



Vignettes on prayer

MY JOURNEY INTO
THE HEART OF GOD

BARBARA J. JABBOUR

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I dedicate these *Vignettes on Prayer*,
firstly to my husband, who has been my example to follow
over the fifty-plus years we have been together,
and secondly to my two sons, who have brought
blessing and enrichment to my life.

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO LISA SANDQUIST for all the help she gave me in writing these *Vignettes on Prayer*. No words are adequate to describe my deep gratitude to Lisa for her labor of love.

I am also grateful to my husband Nabeel and my son Farid for their feedback and encouragement.

F O R E W O R D

BARBARA, MY WIFE, IS A WOMAN OF PRAYER. I have been a witness to her life for more than fifty years. I was a witness to her life when she prayed like many godly people for fifteen to thirty minutes a day. Then I was a witness to her life when she prayed for eight hours a day during my teaching at seminaries. I taught a course on “Islam and the Geopolitics of the Middle East,” an intensive 40-hour course at several seminaries. I would enter the classroom with my students and spend eight hours a day, while Barbara went into an office at the seminaries where I taught and spent the whole day praying for my students by name and for the Muslim world. I am a witness to her life today as she lives in the eternal dimension of life, shines in the temporal dimension, and ends up praying without ceasing. I am richly blessed. As you read these short vignettes, you will see a little of what I have been privileged to witness over the years.

NABEEL T. JABBOUR

P R E F A C E

I HAD NEVER THOUGHT THAT I WOULD ONE DAY write about my prayer life. On two occasions, after speaking about my prayer experiences, I was asked if I had ever considered putting these thoughts in writing. Each time I said to the Lord, *If this is your leading, then let someone else ask.* After the third time of being asked, I accepted that this is what God wanted me to do. The following vignettes are what I have been privileged to experience and learn as I have pursued this calling of prayer in my life.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

TWO ORTHODOX PRIESTS HAVE HAD A DEEP IMPACT on my life. The first priest visited our home when we were living in Egypt. As he was leaving, he stood, faced the east, and prayed the Lord's prayer. My hair stood on end, and I will never forget the impact of standing before a holy God. The second priest was an American Orthodox priest attending a conference in Colorado Springs. His title was *Metropolitan*. This was hard for me to remember so I tried associating it with the Metropolitan opera. The only problem was that every time I greeted him, all I could remember was opera! I shared this with him and asked if I could call him by the Arabic title of "Abuna," or Father. He said, "I would be honored." One morning at breakfast he was sharing about the life he had experienced while living in a monastery. Suddenly my heart responded with a deep desire to live like that, to be able to spend time with the Lord in peace and quiet without distraction or interruptions. But then I remembered the early mornings they kept and didn't think I could fit into that. I shared my thoughts with Abuna Jonah, and he said, "Barbara, I think these people get up even before God is awake." We laughed, but the thought gripped me. I had not always had this desire to spend time in prayer, but God had given me a special calling to prayer at a time when I was seeking to find his will for my life. I hope these brief vignettes will lead you into a greater life of prayer.

A C A L L T O P R A Y E R

J E R E M I A H 2 9 : 5 - 7 P R O V E R B S 3 : 5 - 6

I HAVE NOT ALWAYS HAD THE MOTIVATION TO PRAY. My calling in life had been clear over the years. In 1968, God called me to minister with The Navigators in Lebanon. My assignment was for two years, but God had a different plan for my life. God led me into marriage in 1970, and my husband and I had a fulfilling student ministry in Beirut. In 1974, God called us to Egypt where we ministered and served the Egyptians for 15 years starting in 1975. In September of 1990, my husband was interviewed by the secret police and was given 14 days to leave the country. This was a blow to us. We loved our time in Egypt and were looking forward to a lifetime of serving there. We spent one month in England, reuniting with our families, and then traveled to the US. We had a job offer with an Egyptian church in Canada and were pursuing that leading. Then the leadership of The Navigators asked us to consider staying in the U.S., where with our age and experience, we could have a global ministry. God confirmed this next step in our lives. It was very difficult for me to adjust to this new culture. I was lost. In my quiet time one day I was in Jeremiah 29. The title of the paragraph was “A Letter to the Exiles.” This gripped me as I was feeling just like that: an exile. As I reached verse five, I sensed God touching my heart: “Build houses and settle down.” Then in verse seven, “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” A light went on. God had brought me to Colorado Springs to pray for the city. That was my new calling and the beginning of my journey in prayer.

PRAYER

*Your plans for our lives are good, acceptable, and perfect.
Give me peace today, knowing that you are in control
of my life and circumstances.*

P R A Y E R S**L I K E I N C E N S E**

R E V E L A T I O N 8 : 3 - 4

ONE OF MY MOTIVATIONS TO PRAY IS FROM Revelation 8, where the Lamb is opening the seven scrolls and being worshiped by the angels and elders and living creatures. In this passage, an angel with a golden sensor comes and stands at the golden altar. He is given incense to burn in the golden sensor, along with all the prayers of the saints. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, go up before God from the angel's hand. As I read this passage, I remembered the smell of incense. In the Egyptian Orthodox Church, incense is burned as part of their worship service. It is an unforgettable scent, and I have found it very pleasing. Incense was also a significant part of Jewish worship in the temple. And incense was one of the gifts the wisemen brought to the baby Jesus. The prayers of the saints are like incense, a pleasing smell rising before God. The prayers of the saints bring pleasure to God. Bringing pleasure to my heavenly Father is a strong motivation for me as I pray.

PRAYER

May my prayers today bring joy to your heart.

