



FALL SERIES DISCUSSION & STUDY GUIDE PART THREE: LEARNING PRAYER

In follow up to Pastor Steve's *PART TWO: UNDERSTANDING PRAYER* message last weekend and subsequent reading of the Chapters 3-5 (pg. 33-80) this past week, we now launch into *PART THREE: LEARNING PRAYER* in our *PRAYER* series with a message from Pastor Marc. For this week's study, please read pages 81-142 including chapters 6-9 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. **NOTE: There is likely much more here than you will use, so feel free to pick and choose what is helpful through your time of study and prayer this week.**

Chapter 6 | Letters on Prayer (pg. 81-96)

Main Point for the Chapter:

In prayer, we pour out our heart's desire to God, but always in light of the greatness and goodness of God. In this way prayer will strengthen and heal our hearts by reorienting our vision and perspective, bringing us to rest in Jesus Christ as our true security. (see Keller, *Prayer*, pg. 84—88)

Key Scriptures:

Ephesians 3:16—19 (ESV)

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Psalms 27:4 (ESV)

One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.

Matthew 6:9—13 (ESV)

9 Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

10 Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread,

12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 26:39 (ESV)

39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

Study & Reflection Questions:

Note: These questions primarily focus on pages 84—88 where Keller touches on four significant principles on the practice of prayer addressed by St. Augustine in his letter #130, written to Anicia Proba.

Key Prayer Principle #1:

Admit your desolation apart from Christ. You must see clearly that no matter how great your earthly circumstances become, they can never bring you the lasting peace, happiness, and consolation that are found in Christ (Keller, pg. 84 end of second paragraph).

Read Ephesians 3:16—19. This is Paul’s prayer for the believers in Ephesus.

Does he pray for God to bring them prosperity, success, physical health, or status? What does he pray for?

Take a moment to reflect upon how much of your prayer life looks like, “worrying in God’s direction” (as Keller puts it) versus the Ephesians 3:16—19 prayer. Share thoughts.

Key Prayer Principle #2:

Yes, it is okay to pray for a happy life. However, if we have made God our greatest love, and if knowing and pleasing him is our highest pleasure, it transforms both what, and how, we pray for a happy life (Keller, pg. 86 at the top). In other words, will changing your worldly circumstance really bring you lasting and meaningful happiness?

Read Psalm 27:4.

**What does this passage tell us about a meaningful and lasting happiness?
Where does it come from?**

Key Prayer Principle #3:

Use the Lord's Prayer as a guide to reveal to you the types of prayer Jesus encourages us to bring to God. Read Matt 6:9—13. Note the kinds of prayer found: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Petition (Supplication). (Keller, pg. 87)

Which of these four major areas of prayer do you feel could use more attention personally (praise/adoration, confession, thanks/gratitude, petition/supplication)?

Key Prayer Principle #4:

Prayer in difficult times requires special attention. Yes, we pour out our heart's desire in these times, but with the acknowledgment that God's wisdom and goodness is at work. Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is a prime example. (Keller, pg. 87—88)

Read Matthew 26:39. It is a perfect example of balancing honest personal desire and pain while also acknowledging God's ways are higher than our ways and submitting to His will with our lives.

What challenges in your life come to mind when you meditate on this balance of praying to God to change your circumstance, but at the same time submitting to God's plan for your life (which includes this very circumstance)?

Take a moment to pray and acknowledge to God that you desire to rest in the security and promises of Jesus Christ above any promise or security this world has to offer.

Chapter 7 | Rules for Prayer (pg. 97-107)

Main Point for the Chapter:

"Nothing we formulate or do can qualify us for access to God. Only grace can do that—based not on our performance but on the saving work of Christ." (Prayer, Keller, pg. 103)

Key Scriptures:

Psalms 130:3—4 (ESV)

3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

Jeremiah 29:12—14 (ESV)

12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

John 16:22—24 (ESV)

22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. 23 In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Study and Reflection Questions:

In chapter 7 of *Prayer*, Keller summarizes 5 rules on the practice of prayer as found in John Calvin's publication, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (see Keller, *Prayer*, pg. 97—107). From a Lutheran perspective, we may disagree over aspects of John Calvin's theology, or even cringe at his semantic use of the word "rule" as sounding legalistic, however we can still learn much from him through his understanding and practice of prayer. Following are his Rules of Prayer.

