



# **Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers**

*Gary Neal Hansen*

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## **Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers** Gary Neal Hansen

This guide to prayer, rooted in centuries of Christian tradition, introduces figures such as St. Benedict, Martin Luther, John Calvin, St. Ignatius, Teresa of ?vila and Andrew Murray. You'll learn how each of these spiritual giants uniquely connected to God through prayer and have an opportunity to practice each different method yourself.

## **Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers Details**

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Gary Neal Hansen

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# **From Reader Review Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers for online ebook**

## **Gary B says**

I started this book close on two years ago. When I did, I was spending around a week or two using each type of prayer I'd read about. That worked well for a while but then I came across a style of prayer I struggled with and so I stopped reading.

Nearly two years later I decided to finish the book but not "limit" myself to use the form of prayer I was reading about. I think this has worked well because now I've finished the book and can pick and choose a method that seems appropriate at the time. I think ideally one would use the method as one reads about it, but reading the book is better than not reading it.

I appreciated Gary's many different approaches - from Ignatius to Calvin, from Luther to Sandford and from the puritans to Andrew Murray. We can learn much from each form, stage and approach. Some strike me as less-accessible such as the Cloud of Unknowing whereas others are straightforward and much more accessible such as Luther's use of the Lord's Prayer or using some form of daily office.

I also appreciate the two appendices - one is a suggestion for using the book in a group setting, and the other is a summary of how we can try each of the ten forms or styles of prayer.

A final word - if you're looking to purchase a copy of the book, consider the ebook as it contains a "reader" which has many source documents that Gary used when formulating the book. I have the paperback and so have "missed out" on some of the added depth available to others.

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## **Scott Burns says**

I've read a number of books on prayer and have a couple of "go to's" that I suggest to people but none that I've taken a specific liking to... until now.

The aspect of the book that really sold it to me is how practical it is.

There are many books that talk about prayer without really helping you develop your prayer life. While many books provide a new insight into prayer, often prayer books stay quite theoretical, talking about ways to pray without helping you understand how to do it. Kneeling with Giants provides you with both. More than the other books on prayer that I've read, Kneeling with Giants gets into the how, providing us with practical instruction and examples that really help you to engage each style of prayer.

The premise of the book is wise: Awareness of different styles of prayer will help keep prayer fresh over time, and give you access to new styles of prayer which can help sustain you in different seasons of your life. The author's hope in the book is to help you find a way to pray that you will find life-giving, since for so many people prayer can be such a struggle. By introducing you to different styles of prayer found throughout the history of the church, hopefully you'll discover a style that will bring new life and enjoyment to your time spent in prayer. Gary's clear pastoral desire to lead us deeper into the arms of God, and to equip us with tools to enhance our intimacy with Him come through the book clearly.

The book looks at ten styles of prayer. For each one Gary Hansen explains the particular type of prayer, grounds it in Scripture and historical writings, then by using his own experiences he helps guide us in experimenting with that particular method of prayer. Of the ten styles covered, I'd say that his chapters healing and intercession are the weakest, but they introduce you to some great writings you can jump to for more!

When I received the book back in January my thought had been to bash through the book quickly and get a blog up. At the end of his introduction came the exhortation: "However you go through this book, the one crucial thing is to pray (p15)" and I realised that "bashing through" would not do justice to his gift! [If you read this book without giving time to his suggestions, you'll miss just how rich this resource is and rob yourself of some opportunities to experience God in a new way!!]

The material is rich! Each chapter looks at the writing of a great man or woman in church history (like St Benedict, Luther, Calvin, Ignatius of Loyola, and the Puritans) and explores how they experienced prayer. Coated with Hansen's personal experiences, which he reflects on throughout the book, the pages take on a humble pastoral persona, like a spiritual director helping you (and challenging you) to experience deep new ways of meeting with Jesus.

This would be a good book to work through as a group study. At the end of the book are two helpful appendices. The first suggests ways to use the book as a small group or class curriculum, and the second is a helpful summary of suggestions for to how to practice each of the 10 styles Hansen discusses.

