry them. Let them feel Your nearness, even in the darkness.”

2. For First Responders and Helpers

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” — John 15:13

Reflection: In moments of danger, first responders step into the unknown to protect and save lives. Many carry trauma of their own. They need strength, wisdom, courage—and the peace only God can give.

Prayer Prompt: “God of strength, uphold every first responder—police, firefighters, EMTs, medical teams, and all who serve. Steady their hands, sharpen their minds, and shield their hearts. Bless them for their courage and sacrifice.”

3. For Leaders and Decision-Makers

“I urge... that prayers be made... for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives.” — 1 Timothy 2:1–2

Reflection: Local officials, school administrators, government leaders, and pastors are often overwhelmed in the wake of crisis. They bear the burden of leadership when clarity is hard to come by. We pray for wisdom, compassion, and clear direction.

Prayer Prompt: “God, give wisdom to every leader navigating this crisis. Guide their decisions. Fill them with humility and courage. Help them to act justly, love mercy, and walk in truth.”

4. For the Church’s Witness

“You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others.” — Matthew 5:14,16

Reflection: When the world groans, the Church must not stay silent. We are called to weep with those who weep, serve with compassion, and speak hope through our actions and presence. Our prayers lead to witness.

Prayer Prompt: “Lord Jesus, awaken Your Church. Let us be present, not performative—faithful, not fearful. Make us agents of healing, voices of hope, and bearers of light in this dark hour.”

5. For My Own Heart (When I’m Overwhelmed)

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me.” — John 14:1

Reflection: It’s okay to feel heavy. God does not ask us to ignore our feelings—He invites us to bring them to Him. Whether you’re numb, weeping, anxious, or angry, you are not alone. Your emotions are safe in God’s presence.

Prayer Prompt: “God, I feel overwhelmed. I don’t know what to do with this sorrow, this fear, this ache in my chest. Remind me that I don’t have to carry it alone. Be my strength, my anchor, and my peace.”

How to Pray with Children

Helping kids process crisis through honest, age-appropriate prayer

Start with Listening, Not Explaining

Children often hear more than we realize—at school, on TV, or in conversations around them. When tragedy strikes, they need safe adults who will listen to their fears and questions without rushing to fix or explain.

Tip: Begin by asking, “What have you heard?” or “How are you feeling about what happened?” Let their words guide your response. Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know either, but we can talk to God about it together.”

What Children Need to Know

1. They are loved and safe (as much as possible).
2. It’s okay to feel sad, scared, or confused.
3. God is always with them—even when things feel scary.
4. We can always talk to God, no matter how we feel.

How to Talk to Children About Tragedy

Use simple, honest language that avoids excessive detail or scary imagery. Keep the focus on God’s nearness and compassion.

- *Instead of:* “A terrible person hurt a lot of people.”

- *Try saying:* “Something really sad happened. People got hurt, and we’re asking God to help them.”
- *Instead of:* “Don’t be afraid.”
- *Try saying:* “It’s okay to feel scared. I feel that way too sometimes. Let’s tell God how we feel.”

A Short Prayer to Use with Children

“Dear God, Sometimes the world feels scary and sad. Please help the people who are hurting. Be close to them and close to us too. Thank You that You are always with us. We trust You, even when we don’t understand. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids

- **Draw your prayer.** Invite children to draw a picture for someone who is hurting. Then pray over it together.
- **Hold hands or light a candle** as a symbol of God’s presence.
- **Breathe and pray.** Teach kids to take a deep breath and say quietly: “*God is with me.*”

A Wesleyan-Methodist Reminder for Parents

John Wesley emphasized the importance of *grace at every stage of life*. Prevenient grace reminds us that God is already at work in our children’s hearts—even before they understand everything. Helping kids pray plants seeds of trust in God that grow over time.

A Word of Encouragement: You don’t need perfect words. You just need presence. When you pray with your child—even in confusion—you’re shaping their understanding of who God is: God is close, kind, good, loving, and always listening.

Praying Together in Small Groups

A guided structure for prayerful response as a community

Why We Pray Together

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

In times of crisis, gathering to pray as a community is a powerful expression of faith and solidarity. We remind each other that God is still near, still listening, and still at work—even in the darkest moments.

