

How to Show up and Love Well

Thesis: The Lord wants to equip us on how to respond to the crisis, how to pray, and how to join Jesus on his mission. This is an opportunity for us to learn how to show up and love well. The Lord wants to help us to be the church, the people of God, on mission with Jesus in this hour of crisis.

Text: Matthew 9:35-38

Sermon:

For most of us in our lifetimes, we have never been this way before.

During anxious and stressful times, we get to see the best and worst of people.

Some people are taking advantage of this crisis by seeking to fuel fear, anxiety, and anger.

We are being inundated and bombarded with news, speculations, and rumors about the Coronavirus, collapsing economies, lockdowns, and so much more.

The rumors on the internet are rampant and harmful. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner recently said: ““There’s no lockdown. I have not spoken with the National Guard. If something changes, you will hear from me, not yahoos in social media.”

And, Mayor Turner tweeted on March 20: “I am asking everyone again to please get your information from credible sources. There are people on social media who are intentionally putting out false information.”

By the way, in my blog posts and social media posts, I have given you links directly to the public declarations by [President Donald Trump](#), [Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo](#), [Gov. Greg Abbott](#), and the [CDC](#). I want to help you go directly to credible sources.

Some people are trying to lessen the tension and anxiety with humor.

For example, there are also some really funny things being posted on social media. My friend Eddie Smith posted (Facebook, 3’21’20): “If schools are closed for too long, the parents are gonna find a vaccine before the scientists.”

And, Eddie also posted (Facebook, 3’21’20): “They said a mask and gloves [are] all you need to go to the grocery store. They lied. Everyone else had clothes on!”

Here is one of my favorite posts: “If you are an introvert, put your book down and check on your extrovert friends immediately. They are not doing well.”

And, many people are doing amazing things in the midst of this crisis to serve, love, and help others.

1. People have driven to different restaurants and businesses to support them in this time of economic turmoil. Some got in line for food. Others bought gift cards.
2. People have posted on social media about how to help the businesses that suffered from the closing of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.
3. People have checked in with neighbors offering to help in any way, like going to the grocery store for them or running errands.
4. People are reaching out to one another via voice calls, texts, chat, Messenger, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Google Hangout, and others means, in order to stay socially connected in the midst of physical distancing.
5. People are posting wonderful suggestions on how to educate and entertain children who are stuck at home.
6. School districts are helping to feed our most at-risk students by providing breakfast and lunch.
7. Medical personnel and emergency responders are working day and night to care for those in need. And farmers, truck drivers, stockers at grocery stores, and so many others are serving long, hard hours to take care of us.
8. And the list goes on and on. People are stepping up in big ways to serve, love, and care for others.

Chris Hall of Renovare’ [penned the following lines](#):

The coronavirus pandemic is shaking the world. Governments are struggling to respond to the needs of their citizens. Families are careworn as they seek to cope.

How is the Lord asking [us] to respond to this crisis? How is he asking each of us to adapt to our new environment?

People around the world are anxious and fearful.

“I’ve lost my job. Will I get it back? Will it still exist for me when the disease has passed? In the meantime, how can I make ends meet?”

“My business has been shut down. When can I open it again? How will I care for my employees and pay the bills while I wait for things to resolve?”

“What about my kids? Schools are closing everywhere. How will we manage as a family?”

“I’m a single mother. The pressure is increasing every day. What if I run out of money?”

“I’m an elderly shut-in. Does anyone know I’m here? What if I get sick? Who will take care of me? I’m afraid.”

For a moment, let’s pause and prayerfully acknowledge the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual suffering God’s precious image-bearers are experiencing. As we respond to this crisis and people’s legitimate concerns and feelings, let’s avoid glib or insensitive responses to people’s concerns and questions. Our questions, our “what ifs,” are worthy of thoughtful and kind answers, always couched with profound love and gentleness.

I believe that the Lord wants to equip us on how to respond to the crisis, how to pray, and how to join Jesus on his mission. The Lord wants to help us show up and love well.

How to Respond to this Crisis

First, let’s consider this question. “How have God’s people responded to trials and testing in the past?” (Chris Hall, [Remembering God’s Provision: A Response to the Coronavirus Crisis](#))

I think of Israel gathered at the banks of the Jordan river after 40 years of wandering in the desert, now prepared to enter the land promised to Abraham.

