

LEVELING THE
PRAYING
FIELD

*HELPING EVERY PERSON
TALK TO GOD AND
HEAR FROM GOD*

DONNA L. BARRETT

Foreword by Doug Clay

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1

Talking to God, Hearing from God

*"Prayer is the highest order
of business, for it links a powerless
human to the creative force
of God's sovereign power."*

—Dick Eastman

In an honest conversation with Tom, an over-the-road truck driver, we were talking about prayer. He said to me, "Oh, I have plenty of time to pray. I'm just not sure how to pray. I'm behind the wheel of my rig for hours on end. I pray for God to forgive me, to keep me safe on the road, to bless and help all my family members by name, and I thank Him for my blessings.

By that time about three minutes have passed, and I don't know what else to say!"

Can you relate to that? In responding to my trucker friend, I explained that prayer is the communication tool in our relationship with God, so it's like talking to a friend. I encouraged him to envision Jesus sitting in the passenger's seat of the rig and having a conversation with Him about hopes and dreams, neighbors and nations. The idea would be for my friend to say a few lines to God, then listen to what God might want to say to him.

If you feel like you don't have a clue how to pray, you're in good company. The disciples of Jesus felt the same way. That's why they asked Him to teach them how to pray:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

This passage doesn't record the prayer Jesus had just finished praying. In fact, it doesn't tell us any detail except that He was praying in a certain place. Was He praying on His knees or standing with hands raised? We don't know. Was it a long prayer or a short prayer? The Bible doesn't say. Was Jesus praying in a whisper or a loud voice? We don't know. Was He crying out to God or smiling and laughing with God? The Bible doesn't record any of those details.

What we *do* know is that when He finished praying, the disciples who had overheard Him wanted to pray, too. There was something

about Jesus' prayer that caused His disciples to say, "We want to be able to talk to God and hear from God like that." They weren't satisfied just to listen to Jesus pray, they wanted in on it! They knew prayer wasn't a spectator activity. They wanted to be personally involved. They didn't want one or

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two of the Twelve to become specialists who did the praying for the group. They asked, “Teach *us*, all of us, how to pray.”

So, Jesus provided a template for them to learn to pray. It’s brief. You can recite it as is or use each phrase as a springboard to talk to God. In that moment, the Lord’s prayer became the disciples’ prayer as Jesus taught them:

**“Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us 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, NKJV).

It's a short and simple prayer, but powerful. Note how the first five lines describe who we pray to: the King of the Universe, the one true God, our Heavenly Father whose will must be done in heaven and earth.

The second five lines describe why we pray: to ask for our daily needs, to ask for forgiveness of our sins, and to ask for God's guidance.

The last line closes the prayer with adoration and praise that acknowledges God's authority over our lives as His children.

Jesus taught His disciples how to pray by giving them a prayer-pattern that would help them create their own prayers. It's a good place to start—a launching pad to springboard you into a series of themes that are woven well together to know the Lord. You can recite the prayer word-for-word or use it as a starting point for your own conversations with God.

Intentional Prayer

Growing in your prayer life is like developing a muscle. You must be intentional to be effective in

praying. Intentional prayer is made with a plan, a place, and a personal style.

A Plan to Pray

Intentional prayer begins with a plan. I often say you can tell what a person or church values by looking at two things: their calendar and their finances. So, look at your calendar for the last month of scheduled times for activities and appointments. We make appointments with clients, the life coach, the hairstylist, the dentist, and the mechanic. Why not write in appointments with Jesus for times of prayer?

“How relational is that?” you might ask. Well, the friends I want to keep in touch with are the ones with scheduled phone appointments on my calendar, whether they live nearby or across the miles. Without a specific appointment, my friends and I might play phone tag for weeks until we give up trying, then months go by and the relationship drifts. Consider scheduling times of prayer on your weekly and monthly calendars, and keep the appointments as diligently as any other appointment on your schedule.

Coaching for Pastors



When I pastored, most of my sermons included what my congregation fondly came to know as SMWILL: "Show me what it looks like." I consistently shared from my own life or illustrations from others practical examples of how to apply the message in the sermon. Can I show you what it looks like to schedule prayer opportunities into your calendar?