Prayer in community:

- Honors the suffering of others.
- Builds unity and shared compassion.
- Invites God’s Spirit to move through the body of Christ.

- Helps carry the emotional weight together.

Simple Structure for a 10–15 Minute Group Prayer Time

This structure is flexible—feel free to adapt based on your group’s needs, time, or comfort level.

1. Open with Scripture (1–2 minutes)

Choose one of the following passages, or allow someone to read a favorite Psalm:

- Psalm 46:1–3 – “God is our refuge and strength...”
- Romans 8:26–28 – “The Spirit helps us in our weakness...”
- Isaiah 40:28–31 – “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength...”

Leader says: “As we pray today, we’re holding space for lament, compassion, hope, and action. God is with us and hears our prayers.”

2. Moment of Silence (1 minute)

Invite the group to take a deep breath and sit quietly for a full minute before speaking. Encourage them to hold the situation in their hearts before God.

3. Guided Prayer Prompts (7–10 minutes)

Invite the group to respond to the following prompts. You can either:

- Read each one and allow silent prayer,
- Invite open prayer after each,
- Or assign volunteers to pray aloud.

Prayer Movements:

- Lament what is broken.
- Name the people and places affected.
- Ask God to bring mercy and healing.
- Pray for justice and peace.
- Surrender what we do not understand.

Optional prayer prompts:

“God, we lift up...”

“Lord, in Your mercy... Hear our prayer”

“Come, Holy Spirit...”

4. Close with a Communal Prayer (1–2 minutes)

Sample Closing Prayer:

“God of compassion, You see what we cannot fix. You hold what we cannot carry. You remember what we forget. We ask You to come near—to the hurting, the afraid, the weary, and the overwhelmed. Make us a people of peace and presence, rooted in Your love and ready to act with grace. In the name of Jesus, Amen.”

5. Optional: Share One Word

Invite group members to share one word or short phrase describing how they are feeling after the prayer time (e.g., “hopeful,” “heavy,” “grateful,” “still processing”). This creates space for emotional connection and spiritual reflection.

Words from the Wesleyan Tradition

Wisdom, comfort, and hope drawn from our heritage

1. John Wesley on Trusting God in All Circumstances

“Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergy or lay; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth.” —John Wesley

Reflection: Wesley believed that in times of darkness and chaos, the light of God shines through faithful people. In prayer, we anchor ourselves in God’s presence so we may become bold bearers of His peace.

2. A Prayer from Wesley’s Covenant Service (Adapted for modern language)

*“I am no longer my own, but Yours.
Put me to what You will, rank me with whom You will.
Let me be employed for You, or laid aside for You, exalted for You, or brought low for You.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal.”*

Reflection: This prayer reminds us that even when life feels uncertain, surrendering to the loving will of God is never a loss—it is an act of hope.

3. Charles Wesley: Hymn for Grief and Assurance

*“Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.”
—Charles Wesley, 1740*

Reflection: This hymn has brought comfort to generations of Methodists. In times of trouble, we don't need to have the answers—we need the shelter of the One who holds us fast.

4. Wesleyan Theology of Grace in Crisis

Reflection: In Wesleyan theology, grace is not just a theological idea—it is a lived reality.

- **Prevenient Grace** assures us that God is already present, even in disaster.
- **Justifying Grace** meets us when we cry out and find peace in Christ.
- **Sanctifying Grace** transforms even suffering into holy ground as we are formed more deeply in love.

As Wesley wrote in his sermon *“The Scripture Way of Salvation”*: *“By salvation I mean... not only deliverance from sin, but a restoration of the soul to its original purity.”* In prayer, we experience this salvation—not just for eternity, but as real hope in the present moment.

Scriptures to Pray in Crisis

Ten passages to anchor your soul when the world feels broken

1. Psalm 34:18 (NLT) *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed.”*

Pray: “God, I know You’re near—even in this pain. Help me feel Your presence.”

2. Romans 8:26–27 (NLT) *“The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness... the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will.”*

Pray: “Holy Spirit, I don’t know what to say. Pray through me. Intercede for this world.”

3. Isaiah 41:10 (CEB) *“Don’t fear, because I am with you; don’t be afraid, for I am your God.”*

Pray: “Lord, when I feel afraid, remind me I am never alone. You are with me.”