Do you remember the story? Joshua gives the Israelites very specific instructions for how they are to cross the river. “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.” (Joshua 3:3)

Israel heeds Joshua’s words and prepares to cross the Jordan, with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant ahead of the nation. As the priests step into the river, the water upstream stops flowing and the dry riverbed appears. “The

priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.” (Joshua 3:17)

As Israel crossed the Jordan, twelve men from among the people, “one from each tribe,” picked up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, right where the priests were standing, and carried them to the other side.

What did they do with the stones taken from the dry riverbed? They stacked them up as a monument at Gilgal, the first place the nation camped after the river crossing. Why? These stones were a sign of God’s deliverance and provision, a solid and lasting memory device for every Israelite.

Imagine a little boy talking to his grandfather years later during a visit to the monument at Gilgal. “What do these stones mean, Grandpa?” the tiny Israelite asks. “They mean the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. My child, these stones remind us of who God is and who we are. Never forget.” (cf. Joshua 4:6-7)

Isn’t it true that we all have a history of provision, a history of God’s care for us in the midst of the trying and testing we experience as God’s pilgrim people? God acts and then asks us to remember with gratitude. Monuments remind us to do so. They trigger our memory of God’s provision and grow our ability to trust, sometimes during great uncertainty. **What are the monuments God might ask you to revisit today?**

In this season of trial and testing, a place where we have never been before:

1. Make space and time to get close to the Lord.
2. Remember that the Lord is good, that he is a great leader, and that apart from him you can do nothing.
3. Reflect on God’s grace and mercy in your life in times past.
4. Give thanks to the Lord for who he is and what he has done.

These are some ways to respond to this time of crisis. The Lord wants to equip us on how to respond to the crisis, how to pray, and how to join Jesus on his mission. This is an opportunity for us to learn how to show up and love well.

How to Pray

Recently, I was asked by a concerned parent about how to pray for her grown children who are emergency responders in the mist of COVID-19.

I wanted to share with you some ways that I am praying in this season. You can use these prayers to pray for your loved ones, to stand in the gap for your city and nation, to prayer walk in your neighborhoods, or to use as seems appropriate.

These are some prayers to lift up on behalf of others.

Remember: your prayers count. Your groans on behalf of your others count (Romans 8:26-27). And, when you don't know what to pray, just picture yourself lifting them up to the throne of grace, asking for God's help (Hebrews 4:16). The center of the universe is a throne of grace where you and your loved ones can find help in your times of need.

1. **Use this outline to help you to pray: worship, welcome, and warfare.**
 - a. In Matthew 6:9-13, the Lord Jesus taught us how to pray.
 - b. **Worship.** The Lord's Prayer begins with worship (Matthew 6:9). Perspective is everything. We soar into the throne room and come into presence of God through worship. Through worship of Creator God, who is our Father, we displace all other gods.
 - c. **Welcome.** Jesus taught us to pray: *Let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10)*. Welcome the Lord, his kingdom, and his will into your life, your family, your neighborhood, your community, your city, your state, your nation, and your world. (See also Psalm 24:7-10).
 - d. **Warfare.** Jesus taught us the reality of evil and the evil one (Matthew 6:13). Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, disease, and the kingdom of darkness (1 John 3:8; Matthew 9:23-25; Luke 4:18-19; Colossians 1:13; 2:13-15). As you join Jesus on his mission, the Lord will use you to bring deliverance, to dispel darkness, to destroy the works of evil, and to advance the kingdom of God in power and light. Pray and say "no" to what the enemy wants to do, and say "yes" to what the Lord wants to do.
 - e. **By the way, the Lord's prayer ends with a bold, prophetic declaration: "For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."**
2. **Picture yourself standing in the gap between the way things are and the way God wants them to be (Ezekiel 22:30).**
 - a. *"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy*

it, but I found none. 31 So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD" (Ezekiel 22:30-31 (NIV).