A valued habit I've had since becoming a Christian at age fifteen is to block off the first full week of the new year with nightly prayer gatherings at church. The Assemblies of God fellowship I work with hosts this Week of Prayer for every church with calendar reminders and resources urging everyone to begin their new year with a concentrated focus on prayer and fasting. These times of prayer have been important benchmarks in my life: when God spoke clearly about a relationship He wanted me to end and when a career change opened the door for vocational ministry and leaving the law office.

While pastoring, I set aside time each quarter for a personal out-of-town prayer focus, whether at a cabin in a retreat center, a trip to the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, time on the beach, or a trip to a friend's house where the focus would be on prayer and God's Word. This type of thing doesn't happen without advance planning to make reservations, block out dates, and recruit a travel buddy suitable for the purpose of the trip.

As a pastor, I scheduled weekly appointments to pray in the sanctuary of our church with other ministries.

I met monthly for two hours every third Monday of the month for three years with a group that led a ministry to human-trafficking participants.

We held a time for prayer that started forty-five minutes before service each Sunday to prepare our hearts for service.

We hosted "power-lunch breaks" with prayer in the sanctuary for anyone who wanted to drop by for prayer on their noon break.

We put careful planning into the church calendar for all types of activities, so why not include planned prayer? You'll be glad you did if you plan and prepare for your own personal times of prayer.

A Place to Pray

Thankfully we can pray anywhere, but there are places that will work better than others for you. The type of place isn't the same for everyone. You might need to switch it up from time to time, and there might be several places that are great for prayer where you just naturally connect well with God when you are in *that place*. For you, it could be in a deer stand at the crack of dawn, in your vehicle, in your garage, in your basement, or in a literal "prayer closet." You don't have to pray in the same place all the time, but designating *some* place and being tuned in to the types of places that work for you can help you connect well and often with God.

For me, the place has shifted over the years. I have a "prayer chair" with a reading lamp and a place for my journal, Bible, devotionals, and a cup of coffee.

That works for a daily habit. Other places I've found to work for me have been the sanctuary of whatever church I am attending at the time. When no one else is around, I love to kneel at an altar or find a pew or chair to "crash" at and be with God. Walking on the beach (which only happens a few times a year) seems to bring tears to my eyes, and God feels close to my

**Spaces and places—
they keep prayer
interesting.**

heart. Anything outdoors, whether it's the metro parks, a chair on a back deck, a bike trail,

retreat-center walking paths, or a late-night bonfire seems to awaken my spirit to the nearness of God.

On the other end of the spectrum, it helps to keep in mind that some places are too distracting to connect well with God. You can spy out a place or two that works well for you and see if it doesn't make a difference.

I seem to have done my share of hospital visitation over the years. One time, I found myself feeling near to God in the hospital elevator as I was leaving and longed to talk to Him. Suddenly I remembered

that most hospitals have a prayer chapel, so I found it and spent time in prayer before moving on to my other activities. I've also used the prayer chapel in airports from time to time. Spaces and places—they keep prayer interesting.

A Personal Style of Prayer

Competition and inferiority can easily slip into the activity of prayer. The Bible warns God followers that “we do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). Yet we can't help but notice that some people simply find prayer much easier than others. Their passion is high. They're actively engaged. When a prayer meeting is scheduled, they will be there, on time and ready while others seem to struggle to pray much at all. What's that about?

The reasons for these differences can be practical. Some people are just more verbal and articulate, and it spills over into ease in finding words for

prayer. Some have come through dark waters where prayer got them through, and they've developed a "prayer muscle" and an experiential appreciation for prayer. Some carry more burdens and the need for prayer is high. Whatever the differences, be yourself and don't beat up yourself if prayer doesn't come as easily for you as it appears to come for others. Let yourself off the hook to be like someone else who prays and develop your own style and rhythm.

When you notice people who seem to pray easily in public and spend more time in prayer than you, thank God for them. Resist the temptation to see them as specialists even if a title or label comes their way like "intercessor" or "prayer warrior." See them as colleagues, other Christ-followers who pray, like you, and don't be intimidated. God wants to hear *from you* and speak *to you* no matter how many other people are engaged in prayer. No one can do your praying for you.

Motivated to Pray

Over the years, I've been motivated to pray by a variety of things. The logic that God knows about

situations, circumstances, and people and I don't is a huge motivator to share my life with Him. The friendship I enjoy with God grows as I spend time with Him. The needs in my life and the lives of those I love drive me to prayer. When I read in Scripture the many stories of men and women who prayed and how it positively affected their lives, I'm motivated to pray. When I realize Jesus is the Son of God and part of the Trinity and still needed to, chose to, and benefited greatly from a lifestyle of consistent prayer while on the earth, I remind myself how much more I need to see prayer as a valuable necessity in my life. Jesus is our great example, including His commitment to prayer.

