

# Introduction

A PRAYERBOOK FOR teenagers is not a new or novel idea. But prayers for teenagers written by teenagers for use throughout the liturgical year, based on scripture and using inclusive images to address God—*that's a novel idea!*

God of My Heart started as an assignment in Senior High Theology at St. Patrick's High School in North Platte, Nebraska, where Connie Wlaschin Ruhlman taught for seventeen years. She had each student design his/her own prayer book with a variety of prayers, "store bought" and original, free-verse and stylized, and several using the form now published in this book.

After collecting the prayers written by the teenagers for over a year, she gathered together over 100 of the prayers for a graduate school paper. She was encouraged to get them published, and, one thing leading to another, Morehouse Education Resources (at that time Living the Good News) published the first edition of *God of My Heart* in 1997.

In the second edition of this book, you will find additional prayers as well as more material to encourage young people and their leaders to practice prayer throughout the year. Each section contains practical ways to engage in the practice of prayer that are geared toward young people—but practices that could be used by anyone. There is a new section at the end for Youth Ministers suggesting how they might engage their groups in the practice of prayer as well.

As Ruhlman said in the original book, "In your hands you hold the insightful ups and downs of a variety of teenagers' faith lives. What a joy to help birth these young authors' works and to realize even more profoundly that the Spirit indeed directs what we often

presume to be the happenstance of life and its opportunities for growth. I hope these teenagers' prayers find a warm welcome in the hands of Christian youth who wish to begin and continue a relationship with the God of their hearts."

If you are a young person reading these words, know that *you* have a powerful, spirit-filled, authentic voice that needs to be heard and celebrated more often. Our hope is that you will find this book to be a jumping off point for individual prayer, group prayer, prayer time with family and/or friends and prayer in the world.

# *How to Use This Book*

## *For Youth*

This is a book of prayers written by youth, for youth. We hope that the words, situations, reflections and images will speak to you and help you find or develop your practice of prayer and the unique voice you give to prayer. Our hope is that you will find this book helpful on your spiritual journey as you pray and wrestle with all that life gives you.

You can use this book daily, weekly, monthly or seasonally as a devotion and as a call to prayer. We hope you will find the thematic index helpful in finding prayers for a variety of times, experiences or situations in your life, and encourage you to use the reflections at the end of each section as a way of entering into your own practice of prayer and even possibly writing prayers.

As you read the words, thoughts, experiences and faith of other youth, you will discover your own place of prayer as you come to understand, deepen and engage in your relationship to God as an individual and as a community.

## *For Leaders/Teachers/Mentors*

Our hope is that this book will become a tool you can use in group devotion and in retreat settings as a gift to youth and as a way to help explore prayer with them. The prayers contained here were written by youth from all over the church. Read, pray and meditate on these prayers. Allow yourself the time to wonder how the image of God comes through, explore the images the writer has chosen to use, reflect on what the scripture passage has to say about that particular prayer and season of the year, and notice how the prayers in this book reflect the lives of the youth around you.

Along with you, we pray that *God of My Heart* becomes one of the resources you can use in the multitude of ways as you minister to and with young people on their journey.

You will find a thematic index at the back of this book. This will help you find prayers that are applicable to many settings, situations and experiences. We invite you to explore the section of the book at the end that is specifically how you might use this book, the practice of prayer and writing prayers in your youth-group setting. To that end, you will also find, at the end of each seasonal section, suggestions and practices that you can use in youth group or in retreats.

## ***For All***

Be creative, be bold, be authentic as you explore these practices, for it is in prayer that we often hear God's voice and that is a voice we all need to hear more often.

—*The Rev. Shannon Kelly*

# Different Forms of Prayer

## **ACTS of Prayer**

*ACTS* is an acronym that helps us remember the different kinds of prayers.

### **A = Adoration of God**

Praying in *adoration* of God is to give praise to God for all God has done, is doing, and will continue to do. It is one of the ways in which we can fulfill the commandment to love God with all our heart, mind and soul.

