

PERSPECTIVE

AUGUST 2022

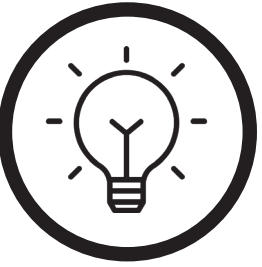


*How Can I
Know God
Hears Me?*

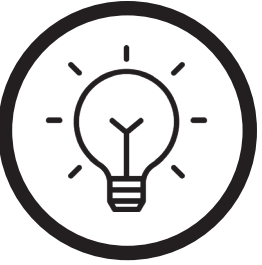
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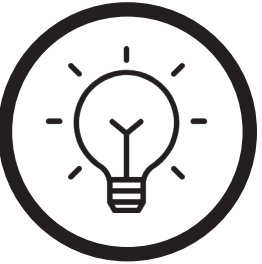
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Aaron Menikoff



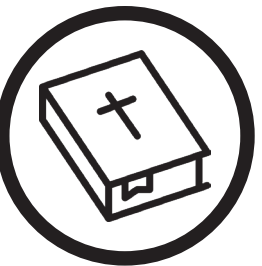
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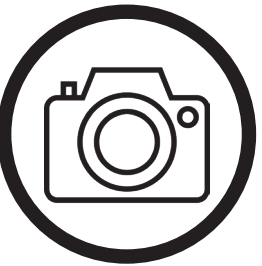
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How Can I Know God Hears Me?

Samuel Morse sent the first Morse Code on May 24, 1844, from a room in the U.S. Capitol to Baltimore, Maryland. The telegraph text came from Numbers 23:23, “What hath God wrought.” At that point, long-distance, instantaneous communication seemed miraculous. But then, the telegraph gave way to the telephone. In 1876, switchboards could service a few dozen customers, but they could only handle a couple of calls simultaneously. In 1915, the first call made its way across the country. Twelve years later, we could phone London. In the summer of 1993, I lived in Moscow, Russia, and Deana worked in Yellowstone. My dorm had one phone, and calls were expensive, so we hardly spoke. Today we have unlimited access to anyone at any time, and we can even see their face!

Though some of us marvel at our access to each other, I think we should marvel at our access to God. He hears us when we pray!

Do you believe that? Most Christians want to pray more often, deeply, and energetically. But prayer has fallen on hard times. We are living through a prayer recession that CNN, the *Washington Post*, or *The Wall Street Journal* won’t cover. For some, it’s because we’re so busy. Others blame laziness or social media. But I wonder if behind it all is a lack of faith that God hears us.

The question I’m asking is, how do I know God hears me when I pray? I have five answers, which I have chosen to answer in the first person. These answers are how I would respond if a non-Christian wanted to know how I can be sure God hears me.

I KNOW GOD HEARS MY PRAYER BECAUSE HE MADE ME.

God is God. He exists. He’s not a figment of my imagination. I am not the accidental, happy result of evolution. A personal, Creator God made me in his image. So, when we talk about prayer, we must speak of the God who has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one essence and three persons. These Three have always been in communion with each other.

Before the world existed, Jesus shared in the glory of God the Father (John 17:5). Before the foundation of the world, the Father chose us in Christ to be his people

(Ephesians 1:4). This means the Father and Son and Spirit conspired for our salvation. They communicated for our good. The Son listened to the Father, and the Father listened to the Son. Made in God’s image, I listen too. Why and how do I listen? How can I hear and understand God? Because I’m in God’s image, and God is a listening God!

Atheists do not pray because they think they are alone in a cold, dark universe. I know I’m not alone. In Psalm 139:1, David prayed, “*You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.*” “*Discern my thoughts*” means God hears me—not just the sound waves produced by my vocal cords but the thoughts and intentions of my heart. In verse 14, he proclaimed, “*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*” David knew God heard him because David knew God made him.

Likewise, I believe God searches my heart because he made me. God discerns my thoughts, and he is always near to me. Prayer is not talking to a ceiling. It’s not personal therapy or a sign of weakness. Instead, it is a stake in the ground where I declare, “I did not make God, but he made me.”

I KNOW GOD HEARS MY PRAYER BECAUSE HE CARES FOR ME.

