



REAL SELF :: REAL GOD

UNLOCKING BARRIERS TO PRAYER

NICKY CHISWELL

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Real Self Real God: Unlocking Barriers to Prayer

© Nicky Chiswell 2023

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ACCESSING 'REAL SELF REAL GOD'

The recording of this album has been made possible by the generous support of many friends. I want this resource to be readily available to everyone who may be helped by it. You can download the eBook and songs at no cost.

If you would like to contribute to the costs of Nicky's music and prayer resource ministry, please feel free to send an optional donation.

The album is also freely available on Spotify.

Please feel free to pass this onto others!

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND FREE DOWNLOADS:

nickychiswell.com/realself

DEDICATION

For Graeme –
My prayer buddy every morning
with that sacred cup of tea.

* * *

For my precious companions on the journey –
who help me to pray.

* * *

In very loving memory of my mother –
Mum
September 1928 – February 2023

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INTRODUCTION

Hi! I'm Nicky and I am so pleased you have found this eBook!
Welcome!

The idea of an album to help people unlock barriers to prayer first occurred to me over ten years ago. This eBook, combined with the songs on the album, are designed to help you unlock the barriers that might be getting in the way of prayer for you.

Do you struggle with prayer? Me too! Big time. Let me explain...

I became a follower of Jesus as a 12-year-old. In the months following, I couldn't wait to pray and spend time with Him. It was like Copernicus realising we are not the centre of the solar system, or like finding Narnia¹ at the back of the wardrobe.

I just could not get enough of Him. I experienced what the Bible calls my 'first love'. (Revelation 2:4)

But after a while I found prayer pretty hard. I am an extrovert and I also have a very busy mind. Sometimes it feels like a bit like a shaken-up snow globe!²

1 Rory Shiner recently shared this illustration in a sermon at church. From CS Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Geoffrey Bles, 1950).

2 I resonated with this illustration from Kim Boykin, *Zen for Christians: A Beginner's Guide* (Ixia Press, 2018).

I didn't like being alone back then, and I can be pretty fast-paced. It's hard to stop the internal whirring. Understandably, I found it hard to pray and focus alone. For many years I wanted to pray by myself but just found it tough. I didn't stick at regular times of prayer by myself for long.

There is something about praying 'in the closet' that I knew Jesus thought was important. It's when no one is watching. It's intimacy. I found myself avoiding making time for this and I knew that was a problem. Then along came some legalism, and some wounds inflicted by life. Big questions about prayer emerged and I kind of dried up. I was baffled and, frankly, quite ashamed of my paltry prayer life. My inner world's sense of the Lord, His glory and His love just shrivelled.

In the last 20 years or so, a whole lot of different things have helped.

Some of these things have been friends, church, structured retreats with input, a spiritual director and many, many books. Websites, podcasts and apps spurring me on to pray have been great too.

But who has helped most of all is God Himself – the one to whom we pray. Thankfully, He is endlessly patient and keen for me to keep learning and growing in prayer. He is our Shepherd and He is here to help.

Knowing His lovingkindness, as the psalmist says, is better than life. (See Psalm 16)

That helps me to pray!

I am still a prayer struggler – but there is great news!

INTRODUCTION

The truth of the matter is there is nothing at all terminally stopping us from praying. Everything that gets in the way can be overcome. Jesus has done absolutely everything required to enable us to pray. He is praying already, and we are in Him! Just bring your real self to our wonderfully real God.

His arms are open... Come near!

HOW THIS EBOOK WORKS

I have picked my five top barriers to personal prayer that have dogged me over the years. Here is the list!

This is followed by what my internal voice says and the title of the related songs on my album *Real Self Real God*.

BARRIER 1:

A WRONG VIEW OF GOD AND HOW HE SEES ME

Internal voice:

"He's not that keen!"

"I am not good enough."

Songs:

[Come Near](#)

[Come Now and Pray](#)

BARRIER 2:

SIN, GUILT AND SHAME

Internal voice:

"I am too bad to face up to Him. It's easier to avoid God than experience shame."

Songs:

[Confession](#)

[Come Near](#)

[Real](#)

BARRIER 3:
PACE, ANXIETY, LOAD AND DISTRACTION

Internal voice:

"I can't stop to pray or it will all fall apart."

"I don't have time."

"I'm too tired."

Songs:

[Song For Martha](#)

[In Peace](#)

BARRIER 4:
DISTRESS, GRIEF, DEEP SADNESS, DISAPPOINTMENT AND
PROFOUND SUFFERING

Internal voice:

"I am hurting too much to talk to God about this. Why doesn't He make it stop if He loves me?"

"If He doesn't answer it will be disappointing all over again,

and that is too painful."

Songs:

[Too Deep](#)

[Psalm 143](#)

BARRIER 5:

EGO, FALSE-SELF AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Internal voice:

"Secretly, perhaps I can do this without Him-I have made other arrangements rather than prayerful dependence upon Him."

"Looking good to others matters a lot – the approval and affirmation of others will fix my life."

Songs:

[Humility](#)

[Real](#)

In each chapter I describe the barrier and provide a link to the related songs next to the lyrics. This is followed by a tool to help you pray and some suggested Bible passages to ponder.

KEY TO “REAL SELF REAL GOD”

Each chapter includes:



The inner voices that may hinder us praying



A description of the barrier



The lyrics of songs, and links to the recordings, that relate to that barrier



A prayer tool to help address that barrier



Some Bible passages that speak into that barrier



Further resources to explore

Suggestion

Pick a barrier to prayer that seems relevant to you. Read the chapter of this eBook which addresses that barrier.

After reading the description of the barrier, listen to the songs to help your frame of mind...

Then you might like to try using the prayer tool for that barrier. These tools are designed to assist you in a practical way. They might help you to open the gate and turn towards Him, hopefully opening up to Him with all that is in your heart

and mind.

You may also like to listen to the Lord by pondering a couple of the relevant bible passages listed.

My simple prayer for you is that you would 'keep on praying and not lose heart.' (Luke 18:1).

Please pray the same for me!

– Nicky Chiswell, 2023
Melbourne, Australia

BARRIER 1:
HOW YOU SEE GOD, AND HOW YOU THINK
GOD SEES YOU



"He's not that keen!"
"I am not good enough."



How I see God, and how I think He sees me, affects my praying enormously.

In my Christian walk some ways of thinking have been hanging around the back of my mind that are just not helpful at all.