I'd recommend buying the e-book. It includes a reader containing excerpts from the primary source texts, which he draws from throughout the book. Though the book is a fine tool without this, the reader would add an extra element of depth through exposure to some of the writings from the history of the Church.

So... if you find prayer challenging, if your prayer times seem dull, if you're looking for a prayer study for yourself or a group, or if you're simply intrigued now that you realise there's more than one way to pray, I'd highly recommend you grab a copy of *Kneeling With Giants*!

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## **Gail Welborn says**

**\*\*This amazing book on Christian prayer giants belongs in every home and every church! It's a 12+ on a scale of 1 to 10.**

**'Kneeling with Giants,' by Gary Neal Hansen, IVP Books, 2012, 238 Pages, ISBN-13: 978-0830835621, \$15.00**

Sometimes our prayers seem to reach the ceiling and stop, with prayers that feel hollow, flat and sterile to our own minds or ears. We would like a spiritual prayer mentor but don't know where to find one or even where to look. If that describes how you feel, then this book on spiritual prayer giants of the past is for you.

In perfect time for National Day of Prayer week, Hansen's new book on prayer introduces ten spiritual giants from church history with prayer techniques "...rooted in centuries of Christian tradition..."...Full Review:

### **Mary Beth says**

Excellent overview of the various forms of Christian prayer. The ecumenical approach is refreshing and much needed in our fragmented Christian church of today. Each chapter is amazingly practical, but also gentle and encouraging to the person seeking to enhance his or her relationship with God. Firmly rooted in Scripture and sound religious tradition. The ten prayer forms addressed show the immense diversity and depth of the Christian prayer traditions. Something for any Christian seeker regardless of the length of his journey along the Christian path. I would highly recommend to anyone interested in enhancing their prayer life.

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### **Lynn Kidd says**

Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers by Gary Neal Hansen is a must read if you want to build on your prayer life. You must be prepared to take it slow and truly engulf the words that you read. I had plans of just skimming through and picking out what I wanted but its impossible. This book is written in a way that you must not only read and think about what your reading but also to apply it. I have found myself following the suggestions of using this book as a tool and it truly if making an impact on my relationship with God. I believe Gary Hansen had written a remarkable book that will show people through history how prayer styles have made a difference.

I am still reading this book, taking it at a snails pace you could say. It has been worth every minute I have spent reading. Every page I turn gives me new insight and helps me become a prayer warrior for my family and friends.

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### **Josh Hall says**

This book surveys a number of different types of prayer. There are some helpful insights. The author has a likable writing style. Unfortunately, it also advocates for several types of prayer that have more in common with eastern mysticism than Biblical Christianity. I would not recommend this book to those young and impressionable in the faith.

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### **Dave says**

The only thing that kept this from getting 5 stars from me is just personal preference. There were some chapters I just really couldn't get into and fought to get through. I don't want to take anything away from the quality of information or skill of the writer to present the ideas.

To get the most out of this book, I would urge the reader to consider the totality of it, not just look for a specific chapter or method to change our life. Although there were some chapters I loved, especially the last few, which created very meaningful contemplation, the book as a whole had a far greater impact on my prayer life as a sum of its parts.

Kneeling with Giants was invaluable to me in transforming prayer from a spiritual Christmas list we send up to God and wait for a return, to an ability we have been given as a gift, to communicate with and be in the presence of our God

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## **Clint Walker says**

As many readers of this blog may know, I am always have my eyes open for books that discuss spiritual formation and prayer, especially if they do so in a unique and thoughtful way. Recently, Intervarsity Press published a wonderful little survey methods for prayer by Gary Neal Hansen called Kneeling with Giants.

Kneeling with Giants approaches the subject of prayer by looking at how saints of old prayed throughout church history. This is a good idea. It allows readers to observe someone else's method of praying to see if it works for them. It allows Dr. Hansen to instruct his readers on how to pray without beating them over the head with how they "should" do this, or have to do that. Hansen approaches his topic with a lot of grace.

As an "NT" on my Myers-Briggs test, I was thankful to see that there were several models of praying in this book that engage the intellect in more than a perfunctory manner. In particular, I enjoyed the instruction from the Reformed Tradition--both the chapter on Calvin and on the Puritans.