### **C = Confession**

Prayers of *confession* are a way of “clearing the decks” with God. It is an opportunity to name those things that have come to separate you from God or others (your actions, resentments you hold, objects like money or popularity that get in the way, etc.) and ask for forgiveness and guidance for the future.

### **T = Thanksgiving**

Prayers of *thanksgiving* might be the prayers that come most easily because many of us are taught from an early age to say thank you. Saying thank you to God is a way of holding up all that God has blessed you with and honoring God for all those blessings.

### **S = Supplication**

Prayers of *supplication* are when we come to God asking to tend to our needs or the needs of others which is an important way

of asking God to be a part of our lives—the ups and downs, the good and the bad, the joyful and the painful.

If you notice, we do each of these things in church every Sunday. We praise God, we confess to God, we give thanks to God, and we ask God to tend to our needs and the needs of others.

## *Praying Through the Church Year*

The Church calendar is set up to reflect the seasons of the church year. Our seasons reflect where we are in the story of Jesus' life and the life of the church. Praying through the church year is an important part of what we do as it helps us remember the story of Christ and our part in that story:

In *Advent* we wait for the birth of Christ with expectation and preparation.

In *Christmas* we celebrate the birth of Christ with joy and peace.

In *Epiphany* we remember the coming of the Wise Men, the baptism of Jesus and other times in which there are “a-ha” moments as people realize that Jesus is the Messiah.

During *Lent* we give extra thought about how to change our lives in order to live more in accordance with Jesus' teachings. At this time people often take on special disciplines or give up something as a discipline (more on this later!). It is often a special time of confession in the hopes of realigning ourselves with God and others.

In *Holy Week* we remember and walk the story of Jesus' final days, which helps us recall the whole story of Christ's passion, death and resurrection.

*Easter* begins with the story and celebration of Jesus' resurrection. The Easter season is seven weeks long and a time to

continue to hear stories of Jesus' appearing to disciples and friends. This is a time of remembering that Jesus broke the cycle of death and rewrote what death means for all of us.

*Pentecost* starts with the story of Pentecost, where the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to us by Jesus. The season after Pentecost is a time for us known as the "green, growing season," the season in which we hear stories of Jesus, his life and his ministry while here on earth. During Pentecost, we reflect on what these stories have to say to us about God, God's people and our part as God's people.

## ***Prayer and Listening***

Like a conversation you have with friends or family, prayer is not a one-way conversation. In prayer, we both talk *and* listen. As you write your prayers, think about how you are called to listen to God and how you invite others into that holy silence.

## ***Meditation***

Part of praying can be meditating on an object or word or phrase. Meditation is a form of focusing, and it is a form of letting go. It invites the person to let go of what is swirling in their head and in their heart and instead to focus on God and God's word.

## ***Envisioning God's Call***

Throughout scriptures, God calls us to be a part of creating the Kingdom of God. God calls us to a new way of life, to a new way of treating each other, being with one another, and caring for the least of these among us.

Take a moment and envision the world that God is calling you and your community to be a part of. How can we pray for that world to come into being? How do we pray for one another, for world issues and for things that seem bigger than we are?



Season of

# Advent



**he Incarnation** (God becoming one of us) is an event we've celebrated for over 2000 years, and each year we eagerly attempt to refocus on God's gift: *Emmanuel, Jesus come to be with us.*

We make that attempt in Advent, a time of preparation and waiting. Yes, it's true, we often lose the focus, but as Christians we are always drawn back...back to the manger, its generous gift, its stark simplicity and its radical invitation.

Our Advent prayers offered here do just that: draw us back to the basics. In these reflections we focus on the simplicity of the manger and the awesomeness of the Incarnation. We gain fresh insights into what it means to prepare, what it means to wait, what it means to welcome Christ into our life in a new way.

 **Our King and** *Savior now draws near: Come, let us adore him.*

—*Book of Common Prayer, page 80*

Advent is the time of waiting and preparing for the birth of Christ. However, we as humans don't like to wait. We want everything now—our food, our information, our rewards, our salvation...all *now*. Remember this as you pray.