Sometimes I am not even fully conscious of these ideas about God or about myself. But they are under the surface. I know they are blatantly inaccurate... but they still lurk there and trip me up.

Here is a list!

- ▶ Sometimes I secretly hold on to the idea that the God I pray to is kind of grumpy, unkind, uninterested, cross or frustrated with me. His arms are folded and He's sighing. My instinct would be to avoid a person like that at work or at a party. So, my guts tell me to stay away, and I stop turning towards Him.
- ▶ Or sometimes I have wondered what if He is just not that into me? Why He would be bothered with me? A deep sense of insignificance or inadequacy can kick in and stop me praying.³ Likewise, sometimes I don't pray because I think I am not that important to God in the big scheme of things. He is busy with much bigger Kingdom business.
- ▶ Or have you ever felt that the God who made us just seems ... well... absent? Big doubts about Him can stop me praying.

Here's another one:

- ▶ What if He is just getting on with the pre-scripted movie of life on earth so my prayers don't really have much effect anyway? His pre-destined will is going to happen anyway, so why bother pray? I am just a cog in a ministry machine building His kingdom. Just get on with doing stuff!

³ These feelings can be habitual and a leftover from past experiences and childhood things. The point is not to beat ourselves up about having them but just to stop and notice how they can get in the way of us praying. Bring them to Him!

All these thoughts don't help me pray. They can really get in the way.

Which ones on this list do you most resonate with?

I remember an evening decades ago where a bunch of people got to ask any question to a very wise, wonderful lecturer at the theological college where my husband, Graeme, was studying. I asked a question about how effective prayer really is, given the sovereign rule and control of God.

Isn't His will just going to happen anyway?

I will never forget the gist of this man's answer. I can't remember it word for word, but on so many levels he showed me that I had a mistaken view of God and of how He sees me too.

He said I needed to get rid of the idea that we have no part in God's rule and reign. Ditch the idea that God somehow is unaffected by our sharing our requests and desires with Him. He is a Father, He is love.

There are so many examples in God's word of Him responding to the prayers of His people, that we must take prayer seriously. We are repeatedly encouraged to pray in His word.

We are not watching a pre-recorded video here. God's sovereign rule and His knowledge of the future includes our responses and requests to Him. We are His children. He wants us to pray. And it is powerful and effective when we do.

Look, if we are chosen by Him to enjoy the brilliant privilege of going right into the throne room of God, why

would we hesitate? Why indeed!

I needed to get back to a clear understanding of what the real God is like with His people. He loves, He listens and is powerfully responsive.

He sent Jesus, his own beloved Son, to live and die on earth. He rescued us from ourselves. Then He was raised to life to open the door to His throne room. He did this so that all barriers to being with Him are removed.

That was a lot of effort to go to – just so we could pray and commune with Him!

I also needed to know who I really am. To understand what it means that I am a chosen, loved and rescued daughter of the King.

A right view of our God and of ourselves is the doorway to vital prayer.

*“The Father leans forward to listen.
The Son is praying at the throne.
The Spirit lives and groans within us.
So when we pray, we’re not alone!”*



Prayer Tool

How we see God and how He sees us

- ▶ Take three long slow deep breaths
- ▶ Listen to [Come Near](#) and/or [Come Now and Pray](#)
- ▶ Thank God that He is here, and that He is helping you to pray!
- ▶ Be real and take a moment to tell Him how you are feeling about praying at the moment.
- ▶ Do you have a sense of God being present or distant? Tell God about this in your own words...

eg "Lord, you seem a long way away and I wish that..."

- ▶ Do you have a sense that He cares about you? Tell God about this in your own words...

eg "Lord, I am not sure what you are thinking or feeling when You see me come to You. I know in my head that Your word says You care, but I am feeling wobbly about that... Please help me with this!..."

- ▶ Do you have a sense that God is powerful and can do more than you ask or imagine? Or have you become cynical about His interest in things you care about? Tell God about this in your own words...

eg "Lord I believe... help me in my unbelief!... I have grown a bit crusty and cynical about You answering prayer... Please help me..."

- ▶ Ask yourself, 'When I go to pray, what do I really think God is thinking about me?' Tell God about this thought.

eg *"My mind is telling me that You aren't that pleased I am here at the moment because..."*

"It feels like You might be thinking..."

Then just thank Him that no emotional barrier is too big to overcome – even this emotional and thought barrier. Even if it feels a certain way... the truth is different.

As Christian leader and theologian Peter Adam says:

"I don't know what you think about you, but I do know exactly what God thinks about you!"

PONDER this thought. You might like to use the suggested scriptures on the next page. Ponder them with God – He is speaking them to your heart and mind.

ASK the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to help you know the real Him, and ask Him to help you pray and teach you to keep praying and not give up.

Think about how excited the Father is to see His kid running up the road towards him after a long absence. Enjoy His embrace.



[Come Now and Pray](#) / [Come Near](#)



Scriptures to Ponder

- ▶ **Psalm 145, especially 145:7-9:** God's character
- ▶ **Exodus 34:5-9:** God's declaration of His character and how he see us
- ▶ **Psalm 103:** He *knows* us and has dealt with our sin... no surprises to Him.
- ▶ **Matthew 11:27-30:** Jesus' advice on coming to Him
- ▶ **Matthew 28:17-20:** His power, authority and presence
- ▶ **Luke 1:1-13**
- ▶ **Revelation 1:12-16:** The might and power of Jesus Christ
- ▶ **Romans 8:1-4; 15-17; 26-39** – Highlight the parts that assure us:

that He is at work now

that He has the future sorted, and

that He is helping us with our prayer



Suggested Resources

- ▶ One brilliant book is Kyle Strobel and John Coe, *Where Prayer Becomes Real: How Honesty with God Transforms Your Soul* (Baker Books, 2021)
- ▶ I can highly recommend Dane Ortlund's books *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Crossway, 2020) and *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Crossway, 2021). These are especially good at exploring what the character of the God we pray to is really like and how He sees us.
- ▶ Paul Miller's *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (NavPress, 2019) is also very helpful.

BARRIER 2: SIN, GUILT AND SHAME



“I am too bad to face up to Him. It’s easier to avoid God than experience shame.”



I have learned that shame is just about the deepest and hardest emotion to tolerate. I have learned this in my work as a psychologist and from living here on earth as a human for many decades. Shame is disgust turned inwards. It feels unspeakably awful. I just don’t want to feel it or face it. It doesn’t feel safe to do so. Part of me wants to avoid that feeling at all costs.