SUPPORT FROM OUR FATHER

ISAIAH 40:28-31 DEUTERONOMY 32:10-11

I WAS ATTENDING A NAVIGATORS' STAFF CONFERENCE in Florida and was in the meeting room, waiting for the morning session to begin. Seated in the row in front of me was a father, and next to him in a wheelchair was his son. As the meeting started, the young man in the wheelchair began making noises. His father reached over and said to him, "Not yet." As we began singing, the father stood up and helped his son to stand. As he stood behind him with his arms wrapped around his chest, supporting him, the young man began joining in the singing. The noises this young man made brought tears to my eyes. I thought, *that is how my life is. I'm handicapped, needing help and support. And my prayers are like the noises this young man is making. But my heavenly Father is right behind me with his arms around me, helping me to stand. And whatever noises come out of my mouth, my heavenly Father loves to hear.*

PRAYER

Help me today to rest in your arms. Whatever today may bring, help me to remember that I am not alone, but that you are supporting me and you will never let go.

SITTING AT
THE FEET OF JESUS

EXODUS 3:5 JEREMIAH 5:22

MY HUSBAND WAS TEACHING IN A CHURCH in Austin, Texas. I was there to spend time in prayer for him and the attendees of the conference. It was a Sunday morning, and I had not been able to find a quiet spot to pray. Sometimes churches on Sunday mornings can be one of the busiest and noisiest spaces! I finally found a corner with a chair, and the spot was perfect. I enjoyed my time praying over passages of scripture for the day's events and for the church. As I was standing to leave, I turned around to gather my books and notes, and there on the wall behind me was a painting of Jesus. It was a large picture showing Jesus with the background of nature. The painting ended at Jesus's knees, and the chair I was sitting on fit under the frame of the picture. I suddenly realized that throughout my time of prayer, I had been sitting at the feet of Jesus! What a privilege we have to be so close to Jesus in our prayers and our daily living. I had been sitting on holy ground, and I could have missed realizing this. Moses in the wilderness encountered the burning bush and was told by God to remove his shoes as he was standing on holy ground. I can only remember one time I was so aware of God's presence that I removed my shoes. I long to grow in my awareness of his presence and his holiness.

PRAYER

*You are a holy God, and yet I can come and sit at your feet.
May I not miss the closeness of your presence today. May I
also remember that I am on holy ground in your presence.*

D I A L O G U E
O F P R A Y E R

J O H N 1 0 : 2 7 J E R E M I A H 2 3 : 2 9

PRAYER IS A DIALOGUE, A RELATIONSHIP. In a conversation, it is very difficult to relate to someone who does all the talking. It is a one-sided monologue. This can be what prayer is like when we come with our list of requests and talk nonstop to our heavenly Father. It's a one-way communication. In a dialogue, there is sharing, listening, and a response. I have been learning and enjoying praying over scripture. I read a passage, listen to what my heavenly Father is saying, and then I respond in prayer. Then I read again, stop, listen, and then continue in prayer. I prayed through the whole Bible with a dear friend who made me aware of praying over scripture. I'm so grateful for being blessed in this way. Praying over scripture is amazing. There is always something to pray for, either for the person or for the situation. I start at chapter one and read. Sometimes it is only one verse that I read, and my heart is gripped. Sometimes I read a whole paragraph before my heart is touched to respond in prayer to what I have read. I love prayer letters and newsletters that include verses or a passage of scripture. I know where to start as I speak to my heavenly Father on their behalf. My Bible is full of notes of people's circumstances that I have prayed a particular passage or verse for, with the date. And there are also dates and notes of gratitude in the margin when I recognize that God has answered.

PRAYER

Thank you, Father, for speaking to us through your written word, which is like a hammer that breaks the rock into pieces. Forgive me for rushing into your presence with my prayer list and not taking time to be in your presence and listen to what you have to say. Teach me how to grow in our prayer conversations with you.

F R O M D E A T H
T O L I F E

J O H N 5 : 2 1 J O H N 1 1 : 2 5 - 2 6

ON THE LATTICE WORK SURROUNDING THE SUPPORTS OF OUR covered balcony climbs a beautiful Clematis plant. Now, it is summer, and the blossoms are abundant, beautiful, and colorful. Every autumn, leaves and flowers fade and fall away, and the barren branches brace themselves for the coming winter cold. The plant looks lifeless. One of my friends and I both have brothers who have no desire to know God. They remind us of the Clematis plant that looks dead and lifeless. In the spring, amazingly, small green sprouts of life appear on the Clematis branches. The lifeless plant surges with new life. Our brothers look like dead branches, but that does not mean new life is impossible. I touch my Clematis blooms and pray for my brother. My Clematis plant gives me renewed hope for my brother's salvation.

PRAYER

Thank you, Father, that your creation reveals to us the realities of life and death, beauty and decay. Help me to believe you for those dear to me who do not know you.

