

# RON JONES

*Author of The Jesus Way to Pray*



10 KEYS  
TO A  
MORE  
POWERFUL  
PRAYER  
LIFE

# ASK, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU.

## *Matthew 7:7*

C.S. Lewis traveled a long journey from atheism to theism to Christianity. During a difficult season in his life of faith, the esteemed Oxford scholar found prayer to be a mysterious and difficult discipline.

Deeply grieved by the death of his wife, Lewis wrote *A Grief Observed*. Some believe he wrote the book after reflecting on Psalm 22:1, which reads, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” When Lewis prayed, pouring out his sorrow to God, he felt abandoned by the Almighty. The experience of prayer, he reflects, was like getting “a door slammed in [my] face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside.”

**Does prayer feel that way to you? Has heaven locked its doors, or so it seems, and you cannot connect with God through prayer? Does it appear as though your prayers ascend no higher than the ceiling in your prayer closet? You pray and pour out your heart, but you also wonder, “Is anybody there? Am I just talking to my imaginary friend?”**

If the God of the Bible hears and answers prayers, and if His coverage map is the best in the universe, why do our conversations with Him sometimes feel like a dropped cell phone call?

Admittedly, sometimes I am tempted to pray, in the vein of the old Verizon commercials, “Lord, can you hear me now?”

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Whether or not God answers prayer is one of the great mysteries—and at times, frustrations—of the Christian life.

*Why are some prayers answered in miraculous ways, when others appear to go ignored, sometimes with seemingly tragic outcomes?*

*If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, do our prayers really matter?*

*Can we change God’s mind with our prayers?*

These are deep questions of the soul, and there are no easy answers. I suspect that the innerworkings of prayer is one of those things we will not fully understand on this side of heaven.

**However, what I do know is that Scripture commands us to pray fervently, persistently, and with authority.**

The Bible mentions prayer hundreds of times, often with bold promises associated with our heaven-sent conversations. Jesus even says that we will receive anything we ask for in faith (Matthew 21:22). However, the Bible also reveals what hinders us from receiving answers to our prayers. As Scripture guides us in how to have a more effective prayer life, it certainly seems we have a role to play in the answers to our prayers.

**In this guide, I share with you ten ways to pray more effectively and experience more power in your prayer life. These prayer tips come straight from the Bible.**

We cannot control or manipulate God. Nor can we willfully make our desires happen. But God cares about how we talk to Him and about the posture of our hearts. When we pray on God's terms, miracles are truly possible.

My hope is that the tips in this guide will help you pray with confidence and expectancy, believing God hears you, loves you, and has your best interests at heart, no matter how He answers your prayers.



A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Ron Jones". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Pastor & Radio Bible Teacher

# *How to Unlock* ANSWERED PRAYER

Answered prayer is not automatic. We must speak to God on His terms. A careful survey of the Bible reveals at least ten keys to unlocking answered prayer. Let's take a closer look.

## #1: CONFESS YOUR SIN

The most obvious hindrance to answered prayer is the sin that separates us from God. The prophet Isaiah writes, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

The ancient prophet lays our communication problem with the Almighty squarely on us, not God. First, if you are not in a relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for your sins, then you have no access to God through prayer. You are still in your sins, and they stand between you and God like Mount Everest. Faith in Christ alone opens the communication lines between us and God, and it starts with confession followed by repentance. Confession means I agree with God about His diagnosis of my spiritual condition (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23).

For the believer in Jesus Christ, our sins no longer separate us from God. However, unconfessed sin breaks our fellowship with him. The psalmist writes, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18). To regard sin is to cherish it, which is the opposite of confession and repentance. The Apostle Peter also quotes from the Old Testament when he writes, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

## #2: MAKE THE ASK

Prayerlessness also gets in the way of God hearing and answering our prayers. It seems obvious, but God does not hear what we do not speak. We must cry out to Him. F.B. Meyer said, “The greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.”