Of course, sometimes a sense of shame is there falsely. It can be a result of having been treated very badly and it very often follows experiences of abuse. It can become a habit of mind and heart that is there unfairly. This shame is

unwarranted.

Sometimes, however, shame is a healthy reaction to our own failures to live according to our values. We know God holds these values also, and so we squirm. It is a very difficult feeling to bear.

When we completely leave the Lord God out of the picture in our behaviour, schemes, thoughts and words, the Bible calls this “sin”.

We can get hit with a shame wave when we know we have sinned. We knew it was wrong, but we did it anyway.

Often, we really want to avoid the feelings of shame and it's that's when the doorway to excuses, pretence, defensiveness and “false-self” strategies stands wide, wide open. Maybe these things might make us feel better?

We also can just avoid ‘facing up’ by attempting to simply ignore and bury the whole thing. Our ego beckons us to avoid the deep discomfort of shame. It wants us to play pretend.

It makes perfect sense to me that after ignoring God's clear instructions, Adam's first response was to hide. Then he blamed Eve. They also start “covering up” in every way possible. (Read Genesis 3 for the whole miserable story.)

Another shame response is to beat ourselves up constantly, kind of pre-emptively attacking ourselves. Perhaps we do this so that rejection or judgement from others or the Lord doesn't feel so bad. After all, we got there first.

Our wonderful, three-in-one God knows extremely well

how this stuff works in our inner-being.

Want to hear the most wonderful news ever?

Our God offers a way out of this prison of shame-avoidance and self-punishment!

He says:

“Come! You can be your real self with all the difficult feelings with me. I am actually safe because you are in Christ who has dealt with all of it! Come to me...”

Are you familiar with Psalm 51?

The author, King David, should have been totally ashamed of himself. Frankly, he should have been stoned for murder and adultery. At the very least, he should have been “cancelled”.

God’s prophet, Nathan, knew that David couldn’t face up directly to what he had done, so deep was his self-deception and denial. So, he tells a story which you can read in 2 Samuel 12. David is then undone and writes Psalm 51. His words are a model to us of how to face up to and speak out our sin, guilt and shame.

We need to face it and name it as wrong. We need to know that it is ultimately the Lord Himself whom we have sinned against.

Amazingly, we can do all this without fear of being rejected!

Almost too good to be true, right? Not what we are used to... at all.

Let me encourage you to give it a try. Follow David’s example in Psalm 51. Fall upon the mercy of our God. No

hiding, no fudging.

We can get so easily stuck in a circle of avoidance or self-punishment. But – take it from me – they are both just energy-sapping dead-ends.

But listen up! There is hope! We can get unstuck from the sin that so easily entangles us! (Hebrews 12). He can help and is in the battle with us. So don't hesitate... let's do this! Turn towards Him with your real, sinful self. Name what you have done, express your sorrow, regret and desire to turn away from sin. Then receive and know His words and work of forgiveness.

"We want to make a new start, so we come..."



[Confession](#) / [Come Near](#) / [Real](#)



Prayer Tool

Confession of Sin
Let's stop avoiding...and come clean!

We can get unstuck from the sin that so easily entangles

us! (Hebrews 12). God can help and is in the battle with us. So don't hesitate... let's do this.

Here are three things to help get started!

- ▶ Some **words of confession** with space to get specific and name things.
- ▶ Some **questions to ponder with God** to help you notice what is happening and be with the discomfort. This is better than just "skimming over" things and too quickly moving to the good news at the end! These questions can help the growth process as we keep moving forward in our battle with sin.
- ▶ Some clear and comforting statements **declaring forgiveness** and your cleansing. There are no barriers between you and the Lord. It is finished. It is dealt with in Jesus!



Prayer Tool

Words of Confession

Take some time to get specific and concrete with the Lord. Name what has been done. Say or write clearly what the sin is.

*Almighty God, long-suffering and of great goodness
I confess to you, I confess with my whole heart
my neglect and forgetfulness of your commandments and*

BARRIER 2: SIN, GUILT AND SHAME

values:

my wrong doing:

things I am ashamed of:

my wrong thoughts:

my wrong speaking:

the hurts I have done to others:

and the good I have left undone:

*O God, forgive me, for I have sinned against you; I am so sorry.
and raise me to newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
AMEN*

Questions to ponder with God

O Lord, help me know why I did what I did or do what I do. Help me learn from what has happened here, or what habits I am having trouble breaking.

I name these things here:

I face them WITH You, please help me. Thank you that You are here!

Lord, please show me what might be going on here:

- ▶ *is there an internal wound I am trying to comfort or protect with this sin?*
- ▶ *Is there a difficult feeling I am trying to anaesthetise with this sin?*
- ▶ *Am I just too tired? Too bored? Too lonely? Has this contributed to me sinning and leaving You out of the picture?*
- ▶ *Has the pace I have been doing life at been too fast for me to wisely look after my soul, body, emotions, mind, relationships?*

Declaration of forgiveness:

The wonderful news, it really is this good...

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love, and He is slow to anger and very, very fast to forgive. Those who call on Him, who call on Him in truth, as you have done. He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him and he hears their cry and saves them!” (Psalm 145, NCV – Nicky Chiswell Version)

“If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1, ESV)

“No, in all things things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor depth nor height nor anything else in

all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39, ESV)

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!” (1 John 3:1a ESV)

Let’s live in hope. As far as the east is from the west... that’s how far He has removed our sin from us. If we bury it, it might kill us. With things unearthed, faced and confessed, we find love, life and peace.



Scriptures to Ponder

- ▶ **Psalm 51:** read the story in 2 **Samuel 12 and** then read this psalm of repentance by David.
- ▶ **1 John 1:5ff:** The importance of confession
- ▶ **Luke 5:20-26:** Jesus has the power to forgive sins
- ▶ **Psalm 103: 6-14:** We are known and He has removed our sin



Suggested Resources

- ▶ Kyle Strobel and John Coe, *Where Prayer Becomes Real: How Honesty with God Transforms Your Soul* (Baker Books, 2021). This book is just great on the “inner

game” of avoidance. It also helps us to plumb more deeply the riches of the Lord’s Prayer, especially the part on “forgive us our sins”.

- ▶ Dane Ortlund’s *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Crossway, 2021). The section on repentance is so good.
- ▶ Trevor Hudson, *Seeking God: Finding Another Kind of Life with St Ignatius and Dallas Willard* (NavPress, 2022). The chapter on “Changing Direction”, i.e. repentance. is just wonderful.
- ▶ Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* (Zondervan, 2022) also has a whole chapter on the why and how of confessing sin to God. There is wonderful and brutal honesty here.

