

In light of my recent sermon series, I thought I'd provide a recommended reading list on the topic of prayer.

There are so many good books on prayer, it is hard for me to identify my favorites. The following are some of the best, but there are certainly others worth checking out (virtually all of these should be available at Amazon.com):

The Psalms -- The Bible's own "prayer book" is the best tool for prayer. Whether read or sung, the inspired prayers of the Psalter will challenge and reshape you. The Psalter is God's way of training us to pray "his way." If you pray through and meditate on the Psalter, you will find yourself talking to God about everything under the sun -- including a lot of things American evangelicals routinely omit.

You'll also find that the Psalter is something of an "encyclopedia of the soul" (as John Calvin called it), covering every human feeling and response. The beginning, middle, and end of the Christian prayer life is the Psalms.

The Book of Common Prayer -- This is one of several liturgical resources that can help your devotional life. Other traditions have prayer books as well (including Presbyterians), but the Anglicans have mastered this format more than anyone else. If you don't already have a prayer book, I'd suggest getting one (preferably a pre-1979 edition, like a 1559 or 1928). The collects, prayers for various occasions, and the "great thanksgiving" form are wonderful for family worship. Using the Prayer Book will train you in eloquent brevity in your own prayer life more than anything else. Various editions of the Prayer Book are also available online.

Martin Luther and John Calvin write on prayer. Luther wrote letter to his barber in answer to questions about prayer. It is now published under the name *A Simple Way to Pray*. It is a very short work, focused on praying through and meditating on the Scriptures. Calvin's *Institutes*, book 3, includes a fine discussion of prayer that deals with all the major questions in a helpful way.

*Prayer: Cry for the Kingdom* by Stanley Grenz -- This is a wonderful little theology of prayer. Grenz explores how prayer "works," how to pray according to God's will, and how to pray effectively. While it does not cover every question, and is slanted more to grappling with theological issues than practical ones, I strongly recommend it. If you only read one book "about" prayer, this is a very good pick. I was really surprised by how balanced and refreshing it was.

*The Message of Prayer: Approaching the Throne of Grace* by Timothy Chester -- This book is a very solid and thorough overview of the Bible's teaching on prayer. Chester works exegetically through most every major text in the Bible that bears upon prayer -- though he does not do as much with the Psalms as one might have expected. He does a fine job connecting prayer with the wider story of biblical theology and includes many helpful practical applications. This is the best comprehensive "theology of prayer" that I know of.

*Prayer: The Great Conversation* and *Prayer for Beginners* by Peter Kreeft -- Kreeft is a Calvinist-turned-evangelical-Roman-Catholic, though there is very little that faithful Protestants would find objectionable in these works. They are both short, extremely practical introductions to the Christian practice of prayer. If you're looking for a "how-to" book that doesn't short change you theologically, these books are good places to start. Either one would be a good read for a Christian struggling with prayer, or a new believer.

*Praying Backwards: Transform Your Prayer Life By Beginning in Jesus' Name* by Bryan Chapell - - Chapell is a very good preacher, especially in his ability to use illustrations to drive points home. This book is not all that thick in terms of biblical exegesis, but it's filled with stories and illustrations of effective prayer that are bound to encourage any Christian to pray more diligently. Chapell is especially strong in showing what it means to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*If God Already Knows, Why Pray?* by Douglas Kelly -- Kelly's book is a pretty good treatment of its title question, showing how God's sovereign plan includes the prayers of his people. But it's more than a raw theology of prayer -- Kelly offers several practical lessons along the way. If this question interests you, I'd also suggest reading the chapter on prayer in John Frame's new book *So Great a Salvation*.

*The War Psalms of the Prince of Peace* by Jay E. Adams -- This is an excellent introduction to the meaning of the "imprecatory Psalms" -- that is, those Psalms that call for God to bring judgment against his enemies (e.g., Ps. 109). If you've wondered what it means to pray these prayers today -- or if we should even do so -- this is the book for you.

*Crying for Justice* by John Day -- This book also deals with imprecations, but it is not as theologically rich or christocentric as Adams' book. Still, if this is a topic that troubles or interest you, it will be a helpful read.

*Prayer for Amateurs* by Jane Holloway -- Part of a larger "for amateurs" series, this book is a very compact introduction to prayer (under 100 pages). This would be a great book to give a new Christian.

There are several other books on prayer that should be mentioned here, even if only in passing. C. S. Lewis' *Letter to Malcom* is a fine introduction to Christian liturgy and prayer. *Pray With Your Eyes Open* by Richard Pratt and *Prayer* by Richard Foster are rightly considered "devotional" classics, and will help any Christian begin to pray more regularly and faithfully. E. M. Bounds' voluminous writings on prayer are still worth reading. J. I. Packer has a new book that I have not yet read entitled *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight*. It looks good. N. T. Wright has a wonderful book on the Lord's Prayer. Eugene Peterson's works on Christian spirituality and on the Psalms are great resources (e.g., *Christ Plays in 10,000 Places*; *The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*; etc.). Richard Longenecker's edited collection of essays, *Into God's Presence*, looks promising though I have not read much of it yet. If any of you have found resources on prayer particularly helpful, feel free to share them here.