## Advent Prayers

“**B**eware, keep alert: for you do not know when the time will come.”

—Mark 13:33

### Patient God.

We struggle to live on your time, instead wanting to live on our own time. We want to eat when we are hungry, sleep when we are tired, be rewarded when we have done well, heal when we become wounded, be loved when we love. We turn away from you when things don't happen fast enough, forget you when it doesn't seem like you are with us, ignore you when you tell us to stay awake and wait. Forgive us for the times when we have blocked out your message, fallen asleep against your request, and not waited for your time, your moment. *Amen.*

We have all been blessed in so many ways. Remember to pass the peace of Christ to all whom you meet today.

—Rebecca McGregor

*(Themes: waiting, peace, Advent)*

**F**aithful friends are *beyond price; no amount  
can balance their worth.*

—*Sirach 6:15*

## God of Friends.

Friends are the greatest. A true friend is one of the most cherished possessions I could ever wish to have. My friends have stood by me through a lot and they have always been there for me.

God, help me to remember this when material things seem to matter more than they should, such as when I am Christmas shopping. While gifts are important and fun to get and give, I know that spending time with my friends and family is even more important than any gift. People are the real treasures, not material goods, although advertisers would have us believe otherwise. When I get caught up in material things, help me to remember the value of my family and friends and what a precious gift our time together is. *Amen.*

Today I will treat every friend, every family member, as the valuable gifts that they are in my life.

—*Julie Brown*

*(Themes: friends, family, material goods, gifts)*

**N**ow faith is *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

—Hebrews 11:1

## God of Faith.

There are many times that I find myself being a nonbeliever. I doubt things that cannot be proven or seen. Sometimes I don't understand your ways, and that makes me doubt. Like now, during Advent, I wonder why you came as a baby and why you chose the conditions you did.

What is it you are saying to me during this time of preparation for Christmas? Help my faith in you to grow, no matter how many questions or doubts I have. Help me to understand that faith is a gift, and I don't need to understand everything. Help me to believe what is seen and unseen and to trust in your ways. *Amen.*

Today I will have faith in myself, in you and in others around me.

—Teresa Harvat  
(Themes: doubt, faith, belief)

**T**his people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

—Matthew 15:8

## God of My Life.

We often say that we are close and have a good relationship with you, but how many of us are telling the truth? Sometimes it's just easier to say the words and think that we are close and forget that we have to work at building a friendship with you.

I want to be close to you, not just say that I am, especially in this time of preparing for Christmas. Please give me the grace to hold you close in my heart and show you that I mean what I say through my actions. Amen.

Today when I pray, I will think about and mean the words I speak, rather than just say them.

—Matt Voss

*(Themes: prayer, truth, intimacy with God)*

**“So whenever you** *give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

—Matthew 6:2-4

## All-Giving God.

Helping needy people in today's world can make a person look good. It says that we are trying. But many of us don't see the true “magic” in helping others. It is not the recognition or the rewards but the feeling inside, the deep satisfaction of giving of oneself that transforms us. It is true that we end up receiving more than we give.

God, this day was given to me by you. Let me make the most of it. When others need help or are having trouble, guide me to give a hand when it's needed and not make a big deal of it. When I help a classmate with their homework or give money to a homeless person on the street, I know that being able to help is reward enough. Thank you for the opportunity to give to others and for the experience of the true joy of giving that comes from it. *Amen.*

Today when I give to others, whether it be my money or my time, help me to leave it at that and not seek thanks or recognition.

—Jodi Boyd  
(Themes: selflessness, giving, mission, outreach)

**T**he Lord is *my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

—Psalm 27:1a

## God of Good Choices.

In my life there are many different twists and turns. Sometimes I get so mixed up that I don't know where to go. I am afraid of so many social pressures: drinking, drugs, sex and others.

God, please lead me to your light and take away my unreasonable fears. You and I can get through tough situations together. During this Advent season let me take a positive step out into life and not fear what may come of it. Grant me strength and wisdom to understand that I have nothing to fear when I confide in you and follow your will. Please work through me to give others the strength they need not to fear what they do not know. *Amen.*

Today I will do what I know is right no matter what my peers may think.