Fundamentally, prayer is asking and receiving. Jesus made this clear when he said, “Ask and it shall be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). James must have heard Jesus, his half-brother, say this numerous times because James said, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

Earlier, I recalled how difficult it is for some salespeople to ask for the order. Anyone can wax eloquently about the features and benefits of his or her product; however, high-achieving salespeople easily look the customer in the eye and ask, “May I have your business?” Likewise, as simple as it sounds, bring your request to God in prayer and wait for His answer in faith.

The prophet Samuel believed prayerlessness was a serious matter. To the people under his spiritual leadership, Samuel said, “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and right way” (1 Samuel 12:23).



## #3: ASK IN FAITH

Let's stay in the book of James for another insight into the keys that unlock answered prayer. James provides more wisdom from above when he writes,

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”*  
*James 1:5-8*

James is a practical theologian. During a discussion about overcoming the trials of life, he talks about the need for wisdom and faith. Biblical wisdom is the ability to live life skillfully, putting into practice the truth we learn from God's perfect and holy word. It takes faith to do that consistently and without doubting. According to Hebrews 11:1, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” James's point is that God will not give us wisdom, even if we ask for it, if we do not intend to walk in that wisdom by faith.

Of course, doubt is the enemy of faith. We cannot be certain and doubt at the same time. If we doubt that God will give us wisdom willingly and generously, then we are like the wave of the sea, “driven and tossed by the wind.” Wavey Christians are weak believers. James calls them “double-minded” and “unstable.”

The double-minded person experiences inner conflict. One part of his mind is certain, while the other is doubting. His instability makes him like the drunken man who cannot walk a straight line or like the wave of the sea that rises one moment and then comes crashing down. The double-minded person is also like the pushmi-pullyu. Dr. Dolittle describes the rare beast as “the rarest animal of the African jungles, the only two-headed beast in the world!” The pushmi-pullyu tries to walk in two directions at the same time, as does the double-minded person who lacks the certainty of faith.

## #4: ASK UNSELFISHLY

God does not hear and answer selfish prayers. James says, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3). The New Living Translation of the Bible says it this way: “And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.” No matter how sincerely we ask, we will never pull the wool over God’s eyes. We cannot fool Him. He knows when we are sincerely wrong, and our motives are skewed. Remember, if the request is not right, God says no!

Only by God’s grace can we truly live a selfless life by putting the interests of others ahead of our own. If you struggle with selfishness, turn Philippians 2:3 into a prayer, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” Then, do the same thing with Psalm 119:36, “Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.”

## #5: ALIGN WITH GOD'S WILL

First John 5:14 tells us that prayer aligned with God's will receives His affirmative response, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." Conversely, God will not hear and answer a petition that is not according to his decreed or desired will. This brings us full circle to the Jesus way to pray, "Pray then this way ... your will be done." In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus yielded His will to the Father's by praying, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Matthew 26:39).

The will of God and the word of God go hand in hand. Thus, the best way to pray according to the will of God is to pray the word of God. One resource I love is Donald Whitney's wonderful little book titled *Praying the Bible*, where he shows readers how to pray through portions of Scripture, especially the Psalms, one line at a time. This time-tested prayer method means you are always praying the will of God because you are praying the word of God. Praying God's word is also the best way to avoid the "vain repetitions" Jesus warned about in Matthew 6:7.

## #6: PERSIST IN PRAYER

Persistence is a virtue that too many people lack, especially when it comes to prayer. In real estate, the three most important words are location, location, and location. Biblical prayer is all about persistence, persistence, and persistence. To persist is to press on and press through until you receive a breakthrough. Do you press on in prayer?

Consider Thomas Edison, who discovered 1,880 ways not to make a light bulb before he invented one that did work. Or think about film producer George Lucas. Every major Hollywood studio rejected his movie called Star Wars until 20th Century Fox said they would take a chance on it. Baseball's Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times on his way to hitting more home runs than anybody in the history of the game (714) until Hank Aaron broke the Bambino's record on April 8, 1974. Persistence is one of the most important keys to success in life.