Let yourself off the hook to be like someone else who prays and develop your own style and rhythm.

I'm also highly motivated to pray when I think of prayer as a beautiful act of submission. When we pray, "Thy will be done," we admit that God is in charge and we are not. This clarifies our priorities. He is sovereign; we are submitted. Throughout the Bible we see a God who guides His children to pray.

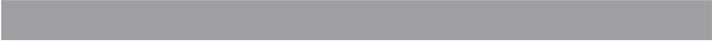
Why? Because we *need* to pray. We need His guidance and power and transformation in our lives. Without His help we will mess up and miss out on His best for us. He has consistently taught His children that when we are stymied and struggling He will provide solutions and strategies for us.



Leveling the Praying Field

In sports, there's just too many of us who watch, but never get out on the field. With prayer, don't choose to just sit in the stands. Everyone can pray.

Through prayer we are restored, and we grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). We learn to trust God for the answers we don't see. We learn to know His thoughts, and we share our thoughts with Him. For the believer, prayer is not optional. After more than three decades as a pastor, I truly know prayer to be the best work of anything we can give our time and attention to.



Questions for Reflection

- 1 What are two or three things that motivate you to pray?
- 2 What comparisons about prayer do you make with others that you want to stop making?
- 3 What places of prayer work well for you?

About the Author

At the age of fifteen, Donna became a follower of Christ at the altar of an Assemblies of God church in Youngstown, Ohio, Highway Tabernacle. Passionate about serving the Lord from the beginning of her Christian journey, she felt called to serve God in ministry, but her life took an unusual and circuitous path to fulfill her calling that only a sovereign God could have orchestrated.

In the late 1970s, with no examples of women in vocational ministry within view to guide or inspire her, Donna found herself in a career as a paralegal in a law office while volunteering at her church as a youth leader, youth choir director, and pioneer of a young adult ministry. Taking night classes, she graduated from Western Reserve Paralegal Institute, often wondering during those seven years working in a law

office if God had forgotten about her call to ministry. All the while, she was gaining experience that would serve her well throughout ministry and ultimately fit quite nicely in her present role as general secretary of the General Council of the Assemblies of God.

The opportunity to move a step closer to ministry came in 1985, when her church hired her as bookkeeper, and she enrolled in distance learning classes for ministry through Global University's Berean School of the Bible. Having completed that training, she was licensed for ministry with the Assemblies of God in 1988 and joined the pastoral staff at Highway Tabernacle Assembly of God as youth pastor. In 1995 Parma Bethel Temple (now Parma Christian Church) near Cleveland, Ohio, invited her to serve as associate pastor overseeing Christian education, pastoral care, and missions (1995 to 2002). While there, she was ordained with the Assemblies of God (1999). That step of ordination served her well when the senior pastor of Bethel Temple retired, and the church board asked her to serve as the interim senior pastor. When the church elected a new senior

pastor, Donna began exploring what would be next for her—and it turned out to be church planting.

Donna attended a church-planting training event and interviewed with her district presbytery for approval to begin this new endeavor. In October 2002, Bethel Temple released thirty-two church members and, in partnership with the Ohio Ministry Network's Church Multiplication Network, parented a new church with Donna as senior pastor: Rockside Church. Blending her experience in the business world with her love for the local church, this new assignment from God was a perfect fit for her. Located among the business professional community of Independence, a suburb known as the contemporary version of downtown Cleveland, the new church plant met in rented conference space owned by Indiana Wesleyan University. This positioned the church strategically from a financial stewardship perspective as only 4 percent of their budget went to facilities, leaving resources for 42 percent of their budget to be allocated to U.S. and World Missions. The last year Donna pastored Rockside (2017), the

church was partnering with sixty-two missionaries/missions organizations.

