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# Seeking God's Help

Take a minute and think about the past...are there losses that still give you pain when you think about them—the loss of a person, a friendship, an opportunity?

Think about the future...are there things that you're worried might happen—either to you or to someone you love?

Think about the present...

- Are there things in your life that are going wrong—things that have you feeling frustrated, upset, or discouraged?
- Are you feeling uncertain about a decision you have to make?
- Are there people that you dislike or avoid being around because they've hurt or offended you in some way?

If you're like most people, you can answer “yes” to one or more of these questions.

And somewhere deep in your heart, you probably know that the only way to truly overcome these feelings is to seek God's help.

This book was created to help you do that. It's not a typical book that you read through and put on the shelf. Instead, it's like a toolbox with six tools (called *spiritual practices*)... six tools that you learn how to use, and then use again and again whenever you need God's help.

## Four Features

There are four features that make this book easy to use.

**Stories:** Each spiritual practice (except the last one) is prefaced by a short story, designed to help you visualize what it looks like to learn and use the practice.<sup>1</sup>

**Instructions:** At the end of each story is a set of simple instructions that helps you prepare yourself to begin learning the practice.

**Steps:** The spiritual practices themselves are made up of a series of steps. These steps are what you use when you are alone with God.

**Tabs:** Each of the six book tabs takes you directly to the first step of a practice, making it easy to use the practices over and over again.

## The First Few Weeks

In the first few weeks, for deep learning to take place, you need to spend some concentrated time with each practice. The recommendations that follow will help you to accomplish this.

- 1. Involve others:** The first recommendation is to find two, three, or four other people who want to learn the practices at the same time as you. Our experience has shown that a 3- to 5-person small group offers the right

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<sup>1</sup> All the stories feature someone learning the practices with others (in a small group). While forming a group is not necessary, we do encourage it and wrote the stories with that in mind.

amount of encouragement and support to make for a great experience with the book. *(To learn about how to use this book in a small group, go to the “Essential Practices Groups” section at the back of this book.)*

- 2. Take your time:** The second recommendation (whether you do this by yourself or in a small group) is to proceed slowly, spending two weeks with each practice. This will give you the opportunity to use the practice 5-10 times, which is important for gaining insight on how and when to use the practice in your everyday life. It will also give you the chance to experience how God changes your heart when you come to him for help.
- 3. Stay the course:** The third recommendation is to stay the course. This book is new, it's different, and it may seem too simple. Our experience has been that people who just stepped into it, and didn't overthink it, had some of the most life-changing experiences of all.

Once you've spent concentrated time using the practices, your ability to seek the Lord's help and have an intimate and genuine relationship with him will grow. You will have a practical, Christ-centered way to deal with your losses, sadness, worries, anger, frustration, indecision, and resentments.

And you will understand what the psalmist meant when he wrote in Psalm 121: *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

**WHAT SHOULD  
I DO WHEN  
THINGS ARE  
GOING WRONG?**



PRACTICE 1

# Praise

# Dave's Story

“No, shine it a little higher...up here!”

“Honey, I can't see what you're looking at.” Cathy was less than excited about filling the role of “flashlight holder” while her husband lay awkwardly under the kitchen sink. “I told you my brother said he would be happy to come over.”

“I don't need your brother to fix a simple leak under the sink. Just shine that light up here.”

Clang! Cathy heard the wrench fall.

“Ouch!” Dave exclaimed. “I just sliced my thumb. That's great!”

Crack! Cathy tried not to let out a giggle as her husband's forehead didn't quite clear the opening of the cupboard. Dave jumped up not sure whether to hold his bleeding thumb or throbbing head. In his anger he kicked the cupboard door and let out a word that Cathy hoped the grandkids didn't hear.

“Nice, dear,” Cathy said as Dave left the room.

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The other guys were chatting and drinking coffee as Dave arrived at his men's group meeting looking a tad frazzled. Brad was the first to notice the large bandage. “What happened to your hand, Dave?”



“I went a few rounds with the kitchen sink...unfortunately the sink won,” Dave said with a sheepish grin.

The group started and after, Irv, their leader, explained how they were going to use Essential Practices, he directed their attention to the first practice. He told the guys that the practice was praise and that it was the spiritual practice the Bible calls us to use when things go wrong in our lives.



Dave walked in the door and gave his wife a kiss on top of the head as she read the paper.

“How was your meeting tonight?” she asked.

“It was good. I’m excited about the practices we’re going to be working on,” he said as he poured a glass of iced tea. A minute later he was sitting next to her on the couch, opening the sports section.