- b. You and I are invited and called to stand in the gap and to build up the wall.
 - c. Pray accordingly between the way things are and the way God intends them to be.
 - d. Ask the Lord for mercy; your prayers swing the pendulum from judgment to mercy.
 - e. Cry out for mercy for others and for the land.
 - f. You and I have a priestly ministry (1 Peter 2:5, 9-10; Revelation 5:9-10; 2 Chronicles 29:11). A priest represents people to God and God to people. So, let's get in there, listen to the Lord, and stand between the way things are and the way God wants them to be.
3. **Ask the Lord to be their shield and protector** (Psalm 3:1-8; 28:7; 91:1-16; 144:1-8).
- a. *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song (Psalm 28:7 NIV).*
 - b. Pray the Psalms and other passages over your loved ones as the Lord leads.
 - c. Declare the words, promises, and purposes of Scripture over others.
4. **Ask the Lord to put a wall of fire about them (Zechariah 2:5) and to surround them with a hedge of protection (Job 1:10).**
- a. *Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him 4 and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. 5 **And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,**' declares the LORD, 'and I will be its glory within'" (Zechariah 2:3-5 NIV).*
 - b. Lord, burn up everything that comes against them that isn't a part of your kingdom in your jealous, zealous, fiery love, in the name of Jesus.
 - c. Declare: "You, O Lord, are their hedge of protection" (Job 1:10).
5. **Pray for only what is of God's kingdom to touch them** (Matthew 6:10).
- a. Lord, only let what is of your kingdom touch them.
 - b. And deliver them from evil, from all disease, demons, and darkness, in the name of Jesus (Matthew 6:13).
6. **Pray that as they go, may they go as ambassadors of the Lord** (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).
- a. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins*

against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20 NIV).

- b. Lord, I pray that as they go, send them forth as your ambassadors.
 - c. Lord, you have given them a ministry and message of reconciliation.
 - d. Lord, you are making your appeal through them, moving and working through them to your glory, O God.
7. **Lift them up to God's throne of grace that they might receive grace and help in their time of need** (Hebrews 4:16).
- a. *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16 NIV).*
 - b. Lord, I lift them up to your throne of grace that they might receive grace and help in this time of need.
 - c. Pour out your grace and help in the name of Jesus.
8. **Ask the Lord to back up their words and works with the power of God, with the presence of the Holy Spirit, and with the voice of Jesus reaching people right at their point of need** (1 Thessalonians 1:5).
- a. Ask the Lord to send them as his anointed ones in his power and authority to do what he has asked them to do (Luke 9:1-2; Luke 10:1, 8-9).
 - b. Ask the Lord to manifest his will, his ways, and his wisdom in and through them.
9. **Ask the Lord to grant them awareness of his presence with them** (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Hebrews 13:5; Joshua 1:9; Matthew 28:20).
- a. Lord, your presence is what they need.
 - b. You said you would never leave them nor forsake them.
 - c. I ask you to give them physical strength and heart strength for what you have called them to do and for the territory you have called them to take (Joshua 1:9).
10. **Thank the Holy Spirit for his abiding and abounding presence with your loved ones, neighbors, and others** (John 14:15-31).
- a. Lord, I entrust my loved ones to you.
 - b. Thank you that you are near to them even in this time of crisis, even when I cannot be physically with them.
11. **Ask the Lord to fight for them according to Psalm 45:3-5.**
- a. *Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. 4 In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds. 5 Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet (Psalm 45:3-5 NIV).*

- b. And ask the Lord to rule in the midst of his enemies which come against your loved ones, friends, and neighbors (Psalm 110:2).
 - c. And when they are surrounded by their enemies like sickness, fatigue, discouragement, etc., pray that they would look for the table of the Lord (Psalm 23:5-6). Pray for them to look for the Lord when they feel surrounded or overwhelmed.
12. **Use the principle of displacement: pray for the opposite of what you see.**
- a. If you see or discern fear, then pray for faith and courage.
 - b. If you see or discern hatred and anger, then pray for love and forgiveness.
13. **Declare over others the promises, plans, and prophetic words of the Lord.**

These are some ways to pray in this time of crisis. The Lord wants to equip us on how to respond to the crisis, how to pray, and how to join Jesus on his mission. This is an opportunity for us to learn how to show up and love well.

How to join Jesus on his mission

Jesus said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17 NIV). And, Jesus said that, as the Father sent him, so he has sent us (John 20:21).

I am so encouraged and excited by the creative ways in which you are showing up and loving others well.

