

Praying Upside Down

Kelly O'Dell Stanley

Week 1

Chapter 1: My First Upside-Down Prayers

1. Explain a time when you went through something unexpected. How did God provide for you or reveal His presence to you during that time?

Chapter 2: The Art of Moving On

1. How have you had to adjust your expectations when a situation hasn't gone the way you'd hoped? Looking back, did it work out for the better?
2. When Kelly's house finally sold, she began to understand how God works through the bigger picture—one that affects more than just her own needs. How can we work to keep God's point of view in the front of our minds and adjust our expectations accordingly?
3. What are your biggest prayers right now? Why do they feel impossible? What are some ways to begin praying them "upside down"?

Chapter 3: Jesus Turned the World Upside Down

1. Have you ever found yourself "stuck" in prayer? What did you do to get "unstuck"?
2. Kelly says, "The power isn't in the asking or dependent on your ability to find a creative way to ask—it's in the creative and surprising ways in which God answers." How have you been surprised by the way God has answered some of your prayers? How did it change your view of Him?

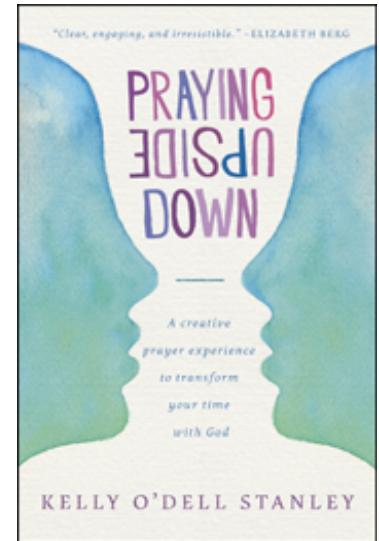
Week 2

Chapter 4: Drawing Near

1. What are some of the prayers you remember praying as a child? How have those prayers changed as you've grown older?
2. Where was the first place that you felt like you truly encountered God in a new way? What was that experience like?
3. Do you struggle with hard questions and doubt toward God? What is holding you back from confident belief? How can we support one another as we work through these hard questions?

Chapter 5: Seeing What's There (Realism)

1. Kelly admits to being her worst judgmental self at airports. Where do you find yourself at your worst? Why do you think that is? What helps you snap back into line?
2. What does prayer look like in your life?
3. Kelly encourages us to be realists in our prayer lives, "focusing on the truth of what we see, feel, and experience . . . to find the very real presence of God in every moment." What are some real, tangible ways you've seen, felt, or experienced God this week?



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Chapter 6: What's Blocking Your View? (Obstacles to Seeing Clearly)

1. Have you ever been in a situation in which you couldn't find the words or strength to pray? What was blocking your view of God? How were you able to connect with Him again?
2. What are some tangible ways God has shown Himself to be your center during tough times?
3. What are some of the other ways you can pray when you don't have words?

Week 3

Chapter 7: Where Are You Standing? (Point of View)

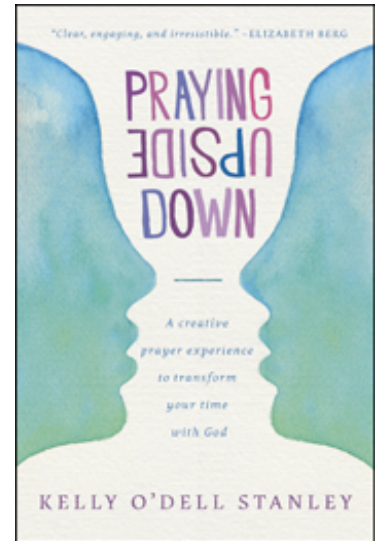
1. Kelly says, "It's important to see what's in front of you, true. But it's also important for you to notice where you are standing at any given moment because your viewpoint affects what you see." When you look at your prayers and desires, where are you viewing them from? How does that limit your sight of God's work in your life?
2. Have you ever said you've forgiven someone but have still held on to resentment? What would it feel like to actually forgive that person?
3. Do you pray for your enemies, for the people who have hurt you deeply? Name some ways we can support each other in practicing this upside-down command.

Chapter 8: Leaving Room for God in the Picture (White Space and Negative Space)

1. What is the "white space" in your life? Are you comfortable with silence and free time, or do you work to "fill in the gaps"?
2. Matthew 6:8 from The Message says, "With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply." What are the simple, stripped-down versions of some of your prayer requests?

Chapter 9: What He Is Made Of (Drawing the Underlying Structure)

1. Do you ever find yourself compelled to pray for other situations when you are in the midst of praying for something specific? Where did those prayers lead?
2. Practice taking a prayer request and breaking it into "basic shapes" as Kelly describes. What are the fundamental ideas that constitute it?



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Week 4

Chapter 10: All Points Converge at the Horizon (Perspective)

1. What are some ways you find hope or perspective during times of trial?
2. Kelly tells the story of Ann and Peggy, who instead of praying for their own burdens prayed for each other's. Whose burdens can you carry through prayer this week?
3. When you can't see the good in a situation, it can feel like God isn't listening or giving you your heart's desires. How can we change our point of view to remember "the storm that redeemed the harvest"?

Chapter 11: Breaking It into Manageable Pieces (The Grid Method)

1. When you are overwhelmed, what are some ways you cope and break everything into manageable pieces? How can you apply this to your prayers, like Kelly describes?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where you think, I can't believe I'm back here again like Kelly experienced with her dad's new diagnosis? How can you lean into the grace and strength of God this time around?

Chapter 12: Developing Your Skills (Sketching and Drawing)

1. What are some ways you can move your "prayer sketches" to a more complete work of art? What fears and hesitations do you feel when you contemplate praying in greater depth?
2. What are some ways you've discovered to truly connect with God? When you are free of distractions, how do you best find Him?
3. Do you share your experiences with God?

