



FALL SERIES DISCUSSION & STUDY GUIDE PART TWO: UNDERSTANDING PRAYER

In follow-up to Pastor Marc's PART ONE: DESIRING PRAYER message last weekend and subsequent reading of Chapters 1 & 2 (pg. 7-32) this past week, we now launch into PART TWO: UNDERSTANDING PRAYER in our *PRAYER* series with a message from Pastor Steve. For this week's study, please read pages 33-80, including chapters 3-5 in the book, *PRAYER*, by Timothy Keller. Utilize the following study and discussion/reflection questions on each chapter individually, with your family, or small group.

Chapter 3 | What Is Prayer? (pg. 33-49)

Main Point for this Chapter:

"What then is prayer, in the fullest sense? Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him." (Keller, *Prayer*, pg.48)

Key Scripture:

Romans 8:14-17 (ESV)

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Study & Reflection Questions:

1. Keller speaks of two different types, or levels, of prayer (*Prayer*, pg.44-45). One is instinctive, or general, and is a result of divinitatis sensum. John Calvin explains divinitatis sensum as the sense of deity that all human beings have (The Apostle Paul speaks to this in Romans 1:19-20).

What is the second type, or level, of prayer Keller mentions (Prayer, pg.45, 3rd paragraph)?

Where do you see evidence of this in the Romans 8 passage above?

2. Romans 8:16 points to some essential differences between Christian prayer and other types of prayer.

What are these differences? (Hints: Who are we? Who informs us who we are?)

How does this bring comfort to you?

3. Prayer is an avenue for creating and experiencing relationship with God. There are many different types of relationship we experience (e.g. friend, sibling, spouse, parent, boss, acquaintance, etc.), and many different levels of intimacy. Read verse 15. "Abba" is a translation from an Aramaic word that interpreters liken to our contemporary term of "Daddy" or "Papa." It is a tender, reverent, and intimate title. It is a term a young child would use to address his father. Paul purposefully chooses to use this word in the passage.

What do you think this says about the way God sees us?

What does this say about the way he asks us to approach Him?

4. Our relationship with God should not change depending upon how our life is going. Keller points to the book of Job as an example of the ability to love God no matter our circumstances.

From the Romans passage above, what do you observe about the attitude Paul says we should have when we pray?

Do you find it more difficult or easier to pray during times of great emotional upheaval?

Why do you think this is?

5. Romans 8:17 connects our relationship with God as adopted children to the person of Jesus Christ, God's one and only son. Paul reminds us that if we are adopted sons and daughters, then we share in the same inheritance as Jesus Christ himself. This also serves to remind us that Jesus paid a price for us to receive the gift of adoption. He suffered and died on the cross for us to be able to know God as "Abba" (father/daddy). God speaks to us through the person of Christ and we know him through the Living Word. The power of prayer depends on knowing God, and there is no better way to know God but through His Son, Jesus Christ. To suffer with someone is to really know that person (compassion literally means 'to suffer with').

In what ways are you suffering (sacrificing, enduring, and giving) in the name of Christ (see verse 17)?

How are you answering (responding to) God through prayer?

Chapter 4 | Conversing With God (pg. 50-65)

Main Point for the Chapter:

“God speaks to us in his Word, and we respond in prayer, entering into the divine conversation, into communion with God. (Keller, Prayer, pg.64)

Key Scriptures:

2 Samuel 7:11—14 (ESV)

11 ... And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son...

2 Samuel 7:27—29 (ESV)

27 For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. 28 And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. 29 Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.”

Ephesians 2:20—22 (ESV)

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1 Peter 2:4—5 (ESV)

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Study & Reflection Questions:

(It may help to read the full chapter of 2 Samuel 7 to give full context to the two 2 Samuel passages above.)

6. In Chapter 7 of 2 Samuel, King David intends to build God a more permanent temple to replace the tent that, up to this point, has served as God’s dwelling place among His people. Then through the prophet Nathan, the word of God comes to King David (read 2 Samuel:11—14).

In this passage what is it that God is promising to King David? Do you think King David understood exactly what God was promising and what the ramifications would be?

Have you ever felt like you knew what God was trying to tell you through his Word (the Bible) and the Holy Spirit, only to find later that your initial understanding was not quite right?

7. In response to God's promise, King David speaks a prayer Him (read, 2 Samuel 7:27—29). Now read the second paragraph on page 64 in Keller's book, *Prayer*. This is an important observation to make in the 2 Samuel passage. King David is praying in response to who God is and what God is speaking into his life.

Are you taking the time to allow God to speak to you through the study of His Word and the working of the Holy Spirit within you? Have you been doing too much talking and perhaps not enough listening?

8. Read Ephesians 2:20—22 and 1 Peter 2:4—5. Here in the New Testament we see the full and rich meaning of God's promise to King David coming to fruition some 1000 years later. We know that God did indeed build David's house (family) and it culminated with Jesus, the ultimate Son of David and Son of God.

Now, what do these two New Testament verses reveal to us?

What is God revealing to those who believe in Him?

What amazing truth is revealed about the temple that God promised to build for David? (Answer key: see Keller, *Prayer*, page 65, last two chapters)

How does this change the way you live, the way you pray?

Chapter 5 | Encountering God (pg. 66-80)

Main Point for the Chapter:

Conversation with God leads to an encounter with God. Prayer is not only the way we learn what Jesus has done for us but also is the way we “daily receive God's benefits.” Prayer turns theology into experience. Through it we sense his presence and receive his joy, his love, his peace and confidence, and thereby we are changed in attitude, behavior, and character. (Keller, *Prayer*, pg.80)

Key Scripture:

Galatians 4:4-9 (ESV)

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. 8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Study & Reflection Questions:

9. In Paul's letter to the Galatian church he describes prayer as a response to the Holy Spirit entering our very hearts with the knowledge of God. Read Galatians 4:4-9 and observe the variety of terms

used to describe what it means to have a relationship with God (e.g., redeemed, adopted, heirs, etc.).

How many descriptors can you find?

10. Observe Paul's message in verse 9— that having an intimate relationship with God means knowing, and being known by, God. Because of this we are free from the trappings of this world. When our prayers are predominately asking God to provide us with worldly things, it may be evidence that we are turning “back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world” (v.9). It is human nature to pray to God to give us things; to make us more successful; to change our circumstances; to better our lives, but Paul exhorts us to seek out something more in our prayer.

Between these two options, what does your prayer life look more like: Is it a means to ask for things, so you will be happier in life, or is it a means to know God better in order that He actually becomes your happiness?

11. In our prayer life, when we forget about the work of Jesus Christ, we are susceptible to putting the world ahead of Jesus. We need constant reminding that we are not able to save ourselves; only the work of Jesus can do this. Read the first two verses of the Galatians scripture above (vv. 4-5). Our relationship with God is possible through the work, the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Note the progression we find in this passage: It all starts with Jesus, the Son of God.

When you pray do you acknowledge and praise God for the gospel (e.g., we all are sinners—none is righteous, it is only by God's grace that we are saved through faith in Christ, Jesus died for the lost, Jesus conquered death, etc.)?

Being aware that the gospel message through the power of the Holy Spirit fuels our passion and delight to come before God in prayer, what are some practical ways that you can incorporate the gospel into your prayers?

12. Read Galatians 4:6. The term “Abba” is Aramaic and it signifies the close, intimate relationship of a father and his young child. It is an expression of affection, confidence, and trust. On the cross Jesus experienced separation from God (his Abba) so that we could also call out “Abba” in our prayers to Him.

How did this scriptural understanding influence the prayer life of Martin Luther? (Hint: See Luther's prayer on bottom of page 71 in Keller's book)

How might this change how you speak to Him?

Finally, when is the last time you truly spoke to God with the tone and attitude of a child coming to his/her father? Remember, He is not an imperfect, broken, earthly father (as all are), but rather a perfect father who is always there to hold you up. Come before God today (right now) and bare your heart to Him. Make a prayerful effort this week to ask the Lord to shift your theology of prayer into a true relationship with God, your Father (see Keller, pg.80, last paragraph).



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