BARRIER 3: DISTRACTION, ANXIETY, PACE AND EXHAUSTION



“I can’t stop to pray or it will all fall apart.”
“I don’t have time.”
“I’m too tired.”



Well, this one has been a huge barrier for me! Probably the biggest.

As mentioned, I am busy-minded and very distractable. I tend towards anxiety and if I don’t get things done, I feel like I am not keeping up and a bit of a failure. Stopping *doing* to pray is hard.

The very first time I went to a spiritual director, because of my difficulties with praying, she wisely said:

"I don't think you are having trouble with praying; I think you are having trouble stopping."

Bingo. Nailed it.

Like a friend of mine said to me years ago:

"... when you put your foot on the brake, all the crap at the back of the station wagon comes flying forward."

I so relate to this! Stuff comes up when you stop. Unwanted thoughts and emotions. It's easier just to keep driving!

I have always loved the Mary and Martha story.

I wrote *Song for Martha* because our Archbishop was coming to preach on that passage one Sunday. Our pastor asked if I could do an item after the sermon. I wrote the song that week and I sat through Bible reading and then the sermon started.

I began to fume silently.

He spent 15 minutes on Colossians 1. The hymn to Christ, that passage about *"the One through Whom and for Whom all things were made... He is before all things and in Him all things hold together"*. He went on and on! He dwelt there and showed that all things only exist and hold together because of this One.

Well, *that* was not the bible passage I had been told! I had a song that did not fit and I thought my effort was wasted.

Then there was a pause...

Ever so quietly he said:

"So tell me this. If this one was in Mary and Martha's

lounge room...what on earth was Martha doing in the kitchen?"

Mike drop... slam dunk...

I did then sing the song... but with a much more humble posture.

It's so ironic that I had been fussing about my effort not being recognised. Just like Martha!

Martha was so busy serving Jesus, that she forgot to be with Him, listen to Him and receive from Him. She got cross with others. She thought it was "all up to her".

She had too much to do, and not enough time to sit with Him... or so she thought.

What happens for you when you are going at a great pace? I get anxious, stressed and can be fractious like Martha.

She kind of "missed" Him when He was right under her nose.

She forgot that "the Lord is at hand!" (Philippians 4:5).

She forgot to stop and be *with* Him.

She let the pressing need of feeding an extra 13 people distract her from slowing down to listen to Him.

Now, lots of my friends feel fairly attuned to Martha's gripe here. Isn't it fair enough that she was stressed and cross with Mary? That she felt overlooked and unhelped?

But remember *who* was there. Let's face it, he had just fed 5,000 people effortlessly the chapter before! They could probably cope with dinner being a bit late!

But no... she had switched into "achieve" mode and was sure it was all up to her in the kitchen. Mary wasn't supposed

to be learning from Him, it was not her place. She should be with Martha, making food. Not with the Master, listening.

The truth is that taking time to sit at His feet is essential. Even if there is a pressing need to get on with things. It's the spiritual version of eating properly or cleaning your teeth each day. You will start to notice the consequences if you don't. I certainly did!

The preacher at church that day encouraged us to choose to be at Jesus' feet every day, even if it means not eating your muesli in the morning. Make time, it's the *best* thing. It's the *one* thing. *He* is the *only* thing worth worrying about.

Don't let being "distracted with much serving" be a barrier between your soul and the presence of the One it is thirsting for.

Take a seat with Him...

There's no better place.



[Song for Martha / In Peace](#)

In Peace is a psalms lullaby that might help you slow down.



Prayer Tool

Slowing, Silence and Stillness: Why It's Helpful

It is pretty funny that I of all people am writing on slowing, silence and stillness! (My husband Graeme joked "yeah... you could have a lot to say about that!")

It is *not* to be spooky or super-spiritual. It *is* to be helpful and enable us to stop and spend time with God in a focussed way.

I have found Adele Calhoun's wisdom and Ruth Hayley Barton's books brilliantly helpful and will summarise some of the ideas here. Leighton Ford's book *The Attentive Life* has also been drawn upon.

Why slowing down and silence helps

We are constantly stimulated by incoming voices, demands and expectations. We are also constantly feeling we should be *doing* stuff... and the voices and expectations come from within ourselves too.

Deciding to have times of silence and stillness can help enormously.

Silence and stillness helps us to stop striving... and rest

Having no-one talk to you, and you not having to talk to someone else, is a way of ceasing all demands for response

or action. The *brilliant* news of the gospel is that Jesus has done all the responding and met all the demands required for you to be with God. Isn't that a relief!!! There is nothing for you to "do". Silence helps us be.

I found this exercise helpful in silence...

- ▶ Take three to five very long slow very deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- ▶ Stop and notice anything you can hear. Count the number of things you can hear. Notice the silence in between things you can hear
- ▶ Listen to things in God's world
- ▶ Notice ten colours – He created colour!
- ▶ Then just ponder the following words very slowly, line by line, and see what it's like...

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

(I have adapted and added to this exercise From Leighton Ford's *The Attentive Life*)

Silence and stillness helps you notice...

Silence helps you notice what is happening *around* you and *in* you. You can mindfully pay attention to what *is*. This can be restful and feel wonderful *or* it can be really, really hard.

To quote Adele Ahlberg-Calhoun directly:

"In quietness we often notice things we would rather

not notice or feel. Pockets of sadness or anger or loneliness or impatience begin to surface. Our own outer agenda looms larger than our desire to be with God in the silence. And as the silence settles in and nothing seems to be happening, we often struggle with the feeling that we are wasting time." (Adele Ahlberg-Calhoun, *The Spiritual Disciplines*)

What can you do if it's really hard?

Can I encourage you not to put your foot on the accelerator again and rush into other activity? Just see if you can sit with it...

Notice it.

Name it.

Adele Calhoun helpfully goes on to say...

"Everything we notice in this struggle can be an invitation to prayer... Like a can opener... the silence opens up the contents of our heart..."

So, in this time try and notice what might be surfacing:

- ▶ What feelings are happening?
- ▶ What people/events are you thinking about?
- ▶ Is there a striving to fix things?
- ▶ Or disappointment?
- ▶ Anger with someone?
- ▶ Grief or sadness?

Bring this to our Father who loves and knows you. Tell Him all about it. One by one. Speak them out loud or write them if that helps you.