Knowing that we easily give up, Jesus told two parables that encourage our persistence in prayer: The Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-9) and the Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8). In the latter parable, Jesus links persistent prayer to faith.

*And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”*

*Luke 18:1-8*

If you are one of those persons who frequently says, “One of these days, I’ll get around to it,” ask God to help you become a more persistent person. Then, apply your new persistence to prayer. Keep on praying until you receive a divine breakthrough!

## #7: RECONCILE YOUR BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Broken relationships can also hinder our communication with God. Since God is in the reconciliation business (2 Corinthians 5:18-19), reconciling our broken relationships has always been a prerequisite to approaching Him. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 6:23-24).

The Apostle Peter hits close to home by linking answered prayer to the way a husband treats his wife, saying, “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

Marital conflict is inevitable, even in the best marriages. Resolving conflict of any kind is a choice we make, and it is hard work. Reconciliation also requires two willing parties, which is why Romans 12:18 says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Because our prayer life depends on it, Christians must be committed to reconciling broken relationships, even broken marriages, when possible.

## #8: RESPECT GOD'S WORD

Respect for God's word is another key that unlocks answered prayer. Indifference to God's word will surely close off our communication with Him.

Indifferent people show a lack of concern or interest in something. They shrug their shoulders. Apathetic, callous, careless, insensitive, inattentive, and negligent are similar words that describe their state of mind and behavior. I'll say it again. If we become indifferent to God's word, He will not hear our prayers. Proverbs 28:19 says, "If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." Those are strong words, but they are designed to awaken the indifferent.

Obedience is one way we show respect for the Bible. Are you walking in obedience to God's holy word, or have you turned your ear away? People who do not read the Bible, let alone obey it, are indifferent to God's word. Why should God listen to and answer our prayers if we do not care enough about what He says to read and practice His holy precepts?

From the positive perspective, Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). To abide in Jesus is to be so aligned with Him that there is no separation between God's word and you.



Indifference to the poor will also hinder our prayer life. Proverbs 21:13 says, “Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.”

## #9: BECOME A PRAYER WARRIOR

Spiritual battles in the heavenly realms might be why the answer to your prayer is at least delayed, which is another reason to persist in prayer. The Apostle Paul opened our eyes to spiritual warfare in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul's words in Ephesians 6 probably inspired the term "prayer warrior," which often describes people who are committed to the ministry of prayer.

Warfare prayer is real and necessary in the Christian life. The Bible tells us that we "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against ... spiritual forces of wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). Daniel experienced this firsthand when he started to pray but did not receive an answer from heaven for twenty-one days. When the breakthrough came, the angel of the Lord told him what was happening, peeling back the curtain to give us a glimpse of the spiritual warfare taking place in the heavenlies (Daniel 10).

The absence of prayer leaves one vulnerable to the devil's attack. A spiritual warrior prays as the primary way he does battle with the unseen forces of darkness; he puts on his spiritual armor daily, "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Ephesians 6:18). Of course, Jesus addressed the reality of spiritual warfare when He taught us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).

## #10: PRAY IN JESUS'S NAME

In 2001, President-elect George W. Bush invited two men to pray for him during the inauguration ceremonies in Washington, D.C. Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, and Kirbyjon Caldwell, a leading Methodist pastor from Houston, accepted the invitation and did not hesitate to voice their prayers in Jesus's name, which, not surprisingly, lit a political and cultural firestorm.

And yet, praying in His name is exactly what Jesus taught His disciples to do during His Upper Room discourse (John 14:13-14, 15:16, 16:23-24). How else would anyone expect two Christian clergymen to pray?