For example, yesterday (Saturday, March 21), Ron and Mindy Homann, Michele Regal, and Richard Newton did something amazing. Under Ron's leadership, they made signs and got some banners together inviting people to receive prayer here under the portico at Calvary. Ron posted some awesome pictures of praying for people on Saturday. What a great idea.

Here is the report from Ron: "We prayed for 22 people today in person and 2 online. Many cried as burdens were lifted and they were encouraged. Thanks Mindy, Michele, Richard who were our ground team and our CCC family for covering us. God is good and he is faithful. He held the rain back until the end and handpicked people to bring by all day!"

The Lord Jesus is still on mission touching people with his salvation, deliverance, healing and encouragement. And, we get to partner with Jesus. Our God is giving people creative ways to show up and to love well.

How do we join Jesus on his mission?

(Adopted from an article published by Ed Stetzer: [What Now When We Can't Meet? Putting The Mission into Missional.](#))

First, we remind ourselves and others that God is still in control and is not surprised by what is going on.

And, we need to do this consistently and continually.

Consider at Acts 4. How did the early believers respond when they faced persecution involving the arrest of Peter and John? After their release, Peter and John with the church lifted their voices in prayer, starting with *"Sovereign Lord"* (Acts 4:23).

May we continually praise and honor God no matter what our circumstances are.

Second, we need to see every situation as an opportunity.

The government has recommended that we avoid groups of 10 or more. Rather than focusing on the limitations, let's acknowledge that we get to do something special in our community to show our care for those at greater risk. We also get to demonstrate that the church is far more than a gathering on the weekend. May the church be powerfully scattered throughout our communities, as we were meant to be.

Third, many churches are learning to use technology as a tool for the gospel of the kingdom of God.

For example, many churches are getting online for the first time ever, and that is a way to expand their influence and ministry. Other churches are learning to use online giving portals as a way to help their people practice good stewardship, even in a time of physical distancing.

Our church is taking its first steps into online streaming. Live streaming our services is important to reaching others. It is possible for small groups to gather to watch services together. This is a great opportunity to gather and to invite others who aren't in the higher risk demographic to come together in worship.

People are using technology and social media to share best practices, to communicate practical wisdom, and to help with new skill development.

Fourth, we can live out the Great Commandment.

What does it look like to love our neighbors as ourselves?

One way to love others is by mobilizing our church to protect those at risk. We can give thanks for the fact that almost all people under age 60 who are otherwise healthy should be able to ward off the coronavirus should they contract it.

But what about those who are vulnerable or who have compromised or weak immune systems?

Here is a message for our seniors or for those with weak or compromised immune systems: you can fully exercise your freedom in Christ to stay away from gatherings and to practice physical distancing.

And, we want to stay connected with each other in this season. We can use technology to connect socially even though we may have to distance physically. Let's call, text, and connect in all sorts of ways. Let's leverage technology to connect regularly with others.

Fifth, we get to join Jesus on his mission as our church becomes the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus in the coming days.

This includes how we treat one another, how we respond to adversity, and how we both show and share the love of Christ to the unchurched. God has given us an amazing opportunity to live out our faith in our communities. Here are some specific ways:

- Providing childcare for healthcare workers whose kids are out of school
- Preparing meals for children and families in need
- Walking a dog for elderly neighbors
- Offering to pick up food and supplies for those most at risk
- Regularly calling and texting those in your neighborhood to check in
- Offering words of hope for those dealing with anxiety and depression
- Support local businesses through ordering out as you are able
- When you have to go shopping, inquire with workers as to how they are and tell them you will be praying for their safety
- Finally, when this season has passed—and it will pass—let us plan a great celebration of thanks to God, inviting our entire communities to gather with us. What a remarkable opportunity to join with our community who walked this path together.

May this be a time where the uncertainty and discomfort of this season make us catalysts for creative and effective means to reach others. May it be a time when we show those around us that we care about them and the most vulnerable in our communities.

