

Simple Prayer: Learning to Speak to God with Ease

Available August 29, 2017

\$16, 144 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4481-4

"I think prayer is intimidating and can at the same time become well-worn for the more mature Christ-follower. This book is to be a guide to reenergize the prayer life of the reader. Simple Prayer moves us beyond our words and into a deeper intimacy with God."

— Charlie Dawes, author of *Simple Prayer*

Simple, but Not Simplistic, Prayers

I am a Cubs fan. This short statement tells you so much about me. It tells you that I am loyal. It tells you that I have the ability to believe in the unseen. To be able to faithfully root for a team that went 108 years between World Series wins requires an incredible amount of loyalty. Over the years I have learned that there are certain words and phrases that have special meaning to Cubs fans. Words that seem innocuous to most are near and dear to our hearts. Words paint pictures and invite us into experiences. For Cubs fans, words like *brick* and *ivy* bring a smile to our faces – and on the other side of the coin, words like *curse* and *Bartman* send chills down our spines.

The words we say and how we say them matter a great deal. Simple prayers are powerful because of that fact. Our words are loaded with our emotions and experiences, and when we use them we are painting pictures for people to examine and inviting them into experiences.

The Original Simple Prayer

This idea of praying short phrases or words is not new. For as long as people have been praying, they have wanted their prayers to take them beyond the surface and plunge them deep into the presence of God. Two important mystics were some of the first to pray simple prayers. The first, John Cassian (AD 360–435), was born in present-day Romania and in his youth traveled to a monastery in Bethlehem to live an ascetic life. Cassian believed that the monk ought to be attentive to God alone; this attention produces a union with God that has several forms. In his work *Conferences*, Cassian introduces the Eastern monastic practice of *monologistos* – a prayer that consists of a single phrase or word. The Jesus Prayer is perhaps the most popular monologistos.

The second mystic is John Climacus (AD 579–649), who wrote the spiritual classic *Ladder of Divine Ascent* and found the ideal prayer to be a monologistos. Climacus writes, "Do not launch out into long discourses that fritter away your mind in efforts for eloquence. One word alone spoken by the Publican touched God's mercy; a single word full of faith saved the Good Thief. Proximity in prayer often fills the mind with images and distracts it, while often one single word draws into recollection." These words redirected my prayer life.

The single-word prayer was not to be an accompaniment to but the very essence of one's breath. What is offered is not a ritualistic prayer but a rhythm of life to enter into. A monologistos serves the soul in the same manner that breathing serves the body, providing strength and vitality. The simple prayer serves as a source of life in the midst of life.

Practicing These Simple Words to Pray

I love the Hebrew wisdom literature. The honest and raw emotion of it appeals to me. The rhythm of the writing is smooth and abrupt, sometimes in the same moment. The crown

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Charlie Dawes (DMin, George Fox Evangelical Seminary) is a pastor at Metro Church DC. He was formerly associate vice president for student development at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, as well as assistant professor in practical ministries in the college of Christian ministries and religion.

Charlie has served the local church for over seventeen years as a student and young adult pastor and worship leader. He is married to Nicole and they have three children.

jewel of the genre is the Psalms. The Psalms were used in public worship in Israel as well as for private devotions. They show us how intimate and free our relationship with God can be as we share every thought and feeling with him. Among the thousands of words that the Scriptures offer us to guide our prayers, there are a few that I want us to consider and embrace as examples of a modern-day monologos—a new simple prayer in the vein of the mystics.

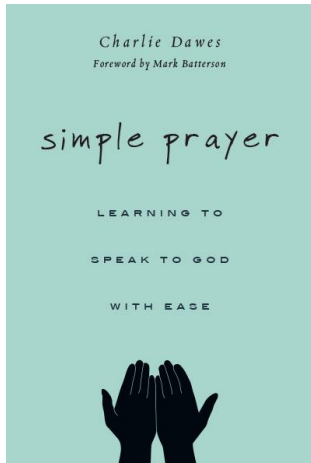
Selah. I am finding that my life is getting more and more full, often with good things—kingdom things even—but even so, there are moments when the prayer of my life needs to be a simple prayer of *selah*. When life is too good to rush by, simply pray *selah*. When there is news that is overwhelming and it is hard to find the next breath, *selah*. Life can easily be lived and not enjoyed. We can move from conversation to conversation and not allow ourselves to be known.

You know me. To be known by God is more than saying that God is aware of us; it is to say that God desires to inhabit every detail of our lives. God is not looking for a social media relationship with us, a relationship from afar. A need for intimacy is woven into us, and we all wander until we find our home in God. I remember watching the sitcom *Cheers* when I was younger. I loved when Norm would cross the threshold of the bar, and everyone greeted him with a loud, “Norm.” He was beloved, he was known. Take a moment and pray this simple prayer: *You know me*. Allow each repetition of this prayer to provide more and more assurance to your heart that you are indeed known by God. Your actions cannot undo this and you cannot earn it. You are not known as the sum of your skills or achievements. You are not embraced by the love of God because you have accumulated wealth or possess status. You are known because you are the beloved of God.

