

Rigorous Prayers for Life's Greatest Challenges

*Taking It to
Our Knees*



Craig D. Lounsbrough, M. Div., LPC

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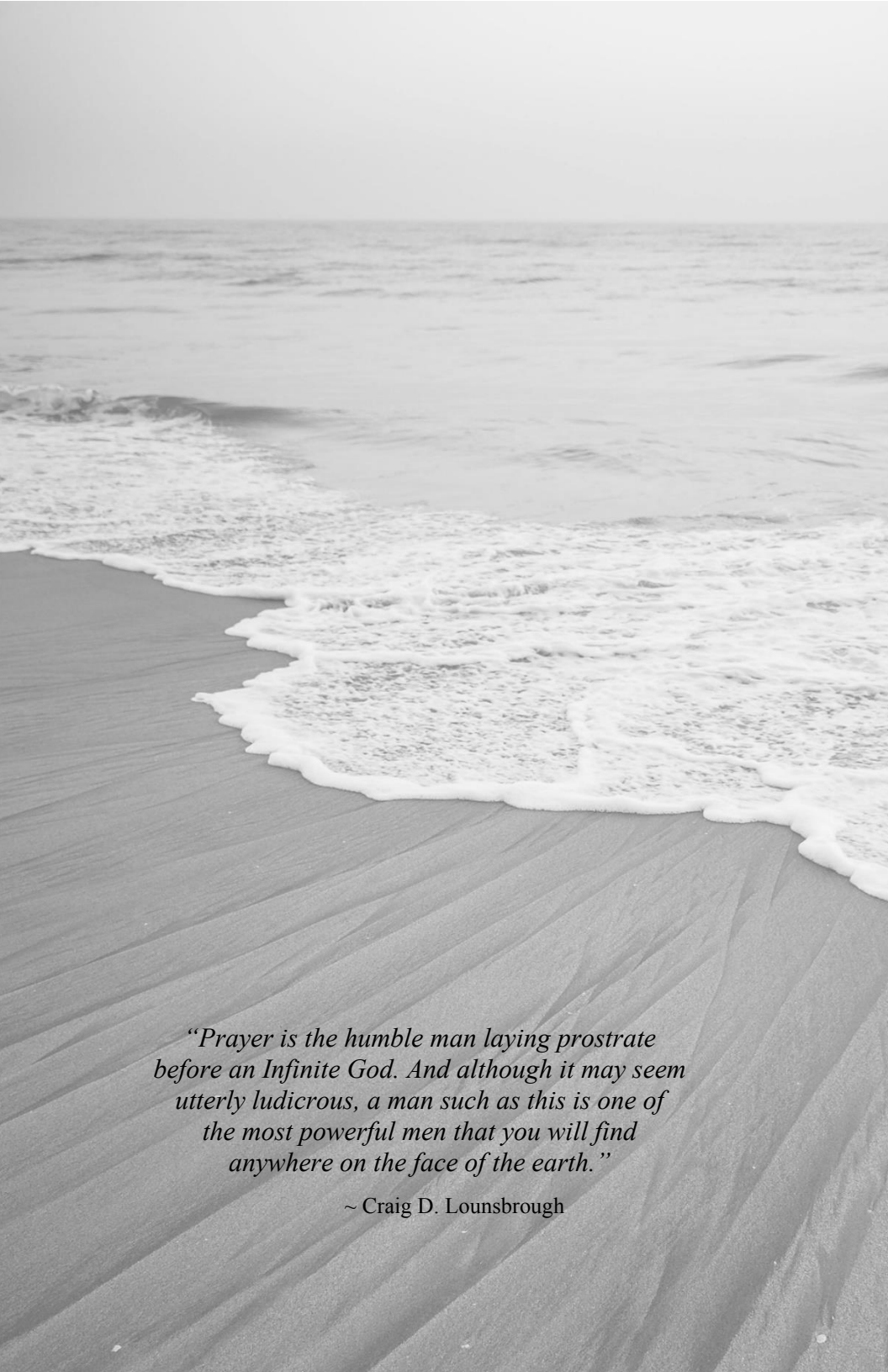
By Craig D. Lounsbrough

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Section One

Chapter 1

Reshaping Our Understanding of Prayer

A black and white photograph of a beach. The foreground shows the sand with distinct, parallel ridges or tracks. In the middle ground, waves are breaking onto the shore, creating white foam. The ocean extends to the horizon under a pale, overcast sky.