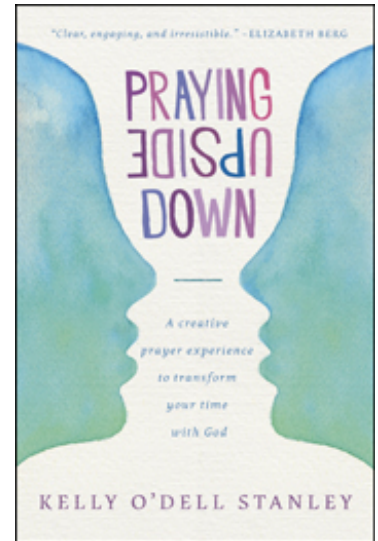
Week 5

Chapter 13: The Importance of the Process (Keeping a Sketchbook)

1. Have you ever looked back and reread old diaries or journals from your childhood? Where do you see God answering your prayers or providing for you?
2. Are there other ways, like journaling, that we can use to help us notice the ways God answers our prayers?

Chapter 14: Taking the Measure of Things (Proportion)

1. How do you call on God in extreme moments of fear? What happens?
2. Do you ever find yourself "censoring" your prayers? What are some ways that you can fight this tendency and allow yourself to be open, truthful, and vulnerable with your Creator?



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Chapter 15: Just Keep Going (Contour Drawing)

1. The author discusses her muddy car adventure with “just keep going” prayer. When was the last time you had a “just keep going” prayer moment? What went through your mind? What happened when that fear-filled moment passed?
2. In what situations do you find it hard to stay focused on Jesus? Name some ways that we can support one another in redirecting our attention.
3. Kelly says, “The answers to your prayers may be hard to understand. But the One who answers them remains faithful, constant, eternally and perpetually good and merciful and just—even when the answer hurts or seems unfair or makes no earthly sense.” Have you had a situation in which the answer to your prayer is hard to understand? Did you stumble? How do you trust that God is still good and for you during these times?

Week 6

Chapter 16: “Where Did I Put My Shoe?” (or What Are You Waiting For?)

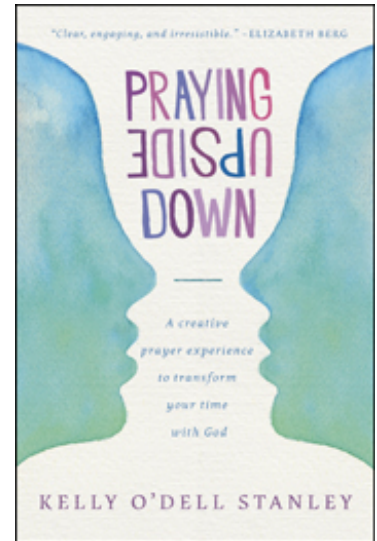
1. When was the last time that something was supposed to be fun but did not end up that way?
2. Do you find it hard some days to make time for prayer? What are some ways you can adjust your schedule for daily prayer?
3. What moments are the hardest to pray in? What makes them difficult?

Chapter 17: Seeing Past the Dots (Pointillism)

1. Can you recall a time when you didn't fit in? What were some ways you tried to? Did they work?
2. After her mom died, Kelly talks about how her outside behavior didn't match her inside heart toward God. Have you ever experienced a season like this, and if so, how did you come out of it? How can we support each other through these times?
3. Kelly explores how the pointillism style can be applied to our prayer life. Do you have a situation that you need to step back from and reassess? What's the bigger picture?

Chapter 18: Prayer Prompts (Symbols)

1. What are some symbols that you connect to your loved ones? What made you pick those objects? Use them as reminders to pray!
2. How often do you talk to God? How can we work to pray ceaselessly as the Bible calls us to?
3. Kelly says, “God's measure of success is different from everyone else's.” What too-high expectations have you set for yourself? Are you trying to make something happen by your own power rather than trusting God to come through? How can we live in the freedom of Kelly's statement?



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Week 7

Chapter 19: The Purity of Prayer (Simplicity and Minimalism)

1. What does simplified prayer look like to you? How do you find these prayers to be more intimate than elaborate prayers?
2. Are you ever afraid to spend time alone in prayer? What tools of prayer (your Bible, journal, music, etc.) sometimes serve as distractions, getting in the way of real communion with your Father?

Chapter 20: Bringing the Fish (An Artist's Tools)

1. Recall the last time you made a mistake and someone gave you unexpected grace. How did that make you feel? What have you learned from that experience?
2. Kelly says, "One tool isn't enough for a lifetime of prayer." What are some of the tools in your toolbox? Have you added any through reading this book?
3. Kelly says that when you pray, "some answers may thrill your soul, and others may break your heart. He knows what He's doing, even if you can't see it yet." How can we trust this, especially in moments of heartache? What are some ways we can remind each other of this important truth?

Chapter 21: Finding Your Own Style (The Artist's Process)

1. Have you ever experienced "writer's block" in your prayer life? What do you do to get past it?
2. Kelly says we are called to communicate to God and about God. What are some ways that you live out your faith?
3. Name some of the ways that you hear from God. How do you know that it is Him speaking?

Week 8

Chapter 22: Looking to the Masters (Learning from the Experts)

1. Are there any moments of prayer that you find uncomfortable? What are they, and why? How can you change your perspective as you observe different prayer practices?
2. What inspires you? Do you see God in those moments of inspiration?

Chapter 23: A Permanent Perspective

1. What is the biggest obstacle you face when you go to pray?
2. Kelly writes about the need for practice in our prayer lives—just like any other skill. What are some ways we can encourage each other as we work toward fuller prayer practices?
3. What are some of the biggest takeaways you've gained while reading *Praying Upside Down*?