What does it mean to pray in Jesus's name? Primarily, it means that our access to the Father in prayer comes only through Jesus. We are in the Lord's presence by Jesus's merits, not ours, and pray in His authority. Though not a perfect illustration, praying to the Father in Jesus's name is sort of like calling the President of the United States and invoking the name of a former President who already set up the conversation so that he is expecting your call.

Praying in Jesus's name also acknowledges the trinitarian aspects of biblical prayer. The Bible's way to pray is to the Father, in the name of the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. I hear a lot of theologically sloppy praying directed to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus precisely taught His disciples to pray to "Our Father" and "in my name."

In John 14:13-14, Jesus said, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." Of course, the words "I will do" assume we have met all the other prayer criteria, including making requests according to the will of God (1 John 5:14).

Furthermore, as Christians, we need to be careful that we do not treat the words "in Jesus's name" like the word "abracadabra," which magicians use to signify the moment something magical happens. God the Father, who is all-powerful, is neither a genie nor a magician.

The Father generously grants His children access through prayer because of the mediatorial work of His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). Thus, in Jesus's name, "with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

# *Expect* THE UNEXPECTED

When I was a child, I prayed like a child, and for childish things. For example, one day, I asked God for one million dollars. What was I thinking? Honestly, I think I was testing God and His promise to hear and answer our prayers.

With all the sincerity I could muster, I assumed the prayer position by kneeling on the floor in my bedroom with my head bowed, eyes closed, and hands folded. “God,” I said quietly so nobody else would hear me, “would you please give me one million dollars?” I opened my eyes, hoping to see a stash of cash appear before me on the floor. I know, I know; how silly of me.

However, much later in life, after earning a college degree in financial planning, it occurred to me that God might answer my prayer another way—a way that would even exceed my childish request. Did you know that earning \$25,000 per year for forty years equals one million dollars? My first employer paid me \$22,000 annually; since then, I have earned much more per year. Do the math. Truly, multi-millions of dollars have passed through my hands, and probably yours, during the past four decades of my employed life.

Did God answer my immature prayer, just in a way I did not expect?

Bill Hybels gets credit for the following observations about prayer.

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If the request is not right, God says no.

If the time is not right, God says slow.

If you are not right, God says grow.

When all is right, God says go.

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Sometimes, the answers to our prayers look very different than what we expected. However, that does not change the fact that God hears and answers prayer. Biblical faith always leaves room for God to act in His way, time, and according to His will.

# *Prayer* CHANGES US

So, what happens when you have confessed your sin, prayed in Jesus's name, surrendered to God's will, and still don't get the answers you hoped for?