KEEPING WATCH IN PRAYER

NEHEMIAH 4:1-23

IN MY QUIET TIME ONE DAY, I WAS READING in Nehemiah and reached chapter four. Nehemiah had been called back from exile to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. The walls had been broken down and the city gates burned. Nehemiah convinced the Jews to be willing to rebuild the walls and restore the gates to save the city from the disgrace it faced. The Jews and their nobles and priests and officials all agreed to work on the wall. News of this reached their enemies, who mocked the Jews with taunting and ridicule. Nehemiah stood firm, and the Jews continued building. When the wall was halfway built, their enemies were furious and planned to attack Jerusalem and stop the rebuilding process. Nehemiah was an organizer, and he took defensive steps. He positioned people at the lowest sections of the wall, posting them by families with their weapons. From that day on, half of the men did the work, and the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows, and armor. They were positioned behind the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried the materials did the work with one hand and held a weapon in the other. And each of the builders wore a sword at their side with their hands free to do the work. The men on guard held their spears from the first light of dawn till the stars appeared. As I read this, I was struck with the thought that this is a description of my prayer ministry. My calling is to stand ready, watching for the enemy and guarding the backs of those working and co-laboring with God to spread his kingdom on earth. My husband Nabeel is called to be on his hands and knees building. My role is to watch for the enemy and to protect his back and the backs of those laboring on behalf of the kingdom of God.

PRAYER

*Thank you, Father, for those who labor alongside you
in spreading your kingdom. Help me to be faithful
to pray for those you bring to my mind. Thank you
for your victory over evil.*

S T A N D I N G I N T H E G A P

E Z E K I E L 2 2 : 3 0 N U M B E R S 1 6 : 2 0 - 2 2

EZEKIEL 22:30 SAYS, “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.” When I pray, I am standing in the gap on behalf of those who do not know God. Whenever I share about this part of my prayer experience, I raise my arm and say, “Yes, Lord, I will stand in the gap for Muslims around the world and for whomever you lay on my heart to pray for.” Raising my arm is a commitment to my belief that prayer can change circumstances and people and that God’s eyes are looking for people to stand in the gap. Scripture shows us that people who have been willing to stand in the gap on behalf of others have made a difference. Numbers 16 tells the story of when God was angry with the people of Israel, and Moses prostrated himself in front of the Lord for the people. God listened and the people of Israel were spared.

PRAYER

Lord, help me be available and willing to stand in the gap on behalf of those you lay on my heart. Open my eyes to the needs around me and give me the courage to be willing to stand in the gap on their behalf.

**T H E G I F T O F
G O D ' S P R E S E N C E**

I S A I A H 6 : 1 - 3 P S A L M 4 6 : 1 - 3

I ENJOY PRAYING OVER THE NAMES OF GOD in Hebrew, especially YHWH¹ Shammah: The God who hears and is there (Ezekiel 48:35). The Almighty sovereign God inhabits the space that we live in, for the whole earth is full of his glory. The triune God (God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit) dwells in the space around us. It is easy to think of God up there, far away in heaven, but his name communicates that he is right here. We have been given the gift of God's presence. Whatever my circumstances may be at this moment, YHWH Shammah is right there. I am reminded of the picture of the two sets of footprints on the sand. There are times when only one set of footprints is seen. We often feel that we are alone in our circumstances. The one set of footprints is the time when I was being carried in the arms of Jesus. YHWH Shammah is the God who is there, whether I am aware of it or not.

PRAYER

*Thank you that you are a knowable God who is always there.
Thank you for choosing to live with us. You are there
when we are in trouble. You are there when we are lonely.
You are there when we are being persecuted. You are there
when no one else is there, and you are there for isolated
prisoners. Help me today to know and sense your presence
as I go through my day.*

¹ In the Old Testament time when manuscripts of the Torah were handwritten, they used the letters of YHWH with the vowel sounds of the Hebrew word Adonai (The Lord). This was for the purpose of reminding the readers that the holy name of God, YHWH, should not be spoken by human sinful lips. The letters of YHWH and the vowel sounds of Adonai put together confused scholars in the previous centuries. They pronounced that strange word that does not exist in Hebrew as Jehovah.

JOINING THE HEAVENLY PRAYER MEETING

MATTHEW 6:9 HEBREWS 4:16

I WAS AT WESTERN SEMINARY IN PORTLAND, Oregon, co-laboring with my husband Nabeel, who was teaching. I spent my time praying for the students, their families, and the Muslim world. I met one of the professors there who was formerly a missionary in Pakistan. She shared a story with me that has been so meaningful over the years. She said there is a prayer meeting going on in heaven 24 hours a day. God the Father is listening to our prayers, and his promise to us is that he not only hears but will answer. Jesus is our high priest and our advocate. He's praying for us before his Father's throne. The Holy Spirit's promise to us is that he will help us in our weakness and when prayer is difficult. When I go to prayer, it's like asking if I may join their prayer meeting. The triune God already knows the needs and desires of my heart, and I want to be on the same wavelength with him. Recently I learned a word in Greek that describes the Triune God. The Greek word is perichoresis, which means to dance around. Tim Keller put it well: *"Each of the divine persons centers upon the others. None demands that others revolve around him. Instead, each voluntarily circles the other two, pouring love, delight, and adoration into them. Each person of the Triune God loves, adores, defers to, and rejoices in the others. That creates a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy and love."* What a privilege it is to be invited to join that party!

PRAYER

*May I remember that today I am not alone as I pray.
May I bow my head and my heart as I join this
amazing party today.*

T H E H E A R T
O F T H E B O D Y

L U K E 1 1 : 2 - 4 I T H E S S A L O N I A N S 5 : 1 6 - 1 8

I WAS AT WHITWORTH UNIVERSITY IN SPOKANE, Washington. I was there praying for the students and the university that week as my husband taught his intensive course on Islam and the Geopolitics of the Middle East. The chapel at the university was a beautiful place, with stained glass windows and a peaceful atmosphere. My prayer times had been rich, and I had enjoyed singing the old hymns in the hymnals at that chapel as I worshiped the Lord. I was praying through 1 Corinthians, and I came to chapter 12, which covers the spiritual gifts of the body of Christ. Suddenly I had this deep desire to know where I fit into the body of Christ with my ministry of prayer. Immediately, the answer came: *You are part of the heart*. I remember falling to my knees and weeping. I have thought a great deal about this answer. By profession, I had been a nurse and had an understanding of anatomy and physiology. The heart is the engine of the body. If the heart stops beating, the body dies. Prayer is the heart of ministry. As we pray, we enable the blood of life to keep nourishing the body of Christ. If prayer stops, the body dies. With this awareness has come a responsibility that I take very seriously.