It’s not enough to say God made me. I have to believe he cares for me too. And not how I care for a splinter in my toe or a thorn in my side. No, God cares for me the way I care for my son and daughters. So, to believe God hears me, I must trust that he loves me.

Let me first acknowledge that God does not hear everyone’s prayers. Of course, the words reach his ears—he’s God, after all. But God is not warm or receptive to every prayer. He does not hear the supplications of the proud. In Luke 18, we read of a Pharisee and a tax collector, both of whom went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee boasted of his good works, while the tax collector identified himself as a sinner and pled for mercy. God only heard one prayer. It was the tax collector who went home forgiven. It’s not that we must be perfect; no one is perfect. But we must be humble. We must be aware of our sins and quick to confess them. Our need for God’s mercy and grace must overwhelm us. There are prayers God does not hear, especially those of rebellious unbelievers.

But for those of us in Christ, God hears us because he cares for us. He doesn’t treat me like a stranger, and he

doesn't even treat me as a friend. Instead, God treats me as his child. His ear is bent toward me.

I recently had a salesperson knock on my door. As she courteously sought to sell me her product, I listened but eventually ended the conversation without trying to be rude. I heard her, but her words meant little to me. But what if my child knocked on the door? Would I send her away? Would I close the door on her? Of course not. I'd say, "Come in, get out of the cold, talk to me!" God hears my prayers like a father hears his child. "But when Christ had offered for all time **a single sacrifice for sins**, he sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12).

In Romans 8:15, the Apostle Paul says, "*But you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'*" I know God hears me because he has adopted me into his family and made me his son. If you are in Christ, then you have all the advantages of the sonship of Jesus himself. You have God's ear because you're a part of God's family.

Christian, perhaps you struggle to believe God cares for you. Maybe it's because many of your prayers go unanswered. But if you're in Christ, God cares even when he seems quiet. John Calvin put it this way: "Although [God] never either sleeps or idles, still very often [he] gives the impression of one sleeping or idling in order that he may thus train us, [who are] idle and lazy, to seek, ask, and entreat him to our great good." So until you believe God cares for you, you'll never pray as you should.

I KNOW GOD HEARS MY PRAYER BECAUSE HE HAS SPOKEN TO ME.

In other words, God has initiated a conversation with me. I believe he hears me because I'm convinced of his verbal relationship with me.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the garden. They fell out of communion with God as a result of their actions. They had a perfect relationship with God before this. He walked and talked with them in perfect harmony. But they chose instead to live outside the safety of God's will, which resulted in a chasm between God and man. Yet, God—in his love—penetrates our darkness by speaking to us through his Word.

We can only call out to God because he first called out to us. Prayer starts with God speaking to us, not us talking to God, which is why Christians naturally read the Bible before praying. We first hear what God would say to us,

then turn and talk to God. Our words to him are in direct response to his words to us.

Has anyone important ever reached out to you to start a relationship? A few years ago, I opened my email box and saw an email from a Christian leader whom I'd met, but I had no reason to think he knew me. I was surprised he reached out to me! I clicked on the message only to discover it was a fundraising email for his ministry. It wasn't personal.

God's not like that. Personal invitations and heartfelt commands fill his Word. He says in Psalm 50:15, "*call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*" In Romans 12:12, the Lord, speaking through the Apostle Paul, says: "*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*" Christian, this is God's Word to you—his invitation. God tells you to call upon him constantly. When you wake, talk to him. Throughout the day, talk to him. Before you go to sleep, talk to him. Not simply when you have time, not simply when you're in need, but constantly.

You probably don't pray as often, deeply, or energetically as you want to. Perhaps the main reason is that you don't believe God hears you. But how can you doubt God hears you when he pursues you through his Word? He tells you to come to him, to draw near to him (James 4:8). You can trust God hears when you speak to him because he's the one who started the conversation.

I KNOW GOD HEARS MY PRAYER BECAUSE GOD PROMISES TO HEAR ME.

1 John 5:14 says, "*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.*" So, John is writing about confidence in prayer—specifically in prayer requests. So, you can rest assured that he will hear you and answer your requests when you pray. Yes, we pray in Jesus' name to experience joy now. But such joy is merely a foretaste of what's to come. On that day, faith—of which prayer is the essence—will turn to sight.

