Jod accepts our prayers just as they are. In the same way that a small child cannot draw a bad picture, so a child of God cannot offer a bad prayer.

RICHARD FOSTER



Jesus was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.

LUKE 18:1 (NASB)

It's Really Hard for Me to Pray Right Now by Dave Dravecky

omewhere along the journey through pain and suffering, most of us reach a point where we no longer have the strength, the will, the words, or even the thoughts to pray. And at the same time we long to connect with God. We may long for Him to give us the answers we seek. We may long for Him to reach down from heaven and intervene in an impossible situation. We may long simply to know that He has not abandoned us in our place of pain.

I know I reached that point in my battle with cancer. I was desperate, I was scared, and I found it difficult to talk to God. I found myself praying, "God, I know you'll never leave me or forsake me, but right now it feels like You're gone. But the Bible says You'll never leave me or forsake me, so I know You're still here." It was so frustrating to pray that honestly and not to receive a response that I could recognize. Yet somehow I knew that in the midst of it all something I didn't understand was happening.

During that time I was blessed beyond belief with a wife who became God's mouthpiece to me. Jan faithfully searched the Bible and unfailingly shared God's promises that gave me the strength and peace to endure. She made me realize that yes, God is real, He does care, He does love me, and He will provide whatever I need for the journey. I knew God listened to my prayers because Jan told me He did! (And I knew that there was no

arguing with her to the contrary!)

Not only did Jan become God's voice speaking to me, she prayed for me. I vividly remember being in great pain and hearing Jan cry out to God in prayer for me. Her prayer wasn't anything fancy. It was real basic. She simply poured her heart out to God on my behalf. Her prayer comforted me and it taught me. It helped me realize that I don't have to "pray well" to connect with God. All I have to do is pour out my heart to Him.

Jan was also one of many people all over the country who were praying for me. It was a tremendous encouragement to know that even when I couldn't pray for myself others were praying for me. Just knowing that encouraged me to press on and pray for myself.

I know prayer gets hard. I know what it is like for God to be quiet—real quiet, I know what it is to have overwhelming needs that seem to go unmet. Even so, our connection to God through prayer is necessary to our relationship with Him, so I encourage you to pray.

If you are suffering, my desire is that this issue of *The Encourager* will encourage you to honestly cry out to God. He is listening! If you are a friend or a loved one of someone who is suffering, I encourage you to pray earnestly on his or her behalf. There are many things we are unable to do for our loved ones who suffer, but we can always pray. Our prayers for those who suffer are a precious gift. We may be surprised by the ways in which God honors our prayers and helps His precious, suffer-



Dear Jod, Help My Daddy to be Happy

by Roger A. Wilkin

Sometimes the pain of life in the midst of suffering becomes more than we can bear. It did for Roger Wilkin. His story is painful, but the simple prayer of his dying son touched his heart and enabled him to continue on.

e all rage at God, demanding that He do more than He is doing. He remains quietly unthreatened, saddened beyond words that we think Him cruel or indifferent, but unswervingly committed to the course He has set. He refuses to redesign the plot of the book, having already written the last chapter and knowing that the ending is very, very good, and that every thread in our story is necessary to that conclusion.

DR. LARRY CRABB, FINDING GOD

ife was full and rich. I was the first college graduate from either side of my family. I had worked hard and the world had rewarded me. A wonderful home in the suburbs. A job that I loved and that paid well. A beautiful wife and daughter. And now, to round out life perfectly, our newest arrival—a son, my first.

Johnny was blessed with a great genetic mix, receiving the best from both mom and dad. From mom—beauty and brightness. From dad—personality and determination. A winning combination in which the sky was the limit.

We affectionately nicknamed him "Ricochet Rabbit," because he and his older sister Anne Marie seemed to possess boundless energy. Nighttime reading was an exhausting experience. I would read, and he would run. I was convinced he was learning only every tenth word as he passed by earshot of the book. Baseball was more suiting to his personality. The fundamentals were learned by age three on a baseball diamond in our basement. The crashing of a whiffle ball against the furnace and cinder block could be heard throughout the house. But we all endured because there were dreams of bigger games to come.

Dreams, unfortunately, are sometimes no more than dreams. As I sat with my wife Sandy in a waiting room at Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, nothing in life had prepared me for the doctor's words, "Your child has inoperable cancer."

I remember saying, "This must be a bad dream. Sandy, please wake me." But I was awake. And this wasn't just a bad dream, it was a malignant dream that would consume all other dreams in its path.

