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Living Prayer: A Bible Study Calling for Action

by Richard L. Bowman

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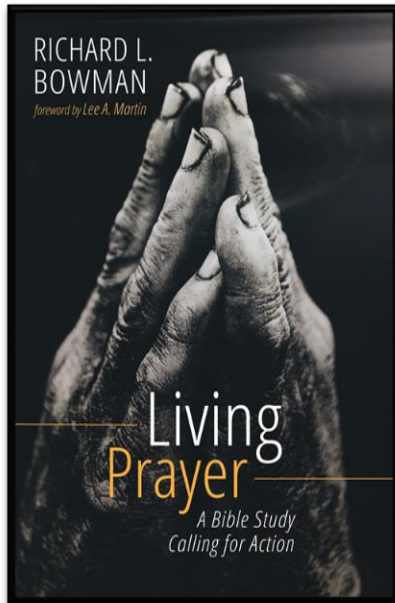
by **Richard L. Bowman**

Living Prayer: A Bible Study Calling for Action

forward by **Lee A. Martin**

How do Christian believers view prayer?

Is prayer a discipline that we need to keep learning? Is it a series of events or activities that we participate in on special occasions or during some regular time of personal devotions? Richard Bowman presents the idea that *prayer is a life-long relationship with God through the Spirit within us and Jesus as our advocate*. This concept is presented through twenty-five Bible studies plus an introductory session.



When do Christians pray?

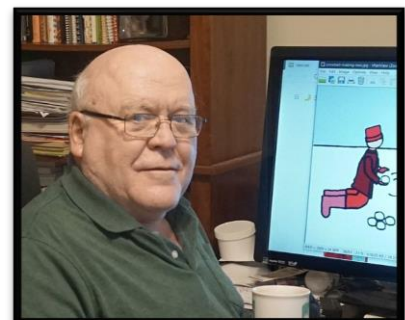
Do we only pray at our once-a-day or once-a-week devotional times? Or maybewe only pray when the Lord's prayer is recited at a public event or in a worship litany? Many of us are acquainted with emergency prayer when an accident or physical sickness involves one of our close relatives or friends. At such times we often do not trust our own relationship with God enough, so we anxiously await the arrival of a minister at the hospital bedside for real prayer to happen.

Is Christian prayer only an activity we practice in such ways, or is it more than that?

In this Bible study and devotional guide, Richard Bowman shows clearly that Jesus and New Testament church leaders taught living prayer as a way of life. Each of the twenty-five chapters includes a biblical text, some reflections on the text, and an easily carried-out assignment that leads readers into deeper conversations with the Spirit of God abiding in each of Christ's believer.

Introducing the Author

Richard L. Bowman is an ordained minister and chaplain in the Virginia Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA. Richard and Elsie, his wife, have served as mission workers in Belize and Albania for several years at the beginnings and endings of their professional careers as physics professor and registered nurse/nurse educator. Richard is also an avid artist working with photography, drawing, and web design.



Prayer is a very important part of the spiritual life for all follower of Christ Jesus, but what was the motivation for you to write this book along this theme?

Over the last several decades, I have grown to greatly value my day-to-day, moment-to-moment conversation with God. Getting my fingers dirty side-by-side with God through his Spirit, is both challenging and exhilarating. I do not know how to talk with God about all of the things that seem tough to me, but I know that God hears my groanings, my pains and my joys. With this total understanding, God then wants to work though and alongside of his human children, including me, to accomplish his will.

Does this renewed practice of “living prayer” also affect your sense of how prayer in congregations and in other public venues should occur?

It does. During these past decades, I have observed that too many Christians misunderstand what praying to God is all about. Often in our churches and in conversation with groups of other believers, we refer to the idea that we need to pray more. By implication we are indicating that prayer will bring the magic power of God into our human situations, and the solution is to pray more. And yet, if we are in conversation with God, how can we be in more conversation with the divine mover of the Universe? If God is God, then God can never be more or less than God.

Now that sounds rather complex in the midst of simplicity. So, how do you suggest persons learn more about “living prayer” moment-by-moment?

First, I am not claiming to know all there is about Christian prayer. However, I do believe strongly that active, interactive Bible study with other followers of Jesus will help us to break down the confines that our culture has erected to separate Christians from the correct understanding of what Jesus and the New Testament writers teach about being daily in “living prayer” with God.

So, how have you designed this book to be interactive for personal study and for study in small groups of believers?

Keeping the chapters short and readable is a general solution. There are twenty-five chapters each beginning with a scripture passage to read and ponder followed by three or more pages with thoughts that have stood out to me. Finally, each chapter ends with a paragraph of things to do (to consider, to comment on in a journal, and to talk with God and others about) which will enable us to begin to effectively apply “living prayer” to our lives with God.