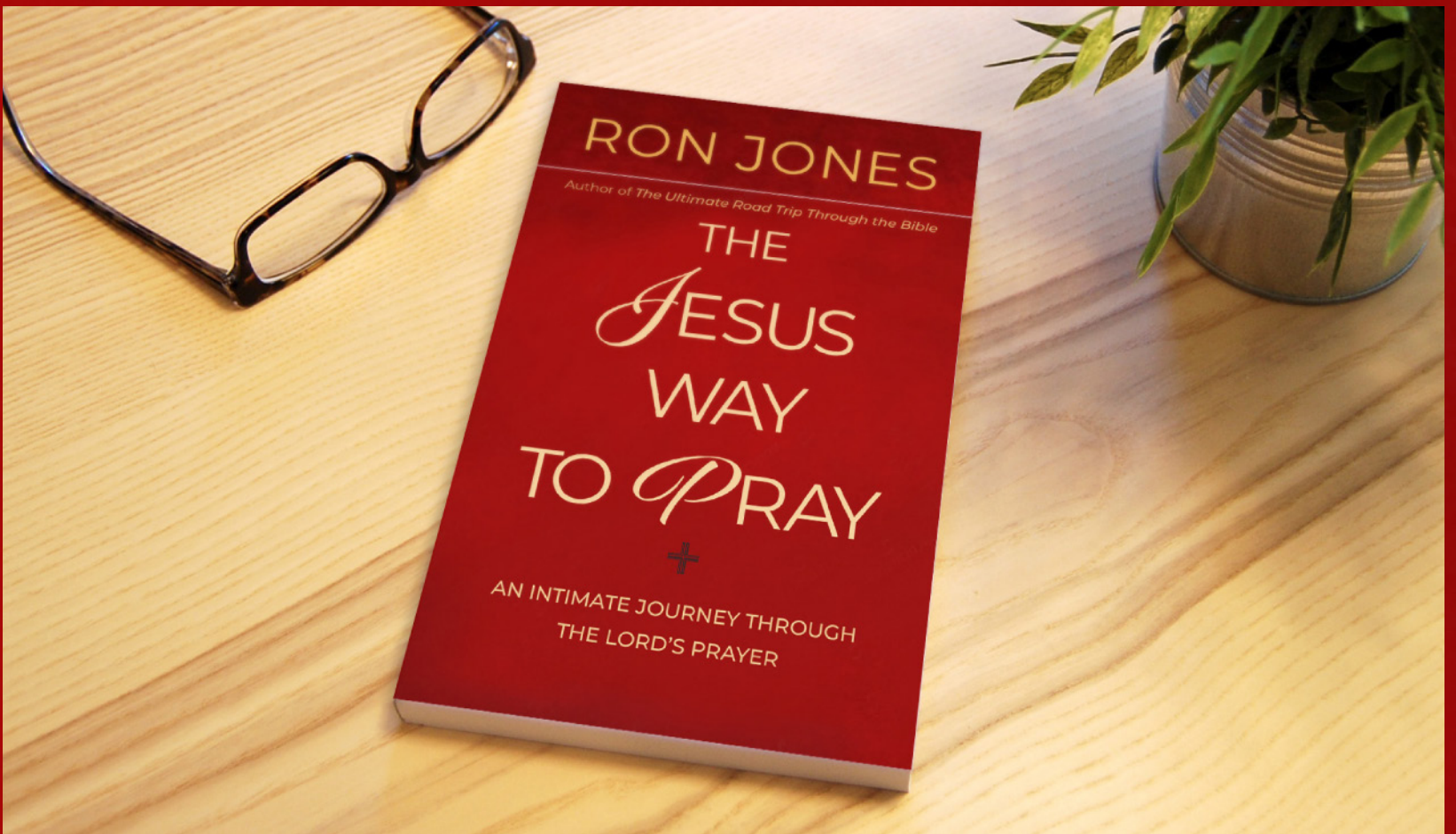
**That is when we learn to trust God and wait on Him... because sometimes prayer is less about the outcomes we hope to receive and more about who God wants us to become.**

Prayer is character-shaping and relationship-building. By prayer, we learn to commune with God and bring Him everything that concerns us, including our pain, hope, grief, and desires.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "God answers prayer in his own way, not ours." Indeed, He does.

**Prayer changes things, but mostly, it changes us.**

UNLOCK A MORE POWERFUL  
PRAYER LIFE BY LEARNING  
THE JESUS WAY TO PRAY



Would you like to learn how to pray from Jesus, the master of divine communication?

The disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray,” and He gave them a model for prayer that even a child can learn. As both God and a human, Jesus had a rich prayer life with His heavenly Father, and He personally understood how God responds when we approach Him in faith.

In *The Jesus Way to Pray*, Dr. Ron Jones, a seasoned pastor and radio Bible teacher, invites readers of any age on an intimate journey through the Lord’s Prayer, exploring its power and beauty phrase by phrase.

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## About THE AUTHOR

Ron Jones is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of **Atlantic Shores Baptist Church** in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called **Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio** (est. 2011) exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible (Vols. 1 and 2)*, *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets*, and *The Jesus Way to Pray: An Intimate Journey Through the Lord's Prayer*.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife, Cathryn, lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 30 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children and an English cream golden retriever named Indi.