“So what’s the first practice?” she asked.

“Praise,” Dave answered.

“What do you mean?” she looked up.

“Like, when things go wrong. The practice is praise.”

“Wait, you’re telling me the practice is that when something goes wrong in your life, you are supposed to praise the Lord?” She looked incredulous.

“Exactly.”

“Oh, *this* should be good.”

“What?” he said with a chuckle.

“You know *what*. That temper?” Cathy said with one eyebrow raised.

“Oh, I just get a little mad sometimes. Honestly, I think I can do this,” he said confidently.

“Don’t get me wrong, there’s no one who would be happier to see your tirades comes to an end, but I guess I’m a little skeptical.”

“Well, you wait and see. I just might surprise you on this.” He gave his wife a playful swat with the newspaper as he stood and headed back to his den.



The next morning Dave got right on it. Although his primary motivation was his commitment to the Lord and the group, he also wanted to show his wife he could do this. He read through the story and the instruction at the end:

*Go off to a quiet place with this book. In prayer, ask God to help you identify things in your life that are currently going wrong and/or things that are currently less than ideal. He may bring to mind things as small as a little annoyance or as big as a personal tragedy.*

*Write down in the space below the things that come to mind. Try not to stop until you have a list*

*of eight to ten. (This may take more than one session of reflection.)*

*When you are ready, select a situation from your list.*

Dave started his list:

1. Curt's resentment toward me for divorcing his mother. I miss him and wish he was a part of my life.
2. Lower back pain that makes it hard to sleep.
3. A cramped house from Tara and her boys moving in with us.
4. Cathy and I don't get a lot of time alone since we are helping out with our grandsons.
5. Busyness of another tax season and keeping the office running.
6. The increased lease payment for CPA office.
7. Our larger clients having trouble paying us on time or at all, stretching our ability to pay our employees and all our expenses.
8. The neighbors lack of attention to their yard and landscaping. It looks terrible and makes our house look bad.
9. Once again, I might as well give up watching sports because my team has been eliminated from playoff contention and the season isn't even half over.

Feeling satisfied about his list so far, Dave read the first step: "In prayer, let go of your desire to understand why this happened." He looked further down and read, "By

sacrificing our desire to understand everything, we begin to act out our belief that God is loving and all powerful. We are turning away from the problem, turning toward God, and trusting him.”

“Hmm...” The step had Dave’s attention. He turned to the next step and read, “Let go of your expectations to have a life without problems.” Below was the explanation, “By sacrificing our expectations for a life without problems, we continue to act out our belief that God is loving and all powerful.”

Dave stopped and thought. At first, it seemed a little intimidating, but, as he thought, it actually felt a tad liberating. “Of course I am not going to live a life without problems,” he said to himself. “Why am I so surprised when they happen? And why do I get so mad about it?”

The third step read: “Praise God and acknowledge that he will bring something good out of this situation.”

Next, he read, “Continue to praise God, even if you don’t see a change in your situation.”

Dave picked up his list and immediately looked at number two: “Lower back pain that makes it hard to sleep.” This had been such a point of frustration for him. It was bad enough being an accountant working sixteen-hour days with April fifteenth approaching, but then many nights he could only sleep a few hours because of the pain.

“I’d like to be a more content person—even when I’m experiencing back pain,” he thought.

Dave flipped back to the steps and prayed through each one in regard to his back pain and difficulty sleeping.

- He prayed to the Lord, releasing his need to understand why he has had to struggle with this pain for the past seven years.
- He let go of his expectation to have a life without problems, acknowledging that this is just one of the many problems he will face as a part of life on Earth.
- He praised God for his goodness, wisdom, and power, and for his love and grace that he has given Dave so freely. He acknowledged that it has been hard for him to see how it could happen but that God is able to and will bring about good from this trial.
- Finally, he prayed for the strength to wake up with a word of praise on his lips every morning, regardless of how he slept the night before.

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“You’re home early,” Cathy said as she greeted Dave with a kiss.

“I just had to get out of there. The phone has been ringing off the hook. I needed to get away to wrap up a few accounts by the end of the day,” Dave replied, pouring a cup of coffee and heading back to his den.

It wasn’t long before two boys zoomed into the room. “Papa...you play?” asked Dave’s three-year-old grandson Jackson, who was carrying a whiffle bat and ball.

“I wish, buddy, but Papa’s very busy with work.”

Just then Cathy came down the hall, “All right, sluggers, we’re going outside. Your Mom will be home soon.”

Jackson quickly turned, and, when he did, his bat smacked Dave’s fresh cup of coffee, spilling it on the stack of papers he brought home and then on his lap.