4. Psalm 13:1–2, 5 (NIV) *“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?... But I trust in your unfailing love.”*

Pray: “I don’t understand what’s happening. But I choose to trust Your love.”

5. Revelation 21:4 (NLT) *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes... all these things are gone forever.”*

Pray: “Come, Lord Jesus. Bring the day when sorrow is no more.”

6. Micah 6:8 (ESV) *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

Pray: “God, help me be part of the healing. Make me just, kind, and humble.”

7. Matthew 5:4 (NRSV) *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

Pray: “Comfort those who grieve today, Lord. Wrap them in Your peace.”

8. Psalm 46:1–2 (NLT) *“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”*

Pray: “You are my refuge, God. Be strength for every person caught in this crisis.”

9. 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (CEB) *“He is the God of all comfort... who comforts us in all our trouble so we can comfort others.”*

Pray: “Thank You for comforting me, God. Show me how to be comfort for someone else.”

10. John 16:33 (NIV) *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Pray: “Jesus, You have overcome. Help me take heart even when the world feels lost.”

Appendix: Scripture for Specific Crises

Additional verses to guide prayer in targeted situations

School Violence & Tragedies Involving Children

- **Isaiah 40:11 (NLT)**
“He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart.”
- **Matthew 18:10 (ESV)**
“See that you do not despise one of these little ones... their angels always see the face of my Father in heaven.”
- **Jeremiah 31:15–17 (CEB)**
“Rachel is weeping for her children... but your work will be rewarded... they will return from the enemy’s land.”
- **Psalm 91:11 (NIV)**
“He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”

Natural Disasters & Environmental Crises

- **Nahum 1:7 (NIV)**
“The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.”

- **Psalm 46:2–3 (NLT)**
"We will not fear when earthquakes come... The mountains crumble into the sea."
- **Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)**
"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you..."
- **Romans 8:22 (CEB)**
"The whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth..."

Global Conflict & War

- **Isaiah 2:4 (NIV)**
"They will beat their swords into plowshares... Nation will not take up sword against nation."
- **Psalm 46:9 (NRSV)**
"He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth."
- **Matthew 5:9 (NIV)**
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
- **Romans 12:18 (NLT)**
"Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone."
- **Revelation 11:15 (ESV)**
"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord... and he shall reign forever and ever."

Acts of Terrorism & Mass Violence

- **Psalm 10:17–18 (NLT)**
"Lord, You know the hopes of the helpless... You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed."
- **Proverbs 6:16–19 (ESV)**
"There are six things the Lord hates... hands that shed innocent blood..."
- **Luke 6:27–28 (NIV)**
"Love your enemies... pray for those who mistreat you."
- **Habakkuk 1:2–3 (NIV)**
"How long, Lord, must I call for help... Why do You tolerate wrongdoing?"

Civil Unrest, Injustice, and National Division

- **Micah 6:8 (NRSV)**
"Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."
- **Isaiah 58:6–9 (CEB)**
"This is the kind of fasting I choose: to break injustice..."
- **Psalm 82:3–4 (NIV)**
"Defend the weak and the fatherless... uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed."
- **James 3:18 (NLT)**
"Those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness."

- 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

"If My people... will humble themselves and pray... I will heal their land."

A Final Word of Encouragement

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." — John 1:5

When the world breaks, it's easy to feel like we are breaking with it. But God is not absent in the pain. He is present, attentive, and closer than we can imagine. He welcomes our questions, holds our tears, and answers with mercy that moves through people like you and me.

Remember: You don't have to pray perfectly—just honestly. You don't need to carry this alone—God is with you, and so are we. Whether your heart is heavy, your soul is weary, or you're simply unsure what to do next, let this be your starting place:

Turn to God. Speak what you can. Trust Him with the rest.

If you need someone to pray with you or walk with you, please reach out to your pastor, a trusted spiritual friend, or a counselor. Our church is here for you. You are not alone.

Thanks for taking the time to read and pray through this document. Our hope is this resource is an encouragement to your faith and help along the way as you grow deeper with Jesus Christ.

Thanks again,
Church on the Hill

*"The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." — Numbers 6:24–26*