It may be that the silence shows you how exhausted you are. It is fine to rest in Him! Have a nap, take a slow walk

or just be still – whatever is restful for you. All these things are good to take notice of... rather than avoiding and burying them in our hurried pace.

Then we can bring God the *real* us that has come to Him in prayer. Whatever we notice, He knows already and *wants* us to bring to Him.

Silence and stillness: helps you pay attention

As well as noticing what surfaces for us, silence can help us *pay attention* to what God's living word says to us.

You can take time in silence to repeat the truths you know... or read about God's character and His saving mighty acts of love for you and mull them over in your mind. You can read the scriptures later in this chapter.

I find it very helpful to ask and ponder the following:

- ▶ How am I going?
- ▶ What's coming at me?
- ▶ How am I feeling about that?
- ▶ What might God have to say to me at this time... about this?
- ▶ (adapted and added to from 'The Attentive Life' by Leighton Ford)

TIP: You may be someone who does better by moving while practising silence. A lovely walk, a swim or whatever may suit your style better than just sitting. I thrive on variety, so will sometimes do these things in a chair or on a walk.



Scriptures to Ponder

- ▶ **Luke 10:38-42**
- ▶ **Psalm 131**
- ▶ **Psalm 46:** A Psalm of help in chaos and trouble, Be still and know that I am God is from this Psalm
- ▶ **Matthew 11:25-30:** The power and invitation of the Lord Jesus to come to Him



Suggested Resources

- ▶ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Waterbrook Press, 2019). This really helped me visit this barrier again and face it square-on at a deep level, with practical help.
- ▶ Ruth Hayley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Transforming Resources, 2010), *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (IVP, 2006) and *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (IVP, 2008). These books were game-changers for me! Highly

recommended and again, they include great practical things to do at the end of each chapter. Brilliant.

- ▶ The 24/7 prayer website has fantastic tools and resources to help you overcome barriers to prayer: www.24-7prayer.com. – also their Prayer Toolshed is so helpful. www.prayercourse.org/toolshed
- ▶ I also love their app Lectio 365 which provides helpful and manageable stimulus/structure for prayer twice a day. www.24-7prayer.com.au/resource/lectio-365-app/
- ▶ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (IVP, 2022). The chapter on “Silence” is so helpful and practical! Excellent on what to do when things get hard when you slow down.
- ▶ Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life: Discerning God’s Presence in All Things* (IVP, 2013). Includes practical exercises as included in an adapted form, earlier in this chapter.

BARRIER 4:
DISTRESS, GRIEF, DEEP SADNESS,
DISAPPOINTMENT AND SUFFERING



“I am hurting too much to talk to God about this. Why doesn’t He make it stop if He loves me?”



Sometimes I avoid talking to God when times are hard. It’s just too painful to be alone with my thoughts and feelings. I may be angry with God, or frightened He won’t answer my prayers, so I just clam up. The darkness can be too deep.

Here are some other things I have done in prayer when times are hard.

- ▶ Sometimes I resort to an anxious, *“don’t you care that we are going to drown?”* kind of prayer. Sometimes praying *makes me anxious!* Under the surface, I think that maybe

if I pray more He might answer more swiftly. Have you ever thought like that? It's a bit like pressing the button a hundred times at the pedestrian crossing. Part of me thinks that if I press it over and over, the lights might change faster!...

- ▶ I think maybe He's not answering because I am not praying enough. Then I feel guilty, as though it's all my fault.
- ▶ Sometimes I worry I might not be good enough for God if I tell Him how I am *really* going and how desperate I am. So, I start praying "politically correct" prayers to see if He might be more inclined to help in a crisis if I am a bit more impressive.

Eventually I just dry up.

There's some pretty messy and confused thinking about God lurking about in there. (See chapter 1)

As you can see, I can get very stuck. Do you get stuck too?

- ▶ Sometimes I am just too scared of being disappointed if I talk to Him again.
- ▶ Sometimes it hurts too much to put things into words at all.

Psalm 88 has a crack at it though. The Psalmist says, "*The darkness is my only friend...*" or it could be, "*my companions have turned into darkness.*"

The Psalmist is completely isolated in his suffering. No-one is holding his hand. Maybe friends have left him, or are just unhelpful? A bit like Job's friends.

God has given us words in the scriptures to help us. When we struggle to put our weeping into words, these psalms can often help.

If you are still up for reading the Bible (and I do not take for granted that you are), you may find your experience reflected there. The complaining, lamenting psalms are an uncomfortable gift. We need to get to know them. They can help us get real.

Complaint and lament

When times are tough, the complaint and lament psalms:

show us how to stay engaged with God... not just give Him the cold shoulder and disengage

- ▶ In Psalm 88 the writer keeps praying, mainly just with questions. He stays engaged and doesn't give up, even though no answers or relief are in sight. The psalmist mentions that he prays every day – day and night, and in the morning!

remind us of the God we pray to

- ▶ He is not a God who hears us for our cleverness or many words... but He is faithful, loving and all-knowing. But sometimes he is also silent.

show us how to “pour out our soul”.

- ▶ The Psalms tell God how the writers are *really* feeling and what they are *honestly* thinking. It's not pretty. But

God is big enough to handle it. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He gives us words to be real. No faking it here.

ask God the tough questions...

- ▶ For example:

Why do you stand far off?

Why don't you do something? Why are your hands stuck in your sleeves? OR

Can a dead person praise you? (implying the question, "so why are you killing me?")

The Psalmist is very real with God and raises his doubts about what God is doing.

The Psalmist just says it all out loud to God.

He tells God the situation and asks Him to intervene in specific ways. He tells God what he wants to happen.

- ▶ He imagines it being different and shares this with God and asks Him to make it happen.

Here is a list of the **complaining, lamenting** psalms. It's great to get familiar with them as we walk with God in a world of disaster and pain.

Lament Psalms	
Community	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
Individual	3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142
Specialised Lament Psalms	
Confession	6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
Cursing	35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140

Note that many of the psalms move from a place of despair and complaint to a place of trust and recalling the power, love and faithfulness of God.

Sometimes this can be a very lengthy process in real life. It can take a lot longer than just the length of time it takes to read the psalm!⁴ But it *is* good to see where it's all headed.

Psalms 88 and 13 are notable exceptions. They remain waiting, unanswered.

Sometimes words are just not enough. Romans 8 says that the Spirit is busy with groans *too deep for words*. Sometimes there just *are* no words.

⁴ I first heard this wonderfully helpful thought as the Christian artist Nathan Tasker shared it while telling the story of some intense pain and loss he and his wife experienced. He said it took him two years to get from the beginning of one of these psalms to the end.