PRAYER

Dear Father, please teach me how to pray and to realize how vital prayer is to the body of Christ.

P O W E R F U L
P R A Y E R

N U M B E R S 1 4 : 5 - 2 0 A C T S 4 : 2 3 - 3 1

BECAUSE GOD IS ALL POWERFUL, HIS RESPONSE to prayer is powerful. Prayer is something that the evil one fears. If he can stop or interfere in our prayer life, he will do so. I remember reading once that there is no force on earth that can keep intercessory prayer out. Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus: “*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power (dunamis) through his Spirit in your inner being.*” Then Paul concluded his prayer with this blessing: “*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work*” (Ephesians 3:16, 20). Let this sentence sink in. God is able to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine, according to his power (dunamis) that is at work in you. On one occasion in Egypt, a young wife came to me for counseling. At that time, I was growing in my ability in the Arabic language, but I knew that I would not be able to understand her deep concerns. I relied on him who is able to do immeasurably more than I can ask or imagine. I prayed and asked God to do the impossible. I was amazed at how I could understand and speak words that I hardly knew existed. Prayer is powerful because the God who listens and answers is powerful.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, you are a mighty, sovereign God. Thank you for the gift of prayer that you have given to us. Help me today to grasp and believe in the power of prayer so that your kingdom may come on earth just as it is in heaven. I believe; help my unbelief (Mark 9:24).

C O - L A B O R I N G I N P R A Y E R

M A T T H E W 16:16 - 18

PRAYER COULD BE SEEN AS A SMALL THING compared to the magnitude of needs we see all around us. The truth of Matthew 16:16-18 gives me hope and determination as I pray. In these verses, we see Jesus's response to Peter's recognition that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God: "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of death or hell will not overcome it.*" Jesus's promise to Peter was that he is building his Church and the gates of death or hell cannot stop his advancing kingdom. Jesus is building his Church, and there is no power that can thwart that. That gives me tremendous courage. As I pray over unreached people groups, or for the everyday needs of my family and people around me, I remember that God is at work building his Church. His work may not be visible, but I know, according to his Word, that he is building, and one day we will see the results. God is at work, building his Church. The responsibility is his. I am called to co-labor in what he is already doing.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, please give me the courage to believe you for what I do not see. Help me to co-labor with you in your plans for your Church. May I pray God-sized prayers today.

P R A Y E R F U L
D E P E N D E N C E

L U K E 1 1 : 1 - 4

I USED TO HAVE A FEAR OF FLYING UNTIL GOD healed me through Psalm 36:5, “*Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.*” I had a deeper realization that there is nothing that can separate me from the love of God, whether I am on earth or flying in the sky. His love and faithfulness surround me as I fly. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, he gave them an outline and some guidelines, but he also taught by example. When Jesus was facing a decision in his ministry, or when there was a significant event, he prayed. As Jesus was praying at his baptism, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. We see that Jesus withdrew to lonely places and prayed. When facing the decision of naming the 12 disciples, Jesus prayed all night. He was praying before he taught his disciples about prayer. As Jesus was on the cross, he prayed for forgiveness for his executioners, who, he said, did not know what they were doing. Jesus lived out a life that was dependent on prayer. Before facing the crucifixion, Jesus spent an agonizing time in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, sharing his heart and soul with his heavenly Father. He battled with the devil in prayer and won. He rose from his knees spent, but victorious. We don’t have a record of how Jesus prayed during his time in the Garden of Gethsemane, except the very little recorded in the Gospels. We have his example, though, which he has given us to follow.

P R A Y E R

*Forgive me, Father for trying to think how to deal with situations or decisions before coming to you for guidance.
May the Holy Spirit prompt me to come to you first.*

S H I N I N G

L I K E S T A R S

M A T T H E W 5 : 1 6 P H I L I P P I A N S 2 : 1 4 - 1 6

I WAS ATTENDING A CONFERENCE IN TURKEY for our Middle Eastern and North African Navigators' ministries. Also attending the conference was a family from a closed country in the Middle East. They were a simple farming family, but God had revolutionized their lives. Their testimonies and their lives touched me deeply. One evening I was on the seashore praying. The sky was midnight blue, and the heavens were brilliantly lit with stars. It was a magnificent evening. As I was praying for the Muslim world, I heard someone behind me. It was the Muslim background believer (MBB) lady, whose name meant star in Arabic. As I looked at the stars in the heavens and remembered this lady, I thought of Matthew 5:16: "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" The stars in the expanse of the skies are God's lights for us to enjoy. In the same way, we are God's stars on earth. As we shine, we bring him glory and praise. This MBB family was bringing light into the dark places on the earth. I do not have recent news of this family, how they are or even about their safety. I do pray for them that their lights continue to glow in the darkness around them. As I was writing today, a picture came to my mind. I was very young and attending Sunday School. I remember singing the chorus: "This little light of mine, I will let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine." I had no understanding at that time what I was singing, but today this family is illuminating their spot in our dark world, and they understand what it means to shine for God.

PRAYER

Dear Father, may we bring light into the darkness of this world today. Help me to light up one dark spot today.