My only son. My beautiful, bright, three-and-a-half-year-old son. The object of so many of my hopes and dreams. The son for whom I prayed since he was an infant. Protection, health, wisdom, faith—these had been my prayers through the years. And now cancer! *God, what are you doing?*

I knew what God wanted me to do—keep trusting and praying. My wife and I, joined by hundreds of friends, never prayed harder in our lives. From the first symptoms, I prayed for wisdom for the doctors—but the medical treatment was ineffective. I also prayed for relief from pain—but the cancer invaded his spine, generating almost unbearable pain. Most of all I prayed for healing—but the cancer was unrelenting.

Well meaning, but insensitive, people said I needed to trust God more. What could I say? I was doing the best I knew how. Was I perfect? Absolutely not! Did I desire to be? Absolutely! I would have done anything God said, even giving my own life in exchange.

In the midst of Johnny's pain, mine paled in comparison. How do I explain cancer to my child who is suffering in so many ways?

"Daddy, will I ever get my hair back?"



God, what are

you doing?



Roger and Sandy with their son-in-law Ross and their children (bottom row) David, Christina, Anne Marie, Laura, and Michael.

What do I say? No way to describe chemotherapy. No way to describe the prognosis. No way to explain away the stares of others. What do you say to a once-beautiful, three-year-old son who looks like a poster child for a famine appeal?

Apart from a miracle, I knew what was coming. Through tears I am sure he saw, I could only manage the simple refrain, "Jesus loves you, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Johnny accepted my statement of faith. He didn't ask the question again. Such faith in the midst of such pain. Jesus' words from so many years ago flashed across had been my prayers through my mind, Unless you become like a little child, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven. I only wished I could trust like my son.

My pain increased as I watched the cancer invade other parts of his body. I was forced to watch my son be tortured in front of my eyes, and I could do nothing about it. Anger was building as the unanswerable question formed on my lips, "If God exists, then why . . .?" Even Jesus' words, "Not my will be done, but thy will be done," were silenced by my pain.

The day before Johnny died, he was in terrible agony. We had brought him home from the hospital several weeks before because there was nothing more they could do. We placed a mattress on the floor next to our bed so we could be with him continually. The cancer was unbelievably aggressive. It had invaded his spine. He had pain everywhere. Morphine helped for a while, but then the pain would return with a vengeance.

not be tempted beyond what we could endure." In case God didn't know it, I told Him, "NO MORE! **CAN** Protection, health, **ENDURE** NO MORE!" But God wisdom, faith—these was not through

God had promised, "We would

the years. And now cancer! Later that day, as I was holding Johnny's new sister Ι Christina. heard Johnny's cry. This cry seemed particularly painful, and I rushed in to see him.

with me.

Watching him suffer again was more than I could take. Too much pain. Too little sleep. Too many shattered dreams. Too little faith. As I stood next to him, I raised my eyes to the ceiling and shouted out through my tears, "God, where the hell are you? Don't you care? Can't you see? Won't you help? Speak, God! Damn you, speak!" But just silence. No lightning bolts for me, no helping hands for Johnny. Just silence.

But wait! I hear a small, weak voice. No, it is not God's but Johnny's. I drop to one knee and put my ear close to his mouth. "Johnny, what did you say?"

His response brought me down to both knees. "Daddy, I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to Jesus."

A sense of awe began to sweep over me. With hushed anticipation I said, "Okay, go ahead. I'll just listen."

Then Johnny spoke these words, "Dear Jesus, help my daddy to be happy and not sad."

Sobs immediately gushed forth from a depth within me I'd never known. Sobs of joy. Sobs of sorrow. Sobs of repentance. Sobs of hope. I couldn't believe my ears. I couldn't believe what my son had just said.

God had indeed spoken to me through the voice of my child. In the midst of his worst pain, he prayed for his faithless dad. "Dear Jesus, help my daddy to be happy and not sad," were my son's final words on this earth.

Those words brought the words of another suffering Son to my ears, Forgive them for they know not what they do. Johnny had what I wanted—a faith in God that transcends circumstances, an eternal perspective that overcomes our present suffering. God, thank you. Thank you for

This story is taken from a book of letters to dads that Roger hopes to publish in the near future.



he Bible tells us that we are God's precious children, and His greatest desire is for a close relationship with us. Like a loving parent, God is always listening for our cries to Him. The following portions of the Psalms assure us of God's attentive ear.

Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you. Psalm 9:10

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ... you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. . . . Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? . . . you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. ... your eyes saw my unformed body. Psalm 139:1-7, 13-16

For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. Psalm 22:24

God loves His children so much that He can't help but listen intently to their prayers. If you have any doubt about what it means to be a child of God and to have an intimate relationship with Him, talk to a trusted Christian friend or pastor who can answer your questions and help you grow in this most important relationship.



n any relationship, communication is an ongoing learning process. We don't always understand the other person, hear what is on the other person's heart, and we find it difficult to work through misunderstandings. We feel hurt, we withdraw, we build walls in an effort to protect ourselves. Our communication becomes strained, sometimes nonexistent. It happens in our relationships with friends, parents, children, and spouses. And it can happen in our relationship with God.

Never is this more true than when we are suffering. When we withdraw from God, when we become afraid to share honestly what is on our hearts, the pain of our trial is compounded by the pain of our isolation from Him. Listen to the heart cries of wounded sufferers who long for healing in their relationship with God:

- ◆ Elizabeth, who lost a child to cancer, says, "I guess I'm really disappointed with God. Maybe that's why I'm having such a hard time talking with Him. My prayer life is almost nonexistent right now. How can I, the clay, say to God, the potter, 'I don't like what you've done.' Who am I to question God, to disagree with what He has allowed?"
- ◆ David, an Old Testament King of Israel, wrote, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"
- ◆ Dawn, a mother of young children who has cancer, said, "I can't pray any more. I'm all asked out. I no longer believe He answers my prayers. My only comfort is knowing that other people are praying for me."

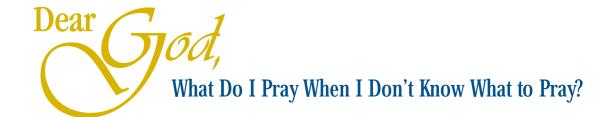
Although it isn't our natural response, honest communication can help bring about healing in our relationship with God. Each of these individuals recognized how vital their relationship to God was, and each of them took the risk of approaching God honestly and sharing the pain in their hearts.

As Elizabeth shed her tears over the loss of her son and told God how empty her arms felt, she was reminded that God is her loving Father who longs to hold her. Yes, the pain of her loss was terrible, but next to the pain and nagging questions of why God allowed such a trial was the truth that He loved her and that she could have no greater comfort than to feel the reality of His loving embrace.

King David saw no point in holding anything back from God. Once he expressed his feelings to God, once he got his complaint "off his chest," he expressed what he knew to be true about God. For example, shortly after he wrote, "How long will you hide your face from me," he confessed, "but I trust in your unfailing love . . . I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me" (Psalm 13:5-6). David never allowed walls to build up between himself and God. His honest cries to God are recorded throughout the Psalms. His intimate dialogue with God reflects a deep, personal relationship that God honored. God even said that David followed Him with all his heart.

Dawn was all "asked out" and God knew how weary her heart was. Shortly after she uttered these words, God sent a friend to her side. Together, they reviewed the past several years, recounting all the times God had answered Dawn's prayers. Piece by piece, as they recorded the answered prayers and inventoried the blessings, the wall in Dawn's relationship with God came down. The door to renewed fellowship with her heavenly Father began to open.

Can we be honest with God? Yes! We not only *can* be honest with Him, we *must* be because honesty opens the doors of communication. God has great compassion on those who seek Him. "He heals the brokenhearted . . . His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:3-5 NASB).



Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven
our debtors.
And lead us not into
temptation,
but deliver us
from the evil one.

e tend to think that prayer should come easily to us, and many times it does. But prayer in the face of suffering can be a different story. We are often surprised when prayer becomes difficult, when it seems fruitless, when the needs of the moment are so overwhelming that we don't know where to begin. During these times, it's easy to lose confidence in our ability to pray or in God's willingness to respond.

The truth is, prayer can be hard work. Oswald Chambers describes it as "not a preparation for work, it *is* work. Prayer is not a preparation for the battle, it *is* the battle."

We're not the first ones to have trouble knowing how or what to pray. Even Jesus' disciples, who were with Him day and night, needed help with prayer. They came right out and asked Him how to pray, and Jesus gave His answer in the form of a prayer—the Lord's Prayer—found in the Bible in Matthew 6:9-13.

The Lord's Prayer addresses the most vital and basic human needs. It not only answered His disciples' question, it can give us a place to start when prayer doesn't come easily, when we're at a loss for words—or even thoughts.

Jesus began His prayer with words of praise to God: Our Father in heaven, holy is Your name. Of course Jesus knows that it is sometimes hard for us to praise God when life is difficult. Yet He knows that praise can be the dynamite that breaks loose the prayer "log jam" in our hearts. Praise places heaven's perspective solidly in our hearts and prepares us to approach God's throne.

The Bible gives us plenty of reminders about the goodness and praiseworthiness of God. James 1:17, for example, reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from Him. So no matter what our circumstances, we can begin to take note of the good gifts we have received in life-Everyone prays perhaps the beauty in their own language, of a fresh snowand there is no language thoughtful that God does not friend, a good understand. meal, our family, the gift of eternal life-and DUKE ELLINGTON start thanking God for what He has already given to us. We can choose to have a praising heart that says, "God, regardless of how I feel, regardless of my difficult circumstances, I will praise You because You are worthy."

With the words, "Your kingdom come," Jesus directed us to pray for His kingdom. He encouraged us to invite God's presence to be established in everything we do, in every part of life. The Psalmist hungered for the presence of God's kingdom in his life and wrote,

"in Thy presence is fullness of joy," Psalm 16:11 (NASB). How desperately we need to feel the joy of God's presence when we are suffering! Like the Psalmist, we can pray for God's kingdom to be present in every aspect of life.

Jesus also instructed us to pray, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." By praying in this way, we give God the freedom to work out His will, His plans, and His purposes in our lives. We can seek out His will by reading the Bible, the Word of God. It is there that we discover the character of His heart and the awesome depths of His love. As we learn more about Him, His plans, and His purposes for our lives, we will receive fuel for our prayers.

As we pray and immerse ourselves in the Bible, we can't help but discover that we are of infinite worth to God. He cares so deeply about the needs of our hearts that He has seen fit to record (particularly in the Psalms) the heart cries of others who struggled before us so that we would know we could express our deepest needs to Him. He who has so tenderly numbered the hairs on our head surely knows what all of our physical needs are. Through the words of His prayer, "give us today our daily

provide for our physical needs.

Jesus knew our human nature well.
He knew that we would at times fail God, ourselves, and others. He knew the burdensome "debt" that failure deposits in our hearts, and He came to earth to set us

bread," Jesus not only acknowledges but

gives His approval for us to ask God to

-continued on page 6-

Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope

free from the weighty debt of sin. That's why He instructs us to pray and ask God to "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

When we walk through suffering, most of us have a multitude of opportunities to seek and offer forgiveness. We need the healing of heart and soul that forgiveness brings. We not only need it personally, we need it in our relationship with God. Jesus, when instructing his followers about prayer, said, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25). A lack of forgiveness can hinder our prayers. Just as we choose to praise God, we must choose to forgive so that we might have whole and debt-free relationships with God and with others.

Suffering, like a thick, blinding fog, can cause us to lose our bearings, making us vulnerable to temptation. We can follow Jesus' example and pray, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

God is our Great Shepherd. Isaiah 40:11 tells us that He longs to gather the lambs in His arms and carry them close to His heart. How His heart must leap for joy when we ask for His help and protection! When we feel vulnerable and

uncertain, we can always pray for His help in:

- allowing Him to instruct us
- trusting Him to lead us
- resisting the temptation to "go it alone"
- rejecting the lure of self-pity
- resting in God's strength and care rather than our own

The Bible assures us that we can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16 NASB). God wants us to come to Him, even with fumbling words and an unsure heart. He's given us the cries, the prayers of others in the Bible and His Son's guiding words on prayer to help us when prayer gets hard. He knew at times it would. How greatly He desires our presence. How much He longs to be a Father to His children—especially when they are hurting.

So we encourage you to continue seeking God in prayer. If you are struggling with prayer, ask God for help. We have no power to maintain our spiritual life on our own. We need God's help—even to pray. And it's okay to ask Him for help.

learned a foreign language you know that you learn it best when you actually have to speak it. The same is true with the "foreign language" of prayer. There are many good resources for learning how to pray, but the best way to learn how to pray is to pray.

DONALD WHITNEY





Is There Some Special Way I'm Supposed to Pray to You?

side from the fact that we are to pray in the name of Jesus, who opens the door to our intimate relationship with God, there is no "correct" posture or way to pray. Note the different ways people in the Bible prayed:

Jeremiah stood before God to pray for his people (Jeremiah 18:20).

Peter knelt to pray (Acts 9:40).

Nehemiah sat down when he prayed (Nehemiah 1:4).

Abraham prostrated himself while praying (Genesis 17:3).

Ezekiel prayed in a loud voice (Ezekiel 11:13).

Hannah prayed silently to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:13).

Paul prayed and sang in the spirit (1 Corinthians 14:15).

David prayed in the morning (Psalm 5:3).

Isaac prayed out in his field in the evening (Genesis 24:63).

Daniel prayed in his house three times a day (Daniel 6:10).

Anna prayed night and day in the temple (Luke 2:37).

And the staff members at The Outreach of Hope have their own favorite ways and places to pray:

Dave prays in the shower.

Jan prays all over the house.

Kim prays in the car (with her eyes open).

Betsy prays when she's out shopping. Diana prays at the kitchen table.

Nancee prays while she's on a walk.

Biblical portion reprinted from *Guideposts*, "The Miracle of Prayer."



Here's How You Can Pray For Me

It isn't unusual to struggle with knowing how to pray for a suffering friend, particularly if your friend's suffering is severe or long lasting. If you find yourself not knowing what to pray, ask your friend for specific requests. If that isn't possible or if you need more suggestions, consider the following list of the most frequent prayer requests that The Outreach of Hope staff receives from cancer patients and their families. Accompanying each request is a related passage from the Bible to remind us how deeply God cares about the needs we bring to Him.

Release from physical affliction either through medical or divine intervention That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick . . . the whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. Mark 1:32-34

Strength to endure the journey

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. . . . those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. Isaiah 40:29,31

For family members to be sustained by God's grace, love, and peace

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds. Philippians 4:6, 7

Wisdom for direction and decisions

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

Patience to live one day at a time

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:34

Provision for the physical needs of life

I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. . . . Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:25, 26

Protection from calamity and misfortune

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble. Psalm 32:7

Support from others who will help bear the burden

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10

For God's presence

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. Ephesians 1:17

For God's glory to be the outcome of their trial and suffering

Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me. Psalm 66:16

For more help in knowing how to pray for those who are suffering, write "Prayer Packet" in the Special Offer section of the enclosed order form.

A packet will be sent to you at no charge.



If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer. . . . a way of loving others.

RICHARD FOSTER

hen those we love are suffering, we often feel helpless and wish we could do more to help. The good news is, we can help. We can pray.

Prayers for a suffering friend are an incredible gift of love. Illness and its accompanying exhaustion, mind-fogging medications, and weariness of soul can make it difficult for those who suffer to pray for themselves. What a great blessing it is to know that someone is praying for your needs when you are incapable of praying for yourself.

Those who suffer oftentimes can actually sense when others are praying for them. Just knowing that someone else is praying sends a powerful message of love, concern, and sacrifice. And best of all, when we pray for someone, we have lifted up their needs to the One who can best meet them and who can give us His peace in the process.

Dear God, fill me with a holy desire to pray earnestly and effectively for my friend. Help me to allow Your Holy Spirit to prepare my heart so I can hear Your gentle voice directing, guiding, and speaking to me on my friend's behalf. Give me discernment and wisdom to know my friend's true needs, those seen and unseen, spoken and unspoken. Help me in every moment to be mindful and sensitive to Your presence. I surrender my will, my thoughts, and my heart to You to be used now as I pray. Amen.



here are as many ways to pray as there are moments in life. Sometimes we seek out a quiet spot and want to be alone, sometimes we look for a friend and want to be together. Sometimes we like a book, sometimes we prefer music. Sometimes we want to sing out with hundreds, sometimes only whisper with a few. Sometimes we want to say it with words, sometimes with a deep silence.

HENRI NOUWEN

The Encourager is free, a gift from us to you. Now that you've read it, become an encourager yourself and share this gift with someone you know who needs uplifting. Don't throw the gift away . . . pass it along!

President Dave Dravecky
Vice President Jan Dravecky
Editorial Director Kim Jones
Editor Amanda Sorenson
Designer Beverly Seefeldt
Photographer Bob Knepper
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Offering comfort, hope, and encouragement through Jesus Christ to those who suffer from cancer or amputation. We accomplish this mission by offering prayer support, personal contact, correspondence, resource referral, and the gift of encouraging literature.



13840 Gleneagle Drive Colorado Springs, CO 80921

Phone: 719 481-3528
Fax: 719 481-4689
E-mail: info@outreachofhope.org

Internet: www.outreachofhope.org







Colorado Springs, CO 80921