Dave leapt to his feet, wincing in pain from the hot coffee, “Jackson, get out of here!” he exclaimed.

Both boys rushed out of the room in tears. Cathy looked at Dave and then followed the boys.

Dave sat back down, frustrated. His entire morning had gone into that stack of papers, and there they sat, soaked from the coffee. In the other room he heard the boys crying. He thought to himself, “How many times has my anger gotten the best of me when things don’t go my way?” He thought of the many times his own children ran from the room crying because Daddy was frustrated or angry again. He let out a weak sigh.

Dave prayed, “Lord, I let go of my desire to understand why this happened and I let go of my expectations to have a life without problems.” He picked up the dripping stack of papers, “Lord, I praise you because you are good and you will bring something good out of this situation.”



When Dave’s group met, each man admitted how hard it is to praise the Lord when things get tough. Dave shared the ups and downs of his week. He highlighted how God used the experience of the coffee spill to teach him about how his

anger had impacted and strained his relationships with those he cared about the most. “It was a painful lesson,” he shared with the other guys, “but this was the first time I was really able to see the impact of my anger.”

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“Sure is a nice day today, Dad! Wish you could join us,” Tara said as she headed toward the door. She and Cathy were taking the kids outside to play in the back yard.

“Hey, this is my last working weekend,” Dave told his wife. “After Monday, another tax season is in the books!”

“I suppose so. You know, I really should be used to this by now,” she answered.

“Well, there’s no reason I can’t let a little of that spring air in. Besides it would do me some good to hear the boys having fun out there.” Just as Dave opened the window, a gust of wind came in and blew stacks of papers off his desk and across the floor. Cathy braced herself, waiting for the explosion. To her surprise, Dave quickly, but quietly, closed the window and moved to the floor to pick up the papers.

Pleasantly surprised that there wouldn’t be an outburst, she kneeled down to help her husband clean up the mess. “Who are you?” she asked with a grin.

“I don’t know, but maybe this praise stuff is making a difference.”

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The room was quiet.

Dave checked his watch and let out a deep breath. He held Cathy's hand. A few moments later the doctor came in and sat down. Dave could tell by the look on his face that he would be receiving bad news.

"Well, what's the word?" Dave asked.

The doctor paused. "It's not good," he said with a sigh. "The cancer has spread and we found spots in six different places in your body. It's spreading and growing quickly."

"Give it to me straight. Don't sugar coat it." Dave looked the doctor in the eye.

"By looking at your results, our best guess is that you have six months to a year," the doctor said.

"Can you give us a minute?" Dave asked.

The doctor nodded and quietly left the room.

Dave held his wife as the news sank in. He reached out to motion for his two children to come closer. He reached up and wiped a tear from his daughter's face and then gently rubbed his son's shoulder. "I think we need to pray," Dave said.

"Lord, right now, we let go of our desire to understand what is happening and why my cancer has returned in this way. I let go of my expectation that I would have a life without problems. I praise you because you are good, you are wise, and you are with us, even now.



“Lord, time and time again you have brought something good out of our trials. You have softened my heart. You have brought my family back together. You have shown me your presence. In this experience I acknowledge that you will bring something good out of this diagnosis and however many days I have left.

“By your grace, Lord, we will praise you for every day you give us together. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.”

# Preparing to Learn

After you've read the story, go off to a quiet place with this book. In prayer, ask God to help you identify things in your life that are currently going wrong and/or things that are currently less than ideal. He may bring to mind things as small as a little annoyance or as big as a personal tragedy.

Write down in the space below the things that come to mind. Try not to stop until you have a list of eight to ten. (This may take more than one session of reflection.)

When you are ready, select a situation from your list.

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# In prayer, let go of your desire to understand why this happened.

## Why is this step important?

By sacrificing our desire to understand everything, we begin to act out our belief that God is loving and all powerful. We are turning away from the problem, turning toward God, and trusting him.

## Praise | Step 2

# Let go of your expectations to have a life without problems.

### Why is this step important?

By sacrificing our expectations for a life without problems, we continue to act out our belief that God is loving and all powerful. Again, we are turning away from the problem, turning toward God, and trusting him.

# Praise God and acknowledge that he will bring something good out of this situation.

## Why is this step important?

As we praise God and trust in him, he brings good out of a bad situation, no matter how bad it is.

In 2 Chronicles 20:21-22, we see an example of the power of praise: *After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever." As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*

# Continue to praise God, even if you don't see a change in your situation.

## Why is this step important?

Hebrews 13:15: *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.*