**T H E H O L Y
S P I R I T ' S H E L P**

R O M A N S 8 : 2 6

I'M SO GRATEFUL THAT I AM NOT ALONE AS I PRAY. Jesus is my advocate. He pleads for me before the Father, and the Holy Spirit is my helper and guide. Sometimes I find it hard to speak words that are appropriate for the need my heart is aching for. The ache is so deep and hurtful that I feel overwhelmed, and no words will come. The Holy Spirit takes my groaning and lack of words and prays them for me. When I think about the needs of people who are lost without Jesus, the task seems overwhelming, and I find it hard to know how to pray. But the Holy Spirit puts into words the aching of my heart.

PRAYER

I'm so very grateful that the Holy Spirit is my helper and guide. May I trust him to put into words the aching of my heart. May I open my life today to his help.

T H E
P R A Y E R C L O S E T

M A T T H E W 6 : 5 - 8 P S A L M 4 6 : 1 0

IN MATTHEW, JESUS TELLS US TO GO INTO OUR CLOSET, close the door, and pray to our Father in secret. He was showing us how to pray quietly and unobtrusively and not make prayer a spectacle like the Pharisees were doing. As I think about this, I remember Psalm 46:10, which says, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* Being in a quiet place, or even in a busy place, and choosing to go into my closet, physically or with a proper mindset, causes me to stop and focus on God. He is a holy, righteous God. As I pray, I love to start with worship. I say out loud, *“I bow my head and my heart before you. You are a holy God. I am so blessed to be able to talk with you and share my life.”* Being still and quiet before God is a deliberate action. I have found that whether in quietness or in the midst of noise, I can, with the right mindset, go into my closet and pray. I remember reading about Susanna Wesley, the wife of a preacher. They had 19 children, 10 who lived. Often, when needing to talk to her heavenly Father, she would throw her apron over her head and pray. She found a way to go into her closet. John and Charles Wesley, two of her sons, were used to bring many to Christ.

PRAYER

Help me today to find my closet, and in my prayer, find you.

C O V E R E D W I T H T H E
R O B E O F R I G H T E O U S N E S S

H E B R E W 4 : 1 6 I S A I A H 6 1 : 1 0

I HAVE A PHOTOGRAPH OF FOUR WOMEN from Afghanistan walking together. Each one is covered from head to toe with the burqas, with only their eyes visible. They even have gloves to cover their hands. I show this photo whenever I share about Hebrews 4:16. Coming with confidence before the throne of God, I can come boldly because I am covered from head to toe with the robe of Jesus's righteousness. When I pray, I am approaching the throne of God, a holy God. When my heavenly Father looks at me, he sees Jesus. Jesus has covered me with his robe of righteousness, and I may approach the throne with confidence to receive help in time of need and to have a conversation with him. There is confidence and yet an awareness that I am facing a holy God. So I bow my head and my heart before him.

PRAYER

Help me to understand as I approach your throne, Lord, that I am speaking to a holy God. Thank you, Jesus, for your righteousness that you have earned with your daily obedience, and which you have credited to my account.

O U R S P I R I T U A L P R O T E C T I O N

E P H E S I A N S 6 : 1 0 - 1 8

I WATCHED A VIDEO THAT SHOWS HOW AN ICE hockey goaltender prepares for a game. Every part of his body has some kind of protection. He goes out to face the opponents fully armed and protected. Prayer is a battleground. As we pray for people or situations in our own lives, we should be adequately prepared. The devil and his angels are a reality, and together they work to undermine and cripple the believer's life. Satan hates prayer. It is one thing he cannot stand against, so he does everything he can to keep us from praying. Paul, in his concluding chapter of Ephesians, talks about being strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. He tells us to put on the full armor of God so that we can stand against the devil's schemes. He tells us our struggle is not only against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the powers of the dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. He tells us to put on the full armor of God to be able to stand against him and his attacks. As I am visual, I like to take each part of the armor in Ephesians 6 and visually put it in place on the person or persons I am praying for. I need to remember, too, to wear my full armor. First, the belt of truth buckled around my waist. Second, the breastplate of righteousness. Third, my feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel. Fourth, the shield of faith, which can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Fifth, the helmet of salvation. Sixth, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

PRAYER

Forgive me, Father, for the times I have ignored the battle I am in as a believer in Christ. Help me today to be aware of the schemes of the evil one and to take seriously praying defensively and being fully protected.

**T H E L O R D I S
O U R S H E L T E R**

P R O V E R B S 1 8 : 1 0 P S A L M 6 1 : 3

I WAS BORN IN ENGLAND AS THE RUMBLINGS of the Second World War were being heard. I don't remember a great deal about the war, but I have a few vivid memories. We had a metal shelter, like a small room, that was put together in our living room. It was rectangular in shape with one side missing. At night, this was where we slept as a family. My father was a naval officer and was away for long periods fighting in the war. When the siren sounded, warning us of approaching enemy planes, we would all go into the shelter and wait for the sound of the all-clear siren. My mother would put her arms over us in protection, and her presence made me feel safe. One night I had an upset stomach. Our bathroom was upstairs and the shelter downstairs. As I was in the bathroom, the siren went off, warning us of advancing planes. My mother called me to come to the safety of the shelter. I can even now feel that tightness of fear in my body and the release of fear and enveloping peace as I reached the shelter. That shelter and the peace that follows is available to us today as we look to Jesus as our shelter and safety. As a believer in Christ, we have a shelter to run into and be safe. Scripture tells us in Proverbs 18:10, *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe."*

PRAYER

Thank you that I have a safe place to go today and a place where you are. Help me today to find my peace and safety in your presence.

F O U N D A T I O N O F
S A L V A T I O N

I S A I A H 5 5 : 1 1 1 J O H N 5 : 1 1 - 1 2

THE PROMISES OF GOD HAVE BEEN LIKE a foundation of solid rock under my feet. As I look back over my life, there have been pillars of rock that have been built into that foundation. My life has not been ordinary in any sense. Growing up in the war years was different. Thinking I was going into teaching, only to have that door closed, I turned my profession toward nursing. God was already guiding my footsteps even before I came to accept him as my Lord and Savior. At the end of my two years training in a college studying childcare, God directed me to study pediatric nursing. At that time, I had an encounter with Christ and my life changed forever. This happened during a meeting for students on a Sunday evening. The message was from Matthew 24:41, which tells about the coming events: there will be two women grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. I knew I had no assurance that I would go to heaven. As I was listening to the message, I sensed that this was God's call on my life. I left the meeting knowing that I was lost. For three weeks, I remember praying: *Please, Lord, don't come back yet. I know that I will not go to heaven.* After three desperate weeks, I knelt by my bed one evening and simply asked Jesus to come into my life and to cleanse me. That was in 1958. And what a joy it is to have the assurance that I will go to heaven. First John 5:11-12 tells me that because I know Jesus, I have the promise of eternal life.

PRAYER

Please, Father, give me a heart for those who do not know you and who do not understand that heaven and hell are realities. May your word be the rock under my feet today.

**F O U N D A T I O N A L
P R O M I S E S**

I S A I A H 43:1-7 P S A L M 119:105

I HAD BEEN ASKED TO PRAY ABOUT GOING TO BEIRUT, Lebanon, in 1968 to lead a women's ministry, as the long-term woman leading the ministry wanted to take two years off to study Arabic. I never had a clear yes from the Lord to go, but the door remained clearly open. I left for Beirut in August 1968. In 1969 my father was critically ill with cancer, and so I returned to England for his funeral and for my family. As I was praying about returning to Lebanon, I was gripped by the passage I was reading. In Isaiah 43:1 God says, *"I have summoned you by name; you are mine."* A light went on. I had heard God's calling on my life in the students' meeting. I continued reading, and verse five says, *"Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the East and gather you from the West."* That was my promise to return to the Middle East. God gathered me from England and planted me in the east. Promises are foundational prayers for me. I asked God for a promise for each of my sons and now for their wives and our grandchildren. I pray over these promises for their lives. My granddaughter was leaving for the University of Hawaii. We had been meeting regularly for breakfast, and on this last morning, I shared with her the promise God had given me for her. I had written it down on a card, and as I gave it to her, she kissed it and put it into her wallet. As I text with her, I share how I have prayed over a part of the promise for her. God says that his word will not return to us empty. I believe that as I pray over promises for people. These promises serve as anchors in my prayer life.

PRAYER

Thank you for the gift of your promises and the power of your words. Open my eyes today to see your promises for my life and for those people I have been praying for.

ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4 MATTHEW 28:19-20

TRAVEL REQUIRES A GREAT DEAL OF PREPARATION and planning, particularly if you are traveling internationally. You may need to apply for a visa, have a valid passport, buy a ticket, and secure a place to stay. Without these things, you can't travel. In intercessory prayer, there are no limitations or boundaries. In prayer I can go anywhere in the world without any requirements. I can go into closed countries, unreached people groups, king's palaces, and government buildings. I can reach out and touch people all over the world without leaving my house, city, or country. The world is wide open and there is no place on earth that can keep intercessory prayer out. Missionary newsletters, world news, and the newspaper open up vistas of people's needs around the world. However, knowing that our prayers have been heard and answered is not always experienced. One experience I had sealed forever in my soul that our prayers are a part of God building his Kingdom, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. We were at a conference in Egypt and needed to leave a day early for travel reasons. The other conference attendees prayed for us as we were leaving. Suddenly I felt a hand on my head. As I looked back, there was Fayza, a Muslim background believer, blessing me. I have treasured that moment—being blessed by a Muslim background believer. It was unimaginable to me in the past. I had prayed for the Muslim world for many years, and here was a woman from a Muslim background, who had found new life in Jesus, blessing me. God was gently telling me that he heard and he was answering, whether I was aware of it or not. God is building his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to believe in your power in answer to prayer and give me a heart to pray for the nations and peoples of your world. Please help me to see the world as you do and to develop a compassion for the lost.

**A H E A R T
O F W O R S H I P**

J O H N 4 : 2 3 - 2 4

BEING MARRIED TO AN ARAB AND LIVING in the Arab world made me a unique missionary. Furloughs and language study were not part of my job description. I did, however, have opportunities to travel to Europe for conferences, and I had a few hours of language study a week. During our years in Egypt, our ministry and our church worship was in Arabic. I can remember vividly the sermon where I put my hand on Nabeel's arm as he was writing the translation of the sermon for me and told him, "It is okay. I understand." I learned a precious lesson during those early years attending church in a foreign language. Why was I attending church? Was it only to benefit spiritually, or was it to worship God? I learned I could worship God from my soul and leave church blessed. Today my primary reason for attending church is to worship. If I am blessed, that is a bonus, not an expectation. As we are older now, my husband and I are the only two people in the car as we run our errands. One of our practices is to pray together during these times of being outside the house, which can be a busy place at times. As we go to church on Sunday mornings, we pray for the pastor and the messages and for those people that God lays on our hearts. We also pray that we would worship God in Spirit and in truth. I look forward to my spirit rising in worship as I sing and participate in the service.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, help me to grow in the wonder of worshipping you.