The Spirit within us is helping us to keeping on turning towards Him, helping us just groan. Even if we can't find the words, He can groan for us.

"Can you listen for the groans?"



[Too Deep](#) / [Psalm 143](#)



Prayer Tool

Being real with God in tough times

Here is a short tool you can use that may be helpful if you are currently giving God the silent treatment, instead of pouring out your heart to Him.

Remember... He knows you, and what is happening for you, better than you know yourself. You are known (Psalm 139). Even if it doesn't feel like it, He is listening.

- ▶ Take some time out to sit still somewhere **and take three long slow deep breaths in and out**. See if you can make them last four seconds in and four seconds out.

▶ **Notice any feelings that are there.**

- ▶ Notice where they are located in your body if you can. Place your hand there compassionately. Bring these feelings to God. Name them if you can... but just bring them with a groan if you can't.

eg "Father... I feel like this..."

- ▶ **Notice any thoughts that are arising.** Tell God the thoughts your mind is generating. He knows them anyway!

eg. "Father, these thoughts are in my mind... I bring them to you. Please help me as they spin round and round."

- ▶ **Do what you can to put your discomfort and distress into words.** Describe the situation:

eg "I feel like I am drowning... I am scared... I am desperately sad... I feel like I will never be the same. This terrible thing is happening... I cannot bear the unbearable..."

- ▶ **Tell God exactly what you would like to see changed.**

"Lord, I want this situation to be changed... I want You to change it."

- ▶ **Imagine the situation changed.** What would you long for Him to do?

"Lord I want you to do this... (heal, help, remove, change, bring justice, help me get unstuck, etc etc)

- ▶ How would you like to see Him use His power now in intervening? Tell Him! Be specific.
- ▶ **Ask God the hard questions you have, eg:**
 - “O God... Why have you let X happen?”*
 - “Why are you NOT letting X happen?”*
 - “What the heck are you actually DOING?”*
 - “WHY do you stand far off?”*
 - “Why are you silent?”*
- ▶ **Ask for help and ask Him to help you hold on.** Ask Him to lead you and not let you go.
- ▶ **Know He is listening even if it feels like He is silent**



Scriptures to Ponder

The Psalms of Lament

Return to the [list of Psalms of Lament](#) in the earlier part of this chapter. These psalms are great to turn to in times of trouble.

- ▶ Have a browse and then pick one.
- ▶ Pray it, word for word. Notice what it feels like to do this.
- ▶ Notice how the psalm:

*names distress and the experience of it
expresses despair and fear, etc.*

turns to God and cries out to Him

- ▶ Then do the same, in your own words, about your own situation.
- ▶ The Lord gives us words with which to question and even accuse Him when times are so dark.
- ▶ Read Job 2 and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.

Just bring your real self to Him.

Then read Romans 8:8 – “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us...”

Follow this with Romans 8:19-26. Can you hear the Spirit's groans?

Take some time to stop and just be with the pain, and know God is groaning too.

No slick answers why, just groaning with You.



Suggested Resources

- ▶ Pete Greig, *God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer* (Regal, 2007). So very real, so very helpful. Tender-hearted.
- ▶ Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Paternoster Press, 2007)
- ▶ Kyle Strobel and John Coe, *Where Prayer Becomes*

Real: How Honesty with God Transforms Your Soul
(BakerBooks, 2021).

BARRIER 5: EGO, THE FALSE-SELF AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT



“Secretly, perhaps I can do this without Him? I have made other arrangements than prayerful dependence upon Him!”



In my thirties, through counselling in a mid-life crisis breakdown, I gained insight into the fact that I was a performer. I was a performing musician and loved to creatively connect deeply with an audience. However, I also realised that I was performing – even when not at a gig.

From a very early age, I had learned to read the room and spent energy plotting how I might come across as impressive and get affirmation.

I slowly started to notice, with God's help, that I did this subconsciously most of the time. It was exhausting! Do you relate to this at all?

Fast forward twenty years. In a spiritual direction session, I had a very direct word from the Lord about this deep operating system that His Spirit was dismantling. It was getting in the way of intimacy with Him.

He just said gently: *"You are free not to do that!"*

He did not say, "Stop that!" or "You are a bad person trying to promote yourself like this, you idiot!"

No, He did not.

Rather, it was an invitation with a smile, to let go of this huge burden. The Lord Jesus was very near, and His presence was kind and reassuring. Freedom indeed!

Image management had become a deep sin structure in me. It was my default position. It still haunts me and hangs around. It is a time and energy consuming mind-game. What a prison!

But the gracious Lord Jesus is offering me a better and more authentic way to live... less striving and plotting.

Now, on my best days, I don't get as anxious about what people think, but care about people more. And He is with me.

Like Zaccheus, I rejoice that His presence is better than all the stuff I was chasing before.

Now I have a choice available – to pull back and choose another path.

Now I can become conscious of it and manually override

the automatic compulsion.

There is hope! Bit by bit, step by step.

Just being our real selves, self-forgetfully, is the place where freedom and intimacy lies.

Self-promotion leads to shallow and brittle relationships and ultimate self-loathing.

Self-forgetfulness leads to love and deep connection.

I can pay attention and be truly present for others so much better when I forget myself. Looking *up* at God is so life-giving!

He is just so wonderful to gaze upon. As the old hymn says, "*Looking only unto Jesus as I onward go.*"

As I go to work, play music, relate to friends, attend church or join in a family occasion, I can rehearse how I am going to "appear", practising my performance in my head.

Or... I can come to Him and ask Him to bless and lead the occasion.

Then I can focus on others and be truly *with* them.

I can bring my attention to Him, not myself, as I engage in the world.

I can do life *with Him*.

Prayer helps me stay consciously connected to His reality and loosens the pull on me to perform.

Looking back, it was a deep, prayerless, and functionally atheistic operating system that was "under the hood" in me. I have wasted so much of life chasing small change, when more than priceless treasure is right here – in Christ! No more hiding, no more striving, no more pretending.

"I am free to bring the real me to the real You."



[Humility](#) / [Real](#)



Prayer Tool

**Bringing our real selves to the real God –
leaving behind the false self...**

O Lord, You know me!

Thank you that there is nothing in me that you don't know about. You know me better than I know myself. You uncover the motives of my heart, you know the self-deception of my heart, better than I do. I need you! [PAUSE]

O Lord, please help me...

To become aware of when my ego and false self is running the show.