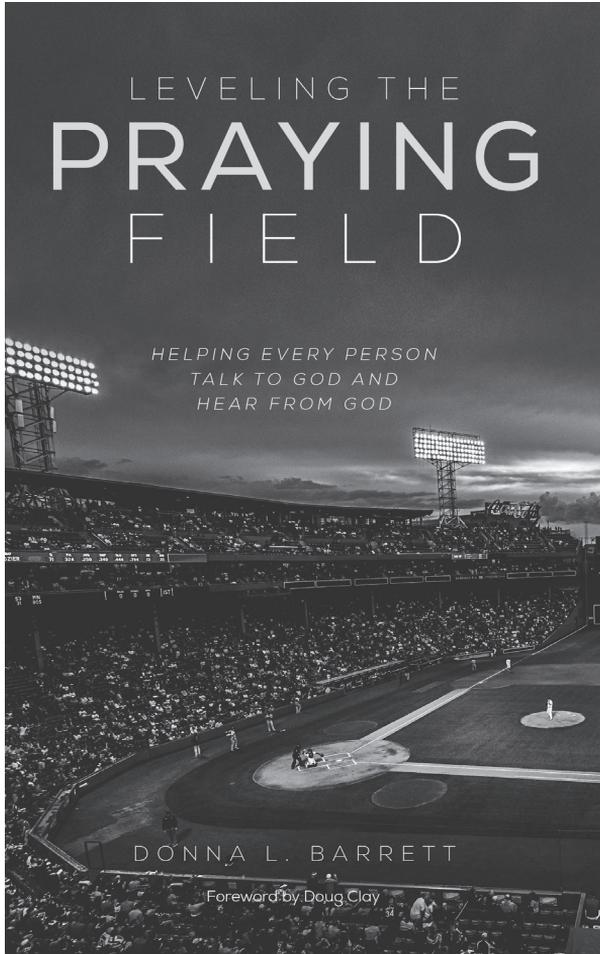
With a deep love for the local church and the network of churches collectively, Donna has served in leadership roles with the Assemblies of God as youth ministry representative in the 1980s, as district church planting coordinator (2004 to 2008), as district executive presbyter of the central region (2008 to 2012), and as general presbyter for Ohio (May 2014 to May 2018). Donna's unique ministry journey has been one she would never have anticipated, but one designed by God to prepare her for her current responsibility as general secretary of the Assemblies of God: the first female executive officer in the more than one-hundred-year history of the organization. In this role, her office stewards the credentials of over thirty-eight thousand ministers. Whether it's because she was a local senior pastor, a church planter, a female minister, a life-long learner trained for ministry nontraditionally, or because she came into ministry out of the business world, Donna is an executive officer to whom

many of the ministers the national office serves can personally relate.

On a personal side, she is single and enjoys her seven nieces and nephews and their children. In her spare time, she enjoys Martin guitars, biking, hiking, beach vacations, and the Cleveland Cavaliers. She currently resides in Springfield, Missouri.

For decades, Donna has been motivated by a passion for prayer, a respect for world missions, and a love for the local church. Her desire in writing this book is to inspire every person to talk to and hear from God, to encourage pastors who are equipping others for prayer, and to place tools in the hands of parents as the primary Christian educators and disciple-makers for their children—so that all may grow in their love for and connection with God through prayer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



For more information about this book and other valuable resources, visit www.MyHealthyChurch.com.

Did you know God wants to hear from you?

Yes, you! Prayer isn't just an activity for 'professionals' while the rest of us feel like spectators. Everyone can get in on the action! In *Leveling the Praying Field*, Donna Barrett's insights will help you to explore prayer as an unlimited opportunity to talk with—and hear from—God, and help others do the same.

If you want to go deeper, pray bolder, and see greater in your life, church, and community, I encourage you to dive into the power of prayer with this life-giving resource. It will change the way you pray!

Dr. Melissa Alfaro, Copastor of El Tabernaculo AD
Assemblies of God Executive Presbyter

Donna Barrett's genuine love for the Church and passion for prayer shine through in this practical, engaging guide.

Dick Eastman, International President Every Home for Christ
President, America's National Prayer Committee

Through reading this book the reader will be a person of prayer. Prayer brings God into our life and makes it possible for us to see miracles happen.

Rev. Thomas Trask
Former General Superintendent, The General Council of the Assemblies of God



DONNA L. BARRETT is general secretary of the Assemblies of God and serves on the Executive Leadership Team. A former church planter, Donna was founder and lead pastor of Rockside Church Assembly of God in the greater Cleveland, Ohio area. With a lifetime passion for prayer, she served as a coordinator and collaborator in her community for the National Day of Prayer. She lives in Springfield, Missouri.



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