1. Joyful Fear (Keller, pg. 97—99)

Read: Psalm 130:3-4.

Our attitude in prayer should be one of both joy and reverence. To fear God is to be in complete awe of his power and holiness. In Psalm 130 we see that God is feared (revered) not only for his perfect judgment, but also because of his ability to forgive.

How does forgiveness of sins enable us to "fear" Him in reverent worship?

2. Spiritual Insufficiency (Keller, pg. 99—101).

Read: Jeremiah 29:12-14.

We should come before God with an understanding of our complete dependence upon Him. We should converse honestly with God about all our flaws and weaknesses. God knows and sees all of our shortcomings.

What does "Seeking God with all our heart" (Jer. 29:13) mean to you? How does repentance fit into this picture?

3. Restful Trust yet Confident Hope (Keller combines Calvin's rules #3 and #4, pg. 101—103).

Read: John 16:22-24, see also Jeremiah 29:12-14.

We can pray with confidence that God hears us and will act on behalf of His children. However, we must also submit to God's plan when His answer is not the one we wanted. We can trust that His larger plan for our good is always at work.

Share or reflect upon an instance when God answered your prayer in an unexpected (possibly unwanted) way. What was the outcome?

4. The Rule Against Rules (Keller, pg. 103—107).

Refer to: John 16:22-24, Jeremiah 29:12-14.

Grace rules all. Calvin cautions us that we should not conclude that following any set of rules can make our prayers worthy to be heard. Remember our access to God is only possible because of His grace. Our ability (or inability) to follow “rules” of prayer does not affect the access to our Father that He gives freely to those who believe in His son, Jesus Christ.

When we pray “in the name of Jesus” we are declaring our trust in Christ alone for our salvation and eternal relationship with God. We are also making a statement that our prayer intends to honor and bring glory to Jesus.

Honestly explore the motivations of your heart in your prayer. Do your prayers have, in mind, the goal of honoring and glorifying Christ?

Share or reflect on your thoughts.

Chapter 8 | The Prayer of Prayers (pg. 108-119)

Main Point for the Chapter:

Jesus gave us The Lord's Prayer as the key to unlock all the riches of prayer. Everything we need is found within it. (see Prayer, Keller, pg. 109)

Key Scripture:

Matthew 6:9—13 (ESV)

9 Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread,

12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

Study and Reflection Questions:

In Keller's book, *Prayer*, chapter 8 expounds upon The Lord's Prayer as a guide from Jesus Christ in how we are to pray. Keller addresses the 7 key petitions found in this very well-known passage of scripture (see Keller, *Prayer*, pg. 108—119).

1st Petition: "Hallowed be Your Name" (Matt 6:9)
(see Keller, pg. 110—111)

This verse reminds us to keep God's name holy. It is also an acknowledgement that God's holiness needs to be evident in those who live by His name (the faithful believers, we the saints).

How do believers in Christ practically show the world that God's name is holy (i.e. that God is holy)?

2nd Petition: "Your kingdom come..." (Matt 6:10)
(see Keller, pg. 111—112)

This verse asks God to extend his life-changing power over every part of our lives. It also contains a future dimension and directs our gaze toward the eternal.

Are there areas of your life that you have difficulty in giving over to God and His kingdom (i.e. areas that you believe if only you try hard enough... you can make it happen)?

3rd Petition: "Your will be done" (Matt 6:10)
(see Keller, pg. 112—113)

This verse declares that we will trust in God no matter our circumstance. We pray for strength to endure all sorts of hardship and still remain faithful in the goodness of God. Or as Martin Luther shares in the Small Catechism:

The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also. How is God's will done? God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.

If you are able, think about and share an instance when this was particularly difficult to do: a time, or season of your life, that you doubted God's goodness (or maybe doubted His presence in your life).

