A YEAR ** of ** PRAYER

John MacArthur



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A PERSONAL WORD

"His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him" (Luke 1:50).

At an appointed moment near the beginning of the worship service, a lone figure ascends the platform stairs and approaches the pulpit. His snow-white hair speaks of a distinguished and elderly soul, yet his stride and physique reveal a younger man and the all-American athlete he was in his day. To the thousands gathered in the sanctuary, this man is their beloved pastor. Their teacher. And to many more outside the walls of this building he is a world-renowned theologian and Bible scholar. An author of esteemed repute.

To be sure, he is all of these to us as well. But John MacArthur is a man whom we love as no other. He is our dad.

We're preacher's kids. We wear the same label today that we wore as young children. And because we have been a part of a church where our dad has been the pastor since 1969, we have been surrounded all our lives by people who knew exactly who we were.

"You're Pastor MacArthur's daughter, aren't you?"

"You must be Dr. MacArthur's son; you look just like him."

As the years went by and each of us married, our spouses joined us, grafted in and belonging to the preacher. Then, one at a time, our own children became part of that family circle as well.

The preacher's extended family.

You have heard jokes about the stereotypic preacher with incorrigible kids lurking in the shadows or waiting out church services in the parking

lot. Perpetual troublemakers who would prefer being anywhere but in church and *anything* but the son or daughter of the man in the pulpit.

That's not how it has been for us. Ditto the spouses and grandchildren.

Each of us has willingly drawn ourselves into the congregation that is Grace Community Church, participating in worship and volunteering for special places of service where we have been called. Our own walk with Christ has been profoundly informed by our dad's expository approach to preaching, unpacking the Word of God verse by verse.

As little ones, sitting with our mother, her open Bible and notebook reminding us what a student acted like, we read along. We listened. We took notes. As John and Patricia MacArthur's children, truth poured over us, shaping our understanding of God from the days when our feet could not reach the floor. When the time was right, we were led to kneel before a holy God and receive the gift of His salvation for ourselves.

In addition to our father's teaching gift in the pulpit, we have also been instructed and inspired by his prayers. Every Sunday at Grace Community Church, an important part of each worship service is the pastoral prayer. When the time comes for this to take place, our dad, the shepherd, steps toward the pulpit as though he's approaching the Throne of Grace. In fact, this is exactly what he is doing.

Those gathered in the sanctuary pray along silently as our dad prays with deep respect and tenderness. They quietly come alongside the man in the pulpit as he thanks God for His grace and the incomprehensible gift of Jesus. Solid theology is forged into these people as their pastor prays.

This is no casual exchange, and they know it.

For us who lived in the John and Patricia MacArthur home, the pulpit wasn't the only place that we heard our dad pray. Nearly every morning of our growing-up years, breakfast together was nearly sacramental. The morning meal our mom had painstakingly prepared was thoughtfully laid before us. No hasty bagel or splash of juice at our house. Then dad usually read a portion from Scripture and often a few paragraphs from a classic devotional. And then he would pray.

Even when we were very young, we listened attentively to our dad speak

to his heavenly Father. We listened and we learned of God's grace through these humble prayers. And we began to understand who Jesus is and what He had done for us.

Our theology was shaped by the words our dad prayed.

Sitting around the kitchen table, we heard dad's words of gratitude for the privilege of being adopted into God's family. We heard expressions of his love for the Bible and the church around the world and for the people who were the congregational family at Grace Church. His transparency disclosed his own disappointments, and his faith unpacked his sheer confidence in God's providence.

In his prayers, our dad was carrying our family into the holy presence of the sovereign God of the universe.

This was no casual exchange, and we knew it.

You may have heard our dad on the radio or seen him standing in the pulpit. For our entire lifetimes, however, we have known and watched him when the microphone was unplugged all week long between Sundays. We have witnessed his tenderness with our mother, his confident discipline with us when we were disobedient or defiant adolescents. We have heard his enthusiastic cheers from the stands from T-ball to professional sports. And we have been the recipients of his affirming words and tender affection. His generosity with his calendar and resources are legendary.

By God's grace, our dad has been what he preaches.

We have seen the discipline of his pastoral study of God's Word, during which he remains focused for countless hours in preparation of opening and explaining the Scriptures to us and others.

And we have heard him pray.