*“Prayer is the humble man laying prostrate
before an Infinite God. And although it may seem
utterly ludicrous, a man such as this is one of
the most powerful men that you will find
anywhere on the face of the earth.”*

~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

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We all have some conceptualization of prayer. How that developed is different for each of us. However, it might have developed, that conceptualization shapes both our discipline of prayer, our habits around this discipline, as well as the degree of passion that we bring to that discipline.

What Prayer Has Become

It could be said that prayer has become something lackluster, outdated, rendered a formality rather than a reality, and frequently marginalized in today's Christian circles. Sure, on occasion we pray as some sort of tired ritual in a church service, or at a funeral in an attempt to say something nice at time when things are not nice. It's that obligatory thing that we create a place for when the occasion presents itself, but it's rarely that thing that we develop a passion for as each new day presents itself.

Or prayer is that thing that we ignore until we're unexpectedly served with divorce papers, or find out that the diagnosis is terminal, or realize that our job is going to fall victim to yet another merger, or we fallen back into our addiction yet again. Prayer turns God into some sort of first responder that we dial up when the world's on fire. And when it's not, we never pick up the phone.

Outdated and Antiquated

Through our own lack of understanding and discipline, we have granted prayer the characteristics associated with some antiquated religious monk stolen away in some secluded monastery off in the woods. Prayer sits on the far fringes of life as some traditional nicety that we toy with when we're not wrestling with bigger things. It might serve a purpose in life's special moments or in the midst of life's most dire emergencies, but even then we're not all that confident that it actually brings anything to either. To varying degrees we've

rendered prayer as culturally outdated, logistically outmoded, a backburner endeavor, and far too simplistic to grapple with the monumental realities that are part of living in the 21st century.

Prayer is that seemingly vague and mystical discipline that's so ethereal that we haven't been able to figure out how or where to grab hold of it in order to bring it to bear on our circumstances. Life's running way too fast, or way too hard, or way too hot for us to have any reasonable amount of time to master this discipline, much less spend any time in it. So we hurriedly gather up the lesser things that we've declared as the important things, and we head off on some mission that is doomed to everything except success.

The Power of Prayer Forfeited

Prayer is not the frontline stuff that we bring to the battles. It's the invincible first wave that we typically never assigned to any wave. It's the force that we absentmindedly forget to bring to the battle despite the fact that it is lethally designed to cut the enemy lines to pieces before any of us can even step out of the trenches. It's the thing that sets legions fleeing in fear, but it's the thing that we set off to the side. In essence, we have come to view it as limp, less than viable, and nice but ineffectual.

Jesus As Our Example

And if that was His chosen modality to launch such a monumental cause, then I think we'd be wise to pay a bit of attention to that. In a world that discounts the spiritual disciplines as anemic, passive and antiquated, Jesus drew upon it as the essential thing without which His ministry could not proceed nor hope to succeed. And from those first forty days forward, He rigorously retained prayer as a central and indispensable part of His ministry right up to the day that He prayed to His Father in His last moments on the cross.

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A Needed Reshaping

Therefore, I would be entirely remiss not to begin this book by reshaping our understanding of prayer. In taking on that endeavor, I may do nothing more than tweak your view a bit, or I might radically alter it altogether. I have no idea how this is going to play for you. However, I want us to be grounded in what prayer 'is' and decisively move away from what it is 'not.' I want us to abandon all lesser ideals and embrace prayer as the potent and indispensable power that handily moves everything that would dare to step in its path. I want us to engage this book understanding the indescribably immense power that we wield when we fall on our knees and lift our voices.

To achieve that endeavor we might begin by asking what prayer is, but also what it isn't. What is this phenomenal thing that we have been privileged to do? How have we diminished it by adding our own contrivances to it, or attempting to tame it so that it walks in-step with our anemic agendas, or secularizing it to make it more palatable to the masses? What is prayer, and what is it not?

The next two chapters will briefly take up this issue as a means of deliberately seizing your conceptualization of prayer, unashamedly stripping it of what it's not, and delivering into the heart of your prayer life a cleaner and more robust understanding of prayer is. By engaging in this brief but pointed renovation you will find the prayer journey in this book more enlivening and life-altering.

You will find a more detailed dialogue presented in the next two chapters. However, to set the stage for this renovation, I would have you consider the following:

- Prayer is courageously living out our faith in the real world. It is not some ascetic exercise carried out in some mystical nether world.
- Prayer is a natural connection to a marvelous God, not an academic pursuit.
- Prayer is the rawness of the soul connecting with the goodness of God, not an obligatory tip of the hat.
- Prayer is discovering what we were built for, instead of questioning if we should have been built at all.
- Prayer is the activity which before all other activities, movements, people's and nations will bend if we just bend our knees. It is not some anemic exercise helplessly held within the four walls within which it was prayed.
- Prayer is not a lifestyle that we learn. Rather, it is the life that we were born to live.
- Prayer is not a formula that we concoct, but an intimacy that we develop.
- Prayer is not the last resort. Rather, it is the first step that will never leave us facing a last resort.
- Prayer is not the thing that we squeeze into our day, but the thing that squeezes everything that would kill us out of our day.
- Prayer is not a discipline, but a manifestation of our love for our God that results in a discipline.
- Prayer is the choice to invade the impossible, not live out our lives hampered by the probable.

I would suggest that you take a few moments to ponder these points before moving on to the next chapter. I would let them begin the process of reshaping your understanding of prayer and the manner in which you will engage this incredible privilege from this moment forward.



30 Days of

Prayer

Craig D. Lounsborough

Day 1

Betrayal Is the Manifestation of Someone's Greed, not a
Commentary of Our Worth

“After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit,
and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you,
one of you will betray me.’”

~John 13:21

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Betrayal is intentional...ruthlessly so. It is the deliberate choice of someone to hold their interests as so superior to our well-being that the cost of crushing us in order to advance their agendas is deemed as entirely reasonable and indisputably acceptable. In this horrifically devastating scenario, we become fodder in someone's blind pursuit of objectives that such an action will, in fact, never achieve.

Once the perpetrator comes to understand that both the agenda and the means chosen to achieve it accomplish neither, they will quickly fabricate a distorted narrative crafted to sustain the acceptability of what they've done. Such a short-sighted effort will demand repeated editing as the narratives cannot keep step with the ever-emerging realities of the betrayal. And herein the betrayal multiplies as the increasingly frustrated perpetrator fruitlessly attempts to justify choices that are ever more intensely being revealed as flawed, failed, and beyond the scope of every fresh iteration.

Yet, we are not human fodder. Betrayal is not a reflection of who 'we' are. It is, in fact, a reflection of who 'they' are. And although the person who betrayed us will adamantly deny such a reality, we must remember that this is simply a failed means by which the betrayer will work to justify unjustifiable actions. You are not human fodder. You are not refuse to be discarded at someone else's whim. Quite the opposite...you are a child of God. You are a manifestation of His amazing ingenuity. You are cherished royalty. You are a one-of-a-kind person with a one-of-a-kind calling. That is who you are.

“Each and every day take the time to tell your children the great people that they are so that they don't grow up living each and every day thinking they're the bad people that they're not.”

~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

Morning Prayer

Dear God:

It is likely that the one who betrayed me is already experiencing the pain of an agenda not achieved and is even now working diligently to avoid that reality. I know that they will work to keep the consequences of their choices at bay, and I know that they will ultimately fail in achieving that goal. And whatever all of this does to them, it is my prayer that they may surrender to those realities and in doing so find their way to You.

As for me, heal the wounds within me, for they are deep. You say that You “heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds,” and I believe that You’re doing that right now because You promised to. And in the healing, may I come to understand myself better, may I grow as I press in and through this time in my life, and may I find myself turning to You with an ever-increasing intensity and ever-growing commitment. I know that my heart will be peppered with hate and I will tend toward revenge as that is part of my humanity. But as this happens, build within me an ability to see the other person as a wounded human being who has only served to increase their own woundedness. And may that soften me sufficiently to begin to forgive them, knowing that such an action will not come easily, but it will come.

I pray all of this in Jesus’s Name. Amen.

A Thought to Carry with Me Today

“No betrayal is so big that God’s commitment to us and presence within us is not bigger.”

~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

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Before this day, I release to God...

Evening Prayer

Dear God:

As this day closes, so does my anger and my hatred. I believe that throughout this day You have been at work in my heart. I thank You for a steady healing, as incremental as it may be at times. I thank You that You are building within me the ability to forgive even though I am very resistant to it at times. And I am deeply appreciative that You are gradually creating within me the ability to see the amazing future that You have already created for me.

With You, an ending is always a beginning and it is never otherwise. And as I end this day, I look forward to the beginning of tomorrow and every tomorrow after that. Grant me a peaceful sleep that arises from a peaceful mind and ever-settling heart.

I pray all of this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

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Day 2

The Aching Void of an Absent Parent

“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will
hold me close.”

~ Psalm 27:10

There are many things that are meant to be forever. There are those things whose permanence in our lives is never questioned because they are designed to be permanent. Their role in our lives had nothing of a temporary nature built into them. Therefore, we have no reason to doubt their permanence. As such, we never stop to consider what life would be like without them because such a thought is entirely at odds with their permanence. Yet, we live in a world where permanence can be traded for lesser agendas and what should never have left us does.

When a parent abandons us, the immense internal conflict of their supposed permanence as held in juxtaposition against their absence rocks our world to dark places. In our desperate efforts to correlate the irreconcilable discrepancies of permanence as held against abandonment, we rationalize the loss of the parent or we work to suppress the pain by denying the loss altogether. We work to believe that this might be better anyway, or that they were going to leave sooner or later, or that they needed their space to live their lives. Yet we soon discover that no rationalization is ever big enough or convincing enough to release someone of a commitment for which there is no release.

And in the desperation of times like these we begin to realize that we've turned to God because He has remained permanent. It is His permanence that becomes our sure refuge. Our sense of stability arises from His stability. Our ability to somehow craft a future empty of a parent that should have been part of that crafting is centered on the fact that God is a certain part of that future as much as He is a part of the present that is shaping that future. And we have the certainty that He will never abandon us in either.

“At the point that I can look into my children’s faces and say that my life is about their lives, I have finally come to

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the point that I can now start becoming a parent.
And if I've not reached this point, I might be
a parent by birth but it all ends there."

~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

Morning Prayer

Dear God:

I am lonely. The people that were supposed to be here...are not. You know the reasons that they've left, and You know the hole within me that their departure has created. You know how dark this hole is and how impossible it feels that it will ever be filled. You also know the hole within them that caused them to leave. You know that the hole within them will never be filled by their choices. And You know that even though the hole within them and the hole within me are very different, they are both in desperate need of healing.

And so, I'm asking You to fill the hole within both of us. You know that it's hard for me to pray for the hole within them, but I know that for myself to heal in the way that I want to heal I must pray for their healing as well. They ran 'to' something because they were running 'from' something. Help them stop the running and start the healing.

Dear God, I believe that You can do more than just fill the hole. You said that you will "supply all [my] need according to [Your] riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This need is big. It's bigger than any collection of words could ever hope to explain. But You are bigger. So, I'm counting on You to fill this hole, heal it, and use this experience to grow me, deepen me, better root me in You, and position me to reach others for You in ways that I could not have done so were it not for this hole.

Evening Prayer

Dear God:

Tonight, the hole is still there. But I know that You have worked out Your healing throughout the day, and You have filled it bit by bit. The journey to healing is a long one, and while that bothers me, I accept it. As much as I don't like that reality, I know that it is within the journey to healing that we grow. And although I am frequently resistant, I am willing to take that journey because You have promised to take it with me every step of the way. And I have the confidence of knowing that You will never step away.

Thank You for being my Heavenly Father. You are the Infinite Parent. The Forever Father. And I know that the day will come when I will be able to approach Your great throne, crawl into the warm expanse of Your lap, and feel the embrace of a Heavenly Father who is Himself filled with the joy of filling me. On that day, all holes will end...forever. And I am thankful for that.

I pray all of this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

A Thought to Prepare for Tomorrow

“I might have my holes, but the healing of today means that they will be smaller in every tomorrow, including the one that is now only hours away.”

~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

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Day 3

Being Jesus to a Gender Confused Culture

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

~ Psalm 139:14

One of the worst things is not knowing who you are. And probably a close second to that is to hate what you do know. And right behind that there's the effort to create something that you think you'll like in order to solve both of those problems.

But all of this misses the only battle that's worth fighting, and the only effort that will insure success. Life is not about creating ourselves. Rather, it's about discovering ourselves. It's not about assuming some presumed right to make ourselves what we're not. Rather, it's about the privilege of discovering who we already are. And that journey is one of the most profound journeys that we are each privileged to take.

Yet we live in a world bent on creating what cannot be created. Certainly, we can mimic many things, but the mimicking will never make us those things. We stand by and watch those committed to becoming what they are not, realizing that the greatest pain experienced by these persons is not the struggle of loving themselves. Rather, it's the heartbreaking failure that they will experience in the persistent effort to make themselves what they are not. And the self-hatred that is certain to follow that failure will handily surpass that which drove them to this decision in the first place.

The rampant declaration to pursue such agendas and to force them on larger society illustrates the failed nature of the endeavor. It would be wise to remember that if something is based in truth it will not need us to sell it simply because the priceless nature of truth always places it beyond the reach of any such market. And one of the greatest truths that we are in desperate need of embracing is the truth of who we are, along with the equally great truth of who we are not.

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“You can borrow an identity if you want. But that’s something akin to spending the whole of your life in a fitting room full of clothes that never fit because you’re embarrassed by the ones that do”.

~ Craig D. Lounsbrough

Morning Prayer

Dear God:

There are those who can’t find who they are, or who have found themselves and are running from what they’ve found. These people are spending their lives trying to become something that they are not because they don’t like what they see. I know that our greatest satisfaction and most profound life is found is discovering who You created us to be and then spending our lives cultivating that person. I know that these are hurting people. Confused people. People embracing a path of failure. People who do not believe that who they are is adequate, appealing, authentic, or worth discovering.

I ask that You help these people come face-to-face with their true, authentic selves. And in that encounter, I ask that You help them engender a robust excitement for who they are and who that true self has the potential of becoming. Help them see the beautiful, entirely unique, and utterly fascinating person that they already are. Help them to understand that they are “fearfully and wonderfully made” in a way that they cannot afford to abandon, forsake, or diminish through lesser choices.

God, I pray for these people, as well as the ones who are watching them walk a road to their own demise. Lord, cause them to fall desperately and deeply in love with who You made them to be.

Evening Prayer

Dear God:

Today they were people who spent their resources working to create themselves rather than discover themselves. I know that they may have felt some temporal satisfaction and accomplishment in these efforts. But I also know that these feelings only belie the deeper reality that to create oneself is only to cheat oneself. They will likely not hear that from me. But I believe that they can hear that from You.

So tonight, touch their lives. Grant them an increased sense of self-appreciation rather than self-condemnation. Allow them Lord, to begin to discover who You created them to be, to find themselves enthralled and utterly captivated with that person, to be helplessly caught up in the possibilities that lay both in them and in front of them, and then grant them the resources to grow that person into Your image.

I pray all of this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

A Thought to Prepare for Tomorrow

“Although what I see in the mirror often doesn’t fit who I believe myself to be, that person provides me everything that I need to be everything that I am. And I have been granted the privilege of spending every minute of my tomorrow with that person.”

~ Craig D. Lounsborough