4th Petition: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11)
(see Keller, pg. 114—115)

The Father does want to hear the needs of His children. In light of the first three petitions we can now come before God in a truly humble manner asking for his provision. Keller quotes St. Augustine saying, “Give me neither poverty (lest I resent you) or riches (lest I forget you).”

How does this quote aptly apply to Matt 6:11?

5th Petition: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6:12)
(see Keller, pg. 115—116)

This fifth petition addresses both our relationship with God and with others. When we honestly see our sin and humbly seek forgiveness from God it enables us to also grant forgiveness to others when they seek it.

**Which is personally harder for you: to forgive, or to accept forgiveness?
Why do you think this is?**

6th Petition: “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt 6:13)
(see Keller, pg. 116—117)

This verse is not asking that we never be tempted. Rather, we ask for God’s help that we do not succumb to the temptation (i.e. that we not be brought into the temptation).

When do you feel you are most vulnerable to giving into temptations: during times of prosperity (when feelings of power and pride arise) or, during times of adversity (when feelings of self-pity and anger arise)? Self-reflect or discuss with your group.

7th Petition: “Deliver us from evil” (Matt 6:13)
(see Keller, pg. 117)

Petition #6 speaks to the internal struggles we have with sin while petition #7 is directed toward the external battle we have with “the evil one” (some Bible translations use “the evil one” in place of “evil” in verse 13). Some scholars believe verse 13 is addressing two different types of evil that we fight (internal and external), while other scholars believe verse 13 is addressing one common evil. Martin Luther had this to say in the Small Catechism about this petition:

We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

How do these words of explanation give you hope through this petition?

A final observation that Keller points out is the use of the plural throughout the prayer: our Father, give us, lead us, and deliver us. This is a very significant observation; Jesus could have easily phrased the command using the singular, “My Father, give me, lead me, deliver me.”

As you consider recent sermon messages and especially last week’s midweek devotion video from Pastor Marc, reflect on what this means to have Jesus pray with us and use “our” throughout. (Hint: see Romans 8:34)

How might this understanding revolutionize your prayers and how you view them?

Chapter 9 | The Touchstones of Prayer (pg. 120-142)

Main Point for the Chapter:

“At the end of time, history will culminate in a great banquet, but... we can eat with Jesus now. How? Through prayer... Prayer (though it is often draining, even an agony) is, in the long term, the greatest source of power that is possible.” (Keller, *Prayer*, pg.140)

Key Scripture:

Matthew 26:36—46 (ESV)

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” 37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” 39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” 40 And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 42 Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” 43 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. 45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

Study and Reflection Questions:

In Keller’s book, *Prayer*, chapter 9 summarizes and distills the individual prayer principles of Luther, Augustine, and Calvin. The questions and reflections that follow are specifically drawn from the subsection “Where Prayer Takes Us” (pg. 134—140) in chapter 9 of Keller’s book.

1. Where Prayer Take Us: Self-Knowledge and Honesty

Where in the Matthew 26 passage above do you observe Jesus exposing to God his most intimate and honest feelings? When you pray do you talk to God about the things you really fear most; do you share the temptations and sins that you are still weak against; do you confess the mistakes you have made that you haven't been able to tell anyone else?

In prayer do you sometimes "hold back" in your intimacy with God? Discuss how praying with total and complete transparency to God would strengthen your relationship with Him. Does absolute honesty with God sound like freedom or does it sound a little scary? Why?

2. Where Prayer Take Us: Trust and Hope

Where in the Matthew 26 passage above do you observe Jesus expressing his trust in the Father? What does Jesus ask of God?

In both Matthew's account and Mark's account (Mark 14:32-42) Jesus prays the same thing three times during the evening.

Why do you think this is significant? What is your response or reaction when you feel that your prayers are not answered in the way you had hoped? Have you ever avoided prayer because you were afraid of the answer you might get?

3. Where Prayer Take Us: Surrender

What parts of the Matthew 26 passage above are evidence of Jesus surrendering to God? What do you think the difference is between trusting in God verses surrendering to God's will?

Finally, share or reflect on a time when prayer has proven to be the most powerful resource in your life. Perhaps it got you through a terribly difficult experience? Perhaps it led to a life-changing event? Maybe it changed the life of someone very close to you?



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