PRAYER STARTERS

TALKING WITH GOD ABOUT HARD TIMES

SUZANNE ELLER

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A Note from Suzie

Trusting God can feel fragile in hard seasons. Some of us grew up in church, and we sang the words from that classic song: *'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus*. . . . Then circumstances or an event or a season made us question what that looks like. When we are in a difficult place—physically, emotionally, or spiritually—we may feel as if we are reaching for Jesus with all our might but aren't sure how to talk to God about what we are going through.

When I was in one of those hard and challenging seasons, I was invited to speak at an event several states away from my home. I was about to take the stage to encourage and teach other women, but the reality was I had been in an extended battle myself. My spirit was bruised. My heart was tender. Speaking to the women in that room was a privilege, but I knew the words I was about to share were for my own heart just as much as theirs.

I prayed quietly.

Lord, I need you.

A few seconds later, a woman came up to me and handed me a small bag. "I was praying for you before the event," she said. "This is for you."

Inside was a small picture of a tree with these words:

> Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.
> He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the

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> stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit (Jeremiah 17:7–8 ESV).

What a vivid picture! The winds whip. The heat is withering. Yet somehow the tree stands because the roots are soundly placed in the deep. That tree doesn't just make it through the drought and heat, it lives and is fruitful.

That day the Lord used a stranger to remind me of this promise:

When we are in hard times, our Source of strength is Christ.

When our roots of faith are in our relationship with him, we will one day look back to see that not only did we survive that hard place, but somehow miracles came out of those face-in-the-carpet moments.

Blessed is the [wo]man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the LORD.

As you talk to God every day, he meets you in the hard place. Sometimes we shy away from time with him simply because we don't know what to say. Please understand that prayer is not about the number of words that come out of your mouth. It's not about how pretty or eloquent it sounds. It's not about how loud or soft you speak. You might sit in silence, and that's okay, because God knows what you need before you even say a word.

Just show up.

As you do, your roots go a little deeper.

I'm so grateful you picked up this book. The prayer starters within are an invitation to begin the conversation you've been longing to hold with God. Each prayer starter was birthed out of a specific Scripture and is a launching pad to talk about what's been on your heart. *Prayer Starters* is a creative, interactive invitation to help you pray right where you are.

A prayer starter may lead you into meaningful conversation with God. It may create space where you just soak in his

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presence. It may allow you to talk with him about what has been heavy on your mind, to air your hurts, or to ask your questions. It may give you room to rejoice about things that make your heart glad. The most beautiful news is that God meets you there no matter what.

Suzie

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How to Use This Prayer Book

Jesus often slipped away to talk to God. With that as our example, one of the most powerful things we can do is to create space each day to talk to him as well. That's going to look different for each of us. If there is a time that is best for you, make it a priority. If there is a place that draws you, make that your spot to meet with God (that might be in your own home or at a local coffee shop). You can carry this book with you or tuck it away in your favorite quiet place.

Find a time and place that works for you.

While there's not a best way to use this book, I'd love to share some suggestions.

- Begin with one prayer starter a day at a time. Start with the first or flip through to find what lights up your heart.
- Have a pen handy or some fun markers or colored pencils. Invite the Lord to join you as you begin (he's already there).
- Some of the prayer starters include prayer prompts. If they resonate with you, see where they take you.

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- If you have more to say, and often you will, write the rest of your prayer on the page. If you have a question for him, write that down too. This is just you and God, and he loves, loves, loves you.
- If there is a day where your words are absent, let the prayer starter simply allow you to breathe in his presence. That's intimacy too.
- If you sense the Holy Spirit leading you, teaching you, offering words of comfort, hope, or even a challenge for the day, write that down.
- If you have concerns about those you love, jot those down as they come to mind. If you are like me, a hundred different things might pop into your brain—like a grocery list. Write those down and then tune back in to God.
- If you are creative and desire to color the illustrations in the book, have fun with that. This is something I love to do! My Bible and journals are filled with color and words in the margins. It's just one more way to center our hearts on what we are reading or hearing from God.
- As a prayer is answered, find the day that you prayed that prayer. Record the answered prayer and the date. This is not only a way to celebrate what God has done, but it becomes a remembrance that you can look back on one day when you need it most.

No matter how you approach this, when you intentionally seek God, you *will* find him.

That's powerful and faith changing.

If You Love to Study Scripture

While each prayer starter originates from a passage of Scripture, I share only a portion of the passage with you. If you want to combine study with your prayer time, there are several online

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commentary and study sites to help you do just that. A few of my favorite resources are:

- BibleStudyTools.com
- BibleHub.com
- Blueletterbible.org
- MyStudyBible.com

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PART 1

Trusting God in Hard Seasons

Whatever dark tunnel we may be called upon to travel through, God has been there.

—Elisabeth Elliot

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1 | You Are My Source

Heavenly Father, some days I try to make it on my own, and that doesn't work because it's in my own strength. Help me to remember that you are my Source. Your strength holds me in the winds and heat and drought. It protects my thoughts and anchors my heart. So, today I put a toe in the deeper waters of my faith. I run toward you and you alone. Though my knees are knocking and my heart is beating fast, I desire to live in the deep with you. Your presence and love will not only hold me but shine through me in ways that are surprising, even in this hard place. Help me to remember that it's not my job to do this all by myself. Thank you for taking all the pressure I've placed on my shoulders and helping me carry it. . . .

Share with God the one thing you want him to know today.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.

Jeremiah 17:7 ESV

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2 | Help Me Remember

God, you know that faith and fear can live in the same place—in me. My fear is that this thing, this hard place, these difficulties will not end or that I'll not be big enough to make it all the way through to the other side. My faith tells me to remember who you are. You are my safe place. You set my feet on solid ground. This situation is real, but so are you. So I place this person, this thing, these feelings in your capable hands one more time, and I'll do that again and again as needed. Thank you for being my Rock. . . .

If you are carrying fear that you had put down in the past, you are not alone. Sometimes it takes a few times (or many) to put it in his hands and see it as a burden God alone can carry.

I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?

Psalm 56:4

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3 | In This Hard Place

Father, sometimes you lead me into a harder path of faith. It takes me away from what is easy or familiar or what feels good in the moment, and I wrestle with that. I might even believe you are taking something good from me. Yet this is what I know: You have more for me. You walk in front of me on this harder path of faith. You lead and guide me every step of the way. More than that, you climb in with me. As we go through this together, I'll discover who I am—the whole me, the person you created me to be. Take my fear. Hold my hand. Lead me. I'm grateful for your mercy and grace that soak over my heart and life even in the fire. . . .

When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.

Isaiah 43:2

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