A L I F E S T Y L E O F W O R S H I P

M A T T H E W 10:29-31 I S A I A H 1:18

THE PREVIOUS VIGNETTE WAS ABOUT WORSHIPING God in church, but today my mind has moved me to write about living a life of worship. As I am a visual person, God's creation leads me to worship him as the Creator. We live in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, so north, south, east, and west, you see the wonder of what God has created. We also have the wonder of many different types of wildlife that walk through our landscape. I have seen a young doe with her two fawns frolicking in my backyard. I had the privilege of seeing a mother bear with her cub and laughed at the playfulness of the cub. They live by the will and kindness of our heavenly Father. Nobody feeds them, but they grow by the kindness of God's provision. I am moved to worship a God who cares for a sparrow and knows when it falls to the ground. As I write today, the landscape around my home is snow-covered. The rocks, dirt, and crevices are now blanketed in beautiful white snow. Isaiah uses this thought to describe our sins: *though they are like scarlet, they will be white as snow*. God speaks to us through his creation. May we be listening and looking today. The Lord's prayer begins with worship: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." May worship become more and more my lifestyle.

PRAYER

*Dear Lord, open my eyes and my heart to worship you
in my prayers and in my life today.*

P R A Y E R
W I T H O U T C E A S I N G

1 T H E S S A L O N I A N S 5 : 1 6 - 1 8

I WAS ATTENDING A CONFERENCE RECENTLY and was asked to share on prayer. It is interesting the questions I was asked afterwards. They were mostly on the mechanics and activity of prayer. However, over the years I have come to experience that prayer is a relationship and not only an activity. When Paul in First Thessalonians talks about praying without ceasing, I understand that prayer is a continuous part of my life. I talk to the Lord when I wake in the morning, as I shower and dress. As I go through my day, he prompts my heart with topics and his Word. Most mornings before I get up, I sit on the side of the bed and say out loud, “*I believe, and I belong.*” This is my commitment to spend my day in conversation with my heavenly Father. Some days my heart is burdened for people and places, and then the burden lifts and I move on. People have asked me, *How do you know when to stop praying for someone or something?* It is when the Lord lifts the burden and the topic of conversation changes. It may come back again. There are ebbs and flows in my prayer life, and I follow how the Lord is leading. As I have been doing corrections on this manuscript, I have been talking about it with the Lord. As I am cooking, I am talking to him, asking him that the food will bring pleasure to my husband or my guests. I see birds on the bird feeders outside my kitchen window, and I thank the Lord for his care of them and for the pleasure they bring me. As I get into my car, I thank the Lord for his provision and for safety in driving. I allow God into my day and exercise my mind to include God in however the day turns out. I am caught up in a conversation that is everlasting, yet always new.

P R A Y E R

*Dear Lord, help me to listen to what you are saying
and to follow your lead throughout this day.*

G O D A N S W E R S**P R A Y E R**

J A M E S 5 : 1 6 J O H N 1 5 : 7

PRAYER TAKES COMMITMENT, TENDERNESS OF HEART, and courage. James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. I used to think that a righteous man was a very holy and special person, but I have come to appreciate that everyone who has put his faith in the Lord Jesus and has repented of sin is declared righteous. My prayers are effective and powerful if I remind myself that I am in Christ and therefore covered with Christ's righteousness. When I am in Christ, clothed in his righteousness and praying, at times I might experience something miraculous happening. At other times I pray trusting God that he will sift through my prayer and do what he does, whether I am aware of an answer to prayer or not. As I was rereading this vignette, I asked myself, *Is this your experience or is it just words?* I tried to recall a specific incident or time where I had seen the miraculous happen, and nothing came to mind. Prayer may be answered in a miraculous way, but for most of us, it is believing the words that Jesus has shared with us and praying over them in response. As I see in my Bible margins, so many answers have come, and there are many more that I have not recorded or were not seen. I believe prayer is powerful—and so is the evil one who will do anything to prevent us from praying. John 15:7 says, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”* What can you believe God for today?

P R A Y E R

*Dear Lord, give me the courage and patience
to believe in you today.*

L I V I N G
T H E N E W L I F E

E Z E K I E L 3 6 : 2 6 2 C O R I N T H I A N S 3 : 3 H E B R E W S 8 : 1 0

MY HUSBAND AND I HAVE BEEN READING Dwight Edwards' book, *Revolution Within*, with several people on Zoom. In the past, I would pray that God would create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me, as in Psalm 51:10. I have come to understand that God has already given me a new heart on the day I had an encounter with Christ. I need to remember to appropriate this truth. Do I see myself as a sinner who is trying hard to become a saint? Or do I see myself as a saint with carnal flesh who often sins? My sin is already forgiven in Jesus. Confession restores my relationship with my heavenly Father and brings us back into fellowship. Sin does not now separate me from my heavenly Father. I can come directly to him in prayer with confidence and peace. As Ezekiel explained, Jesus has written on my new heart his laws. The old heart is now offset by the new heart. I need to believe this truth in the way I think about sin.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to grow in believing that sin can never separate me from you. Thank you, Jesus, for what your death has given to me.