A few years ago, a friend approached us and asked what we thought about our dad's prayers being transcribed and published so others could read them. We felt an immediate mix of emotions. We agreed these prayers should be put in print—and we had our children's children in mind here—but we hesitated, because we suspected that our dad would resist. We knew his thoughts regarding the sacredness and propriety of a person's personal dialogue with the Father.

So we talked it over with him. As we anticipated, dad pushed back, not enthusiastic about memorializing something so intimate. Respectfully, we asked him to pray about it and consider the loss for those who would never hear or read these prayers if they were not published. We encouraged him to allow his prayers to be available in print—not only for our own posterity but as a legacy for those of his friends around the world who would be instructed and inspired by them.

After some time, dad finally agreed...with one caveat. He asked that his children write this introductory note to the book and explain that it was our desire that he put his prayers in black and white.

As you open this book and begin to read and to experience these prayers, you will understand what we have said here about these words expressed to a sovereign God from the heart of one of His servants. These are the prayers of a warrior for Truth. For our family, these are the prayers of our dad, a gentleman who would never be presumptuous in any way. He continues his ministry to all of us from a position of humility and thanksgiving as he stands before a holy God.

And now we are pleased to be able to share these prayers with you. Because they were delivered to thousands of worshipers simultaneously by way of a microphone, they have been adapted somewhat to enhance the experience of reading them in your personal time of devotions. We hope that you'll be encouraged—and transformed—in your own time before the Throne of Grace, just as we have.

God bless you, Matthew MacArthur Marcy Gwinn Mark MacArthur Melinda Welch

PREFACE

There is great power in godly prayer. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man [or woman] availeth much" (James 5:16 κJV).

You are no doubt convinced of that already since you are reading the preface to a book that seeks to lead you to the throne of grace, where God's people may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our times of need (Hebrews 4:12-16). That plural pronoun *us* is all-important because it follows the pattern established by our Lord Jesus Christ in answer to this momentous request from His disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Ponder anew the comprehensive scope and majesty of what has become known as The Lord's Prayer:

- Our Father, who is in heaven, (The Paternity of Prayer)
- Hallowed be Your name. (The Priority of Prayer)
- Your kingdom come. (The Program of Prayer)
- Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (The Plan of Prayer)
- Give us this day our daily bread. (The Provision of Prayer)
- And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (*The Pardon of Prayer*)
- And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (*The Protection of Prayer*)
- For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Consider how strange and self-centered this would sound instead: "My Father, who is in heaven...Give me this day my daily bread. And forgive me

my debts, as I also have forgiven my debtors. And do not lead me into temptation, but deliver me from evil." We who love the Lord can't help sensing that the most vital things we need to pray about go way beyond ourselves, our desires, or our own will. The Spirit within us compels us to lift up our brothers and sisters in Christ at the same time. This book is all about helping us, as God's people, to pray like that more than we actually do. Because we are fallen creatures, we wrestle constantly with a natural temptation to focus on self and immediate circumstances rather than fixing our hearts and minds on what our Lord said we ought to pray about. That's one of many things that make prayer such a difficult discipline for most of us.

I have been preaching from the pulpit of Grace Community Church for more than forty years now. From the very beginning, one of the most sacred and enjoyable parts of our public worship services for me has been the time when we as a congregation come together before the throne of grace. In our normal order of service each Sunday, the pastoral prayer is immediately preceded by a reading from Scripture—normally a full chapter or the equivalent. My prayers usually echo truths that are highlighted in whatever passage of Scripture we have just read together.

Many members of my flock through the years have told me that the pastoral prayer is a highlight for them each week. Over the years I have lost count of the number of people who have suggested that we should publish a collection of pastoral prayers in the form of a devotional book. Other urgent writing projects have kept me from the task until now.

In all candor, I've also been somewhat hesitant to publish a book of prayers because of the many ways prayer books can be (and often have been) abused. These prayers are not intended to be recited by rote. And I would hate to think anyone might say these prayers publicly in a merely ritualistic fashion. Remember that Jesus warned against vain repetition and showy, grandiose prayers (Matthew 6:5-8).

Remember also, however, that Jesus then immediately gave His disciples the most famous prototypical prayer of all time to teach them how to pray (verses 9-13). Clearly, there *is* a right and useful place for model prayers. They help us learn how to pray and what to pray for. They encourage and

assist us in those times when "we do not know how to pray as we should" (Romans 8:26). They help us order our arguments (Job 23:4) when we want to plead our case before the throne of grace but can't seem to find the words.