The chapters I enjoyed most (Calvin and Ignatius) in particular, included some more detailed instruction on how the specific method of prayer was to be carried out. I enjoyed the "boxes" which asked leading questions and gave a few step by step guidelines to implementing the specific kind of prayer well. For several of the mystics, such as the description of the Jesus Prayer, this may have been less appropriate. But when I have a little "cheat sheet" I can copy off to use and share, I am a little better off.

Most books on prayer take two approaches. The either focus exclusively on intercession, or they neglect intercession for most of the book and focus on prayer as simply the exercise of spiritual disciplines. Thankfully, Kneeling with Giants goes to neither of these extremes. It presents a holistic view of prayer that will be helpful to people wherever they are on their spiritual journey.

I loved this book. I am hoping to use it some day as a primer on prayer for people who are beginning their walks with Christ, and seeking some guidance on prayer. I think Kneeling with Giants will be a helpful book for many, and an interesting study for most praying Christians

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## **Susan says**

I have to be honest, I'm not really "finished" with this book, and likely won't be for a very long time. Not because I don't like it or find it difficult to read, but precisely because I like it so much and find it helpful. I first read through the chapters on the spiritual "giants" of the title and how they approached prayer. I am now

working my way through again, trying out each method for a month at a time. The author is straightforward and acknowledges that not everyone will take to all of the various approaches to prayer, but thoughtfully explains the unique benefits of "trying" each one out. This is extremely helpful, and a treasure that I will hang on to.

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## **Dustin says**

Gary Neal Hansen, *Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012). Pp. 237. Paperback \$12.80.

This book came across my desk at the invitation of the author to participate in an online continuing education class for pastors. The focus of the class was learning, and teaching prayer, and this book was the textbook. I'm an Eastern Orthodox priest, and, for a variety of reasons, I wasn't sure how this particular book would fit into my ministry. The Orthodox Church has a rich tradition of prayer, so I was curious to see how the prayer methods Prof. Hansen wrote about would augment my ancient tradition. My conclusion, after reading the book and taking the class with the author, is that this book has a lot to say to Christians of every tradition!

There are far too many methods to cover in a review such as this, but allow me to write about a few of them.

Prof. Hansen begins his book with St. Benedict and the Divine Office. For many Protestants, this method of prayer is very foreign. However, for me as an Orthodox Christian, it's very comfortable. I was able to adapt this method to my tradition very easily; as I worked my way through this chapter I simply used the Orthodox Hours instead of the Benedictine Hours. Even though I was using the Eastern version, what Prof. Hansen had to say about learning the rhythm of the hours, and his encouragement to stick with it even the prayers may feel rigid, apply to everyone equally – Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant.

In chapter four, Prof. Hansen asks us to pray with John Calvin. Before I began this chapter, I thought to myself, "There's no way I'll find this chapter helpful." Yet, lo and behold, this became one of my favorite methods of prayer. Generally speaking, the method in this chapter is a form of *Lectio Divina*, which is not completely foreign to Orthodoxy. What was most helpful were the charts in this chapter, which help one go through scripture in a very studious way. Many people in the modern world practice *Lectio Divina* in a way that doesn't take one very deep into the study of scriptures. Prof. Hansen is able to engage the reader and show one how to truly meditate on scripture as the early Christians were taught to do.

In chapter seven, Prof. Hansen asks us to pray with the Puritans, which means praying through journaling. Again I found myself thinking that I'd be very uncomfortable with this method; but, to my surprise, I found this chapter very helpful. The way the exercises are laid out allow one to truly explore the depths of one's soul. For me, this method of prayer is great for preparing for confession. I can turn to this chapter, and allow my preparation not to be just a listing of my sins, but also an experience of prayer.

