



What can we do if we're in a season of drought or have never experienced a rich life of prayer? This book shares applicable steps to prayer. Begin to breathe again as you offer your heart, desires, and disappointments to the God who loves to listen and respond to you.

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How to Know If Our Prayer Life Has Died

I was born in Montgomery, Alabama, and born again in the same city thirteen years later. Here is where and how it happened. Cramton Bowl is a football stadium that has hosted countless high school and college football games. While I attended many exciting football games in that stadium, none of them compared to the life-changing sermon I heard one evening there in 1965 from the late Billy Graham. He had canceled a vacation to Europe and set up an eight-day crusade at Montgomery's Cramton Bowl. Nearly a hundred thousand people attended, and an estimated four thousand people accepted Christ as their Savior. This anointed preacher and Christlike man preached with integrity, and God mercifully opened my

eyes that June evening to understand the gospel. Before that evening, my desire for eternal life was only a wish, but that night it became a certainty and an understanding that it was a gift from a gracious God to one who could never earn it. This is when and how my life of prayer began.

Knowing Christ personally gave me a thirst to talk to God and read the Bible as I shared with Him my every concern. However, a lack of follow-up and discipleship led to my eventual stagnation of Christian growth. While I attempted to keep my life morally clean, I had no public witness for Christ and, at best, was a secret Christian. My life lacked any true intimacy with Christ. As I journeyed through junior high and high school and anticipated the future, I sought to plan my own life. I did not know God well enough to let Him guide and direct my ambitions. I joined the Air Force Reserve after high school, and my time on active duty awakened in me a thirst to cultivate my relationship with Christ that had begun at that gospel crusade.

As a student at Auburn University, I was experiencing God's blessing, but I knew that I was not living in a way that honored God. My life had the appearance of outward success, but inwardly I was full of fear, anxiety, and a longing for true peace. One day, I wandered into the room of

a fraternity brother. He was unlike anyone else I had ever known. He had pledged this social fraternity on a secular campus for the purpose of leading others to Christ. As I entered his room on that cold December day, he pulled out a little booklet and started sharing about the wonderful discovery of the Spirit-filled life. I did not outwardly respond, but I hung on every word he said. The only thing I knew about the Holy Spirit was what I routinely and mechanically recited at church—"I believe in the Holy Ghost." That day I sensed the Holy Spirit was a person and the resource that I desperately needed.

Since both of our roommates were graduating, this dear brother, Robert "Buster" Holmes, and I agreed to be roommates for the next year. Buster had given me a short book to read on the Holy Spirit over the December break, and the illumination and understanding came during our rooming together the next year. God used Buster to draw me into Christian fellowship and ministries at Auburn. I had found new life at Cramton Bowl in 1965, but this encounter with Buster made me aware of my need to allow the Holy Spirit, who indwells every true believer (Rom. 8:9), to become a dominant influence in my life. This book aims to help you discover if, as a believer, you also may be

grieving or quenching God's Spirit. You'll also discover how He can empower you to pray in ways you have never previously experienced. The Holy Spirit, who is called the "Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), can even resurrect a dead prayer life like He did my own.

As I observed Buster, I noticed that prayer was a natural and continuous part of his life. Therefore, I reached this conclusion: "Buster certainly knows more about the Christian life than I do, and he continuously lives his life in prayer. I guess that is what a Christian is supposed to do. Just as one eats and brushes their teeth each day, so a believer should pray."

As I completed my business degree at Auburn, I began to find joy and discovered God's power in prayer. My life was being blessed in numerous ways. I was being drawn not only to a full surrender to Christ but also to a call to a vocational ministry. I did not in any way feel like I qualified to be a minister, but shared with Buster how I thought God was guiding me. He responded, "God can use all kinds of people." That word filled my life with hope.

When I felt the need to close the door to some good job opportunities in business, I explored pursuing an MBA at Harvard University. At that time, two Harvard

MBA graduates were on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, now Cru. I would go to the Auburn University library and look at the Harvard catalog, but never had any peace about this direction. I now know more clearly that administration is not at all my primary gift. What I really wanted to do was work in a college ministry and help others experience Christ in the way that I had been helped at Auburn. The counsel of my parents and other older and wiser believers encouraged me to get training. I resisted this advice because to me it seemed like the more a person knew about the Christian faith, the less excited they were about it. Why would I want what they had? However, I desperately needed training and I eventually accepted this wise counsel.

After graduating from Auburn, I did a summer pastoral internship in Chattanooga, Tennessee, under Ben Haden. He had been saved as an adult and worked as a lawyer, newspaper executive, and with the CIA before serving as a pastor. That summer, he treated me like a son and gave much needed counsel as I prepared to attend seminary in the fall.

My seminary experience was a four-year, 120-hour program leading to a master's in theology. I studied with a true desire to learn that I had never previously experienced.

In the process of this training, I sensed a leading to go into teaching, to which I was quite resistant. The common stereotype of my fellow seminarians was that the warm- and tender-hearted ones wanted to be pastors and missionaries, and the more cerebral types desired to be professors. I felt an affinity with the former group, but God overcame my reluctance, just as He had my initial resistance to go to seminary. My professors encouraged me to apply for a doctoral program, which I did, and this resulted in two more years of training.

After these six years of intense seminary study, God graciously provided an invitation to go to Chicago to interview for a teaching position at the Moody Bible Institute. The Lord in His kindness opened this door, and this is where I have served for well over forty years.

In this pilgrimage—rooming with Buster at Auburn, doing several pastoral internships, and all my years of academic study—I sought to live a life of prayer each day. I had prayer meetings in my seminary dorm room each night and would meet with others for extended nights of prayers on the weekends. I sought to continue this discipline of prayer as I began my teaching ministry at Moody—until one day . . .

This day when I was diligently pursuing my discipline of prayer, I discovered that something had happened. I also found myself entertaining this very loud thought: “Lord, one of the greatest gifts You could give me is to take this burden of prayer off my back.” Why had it become such a burden? Because in the ten years since discovering the filling of the Spirit and the joy of prayer, I had been met with many exhortations to pray. I had discovered many things that others said were important to pray for, and I diligently sought to do so. However, on this day, I discovered that my prayer life had died even though I was very involved in the activity of prayer.

How do you know if your prayer life has died? It is when you are praying and yet are not expecting anything to happen. That is where I was. And that is why I found myself asking God to take this burden of prayer off my back.

If you had asked me to summarize the teaching of prayer that I continually heard, it would be these two things:

1. Prayer is very, very important.
2. You need to discipline yourself to do it.

These are two essential foundational truths that one must embrace for any additional prayer insight not to be

only theoretical. However, I had fully embraced these two truths and even built my life around them, but my prayer life had died.

The good news is that there is life after death. You can believe God to restore and resurrect your prayer life. Believe God for this as you keep reading, and even trust Him to use you to lead many others to experience a transformation from mere involvement in the activity of prayer to a Spirit-empowered and life-giving discipline.

For Personal or Group Reflection

Describe how your Christian life began.

How do you know if your prayer life has died?

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