It most likely happens in the times when

And also when

It is a habit that has been long term for me Lord Jesus.

I wonder if it started around when I was

at a time in my life when...?

*Please show me my sin, and forgive me. I turn from this with
Your help.*

(You may like to use prayer tool 2 here "CONFESSION")



Prayer Tool

Lord, help me be like Zaccheus

*Lord, thank you for loving me like you loved the sinner,
Zaccheus. Help me climb down like he did because of your
wonderful invitation to hang out with You! Come into my place
Lord and eat with me! Show me that communing with you is
just so much better than things I have been chasing.*

For example:

*Help me Lord, grow and shape my desires in new ways Lord.
Replace my desire for*

with a desire for

and help me notice my desires

Help me notice what good desire might be underneath the ones that aren't great! (eg desire to "impress" might be a front for a desire to be loved and accepted)

Help me notice which desires need to be transformed by you.

The psychologist David Benner writes, "The False Self is the tragic result of trying to steal something from God that we did not have to steal. Had we dared to trust God's goodness we would have discovered that everything we could ever most deeply long for would be ours in God. Trying to gain more than the everything God offers we end up with less than nothing... we become a false self."

Ponder this quotation in the Lord's presence, for He is full of grace and mercy.

With thankfulness, know that Jesus Himself is the author and perfecter of your faith.

- ▶ He is on the job and you are under construction – and
-

it is moving forward!!

- ▶ Give thanks!

Do not let despair about yourself, outweigh the truths of Romans 8.

- ▶ Read the excerpt from Romans 8 below, and highlight any parts that help you be hopeful about how His work in us is going in where it is heading.

Romans 8:26-31

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?



Scriptures to Ponder

Matthew 6

- ▶ Check out these sections of the Sermon on the Mount below. I have highlighted all the parts that are about impression management, in bold type.
- ▶ Long for the reward that happens when you leave impression management behind!

*“Beware of practicing your righteousness **before other people in order to be seen by them**, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

*“Thus, when you give to the needy, **sound no trumpet before you**, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, **that they may be praised by others**. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. **And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.***

*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. **For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others**. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. **And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.***

*“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, **for they think that they will be heard for their many words.** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray:*

“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. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces **that their fasting may be seen by others.** Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

Ponder **Psalms 139:23-24** and use it to invite God in to help you.



Suggested Resources

- ▶ Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy: The Path to the True Christian Joy* (10Publishing, 2012).
- ▶ David G Benner and M Basil, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (IVP, 2015).
- ▶ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Christian/Forum, 2014).
- ▶ Les Murray's poem "Performance" – it's great! Check it out here: www.best-poems.net/les_murray/performance.html

OUTRO

Why is it important?

It is very important to unlock whatever barriers stop you from praying. Here's one big reason why. Our Lord Jesus said to!

In Luke 18, Jesus tells a slightly bizarre story of a widow who intensely annoys a corrupt judge in the night. She just keeps on and on at him, despite getting a very negative response. Luke tells us most precisely why he told this tale:

“Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they ought to always pray and not lose heart.” (Luke 18:1)

The widow pesters the judge over and over. He gives in not because he cares about justice but because he just wants her to go away! Jesus makes the point, how much more **welcoming** and **powerful** and **just** is our Heavenly Father.

But the end of the story has a chilling sting.

“I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Given why he tells the story in the first place, I think Jesus is saying something like:

“When I return, will I find you praying, trusting and turning towards God in all the circumstances of life? Or will

you have made other arrangements?"

Jesus is our returning King and Judge. Will He find you with other arrangements when He comes?

I started making other arrangements, both individually and corporately, in my less-than-prayerful years.

I have good news, though! God is faithful and at work through all this mess. So the barriers are not the end of the story. What a relief!

Here are some things that He has used to help me learn to pray through the years:

- ▶ through being part of a **church community**, praying with others, and learning about prayer through His word together. A weekly small group has been hugely helpful.
- ▶ through the example of **kind companions** with me and ahead of me on the journey of prayer, sharing a longing to go deeper.
- ▶ through **prayer retreats** that gave me practical exercises to try and that cut off my avoidance escape routes!
- ▶ through **fantastic books and podcasts** on prayer
- ▶ through the practice of **spiritual direction** in the last 15 or more years
- ▶ through getting involved with the **24/7 prayer** resources and movement
- ▶ through cultivating some **regular rhythms and practices** of prayer, whatever I am feeling like

Of course, all of this happens through the **power and**

grace of God's Spirit at work.

Thanks to Him, I am no longer as stuck or thwarted by the barriers as I used to be.

Perhaps they will all tangle me up again down the track? (I've even noticed the struggle more as I have been making this album and eBook!) However, I know He is still at work bringing about what He started... whatever is happening in my prayer life.

Prayer guru, I am not. But I know there are ways forward to turn to Him now when those darn barriers rear their head again.

The “with God” Life⁵

He is the author and perfecter of our faith, not us! Let us join in with what He is doing! Do life *with* Him not just *for* Him. Commune with Him. You know deep down it's just not enough to know *about* Him. Get intimate.

If you have been stuck, take small steps in prayer and, believe me, He will draw near to you... whether you feel it or not!

I hope this book and music helps in some way.

Ask friends and trusted others to help you.

If you are a natural-born pray-er nerd and nothing gets in the way for you, that is so great! I hope this resource pack

⁵ My favourite podcast in the last year or so has been the Renovaré podcast. Nathan Foster uses the phrase “the ‘with God’ life” as he describes what they are on about. I love this! Really resonates for me.

will inspire you to keep going – and give you a nudge to help others in it.

Bring your real self to the real God in all circumstances:

- ▶ *when you need help with a right view of God and yourself*
- ▶ *when you are struggling with sin and need His help*
- ▶ *when you are distracted, exhausted and anxious*
- ▶ *when you are suffering and close to despair*
- ▶ *when the ego is deluding you that you can leave Him out of the picture*

... just turn towards Him.

He is waiting, the door is open, His arms are open!
Come every day. Come now.

Come now and pray!

– Nicky Chiswell, 2023

SONG LYRICS AND RECORDINGS

COME NEAR

(Nicky Chiswell)

The Lord is merciful and gracious
He abounds in steadfast love
All the things that keep us from Him
He's removed them one by one

He is slow to anger
He is fast to forgive
For as far as the east is from the west
That's how far He's removed our sins from us
There is nothing that can separate us now
So why are we waiting here?