The final prayer method I want to comment on is the one found in chapter nine: praying with Agnes Sanford. Sanford's method of prayer stresses supplication. After reading through the other methods, of it was this method that I found the most troubling, but not because of the type prayer – the Orthodox services have a very large supplicatory aspect; what was troubling for me was the theology of Sanford herself. I would have preferred to stress Christ's actions more in the process. The point of the book, however, was not to present forms of prayer that work for everyone. The point was to introduce different forms of prayer the Church has used throughout her history so that each reader can discern what works best for him or her. This book acts as

in invitation and provides an opportunity for one to grow in one's Christian walk through prayer. Even though I didn't like Sanford's methodology, I was still glad to be introduced to it because she's had a very big influence on many American Christians, many of whom I interact with daily.

Though a Protestant author wrote this book, don't let that scare you because this book is written in a way that allows it to speak to all Christians. It does cover methods of prayer used by Catholics (Benedictine Hours, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. Teresa Avila), prayers used by Orthodox Christians (the Jesus Prayer), and prayers used by Protestants (Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Puritans, Agnes Sanford, and Andrew Murray). However, I discovered that many of the methods are applicable to any tradition. The only downfall is that if you want the Reader that accompanies this book, you will have to buy the e-book version.

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### **Brian Chilton says**

This was a great book. Hansen helped deepen my spiritual walk with God. Check out all the various prayer styles. Some you may like while others you may not like. But, there are some great tips offered that will deepen your prayer life as never before. Check out the resources that he lists, as well. This was one of those life-changing books. So, I strongly recommend this book for all those who are interested in deepening their walk with God.

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### **Adam Shields says**

Book Review - Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers by Gary Hansen - This is a very good broad sketch at a variety of different prayer methods. What makes this different from other books like Richard Foster's Prayer, is that each of these methods of prayer are accompanied with a biographical sketch. So discussion meditation on Psalms talks about John Calvin and the way that praying Psalms affected Calvin. Very good, readable book.

Click through for a longer review on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/kneeling-with-giants/>

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### **Roy Howard says**

There is a widespread assumption that people who belong to congregations know how to pray. This is a mistake that leads to pastoral neglect. The occasional plea for help, shout of gratitude or song of spontaneous praise is common. Uttering these "prayers" from time to time is not the same prayer as a spiritual practice shaping a whole pattern of living. The old saying that people speak more freely about sex than prayer is true, and it's because they experience the one much more than the other. The author wants his readers to enter into the great joy of prayer and invites them to learn from John Calvin, St. Benedict, the anonymous Russian Pilgrim, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius and the unknown writer of the Cloud of Unknowing. This is an invitation not to a superficial prayer life of occasional outburst but rather a journey with God made possible with mature prayer. "These are not techniques created on a whim (and sold for \$19.95 at the supermarket), but gateways to whole spiritual traditions, ways to grown in a life-giving relationship with the God who created the universe and who redeemed us in Christ." The book comes with a study guide for individuals and groups.

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## **Brian says**

I loved this book! It was so practical. I will definitely be giving this book to more people. I love that it was rooted in history. The 10 different ways that he teaches you to pray were modeled by specific people. They reflect different Christian traditions. I also love that he affirms each of our uniqueness and therefore he suggests trying them on to see how they fit. They may not be what we need today but they may be what we or a friend needs at a specified time in our lives. This book is both theological and practical. Most prayer books are all theology. This was both.

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## **Bob says**

As a young Christian, I thought there was one way to pray. I learned the ACTS acronym (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) and thought this was THE way. Only later did I discover that even within scripture, people prayed in widely different ways. Hansen's book chooses ten saints and their recommended ways of praying to expose us to the breadth of ways God's people have prayed. We have Benedictine liturgy, Luther's teaching on praying the Lord's prayer, the anonymous pilgrim's Jesus prayer, Calvin's use of the Psalms, the Ignatian prayer of the senses and more! I was most surprised with his inclusion of Agnes Sanford's model of healing prayer, which he admits can be controversial. In each of the chapters, and in an appendix at the conclusion, he gives practical instruction for each prayer model with the encouragement to practice these for a period, recognizing that some will be helpful, and some may not connect. Yet he thinks all are helpful to some and some that may not be our "prayer language" now may serve us at a later time.

The e-book version (which I did not read) comes with a supplement of readings for each of the "giants".

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