—Danielle Cooper

*(Themes: peer pressure, fear, God's presence)*

**F**or wisdom is a kindly spirit, but will not free blasphemers from the guilt of their words; because God is witness of their inmost feelings, and a true observer of their hearts, and a hearer of their tongues.

—Wisdom 1:6

## All-Knowing God.

We are the only creatures to whom you granted wisdom to know right from wrong and the wisdom to better our lives. Sometimes I think I'm smarter than you. I think I can deceive you. When others think I'm helping the situation, sometimes I'm really hurting it. Sometimes when people think that I'm doing my homework, I'm actually copying it from a friend. Help me to use your gift of wisdom in a positive way and to be honest with myself as well as others. I know that is a big part of being a wise person.

Thank you for the gift of wisdom. When I think about it, I know that even though I can fool my family and friends, I can't deceive you because you see everything. You even know what I am thinking. *Amen.*

On this day in Advent, I will use my gift of wisdom and do the best that I can do in all my studies.

—Jason Grennan  
(Themes: wisdom, honesty, studies)

**K**eept alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.

—1 Corinthians 16:13-14

## God of Love,

If only our attitude toward life was as simple as these verses that sum up all of life. We need to be alert in waiting for Jesus to come again. When trials and tribulations that we just can't understand come our way, we have the opportunity to stand firm in our faith. Having a brave and strong faith will get us through the challenges of life. Most importantly, we must treat all persons, guard all actions and do all our work in love. It all seems very logical and simple, but it is hard to do.

Please God, help me remember and refer back to these few, powerful words as I go about my day. When things are rushed and time is short, help me to do all my work in love. When people say words that hurt me, help me to be brave and strong and work my way through the hurt. And last of all, when I doubt your plans and your love for me, help me to stand firm in the struggle and know my faith in you will not fail me. *Amen.*

Today I will offer all my work and study as a gift of love in preparation for Christmas.

—Lynn Smith  
(Themes: strength, love)

**John the Baptist** said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

—John 1:23

## Helping God.

When John the Baptizer said these words in the desert, you were working through him. John spent his life working to spread your word. You asked him to baptize you even as he protested, "I am not worthy to untie the thong of your sandal."

Sometimes I feel that you, God, are trying to work through me too, but I sometimes shut you out and won't allow it. I do want to do what is right, but I easily give in to pressures.

God, help me to help you. When you are working through me, help me be aware of it, and help me to listen to my desire to do what is right. What is it that you have in mind for my life, God?

*Amen.*

Today I will be open to all the possibilities you have in store for me.

—Brian Harvat

*(Themes: vocation, Baptism of Our Lord)*

## *Prayers and Resources for Using an Advent Wreath*

FOR SOME INDIVIDUALS, using an Advent Wreath is a prayerful way of focusing their devotions and marking time during Advent. It has rich symbolism and meaning tied to it for a number of reasons:

The wreath is a circle, reminding us that God has no beginning and no end.

The evergreen trimmings that often decorate the wreath remind us of God's everlasting love for us.

The four candles of the Advent Wreath mark the four weeks of Advent as we watch and prepare for Christ's coming. They are often either blue (the color that reminds us of Mary) or purple (the color that reminds us of royalty). Some wreaths have a fifth candle in the middle that is white, known as the Christ candle, to mark Christmas. These candles remind us that Christ is the light of joy and love that chases away darkness.

Advent wreaths do not need to be fancy. They can be made with votive candles and greenery. They can be crafted on floral greenery rings. They can be a brass holder made for holding four candles. Have fun creating your wreath.

As you light a candle each week, you are invited to read scripture, pray and meditate on what God is calling you to that week. You can use the scriptures and prayers below, use the scriptures and prayers found in this section, or use scriptures and prayers that have significance to you.

