

FOREWORD BY
BISHOP WALTER SCOTT THOMAS



ignite

50 days of prayer
that will **CHANGE** your life

MATTHEW L. WATLEY

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FORWARD

My good friend Matthew Watley provides for us in this book more than inspirational thoughts. He imparts to us the deep spiritual wisdom which causes our hearts to soar in prayer. As you read and pray daily, you will become aware that you are growing stronger spiritually. Perhaps you will notice how your prayers are becoming more focused or how the word of God is becoming more integrated within your prayer life. What I know is that your life will not be the same because your prayer life will be transformed over the next fifty days.

From a pastoral standpoint, one of the reasons that we are sharing this devotional with our congregation is that it is steeped in scripture. It says much about the state of current Christian trends and teachings that a devotional rooted in scripture may be considered unique. Unfortunately, much of what purports itself to be Christian teaching is really only inspirational writing at best. Social media like Facebook and Twitter provide us with more than enough inspirational thoughts. We need a deeper well.

As believers, we must never stray from the central importance of the word of God, which serves as our spiritual guide for knowing the mind of God. Our church, like yours I suspect, is very busy attending to the various needs of our congregation and community. In doing so, it is easy for us to lose our collective strength and Kingdom-focus while we are deployed across various areas of ministry. I have found that one of my most important functions is to call membership together, so that as the body of believers, we can concentrate on larger opportunities that are before us.

As a Christian, there is nothing else that is so personal and powerful that transforms my soul like the power of prayer. Prayer is a course from which no disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ ever graduates. The genius of this book is that by being rooted in the word of God, it serves both the new believer and the seasoned saint equally well. Those who are new to the faith are given a systematic approach to understanding how we ought to pray and how prayer works

to transform our lives. For those who have been saved for years, we are given key insights that provide rich, spiritual food and water for hungry souls and parched spirits. The pages that follow are a grand recipe for giving the reader the ingredients and instructions necessary to create spiritual food so that our souls may feast. These pages contain fresh springs of revelation that will ignite a passion for God through a passion of prayer.

Over the course of the next fifty days as you pray, life will continue to happen to you. Life will cause challenges and triumphs to arrive at your doorstep without warning as they always have. What will be different, though, is that as you go to the door to meet them, you will do so in a very different manner. Your prayer life will allow you greater poise and perspective. Life will still impact you and affect you, but now you will also be able to recognize greater opportunities for you to impact and effect your life. Over the next fifty days your eyes will be opened, your heart will be strengthened and your soul will be ignited so that your new prayer life will lead you to live a new and more abundant life.

Bishop Walter Scott Thomas

Senior Pastor, New Psalmist Baptist Church, Baltimore, MD

IN HONOR

To Rev. Matthew A. Watley and Dr. Lawrence E. Lewis, the men whose names I carry and whose legacies I have sought to keep inviolate all of my life.

DEDICATION

I wrote this book by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and at the insistence of my loving wife, Shawna, who has always encouraged me to go beyond my comfort zone. I am grateful to you for seeing more in me than I sometimes see in myself.

I dedicate this book to you, dear. I love you and thank God for you daily. And to our daughter, Alexandra Elizabeth (Ally), who is the greatest answer to any prayer that we have ever offered. Mommy and Daddy love you so much!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to God for all those who have given so generously of their time and energies to making this book possible. To my production team Carolyn Scavella, Yvette Blair-Lavallais, and Brandi Etheredge for making brick without straw, and especially Russell St. Bernard for being clutch twenty-four seven! To Bishop Walter Scott Thomas for lending your name to this work and for lending your voice of counsel down through the years, I am deeply appreciative.

To Dr. Lee P. Washington and the Reid Temple AME family, thank you for walking with me as I seek to fulfill the calling on my life. I know prayer works because you all have covered me in prayers and I am grateful.

INTRODUCTION

WHY READ THIS BOOK?

Don't tell anyone, but I have had long dry spells when my prayer life was simply dead, on a life support system or in need of rehabilitation. I have discovered that the restoration of my prayer life, as well as my greatest growth spurts in prayer, came as a result of reading books that provided biblical insights into the power and practice of prayer. In other words, knowing *why* I should pray caused me to pray more, and knowing *how* I should pray helped me to pray more effectively. My prayer is that this book will likewise serve as a catalyst in your relationship with God, by igniting your prayer life and helping you to mature in your role as a disciple for Jesus Christ.

WHY 50 DAYS?

Fifty days after Jesus was raised from the dead (Easter), the Holy Spirit fell on the believers who had gathered in Jerusalem (Pentecost). Simon Peter is the central figure on whom Jesus focused before he was crucified, and again after he was resurrected on Easter. Simon Peter also became the pivotal person that led the church after Jesus ascended into heaven and after the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers on the day of Pentecost. Before Jesus was crucified, Simon Peter deserted him. Fifty days later, Simon Peter was Jesus' greatest representative on earth. Peter's transformation happened during those fifty days that Jesus appeared to his followers and gave them further instruction. While his words were challenging to all, they obviously had a special impact on Simon Peter. He now understood why Jesus was crucified, why Jesus had established a succession plan, and that he had a crucial role in that plan. Now remember, Peter had often been privileged to join Jesus during his time of prayer, so it seems obvious that these fifty days must have been an intensive time of prayer for Peter. Just imagine how the Holy Spirit can transform you after spending fifty days in prayer!

WHY LUKE 22:31-32?

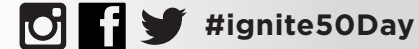
This book has been written as a discipleship-strengthening program in the same way that a personal trainer might create a workout program that is designed to achieve specific results. Think of it as a seven-week “*fitness prayer*” program where each day you are given a specific scriptural passage (in the New King James Version translation) as a complement to the Luke 22:31-32 core passage, to use in your devotion time. In this passage, Peter, a disciple of Jesus Christ, is informed that a demonic attack is imminent. What ensues is a faith journey that tests Peter and one where he learns what it means to be prayed for by the Savior, and how that prayer ultimately transforms his life and leads him to greater faith and a concentrated focus on God’s Kingdom. Over the course of seven weeks, you will understand the personal value, purpose and power of prayer, and how developing a life of intentional prayer will transform your life. The goals of this book are to advance your spiritual development through inspiration, information and impartation.

Each weekly theme is enhanced daily with additional scriptures and insights to help connect the principle of prayer being shared for the week, to the practice of your prayer. At the end of each devotion is a reflection question to help you draw closer to God as you ignite your prayer life. As you read each section, begin by praying that God will open your heart and mind to be receptive to His word.

TIPS FOR READING

1. **Read the Bible** -This book is based on the word of God, so you will need a Bible to appreciate its full meaning.
2. **Pray** - This book is written both to give inspiration to your prayer life, as well as instruction as to how to pray. Therefore, to benefit from these pages, you must devote your time to both reading and then praying about what you have read.
3. **Don’t Do It Alone** -Whether it is in an informal group of friends, through a small group, or as a church-wide initiative, our faith is best when it is shared with others so that iron can sharpen iron. Also, it will hold you accountable to reading and praying every day.

4. **Spread It-** I have included hashtags for each day so that you can engage with others through social media about what the Lord is speaking to you each day.



twitter: @matthewwatley

5. **Surf It** - There are additional resources available at www.matthewwatley.com to help bring this 50-day journey alive. Get ready to Ignite!

Luke 22:31-32 (NRSV) “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, (32) but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Week 1: The Necessity of Confession and Conviction in Prayer
“Simon, Simon, listen!”

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“Satan has demanded...”

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“to sift all of you like wheat...”

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Week 7: Praying to Fulfill Your Purpose and Kingdom Assignment
“strengthen your brothers.”



Chapter One:
THE NECESSITY OF
CONFESSION AND
CONVICTION IN PRAYER

“Simon, Simon, listen!”

DAY 1 | LISTEN UP!

MATTHEW 16:13-20

Key Verse: 17

“Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

It is amazing how one word can rewind your life 20 years in the blink of an eye. Before you know it, degrees, jobs, children, awards and the image you have created of yourself as an adult all vanish when you are called by your childhood nickname. You and the caller of your nickname have instantly gone back in time through this bond of familiarity. This can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on what that time in your life was like. Former names may be affectionately labeled or they may be used to intimidate depending who is using them. The names themselves are often telling. Who wouldn't want to hear “it's ‘The Boss’,” from a familiar voice if you were captain of the football team, or if you were voted most likely to succeed. On the other hand, “hey squirt face” can bring a flood of negative emotions as it takes you back to a time when people called you that to make your life miserable. I guess it all comes down to who is saying your old name, and the reason they are saying it.

In Luke 22:31 the one who is calling Peter by his former name ‘Simon’ is Jesus. The reason Jesus says Simon! Simon is to call Peter's attention to something of critical significance. Of course, Jesus, more than anyone, would be best qualified to use Peter's former name, because it was in the 16th chapter of Matthew that Jesus actually changed Simon's name to Peter, which means ‘rock’. Jesus declared that Peter would be the rock upon which he would build his church. Therefore, for Jesus to refer to Peter by his pre-rock name, not once but

twice, is of real importance. Jesus calls him Simon not as an act of demotion, but as a point of access to his original self. God knows and can name our old nature without negating the promise of our new name.

As a child, when my mother called me by my whole name, Matthew Lawrence Watley, I felt instantly on-edge. I knew that whatever she said next was going to be important based on the way she addressed me. Jesus' saying, “Simon, Simon” functioned in the same way.

Prayer is a conversation between you and God and there may be times when God needs to address you in a manner that gets your attention immediately. Just as the long, high-pitched tone and scrolling message-on television indicates an alert from the Emergency Broadcast System, we are alerted and pay attention when God refers to our original selves. This is where God may impress upon your heart the identity of someone who needs your prayerful attention, or as with Peter, the Lord may reveal a demonic attack at work in your own life. When God calls you by name, there is only one thing to do. Listen!

Reflection Question

Have you ever felt convicted in prayer...not necessarily about sin, but that God was trying to get your attention? Did you pause in that moment or rush past it?

DAY 2 | CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR YOUR PRAYER LIFE

GENESIS 2:18-25

Key Verse: 25

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed

We all have two selves...our projected self and our actual self. Our projected self is who we claim to be, while our actual self is who we really are authentically. Acknowledging our actual selves, with all of our aspirations, anxieties, sins, and shortcomings is really an act of confession. Confession in relationship with God means owning who we are, what we have done, and where we are in life. This is the key to a real relationship with God because it serves as a base line for the Holy Spirit to move and operate in our lives. In fact, this was God's original intent for us. Before Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation in the Garden of Eden, the Bible describes them as being *'naked and not ashamed'*. This was a description of not only how they viewed one another, but also how they saw themselves in the eyes of God. They were each whole. Their actual selves were identical to their projected selves.

Once Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, we see the division of their identities into their actual selves and their projected selves. By covering themselves with leaves, blaming one another and the serpent for their sinful actions, each of them sought to deflect attention from their actual selves and project a different image than who they really were. Unfortunately, this same deflection of the truth happens in our prayer life. We begin wrong-footed because we seek to relate to God through the mask of our projected selves. We attempt to address God in prayer with impressive or pious-sounding words, not necessarily to give reverence to God, but to make ourselves appear

more holy than we really are. We are so used to covering and compensating for our weaknesses when interacting with people, that we often take this same approach with God.

God wants to deal with the real us- what I like to call our *Simon-side*, so that God can continue to develop us into who God intends for us to be - our *Peter-side*. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit, who acts as the arbiter of our prayer life, is to allow us a *'Simon, Simon listen'* moment. God cannot speak to our projected self. For real conversation to occur between us and God, He must get to our actual selves. This is the place of conviction that leads to conversation.

Prayer is the only time in life when we can achieve that kind of openness. God is the only one with whom we can risk being *'naked and not ashamed.'* Prayer at its best does not come from the soul of the *in-control, well-put-together self* that we have projected as our adult identity. Prayer comes from the soul of that scared, confused, guilt-ridden child that still lives within each of us. It is when our actual self speaks up in its nakedness and exposes its unhealed wounds and broken places that God is able to truly minister to us by His Spirit.

Reflection Question

Does your prayer life emanate from your actual self, or your projected self?

DAY 3 | CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR YOUR PRAYER LIFE

GENESIS 2:18-25

Key Verse: 13

So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

Despite King David's great military, religious, and political leadership, he was still flawed. In one of his most pronounced series of misdeeds, David orchestrates an adulterous affair with Bathsheba, attempts a cover up of her resulting pregnancy, and then has her husband Uriah killed. After this, the prophet Nathan comes to David with a four-word indictment, "*thou art the man*" and calls him out for his sinful deeds. David's response may actually be part of the reason scripture refers to him as '*a man after God's own heart.*' David does not deny his actions or blame someone else; rather he confesses to the crime saying, "*I have sinned against the Lord.*"

These are words of transparency and accountability. These are the same words that must regularly proceed from the heart of our prayer life. Every day we disobey God by the unkind words we say, the impure thoughts we think, and the ungodly deeds we do. That's why it is necessary to confess and admit our wrongdoing. Yes, confession goes against our nature. We wrongly think that admitting our misdoings will destroy God's call upon our lives, when in truth it is just the opposite. Our confession causes God to draw more near because now our sin no longer stands between us.

Sometimes it can be hard to admit that we've sinned against someone. Interestingly, although David has acted sinfully against several people, he does not identify them as the

object of his sin; rather, David says that his sin is against the Lord. The same is true for us when we sin - it is against God. Though we tend to think the immediate victims of our sinful thoughts, words, and actions may be other people, ultimately it is God who is wounded. Take for instance a child who steals from a classmate. The other classmate has suffered the hurt of the loss of their property, but the little thief's parents have suffered the harm of disappointment and dishonor. Thus, the larger apology is owed to the parent.

As soon as David confessed his sin, Nathan responded immediately by telling David, "*the Lord has put away your sin.*" Nathan's statement about God's forgiveness of David is difficult to accept given the severity of David's confession. Our fundamental sense of fairness asks how an adulterer, a deceiver, and a murderer can be so quickly forgiven. The answer is difficult for us to conceive because it is based on a spiritual truth. When we disappoint and dishonor our Heavenly Father, He has every right to disown us, but His love for us will not allow Him to do so. Instead, He is eager to forgive us so that our relationship with Him might be fully restored.

When a child sincerely apologizes, a loving parent usually forgives instantly, even though there still may be ramifications resulting from the wrong that has been done. Confession cures the crisis of conviction but not necessarily the consequences. When we confess our sins in prayer, God is quick to forgive us because He knows that we will need Him even more as we face the consequences of our actions.

Reflection Question

What is it that you need to confess so that God can forgive it?

WHY READ THIS BOOK

Don't tell anyone, but I have had long dry spells when my prayer life was simply dead, on a life support system or in need of rehabilitation. I have discovered that the restoration of my prayer life, as well as my greatest growth spurts in prayer, came as a result of reading books that provided biblical insights into the power and practice of prayer. In other words, knowing *why* I should pray caused me to pray more, and knowing *how* I should pray helped me to pray more effectively. My prayer is that this book will likewise serve as a catalyst in your relationship with God, by igniting your prayer life and helping you to mature in your role as a disciple for Jesus Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Reverend Matthew L. Watley is the Executive Minister of Reid Temple AME Church where he founded the church's North Campus in Silver Spring, MD in 2006. The Lord has blessed this ministry by growing the congregation from 200 to more than 4000. Rev. Watley holds a BA and M.Div. from Howard University, a Master's Degree in Executive Leadership from Georgetown University, and he is currently pursuing the Executive Doctorate in Leadership at The George Washington University. He is married to the former Shawna Francis, and they are the proud parents of Alexandra Elizabeth. Throughout his career, Rev. Watley has received numerous academic, civic, literary, and ecclesiastical awards. Concerning these and other accomplishments, he submits that, "The challenge of servant-leadership is not to win acclaim or to amass honor, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God." Micah 6:8



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