



FALL SERIES DISCUSSION & STUDY GUIDE PART ONE: DESIRING PRAYER

In follow up to Pastor Marc's introductory message last weekend and subsequent reading of the INTRODUCTION (pg. 1-6) this past week, we now launch into PART ONE of the *PRAYER* series. For this week's study, please read chapter 1 and chapter 2 in the book, *PRAYER*, by Timothy Keller.

CHAPTER 1: The Necessity of Prayer (pg. 7-18)

CHAPTER 2: The Greatness of Prayer (pg. 19-32)

The Apostle Paul includes prayers in several of his epistles (cf. Philippians 1, Colossians 1, and Ephesians 3). This week we will take a closer look at the one found in Ephesians 1. Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus teaches us some foundational lessons regarding prayer.

Scripture of the Week:

Ephesians 1:15-21 (ESV):

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Questions:

1. In the first chapter of “Prayer,” Tim Keller admits to his previous lack of self-discipline when it came to prayer (pg. 9).

Can you relate to this? If so, how?

2. Take a moment to read and reflect on this week’s primary scripture reading above (Eph. 1:15-21).

What do you observe regarding the frequency and focus of the Apostle Paul’s prayers?

What is your honest assessment of your own prayer life? When, where, and how do you pray? Are you comfortable with your understanding of prayer?

3. The Christian church has long grappled with finding a healthy balance between intellectually understanding Bible doctrine and at the same time recognizing the power of God in your everyday life through experience. Keller compares doctrine and spiritual experience in pages 14-17 (section titled: intelligent mysticism). Read the last paragraph (pg.16-17) of this section. Observe that in Ephesians 1:17-18 Paul prays for the church to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened. Notice the beauty of this statement and how it combines the worlds of intellect and feeling; knowledge and experience; head and heart.

In your Christian faith do you tend to emphasize doctrine (conviction of the mind) or spiritual experience (affection of the heart) more?

4. In every one of Paul’s prayers throughout the New Testament he never asks God to change the reader’s circumstances (cf. the first sentence at the top of pg.20 in Keller). Read Ephesians 1:15-21. Paul’s letters (Epistles) were written during a time of terrible persecution and hardship for new Christ followers and it would not have been surprising for Paul to ask God for help in their circumstances. However, Paul does not do this; his primary request and focus is simply for the church to know God better. He prays that God reveal more and more of himself to His children. For Paul, prayer is primarily used to deepen a relationship with God (it comes before personal requests and desires).

How is this different than the “Vending Machine Approach” to prayer that Pastor Marc mentioned in his series introductory message?

Is the focus of Paul’s prayer the power of prayer itself? If not, what is the power of prayer found in? (Hint: see Ephesians 1:19-20, or Ephesians 3:20-21)

How might this important insight influence the attitude and focus of your prayer time?

5. Spiritual integrity can be evidenced by the way that we pray in private (cf. Matthew 6:5-6) (see Keller, pgs. 22—23). What you spend time thinking about in private reveals the real you. Take a moment to reflect on the things you think about when you are alone.

Do your thoughts gravitate toward things related to God and helping others (i.e. loving God and loving your neighbor) or do you mostly think of worldly and material things (stuff you want, things you wish to acquire, plans you are making)?

Considering the focus of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, what might the Lord lead you privately to specifically pray for more often? What kind of effect might this have on your thought life focus in general?

6. Throughout the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, prayer is prominent, pervasive, and central. Essentially every primary individual in the Bible utilizes prayer as the avenue for communicating with God. Keller mentions some examples (cf. pgs.26—28).

Can you think of some others?

What does this teach us about the relevance, importance, and impact of prayer in our own lives? (Read the last paragraph at the top of page 28 in Keller's book.)

7. At the end of chapter 2 (pgs. 28—32), Keller dissects a poem by George Herbert. It is a poetic piece that strives to convey the richness, and immensity of prayer. Keller draws out these characteristics of prayer from Herbert's poem:

Prayer is a natural human instinct.
Prayer is a nourishing friendship.
Prayer changes those around us.
Prayer is a journey.
Prayer helps us endure.
Prayer means knowing yourself as well as God.
Prayer changes things.
Prayer is a refuge.
Prayer changes us.
Prayer unites us with God himself.
Prayer is awe, intimacy, struggle – yet the way to reality.

Which of the above descriptors have been true for your prayer life? Which of the above have you experienced in a profound way? Finally, which of these would you like to have increased in your life?

8. Keller writes at the end of chapter 2 (in context of our relationship with Jesus through His Word), “There is nothing more important, or harder, or richer, or more life-altering. There is absolutely nothing so great as prayer.” (pg. 32)

Do you agree with this assessment? Does this statement fit with our Lutheran understanding of Word and Sacrament? Why or why not?

After reflecting on Ephesians 1:15-21 and the first two chapters of Keller’s book, what change(s) do you believe the Lord will lead you to make in your prayer life through this study?

In closing, take some time right now to seek the Lord through prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help you “experience your theology” and to have “the eyes of your heart” enlightened and deepened in your relationship with Jesus through prayer in the days ahead.



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