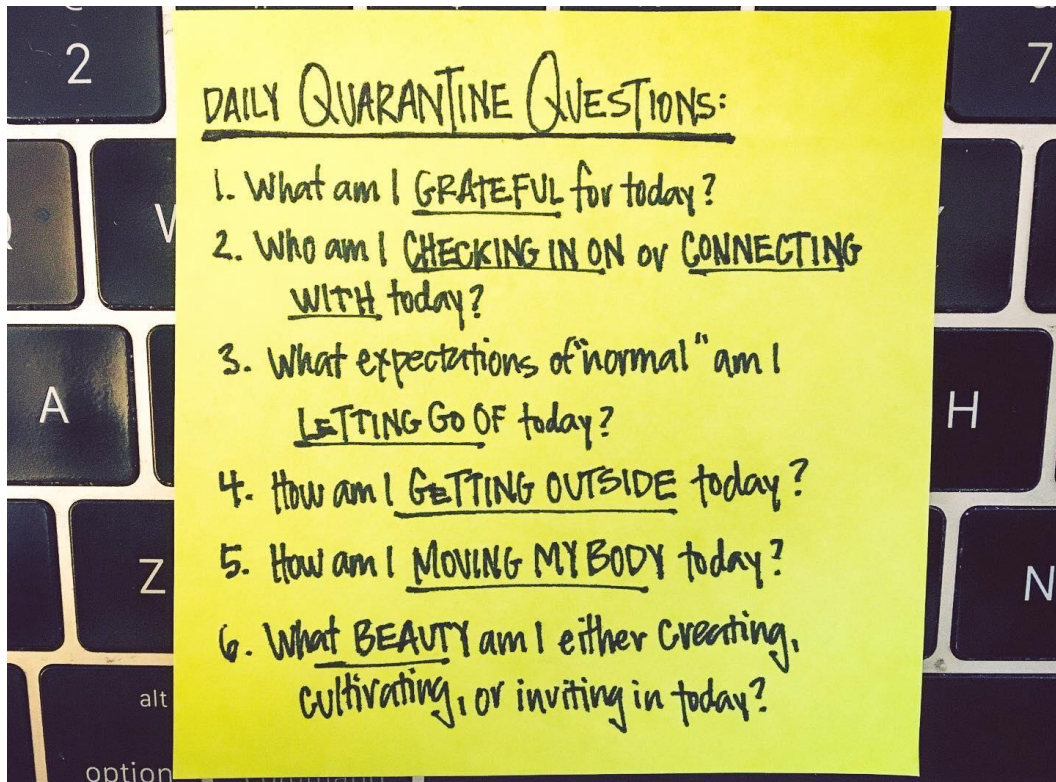
These are some ways to join Jesus on his mission in this time of crisis. The Lord wants to equip us on how to respond to the crisis, how to pray, and how to join Jesus on his mission. This is an opportunity for us to learn how to show up and love well.

Let's follow the Lord Jesus and let his Holy Spirit help us to show up and love well.

By the way, in my sermon notes, which are online, I have posted resources at the end of my message. I pray that you will take time to process this message and to use those resources to help you show up and love well in this season.

1. Daily Quarantine Questions
2. A Facebook post from a friend on the difference between physical distancing and social distancing, and the need for social connection.
3. A post from our friend Michael Sullivant. He invites us to pray the Lord's Prayer in a significantly relational way.

Resources:



Facebook post from Sherri Meyer-Veen about social distancing.

[Sherri Meyer-Veen](#) is with [Michael Meyer-Veen](#).

PHYSICAL DISTANCING... NOT "Social Distancing."

I'd like to propose that we make a change to the way we are talking about this "distancing" thing we are doing. Let's start using the phrase "Physical Distancing." There is no need to "socially" distance; we have lots and lots of ways we can creatively stay socially connected. In fact in anxious times, social distancing can be harmful!

Socially, we need each other. We need to share what we are going through. We need to be reminded there is still goodness in the world. We need to laugh together, cry together, and "be" together, even if we can't be physically present with each other.

We do need times by ourselves too, but not weeks!

And, because language is important, please, please... we are not "socially isolating."

Our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well being are interwoven. We are, and will continue, to feel the impact of all of the change and difficulties associated with these strange times. We CAN get through it TOGETHER! Pick up the phone! Skype. FaceTime. Zoom. Google Hangout. Text. Chat. Message.... use the means you have, which may include the old school email or snail mail. Stay connected. Check in with each other. Let others know you care.

Please share and help change this language and important reminder!



How to Pray from Michael Sullivant's [Facebook post](#) on March 18

God wants a more personal relationship with you.