Hosanna. The cry to be saved comes from a place of desperation. This cry testifies that the present isn’t what it could or should be. It asserts that the one praying isn’t the one who can save. Like those crying out along the road as Jesus rides into town, I want to be rescued—even if I may not fully know from what.

In keeping with the Christian mystics, these single-word simple prayers are powerful for us. Like all simple prayers they create space for the Spirit to commune with us as we pray. This requires space. There are moments in our lives when we know that too much speech is harmful. Each of these simple prayers is designed to make us pause, settle in, and return. The pause is the moment when we acknowledge that we could move on from this moment but make the decision not to. Prayer is retreating from the natural world to find ourselves when we are with God. Each of these words can serve as a simple prayer. They remind us that some moments invite us into moments of pause.

— Adapted from chapter seven, “Simple Words to Pray”



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Sometimes our walk with God seems so difficult. We struggle to find the time to pray, the words to say, and the way to pray them. Are we making prayer more complicated than it needs to be? In his book, Charlie Dawes identifies simple, biblical prayers that will help you unlock the mystery of conversing with God by paring our words down to their most elemental level.

Simple prayer is far from simplistic. Instead, it will help you connect with God at a heart level that cannot be mastered with words alone.

“A Must-Read on How to Make Prayer More Personal and Powerful”

“Behind every story of redemption in God’s kingdom is some kind of story of prayer. Dawes is not just offering a kind of theology of prayer that is simple and easy. Rather, he is subversively giving us a way to experience redemption. Eat this book. Slowly. Like dark chocolate. It very well may open up an entirely new story for redemption in your life.”

– **A. J. Swoboda**, Fuller Theological Seminary, author of *The Dusty Ones*

“There are those books you read when the timing is just right and the words on a page are more Technicolor than black and white. Every once in a while, a book intersects your theology, your praxis, and our culture at exactly the right moment to produce catalytic growth and deep transformation. *Simple Prayer* is such a book. If you’re tired, worn out, and burned out on religion, this book invites you to a new, ancient way of connecting with the triune God.”

– **April L. Diaz**, leadership coach, speaker, author

“Charlie Dawes is restless and ready to walk the more difficult path, if that’s what it takes to follow Jesus. And yet his is a simple spirituality – one that begins with ‘breathe in, breathe out’ and the simple prayers that follow. The words that form his prayers are expertly woven throughout his story. Charlie is an avid storyteller – one whose readers are delighted upon finding their own story and prayer within his pages.”

– **Donna K. Wallace**, *New York Times*–bestselling author

“In *Simple Prayer*, we encounter a young man groaning for a deeper connection to God – a connection not to be gained by jettisoning his heritage among the charismatics, but one that will deepen what he already knows. Charlie Dawes discovered a simple prayer in the deepest pockets of the Christian tradition, and this led him to look for other simple prayers throughout the Scriptures. To read this book is to be challenged to go deeper with God through the simplest of prayers.”

– **Scot McKnight**, professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary, author of *The Jesus Creed*

“*Simple Prayer* has an authenticity, specificity, and electricity that is incandescent. Dawes shows how simplicity of prayer is the ultimate maturity of faith and sophistication of soul.”

– **Leonard Sweet**, professor, Drew University, George Fox University, Tabor College, author, founder of Preachthestory.com

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ENDORSEMENTS

"I've seen Charlie Dawes in many roles. Son, husband, father. Speaker, pastor, worship leader. Professor, writer, friend. In each position he functions with a creative mind and a compassionate spirit. His words can invite others into a world of Christlikeness in any area. Don't miss the chance to learn from a man who has chosen to continue learning daily in every area of life."

— **Chris Maxwell**, campus pastor, Emmanuel College, author of *Underwater*

"We live in a time when a generation is fixated on being consistently connected through the internet. It's refreshing to read a book so well written about our connection with our Creator. I believe this book will encourage people to see prayer not as a chore but as a choice — a choice that enables us to have that intimate relationship with God that he designed us for."

— **Dan Blythe**, youth and young adults pastor, Hillsong Church UK

"Prayer is the forefront of the spiritual life and essential to our development as disciples, yet practicing prayer is overcomplicated more often than not. *Simple Prayer* brings us back to the basics, encouraging us to make prayer a matter of the heart. This book paves the way for you to know and be known by God."

— **Stovall Weems**, senior pastor, Celebration Church

"This is a must-read on how to make prayer more personal and powerful. *Simple Prayer* is as practical as it is challenging, with Charlie Dawes ending each chapter actually putting simple prayers to practice. As the reader, you quickly come to realize that this is not just another book on prayer, but rather a book that leads you in prayer. You will marvel at how much more meaningful your prayer life can become."

— **Kent Ingle**, president, Southeastern University, Lakeland, FL, author of *This Adventure Called Life*, *9 Disciplines of Enduring Leadership*, and *Framework Leadership*

"As someone who uses more than my fair share of words during the day, my prayer life is similar. This book by my friend Charlie Dawes helps leaders like me understand the simple ways that the Lord allows us to know him and speak with him. And oftentimes it's with less, not more!"

— **Tyler Reagin**, president, Catalyst