But did you notice the condition of this promise? He says you can have confidence only *if* you ask *according to his will*. Your prayer must align with God's will. And when the two are compatible, God promises to hear you. When you pray for what God wants, you can be confident that he will grant that request.

I have a child who wants a guinea pig. But unfortunately,

her will is not in accord with my will. To her credit, she gives the persistent widow of Luke 18 a run for her money! But until my daughter's will aligns with mine, that guinea pig will forever be a pipe dream. I love her very much, and my refusal to grant this request reflects not my love but my will.

Please understand me. We ought to pray for blessings God does not promise as well—Paul prayed for God to remove the thorn in 2 Corinthians 12. Jesus prayed for God to remove the cup in Luke 22. Neither our Savior nor the apostle had reason to believe the Father would do this. But they prayed anyway. The Father listened to each request, but he did not “hear” them—because they were not in accord with his will.

We should increasingly pray for things undoubtedly aligned with the Father's will. In other words, you should pray for what God has promised to give you. And as you grow as a Christian, you will increasingly pray for what God wants for you and *from* you.

What does God want *for* you?

- ✦ He wants forgiveness for you (1 John 1:9). When you come to him humbly, asking him to forgive you, he will because God desires that “*all should reach repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9). It's a promise.
- ✦ He wants knowledge for you (Ephesians 1:17). God wants to grow you in understanding who he is and what he does. It's a promise.
- ✦ He wants wisdom for you (James 1:5). He wants you to know how to navigate life, make good decisions, and live in an understanding way with those around you. It's a promise.
- ✦ He wants unity in the church for you (Ephesians 4:3). God wants his church to be a lighthouse for the nations, a place of refuge from the storm of the world. It's a promise for you.

What does God want *from* you?

- ✦ He wants obedience to his commands (1 Peter 1:16). He wants you to be holy as he is holy.
- ✦ He wants you to bear spiritual fruit like love and joy (Galatians 5:22–23). Abundant life for the Christian is a life of spiritual gifts like compassion and grace, mercy and self-control, faithfulness and gentleness. He is not stingy with any of these; he only asks that you pray.

- ✦ He wants you to commit to a church (Hebrews 10:25). He doesn't want you to live the Christian life alone. You are to be a part of a community of faith. You are to have a seat at the table of the family of God—the local church.
- ✦ He wants you to share the gospel (Matthew 28:19). When you pray, he will open doors (Colossians 4:3). God wants his church to grow and will make it happen—not because of the “coolness” of the music or the preaching or the aesthetics, but because he is a God who keeps his promises.

It's a joy to know God promises to hear us—to answer our prayers—when we pray according to his will. And even when he says “no” to requests not in line with his will, you can know that his love remains a granite fact. How do I know this? Because he saved me.

I KNOW GOD HEARS MY PRAYER BECAUSE GOD SAVED ME.

Confidence in prayer is for *believers*—those whose faith is in the Son of God and his sacrifice. Christians are the only ones who can have confidence that God hears them. No one else. If I had one answer to why I believe God hears me, this is the one I would give. He's not just my Maker; he is my Redeemer. Christ cared for me all the way to Calvary. He speaks to me most profoundly in the gospel. His promise to hear me is rooted in the fact that he died for me.

Many people approach God casually as if he's a butler or a genie in a bottle. They pay the tip; they rub the bottle. They come to God with presumption and indifference. They have little regard for the fact that God is holy and mighty and to be feared. They forget they are sinners deserving of condemnation and wrath. Throughout the Bible, approaching God is presented as very dangerous. Think of Moses, who had to take off his sandals. Think of Israel, who had to stay off the mountain. Think of Isaiah, who saw the Lord and said, “*Woe is me!*” We must not take God lightly.

To approach God, we need someone to go before us first and prepare the way. More than that, we need someone to stand in our place as our representative. In the Old Testament, this was the priest. He represented the people to God. In Exodus 28, we learn about the priestly garment. We read of the sewn onyx stone on each shoulder of the garment with six names of the tribes of Israel written on each stone representing all twelve tribes. The breastplate

of the priest had twelve stones. In each stone was inscribed one of the tribes of Israel. This garment had a purpose. When the priest put it on, everyone knew he represented them when he prayed and made sacrifices in the temple. The stones with their names rested on his shoulders and chest. The people couldn't pray to God in the temple—only the priest could. He prayed in God's presence. The people couldn't approach God—only the priest could. In a sense, wearing the garment, the priest took the people with him.