His arms are open
Come near

The Father leans forward to listen
His Son is praying at the throne
The Spirit lives and groans within us
So when we pray we're not alone

He is slow to anger
He is fast to forgive
So come cast upon Him
Every care, every fear

[Download song recording here](#)

HUMILITY

(Nicky Chiswell)

Born and raised, this natural way of life
Self-promotion, you know, it just kinda flows in my veins
And the subtle orchestration of so many situations
And the neat manipulation
Of so many conversations
Just to make things go my way

They were in the middle of a fight
About who was the greatest and why it was so
And the source of all being, light and love, stood in the doorway
Ready and waiting, with a towel and a bowl

Now He made each and every foot
that He washed with those hands
Not a day would pass before His own were scarred beyond repair
Such greatness is too weighty to understand
This love that breaks the boundaries of what's reasonable and fair

*This is the end of the road as I know it
The start of something new
The old clothes won't fit any more
And the tired old phrases just won't do
And I won't fit in to this world like I used to
And for the first time I don't care
I have wasted so much of life chasing small change
When more than priceless treasure is here
At my table...*

If He called into account all that He was owed
There'd be kings and queens and palaces at His feet
They'd be crying for mercy
But He stood at the bottom of my tree

Said He wanted to have some dinner with me
Cheating selfish fool that I am

O and I was born and raised
To this natural way of life
I just wanted to make my mark
Just wanted to be someone
But His greatness overwhelms me
And His love, it broke that spell
And I leave it all behind as I climb down, climb down

This is the end of the road as I know it...

[Download song recording here](#)

CONFESSION

(Nicky Chiswell)

Our Master, nothing is hidden from You
All the desires of our hearts
You know them all, it's true
We want to make a new start

*So we come
To your throne
Of grace and mercy
To find help in time of need*

Create in us a clean heart, O God
Open our mouths and we shall
All declare your praise
With lips and lives
And hearts and minds
With our soul and strength
We'll worship you

Our Saviour, you faced the pressures we face
Humbly we ask your forgiveness
Turn us from darkness to grace
We want to make a new start

So we come...

Create in us a clean heart O God...

[Download song recording here](#)

TOO DEEP

(Nicky Chiswell)

You're seeing things that most of us have never seen
You're walking places most of us have never been
Last thing I could give you is any advice
Nothing I'd say could ever match your eyes

If I was one of Job's friends, what should I have said?
Maybe just tears in my eyes and shake my head...
And maybe..."Don't you let anyone give you slick answers why"
Just let now be now, and let your silence reach the sky

*Can you listen for the groans?
I know you don't believe me, but you might not be alone
Can you hear the Spirit's groans?
Too deep for words...*

You self-implode till you're a little black hole
Smaller than an atom and the weight of the whole world
Out around Pluto you have become
Cold and alone and a long way from the sun

Can you listen for the groans?...

Some people might tell you to hold on
Some might tell you you've got to be strong
Some people might even tell you that you're wrong
To feel this way... but I say:

Can you listen for the groans?...

[Download song recording here](#)

PSALM 143

(Nicky Chiswell)

Let the morning bring the word
Of Your unfailing love
I put my trust in You

Show the way that I should go
To You I lift my soul
I put my trust in You

I remember days long gone
I remember all you've done
Like a thirsty soul in the desert am I
Answer quickly
My spirit fails

Let the morning bring the word
Of Your unfailing love
I put my trust in You

Show the way that I should go
To You I lift my soul
I put my trust in You

I remember days long gone
I remember Christ Your Son
Like a thirsty soul in the desert am I
O come quickly
My spirit fails

Let the morning bring the word
Of Your unfailing love
I put my trust in You

Show the way that I should go
To You I lift my soul

I put my trust in You

[Download song recording here](#)

REAL

(Nicky Chiswell)

One by one,
Prise my little fingers off those tight held dreams
Pick them up and throw them away
If that is what it takes
Burn them down
To the ground
Till I am found in reality, illusions stripped away...

Here I am
There's a Jonah somewhere in me trying to run the other way
Pick me up, throw me overboard
If that is what it takes
Sink me down
Let it all drown
Till I am found in reality, illusions stripped away

*Till I can see the real You
And bend my knee to the real You
Till I am free to bring the real me
To the real You*

*When I can see the real You
And bend my knee to the real You
Till I am free to bring the real me
To the real You*

One by one
Prise my little fingers
Off those tight held dreams...

[Download song recording here](#)

SONG FOR MARTHA

(Nicky Chiswell)

Harassed, hurting, sometimes it feels like it isn't fair
The load is aching, does anyone see, do they even care?
The needs unmet, the deeds undone
And they're all crying out to you
But it's time, it's time

*It's time to come and sit
At the feet of Jesus
It's time to come and just be
At the feet of Jesus
It's a place of receiving, a place of grace
At the feet of Jesus
There's no better place...*

Lay down your burdens
The world can go on without you for now
You seem so certain, It's all up to you
But you can slow down
You're anxious about many, many things
And they're all crying out to you
It's time
It's time

It's time to come and sit...

[Download song recording here](#)

COME NOW AND PRAY

(Nicky Chiswell and Greg Cooper)

Come now and pray
See Him anew
Cast all your cares on Him
Because He cares for you

Come now and pray
Pour out your soul
He knows your heart's desire
So turn to Him and call

Come now and pray
Now is the hour
We fight not flesh and blood
And only with His power

Come now and pray
You're not alone
All heaven's silent as
He listens from His throne

[Download song recording here](#)

IN PEACE

(Nicky Chiswell)

In peace

I will lie down and sleep tonight

For you alone O Lord make me dwell in safety

In vain we rise up with the birds

Going late to rest

Eating bread of anxious toil

He gives His beloved sleep

He gives His beloved sleep

In peace...

The Lord is watching over you

He will guard you life

Your going out and coming in

He will never slumber

He gives his beloved sleep

In peace...

[Download song recording here](#)

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For His Glory,
Nicky Chiswell, March 2023

REAL SELF :: REAL GOD

UNLOCKING BARRIERS TO PRAYER

Do you struggle with prayer? Me too! Big time.

The idea of an album to help people unlock barriers to prayer was an idea that occurred to me over ten years ago. This eBook, combined with the songs on the album, are designed to help you tackle and get past the things that might be getting in the way of prayer for you.

FREE DOWNLOADS:

I want this resource to be readily available to everyone who may be helped by it. You can download the eBook and songs at no cost through the link below. The album is also freely available on Spotify.

Feel free to forward this link to others.

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