I can see how a reader could work through this book as if it were a workbook, but I also sense it is more than that. Is that so?

Yes, I think the most effective way to use this book for Bible study and practical learning in “living prayer” is read and ponder it in a small group of other interested persons. This could span the whole age spectrum from high school through senior retirees. This could be in a Sunday school class, a mid-week sharing group, or even a breakfast or lunch Bible study group. If a chapter is studied each week, the book can be effectively studied in a half-year. Selected chapters could be explored over a weekend retreat—possibly two chapters examined on a Friday evening followed by six in three sessions on Saturday and two more on Sunday morning. My hope is that the layout for study is very flexible.

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Prayer Is Sharing Our Deepest Emotions with God

READ: MATTHEW 26:36–46

[This biblical text is printed in the book so no additional resources are needed.]

PONDER:

[Readers are urged to write down their thoughts in a journal or computer.]

What thoughts and challenges do you hear and affirm in this Scripture?

What questions come to you as you read and pondered this Scripture?

MORE REFLECTIONS:

One of my most cherished incidents in the New Testament is this one where we eavesdrop on Jesus talking to God the Father. Jesus pours out his agony and despair over what he knows awaits him the next day—fake trials and death by crucifixion. And he knows that God the Father is aware of all of this. While I have not suffered such violence, I have had times of urgently pleading with God for a certain outcome while still being committed to following God regardless of what happens. In one such case Elsie and I were asking for a marriage to be saved. But after a critical weekend of intense prayer by several of us, the couple still separated.

Some Christian believers use this text as an example showing us that God will be moved by the amount of our praying for an issue (Jesus prayed for a long time and did it three times) and the depth of our pleading with him (Jesus agonized so much that “his sweat became like large drops of blood falling on the ground” [Luke 22:44 (ISV)]). However, to me, the depth of Jesus’ emotions in this situation comes not from wanting to force God to see things his way but rather from his struggle to see things the Father’s way and his struggle to be prepared for the day ahead and all it would bring.

[. . .The in-between material is available in the book.]

Now let’s examine this incident of deep and agonizing prayer by Jesus in the context of the surrounding events as they unfolded for Jesus during the week between Palm Sunday and Easter. Remember that Jesus had a successful day on Palm Sunday. Riding a donkey into Jerusalem was the sign of an overcoming king. The Jews, who had a long history of being overrun by the Babylonians and then the Assyrians, were looking for a political redeemer or Messiah (the Hebrew word for the Greek word, Christ). During the time period between the two Testaments, the Maccabean family had freed the Jewish nation from the Greeks (under Alexander the Great and his appointed leaders), but only a short time later the Roman armies conquered Palestine. So, the Jewish people were very ready to be a free nation again.

But Jesus, during what we might call “Easter week,” kept confusing the Jews who expected a political Messiah. He forecast the destruction of the temple and the persecution of his disciples. For some this persecution would lead to their deaths (Matthew 24). [. . .] Jesus’ actions and teachings seemed confusing to everyone but Jesus. It was a strenuous and stressful week for Jesus as he tried hard to explain his mission as the Son of God to both his disciples and some non-believing Jews. So, while we do not have much

recorded of Jesus' deeply emotional conversations with God in the Garden of Gethsemane, it would seem like all the activities of the week and the days to follow would have been part of those prayers.

TO DO:

Today begin to trust God's understanding by talking with him about anything that comes along and frustrates, frightens or discourages you. Pour out all these feelings, and let God carry them for you. He loves you and wants the best for you.

Praise for *Living Prayer: A Bible Study Calling for Action*

“Richard Bowman’s *Living Prayer* is a rich study pondering the breadth of what prayer can be for those who would know Christ. Bowman would have us pray in a lively way as though God were alive, near us, and emotionally engaged in what we say. We need exercise to live into that sense of God’s presence. Thanks to Bowman for providing such. Reward awaits those who seek friendship and conversation with the One True God.”

—**James Akerson, District Minister, Virginia Mennonite Conference
Harrisonburg, VA, USA**

One might ask, “Is one more book on prayer really needed?” My response regarding this book is a hearty “Yes!” It is both a testimony to Richard’s intentional walk through life in conversation with God, and a unique encouragement to others to pursue a life of living prayer—unique because it is rooted deeply in the soil of Richard’s own life experience.

—**from the Forward by Lee A. Martin
Experienced Pastor and SWAP leader, Mennonite Central Committee
Kimball, WV, USA**



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