# First Week of Advent

**(Light one candle on the wreath.)**

**“K**eeP awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

—Matthew 24:42, 44

GOD OF HOPE, we light this candle as we wait for your coming. Help us to watch for signs of you in the world around us and in the people we meet. Be with us as we wait for you and fill us with hope as we try our best to serve you. *Amen.*

## Reflection...

- I wonder how you are watching for God in your life?
- I wonder where you have seen hope?
- I wonder what is the hardest part of waiting for you?
- I wonder where you have seen God come into your life?
- I wonder what you hope for?

## Second Week of Advent

(Now two candles on the wreath.)

**A**nd the wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

—Isaiah 11:6

GOD OF PEACE, we light these candles as we wait for your coming. Help us to seek after peace in our hearts, homes, and in our communities as we engage your mission in the world. Guide us in the ways of peace so we can be a part of creating the peace you want for the world. *Amen.*

### Reflection...

- I wonder where you see peace?
- I wonder how you can create more peace in your life or in your community?
- I wonder where you don't see peace?
- I wonder how we can be a part of working for peace?
- I wonder how you seek peace?

## Third Week of Advent

**(Now light three candles on the wreath.)**

**T**he wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

—Isaiah 35:1-2a

GOD OF JOY, we light these candles as we wait for your coming. Help us to hear the joyful message of your salvation, justice, peace, and love. In a world that can be full of despair and loneliness, may we be witnesses of your joy and hope. *Amen.*

### Reflection...

- I wonder where you find joy in your life?
- I wonder where Jesus felt joy?
- I wonder how we can help others experience joy when they are in despair?
- I wonder who brings us joy?
- I wonder where and how we can spread joy?

## Fourth Week of Advent

**(Now light all four candles.)**

**L**ook, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God with us.'"

—Matthew 1:23

GOD OF LOVE, we light these candles as we wait for your coming. Help us to see your love and the love of Mary and Joseph as we approach Christmas with hope, peace, and joy. Be with us in these last days of preparation and waiting and point us to the places where we can see and experience your love. *Amen.*

### Reflection...

- I wonder where you feel love in your life?
- I wonder where you have experienced love?
- I wonder how we show others we love them?
- I wonder how we can love others as you have loved us?
- I wonder where and how we can spread your love?

# Christmas

**(Now light all candles, including the white candle, if you wish.)**

**B**ut the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

—Luke 2:10-14

GOD OF US all, be with us as we enter into the season of Christmas. Show us your ways of hope, peace, joy, and love in all that we do and see and experience. Help us be open to your love for us and for the world so that we can find a new beginning. Guide us through our lives so we may engage in your mission for this world as we seek hope, peace, joy and love. *Amen.*

## Reflection...

- I wonder where the Christ Child has touched your life?
- I wonder where you see and spread hope?
- I wonder where you seek and strive for peace?
- I wonder where you find and increase joy?
- I wonder where you spread and receive love?

## *Advent Daily Prayers*

**AS WE BEGIN** a new year in the church, Advent is a great time to set aside time each day to pray to God, be with God and be silent to receive God's love for you.

We invite you to find a way that works for you. You can use the daily readings for your church, you can use an online devotional, you can use the prayers in this book to help focus and direct you in your time each day. Some churches will have a daily inspiration calendar for Advent, so if you have a church near you or one that you attend regularly, check with them to see if they have Advent devotions or booklets to help you on your journey.

## Creating Prayers During Advent

ADVENT IS A time to prepare, to wait, to listen and to watch for the coming of Christ. It is a particularly good time to *listen* in prayer.

Listen for the still, small voice.

Sit in silence and let it wash over you. You could be in a park, in the middle of lunch or in the quiet of your room. It does not matter what is around you, it only matters that you, yourself, are silent. Sit in that silence and notice the things that come to mind.

At this time of year, with Christmas coming and the end of the semester around the corner, you may find yourself distracted. If you find that you are getting distracted, simply acknowledge that they are there, and put them aside in your mind. Those things that come to mind may also be where God is leading you (only you would know the difference.) If that is where God is leading you, pay attention and stay in the moment.

Listen to that still, small voice. Find where God is speaking to you.

When you feel called, write your prayer to God, not worrying about wording or phrasing. Simply pray and write and stay in the moment.