But in the New Covenant, Jesus is our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–16). Through his representation, we have the grace we need to enter the temple and talk to God. Christ died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended above to sit at the right hand of God the Father. He serves as our representative, advocate, and mediator through this heavenly session.

How do I know my Father hears me? Because my Savior died for me. How do I know God is warm to my requests? Because the love he has for his only-begotten Son is the same love with which he loves me. How do I know God won't push me away when I come to him? Because Christ has taken all my sin upon himself.

Samuel Morse's first message read, "What hath God wrought." Indeed, the Morse Code was a groundbreaking accomplishment. Today you can pull out your phone and call anyone worldwide, which is the staggering power of technology. But even more remarkable is that, in Christ, you can approach God the Father, who holds the universe in his hand. That's the power of the cross.

Christian, I want you to pray more often, deeply, and energetically. But I don't think you will until you believe, really believe, God hears you. How can you be sure he does? You can be sure God hears you because God made you and cares for you. You can be sure he hears you because he spoke to you and promised to listen. And most importantly, you can be sure he hears you because he saved you.

– Aaron Menikoff

ⁱ (Calvin, II.xx.3).

The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions

Edited by Arthur Bennett

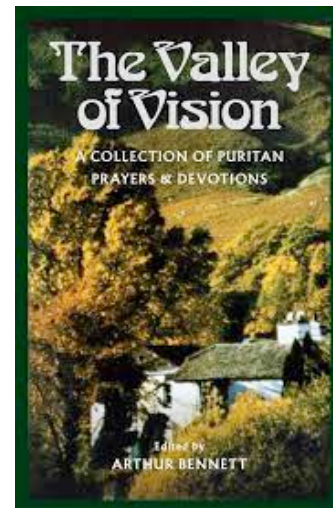
As the title suggests, this book is a compilation of prayers by Puritans from the 16th and 17th centuries. Despite being written so long ago, these prayers are still very relevant and helpful today. After all, their foundation is in Scripture, not merely the dogma of one denomination. They are a good reminder that Scripture applies to all of life and that we should bring each aspect of our daily lives before God in prayer.

Since this book is a compilation of prayers, divided into ten sections. The content of each prayer varies. There are prayers on the attributes of God, prayers that focus on repentance and reconciliation, prayers that include requests to God, and prayers that humble you as you approach the throne of grace. In addition, there is a section with morning and evening prayers for each day of the week, an excellent way to start and end each day.

I enjoyed this book and was comforted seeing the things we bring to God in prayer are very similar to what Christians in the past have struggled with also. This book was convicting, humbling, encouraging, and a good reminder of how essential and effective prayers are in our daily lives. I enjoyed making it a point one week to start and end my day with the morning and evening prayers to be reminded of God's presence, be still before starting the rush of the day, and be still again while reflecting on the day.

The Valley of Vision is an excellent book for those looking to grow in the discipline of prayer. The prayers provide a great way to start one's daily prayer time with God, focus, remove distractions and get into a good mindset for intentional prayer with God. Though not meant to be mindlessly repeated, these prayers provide great reminders of things about which we often forget or fail to think about praising God or praying.

— RECOMMENDED BY ANNE ELIZABETH GOODGAME



Excerpts from the Book

1

"The soul learns by praying; for prayer is communion with a transcendent and immanent God."

— Preface, p. viii

2

"I rejoice to think that all things are at thy disposal, and it delights me to leave them there."

— God the All, p. 4

3

"I adore thee for making me capable of knowing thee."