Spontaneous prayer can be wonderfully passionate and expressive. Most of our praying should be the extempore outpouring of hearts that are always seeking God. But there is also a legitimate place for organizing our thoughts and planning the words we will take before God's throne—particularly when the prayer is for a time we have set aside specifically for worship, either in private or in the midst of a congregation.

Composed prayers have the advantage of being more thoughtful, more to the point, and (when used rightly) less repetitious. Here, for example, are two brief, classic prayers written by Thomas Cranmer for the Church of England's first Book of Common Prayer:

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Your ways, like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devises and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things that we ought to have done, and we have done those things that we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us. But You, O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders. Spare those, O God, who confess their faults! Restore those who are penitent according to Your promises declared to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for His sake, that we may hereafter live godly, righteous, and sober lives to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

Imighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your holy name through Christ our Lord. Amen.¹

^{1.} The first prayer is a general confession. The second is a prayer of humble access. Both prayers were written by Cranmer for the 1549 edition of the prayer book. Seven years later, Cranmer was martyred for his faith when Mary Tudor, the elder daughter of King Henry VIII, made a bloody but unsuccessful attempt to destroy the English Reformation.

Notice the brevity and simple elegance of those prayers. The phrasing is wonderfully compact, and many of the expressions are borrowed directly from Scripture. Remember also that in the classic English of the King James Version, the prayer Jesus gave His disciples (Matthew 6:9-13) is only five sentences in length, comprising 66 words. In prayer, true eloquence and long-windedness are antithetical.

Despite my concern that prayer books can easily be misused in a way that fosters ritualism and religious formalism, today's evangelicals seem far more easily tempted by superficiality, self-indulgence, and prayerlessness. We need to pray more; we need to give more careful thought to the content of our prayers; and we need to spend more time preparing our hearts and our tongues for prayer. It is with that in mind that I offer this book.

These prayers are written with the hope that you will read them prayerfully. The prayers that follow have been selected from a span of several years, and the Scripture reading that preceded each prayer is included as well. To prepare your heart, carefully read the passage of Scripture first—and keep your Bible open nearby as you read each prayer. I've included a few footnotes giving cross-references to key verses that are alluded to in the words of the prayers. Follow the trail of those cross-references, and I think the exercise will deepen and enhance your prayer time.

My own preparation for prayer has often been greatly helped by resources like Spurgeon's published prayers¹ and my favorite collection of Puritan prayers, *The Valley of Vision*.² You may recognize some vocabulary and phrases adapted from those sources and others like them. I have benefited greatly from seeing how great men of God in earlier generations conveyed truth and passion in the simple, picturesque language they used—wholly apart from whatever nuances of expression they might have brought to their prayers through audible cues like volume, tone of voice, inflection, and emphasis. Reading some of their prayers in plain printed format is itself

C.H. Spurgeon, The Pastor in Prayer: A Collection of the Sunday Morning Prayers of C.H. Spurgeon (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004); Spurgeon's Prayers (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2003).

^{2.} Arthur G. Bennett, ed., The Valley of Vision (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975).

a great lesson in how to pray—and a sobering rebuke for the clumsy and slapdash way we sometimes do pray.

In my public prayers, I've always made a conscious effort not to cater to our generation's penchant for superficial, repetitious, and tacky idioms. If the prayers in this book motivate you to be more prayerful, assist you to be more expressive, or remind you to be more thoughtful in your personal prayer life, I am richly rewarded for my labors. May you be even more richly blessed by the magnificent King who invites us to His throne of grace!

> Sincerely in Christ, John MacArthur



PRAYERS ON WORSHIP AND THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD



WEEK 1

ADORING OUR ADVOCATE

1 John 2:1-19

y little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven

you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.



OUR GRACIOUS GOD, we thank You for our heavenly Advocate,

Jesus Christ the righteous, whose death on the cross

made propitiation for all our sins—

perfectly satisfying every demand of Your holy justice.

It is He who brought us

out of guilt and into forgiveness,

out of darkness into light,

out of our rebellion and into Your love,

out of death and into life.

He delivered us from this evil world, into Your glorious kingdom.

How we praise You for the wonder of Your love in Jesus Christ!