Your heavenly Father, your Creator, is truly willing and eager to connect with you heart to heart. He wants you to be His and He wants to be yours. He is your heart's true home. Like any relationship, it's a two-way street. However, long ago, God accomplished His part to lay the foundation for this personal friendship with you. He is the one who has initiated this relationship and the Holy Spirit has already been at work to draw you to himself and to His son, Jesus Christ.

When His first followers asked Jesus to teach them to connect with and talk to God, He shared a special prayer with them that provided them with simple and profound things to say to him. This prayer is known as The Lord's Prayer and it still works today!

Get into a quiet space, all alone or with a trusted friend or two who have already met Jesus, and then, in your heart of hearts relax and welcome God's presence to come near to you. Take your time ... this is about your relationship with the living God! It deserves your attention and focus. First, read through the prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13.

Our Father in heaven,
May your name be honored,
May your kingdom come,
May your will be done,
As in heaven, so on earth.
Give us today the bread we need now;
And forgive us the things we owe, As we too have forgiven what was owed to us.
Don't bring us into the great trial, But rescue us from evil.
You are the rightful ruler of heaven and earth,
Your power is supreme,
You alone deserve the highest praise.

Next, mediate on each phrase of the above prayer and consider the thoughts in parentheses to help clarify what you are praying about.

- Our Father in heaven (Your Creator lives in an invisible dimension nearby that interfaces with our visible world. He wants to be to you what a truly good Father is, no matter how broken, or strong, your relationship with your earthly father has been.)

- May your name be honored (The name points to the nature of God that has been demeaned and mocked by us in the past and by so many people in our world. Feel sorry for this, as you are able. We want this to change in the days ahead.)
- May your kingdom come, May your will be done, As in heaven, so on earth. (Ask now that the presence, ways and purposes of the Holy Spirit will sweep into your life and that people in our world will experience the peace, joy, wisdom and love that is fully known and shared in highest heaven.)
- Give us today the bread we need now (God longs for you to trust him, each day and every hour, for all the practical things you need to sustain your life. Apologize to him for any ways you've been trying to make your life work in your own strength. He is a generous Provider and wants to be honored in this way.)
- And forgive us the things we owe (In this, you are asking for forgiveness for all your sins and failures. This is possible because Jesus went to the cross and shed His blood as a "sacrifice lamb" and died. He died for us all; He died for you. He faced and triumphed over all the evils, of all the ages and of all humanity by dying on the cross. That evil and death were vanquished by this was confirmed by His resurrection from the dead on the third day. Thank God for His forgiveness of all of your sins.)
- As we too have forgiven what was owed to us. (Make space in your heart for the free gift of God's forgiveness in Jesus by letting go of all unforgiveness, resentment and bitterness toward anyone who has wronged you. Also, release any blame toward our good God for allowing bad things to occur in your past. These are toxins in your heart that will gradually destroy your life if they are not released to God. You are invited every day to bring all the pains of your life to the cross of Christ and place all injustices, large and small, into His capable hands. This doesn't mean that what happened to you was right or okay. It also does not mean that you must have a trusted relationship with an abusive person. It simply means that you have put these matters into God's hands so you can be free to enjoy His love, peace and joy.)
- Don't bring us into the great trial (Ask God to protect you and lead you away from engaging in situations that are outside the boundaries He sets for you. Ask him to keep you from trying to make life work in your own wisdom or strength.)
- But rescue us from evil (Evil is real and there is a very real invisible adversary, the devil, who is seeking to assault and deceive you and the people around you. He tempts, lures, entices, lies and manipulates people and situations and attempts to sabotage your friendship with your heavenly Father, His Son and His Spirit. Do not fear, but simply ask God to equip you with wisdom, strength and power for this battle and to be your Captain in the spiritual battle between good and evil. It's a good fight!)
- You are the rightful ruler of heaven and earth, Your power is supreme, You alone deserve the highest praise. (You are closing your prayer with a good

confession by which 1) you gladly acknowledge Jesus as the rightful Lord of your life. 2) you recognize that His power is greater than all other powers, both visible and invisible and 3) you have rejected all other “gods” (idols) and will reserve your deepest affections and highest compliments for who He is and what He has done.

Feel free to go back through this prayer again and again until it becomes more relational and warm. It’s the prayer Jesus Himself taught us to use. Thank Him now for listening to your prayers—He has heard you and is glad that you trust Him. May He be with you now and always!