— A Present Salvation, p. 12

Praying the Bible

Written by Donald Whitney

At this year's *Feed My Sheep Conference*, one speaker, Ligon Duncan, listed five ways to *glorify* God in our family, private, and corporate worship: (1) Read the Bible, (2) Preach the Bible, (3) Pray the Bible, (4) Sing the Bible, and (5) See the Bible (through the practice of the ordinances). At Mount Vernon, we see all of these practiced regularly in our corporate worship, except I wasn't as clear on one: how do we "pray the Bible?" We want to be God-dependent, but sometimes our prayer life may say otherwise. Prayerlessness reveals a heart of self-dependency. We are declaring we don't need God. It keeps us from being spiritually alert. No one enters an important meeting unprepared, so how much more should we prayerfully prepare as we wage spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The disciples' failure to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane led them to abandon Jesus (Mk 14:26-50). That challenges me to pray and recognize my desperate need for God. In his short, practical book *Praying the Bible*, Donald Whitney shows us *how*.

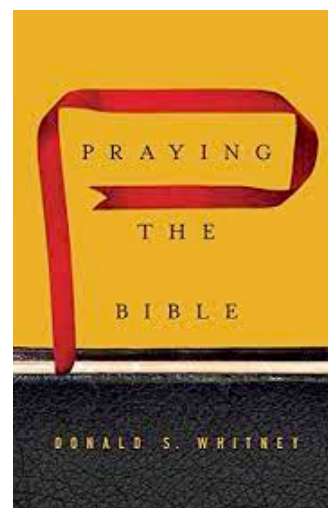
He begins by describing the *problem* most of us have in our prayer time—it becomes routine. We feel it takes up too much time; we get bored; our minds wander; and most end up routinely praying the same old things the same old way.

The **solution**, according to Whitney, is to pray through a passage of Scripture, with a particular focus on the Psalms. As you do this, you are taking words that originated in the heart and mind of God and circulating them through your heart and mind back to God. In the process, your prayer life is not only informing you; it is *transforming* you. Whitney shows a way to pray through the Psalms by providing a "Psalm of the Day" chart, which allows you to systematically pray through every Psalm in the Bible.

He then shows how those who have put this into practice have *evaluated* their experience, among them being: (1) My mind didn't wander. (2) My prayer was more about God and less about me. (3) I wasn't thinking about the time it took. (4) I thought more deeply about what the Bible says. (5) I prayed about things that I don't usually pray about. (6) I didn't just pray about the same old things the same old way.

Praying the Bible has been one of my life's most helpful and encouraging practices. I encourage you to do the same.

— RECOMMENDED BY JIM HEISKELL



Excerpts from the Book

1

"If I try to pray for people or events without having the Word in front of me guiding my prayer, then several negative things happen. One is that I tend to be very repetitive... I just pray the same things all the time. Another negative thing is that my mind tends to wander."

— John Piper, p. 11

2

"By praying the Psalms back to God, we learn to pray in tune with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

— Ben Patterson, p. 45

3

"Praying the Word means reading (or reciting) Scripture in a spirit of prayer and letting the meaning of the verses become our prayer and inspire our thoughts."

— John Piper, p. 79

Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans

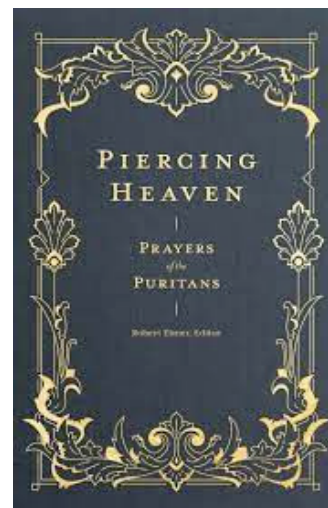
Edited by Robert Elmer

Sometimes our prayer lives can grow repetitive. Circumstances arise when we may not be sure how to pray. In these situations, it is helpful to know how other believers have prayed in the past and learn from them. *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans* is a collection of prayers to inspire and refresh your prayers and further grow your love for Jesus Christ, our Lord. These prayers are uplifting for the mature and the new Christian believer.

The Puritan style firmly focuses on praying God's words back to him, to "pierce heaven" with prayer. Elmer compiled this wonderful collection of prayers in 2019 and updated them for the 21st-century reader. He selected prayers from thirty-two Puritan authors and organized the book into sixteen categories of prayers, from "Teach me to Pray" to "Your Kingdom Come," ten of which focus on "Help Me" prayers such as "Help Me Endure Temptation" and "Help Me Rest in God's Love."