O U R
C O N Q U E R I N G G O D

H E B R E W S 1 2 : 1 4 - 1 5 P S A L M 2 3 : 4 I S A I A H 6 4 : 8

GOD IS THE CONQUEROR. I REMEMBER A TIME in Egypt when someone hurt our family very deeply. I was really struggling to forgive this person. I was standing on our balcony one evening and I prayed, *Dear God, please conquer me, and enable me to forgive. Please be YHWH Elohim to me.* About a week later, I met the son of the person who had hurt us. I was amazed at myself. I was smiling and asking how he was. I suddenly realized that the hurt and resentment had gone. God had conquered me. One of the blessings in allowing God to conquer us is that we experience forgiveness and freedom from bitterness. Being freed from bitterness is a gift. Hebrews tells us that when we are bitter, many people's lives around us are affected. Difficult times in all shapes and sizes are part of living in a fallen world, but God uses these difficulties to make us more like Jesus. God is the potter, and I am the clay. If I remember that he is always in the picture and that it is his loving hand shaping and molding me, it gives me hope. Not seeing God in the picture may lead to bitterness. God's presence gives me hope and frees me to be able to forgive.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, may you always win the battles in my life. Please guard my heart and mind from bitterness.

R E S T I N G I N
G O D ' S S O V E R E I G N T Y

R O M A N S 1 2 : 1 - 2

GOD IS SOVEREIGN. HIS WILL IS GOOD and acceptable and perfect. I learned a deep and lasting lesson on God's sovereignty during my night duty as a nurse in Lebanon. One night, an 18-month-old child was brought in with convulsions. I was a trained pediatric nurse and knew what I should be doing. The medical intern on duty that night did not seem to see the seriousness of this situation. I could hear the child going into a convulsion or fit by the noise she would make. I tried so hard to do what I could to keep that child alive. The toddler died that night and I struggled: *If that baby had been treated by an experienced physician, she might not have died.* I was judging the care the child received. God touched my heart that night as I was reminded that he is God and life and death are in his hands. He is sovereign, and I may not have understood what happened, but I bowed my head and my heart before him as the sovereign Lord. My responsibility that night was to do what I had been trained to do. Life and death are in his hands.

PRAYER

Lord, I may not always understand what is happening in this world. Help me to do what I know I should do and trust your sovereign will for the outcome.

O U R P A R T I N
G O D ' S M O S A I C

1 P E T E R 2 : 1 1 H E B R E W S 1 1 : 1 3

I LEFT ENGLAND IN AUGUST 1968 AND HAVE LIVED in four different countries since that time: Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and now the United States of America. Over the years, I have faced many adjustments in fitting into a new culture and many challenging circumstances. One day I was sitting on my balcony, spending time with the Lord, talking to him about my struggles. The Lord brought to my mind two things. First, being uncomfortable is not a negative feeling. We are pilgrims on this earth. We will never be completely comfortable until we reach heaven. Second, each one of us is part of a mosaic that God is creating. Each one of us has a special shape and color to fit into the final mosaic. I may not experience comfort in my circumstances, but my shape and color is a perfect fit with what God is building. There is a purpose and meaning in how my life is being shaped and colored. Isaiah 43:7 says, “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” I am here in Colorado Springs to bring God glory, nothing more and nothing less.

PRAYER

*Forgive me, Father, for wanting to belong to this world
and settle down to it as if it is my final destination.
Thank you for reminding me that in this world I am a
sojourner. Please be YHWH Nissi, the Lord my banner,
my identity. May I find my peace and joy in you today
and not in where I am or who I am.*

A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

Barbara Jabbour was born in England in 1938. After high school she became a pediatric nurse in London. In 1958 she put her faith in Christ; two years later she met and was discipled by The Navigators. The Navigators asked Barbara, in 1968, to move to Lebanon to lead the women's ministry in Beirut for two years. There she met Nabeel Jabbour, and they were married in 1970. For five years Barbara and Nabeel worked with college students in Beirut. In 1975, they moved their family to Egypt, where she thought they would live for the rest of their lives. But in September 1990, Nabeel was expelled from Egypt and blacklisted. Barbara, Nabeel, and their two sons moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, in January 1991. In 1992, God gave Barbara a special calling to a life of prayer. In these prayer vignettes, you will learn about Barbara's journey.

Vignettes on prayer

MY JOURNEY INTO
THE HEART OF GOD

NABEEL JABBOUR, BARBARA'S HUSBAND WROTE:

Since her conversion, Barbara prayed like all Christians do. But after we had to leave Egypt and come to Colorado Springs in January 1991, Barbara struggled because she missed our grassroots ministry in Egypt. One morning God gripped her heart with a text in Jeremiah 29:4-7 where God told her that it was he who brought her to Colorado and to settle down, seek the welfare of the city... If it prospers, Barbara too will prosper. That was the beginning of her focused journey that started in 1991 and continues until today. Her special burden is prayer for the Muslim world. When I taught my intensive course at seminaries in five days, eight hours a day, I would go to a classroom with my students and Barbara would go into an empty office at the seminary and she would pray for the students and the Muslim world eight hours a day. She was my Moses and I was her Joshua as she "lifted up her arms in prayer."

At times when she starts an extended time in prayer, she does not rush into God's presence with her list of requests. Instead, she knocks at the door of heaven and asks the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit if she could join in their conversation. Prayer for her is journeying into the heart of God.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara Stair was born in England and was a nurse by profession. She was disciplined by The Navigators in England and was sent by The Navigators as a missionary to Lebanon in 1968. In 1970, she was married to Nabeel and became Barbara Jabbour. In 1975, Barbara, along with her family moved to Egypt as missionaries with The Navigators. In January 1991 they moved to Colorado Springs after they had to leave Egypt. In Colorado she was surprised by prayer as she continued with sharper focus her journey into the heart of God.

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ISBN 978-1-7374990-1-5



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