We thank You for sending Your Son, the Incarnate One,

who was despised, rejected, beaten, mocked, and crucified—all in order to atone for our sin.

In Him Your love has outloved all other loves.

Your mercy extends beyond comprehension to sinners with complete and permanent forgiveness of our sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

We therefore long to love You with a love like Yours.

We know that is not possible, so with the apostle Peter

we plead that You would know our hearts, knowing we truly love You in spite of what it often looks like.¹

Our hearts are too much like stone; we ask that

You melt them with Your grace.

Our private lives are too often gated and locked as if we could shut You out and thereby do what we want.

Help us throw open the door and lose the key! May Your will rule our lives.

We worship You, Father, for Your great love and the gift of Jesus Christ, Your only-begotten Son, which is to say God the Son.

We praise You, Lord Jesus, for the wondrous gift of salvation You provided for us.

We adore You, blessed Spirit, for revealing to us the truth of the gospel and for making our hearts Your dwelling place.

Heavenly Father, in us may Your Son see the fruit of His soul's anguish and be glad.²

Bring us away from all that we falsely trust, and teach us to rest only in Him.

Never let us be calloused to the astonishing greatness of the gift of salvation.

May we pursue sanctification—ever-increasing holiness—with all our might!

^{1.} John 21:15-17

^{2.} Isaiah 53:10-11

Lord Jesus, Master, Redeemer, Savior, take possession of every part of our lives— Yours by right through purchase.

Sanctify every faculty.

Fill our hearts with hope.

May we flee the many temptations that relentlessly hound us and mortify the sins that continually plague us.

May there be no hypocrisy in us.

Help us trust You in the hour of distress.

Protect us when evildoers pursue us.

And deliver us from the evil of this present world.

Dear Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow, we confess that You alone are the giver of every good and perfect gift, and You have given us so many things, richly supplying us with things to enjoy.²

And we are reminded by the passage we have just read that the greatest gift of all is Your Son, Jesus Christ,

who sacrificed His very life in order that we might be freed from sin's bondage.

Fill our hearts with gratitude, and may our lives reflect overflowing thankfulness so that all who see may honor You.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

^{1.} James 1:17

^{2.1} Timothy 6:17

WEEK 2

YEARNING FOR CONSTANT WORSHIP

1 John 2:20-29

You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.



DEAR FATHER, we thank You that by Your mercy and grace, through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ, Your Son, we have come to know You.

At the moment of salvation You anointed us by Your Spirit, who remains forever with us to teach us to understand Your truth.¹

You have drawn us by the power of the gospel to the light of Your Word.

You have given us grace to receive the truth—

we who were so deeply defiled by our own guilt;

we who were once condemned to destruction

under the righteous demands of Your justice.

Our very souls were corrupt; we lived in rebellion against Your law; our minds were hostile to Your truth; and our very lives were an offense to Your holiness.

We were hopeless until You gave us an eternal hope.

You have saved us by Your goodness, grace, and mercy.

But You sent Your Son to be our Savior—to rescue us from sin's power by taking our guilt on Himself and dying to pay sin's awful price.

Mercy and truth thus met at the cross;

righteousness and peace kissed each other.2

Your wrath against sin was perfectly satisfied;

Your justice was fully vindicated;

Your truth was forever established;

Your grace was brilliantly magnified;

and all the demands of Your law were perfectly fulfilled.

In the process, You lovingly brought us

into a place of safety, honor, glory, and everlasting salvation!

You made us Your children and heirs—

joint heirs with Your only begotten Son.³

Truly "there is one God, and one mediator also

^{1. 1} John 2:27-28

^{2.} Psalm 85:10

^{3.} Romans 8:17

between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."1

As we contemplate all that Christ did for us on the cross, our hearts are filled with humble gratitude.

Surely He bore our grief and carried our sorrows.

He was pierced through for our transgressions,

He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him; and by His scourging we are healed.²

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.³

And You have graciously and tenderly drawn us to Him, the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.

O Lord, what gifts these are to us!

Give us grace and pure hearts to worship in spirit and in truth,⁴ that our praise may be acceptable to You.

May Christ Jesus be fully on display in us through both our words and our works, so that others may see and be drawn to the pure light of the gospel.

We ask these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

^{1. 1} Timothy 2:5

^{2.} Isaiah 53:4-5

^{3.1} Peter 2:24-25

^{4.} John 4:23