Many authors of those prayers experienced persecution during the turbulent English Civil Wars and the later Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. During this time, the English Crown forbade over 2,200 ministers of the Puritan persuasion to serve as preachers. Their prayers are humble and heartfelt. They placed total trust in the Lord, despite being jailed or banned from leading their flocks for perceived disloyalty. I agree with the editor of *Piercing Heaven*: "The prayers of the Puritans are a treasure for today" and can enhance the daily prayers of any Christian. This book of prayers is an excellent resource for anyone seeking to strengthen their prayer life, now and in the days ahead.

– RECOMMENDED BY JOHN H. H. TUNER III



Excerpts from the Book

1

"You who command and hear prayer! You who help your people to pray! Pour the spirit of grace and supplication, that your throne of grace may be surrounded by supplicants, that there may be a great flocking to the mercy seat, and grace may be imparted abundantly to your own glory, through Jesus Christ the high priest, who is passed into heavens, and is at your right hand forever. Amen."

– The Commander and Hearer of Prayer, p. 19

2

"Come! I long to ascend to your presence and see you in your courts above."

– Waiting for the King of Glory, p. 117

3

"Lord, did you not make me a fisher of men? I have worked all this time and caught nothing. Have I spent my strength for nothing? I will cast my net one more time. Lord Jesus, stand on the shore and show me how and where to spread my net. Give me the words to enclose the souls I see, that they will have no way out. Amen."

– Oh Lord, Draw People to Christ!, p. 184

AUGUST

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

August 1	Acts 21:37–22:29	August 17	1 Peter 4:1–11
August 2	Acts 1:1–11	August 18	2 Timothy 6:11–21
August 3	Acts 1:12–26	August 19	Exodus 19:1–11
August 4	Acts 2:1–13	August 20	Ephesians 2:1–10
August 5	Isaiah 55:6–13	August 21	Titus 2:11–14
August 6	Acts 2:14–41	August 22	Psalms 115
August 7	Acts 21:37–22:29	August 23	Psalms 22
August 8	Acts 22:3–23:11	August 24	Psalms 42
August 9	Acts 2:42–47	August 25	Psalms 79
August 10	Acts 3:1–10	August 26	Acts 19:21–29
August 11	Acts 3:11–26	August 27	Psalms 137
August 12	Exodus 22:16–28	August 28	Psalms 115
August 13	Acts 4:1–22	August 29	Acts 23:12–35
August 14	Acts 22:30–23:11	August 30	Acts 4:23–37
August 15	Titus 2:11–14	August 31	Acts 5:1–11
August 16	Ezekiel 37:15–28		

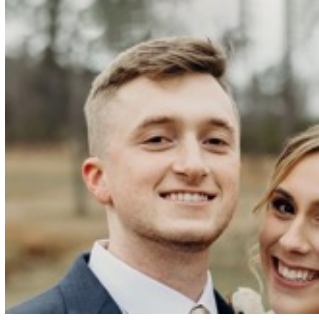
*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



**Hadley
Foust**



**Jonathan
Melber**



**Sarah
Melber**



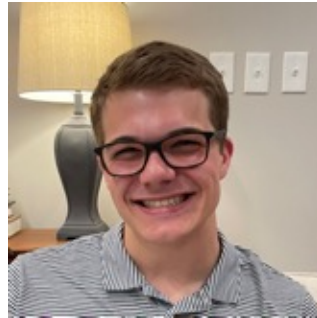
**Paul
Morris**



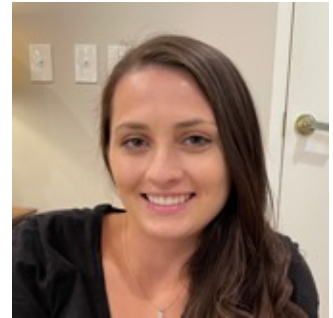
**Stefanie
Morris**



**Emma Grace
Roe**



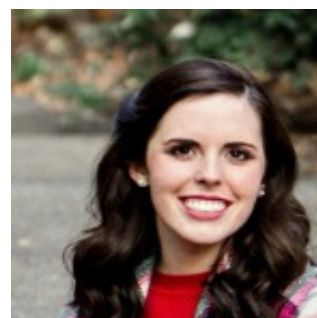
**Jacob
Salley**



**Sarah
Salley**



**Tyler
Ziemer**



**Emily
Ziemer**



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH