

Steve Whitacre

SESSION 4 | DOING PRAYER

Our Recommended Text

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Timothy Keller (Dutton)

Class Overview

- Week One: What Is Prayer? | Chapters 3-5
- Week Two: Learning Prayer | Chapters 6-9
- Week Three: Deepening Prayer | Chapters 10-11
- Week Four: Doing Prayer | Chapters 12-15

Additional Recommended Reading

- *Take Words with You* by Tim Kerr
- *Praying the Lord's Prayer* by J.I. Packer (Crossway)
- *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* by D.A. Carson (Inter Varsity Press)
- *The Valley of Vision* (Banner of Truth)
- *The Message of Prayer* by Timothy Chester (Inter Varsity Press)
- *Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms* (P&R)

“Paul said we should ‘pray without ceasing; (1 Thess 5:17), meaning that we should, if possible, do everything all day with conscious reference to God (1 Cor 1:31). There should be background music of thankfulness and joy behind every incident in our day, audible only to us. (Col 3:16-17)”¹

“I always think it well to put a few words of prayer in between everything I do.”²

I. The Need for a Guide to Prayer

Many of the great prayers of Scripture can serve us as a guide in our prayers:

“To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you.” (Daniel 9:7).

¹ Tim Keller, *Prayer* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 240.

² Charles Spurgeon, source unknown.

"And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned." (Nehemiah 1:5–6).

"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (2 Chronicles 20:12).

"Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king..." (Nehemiah 2:4–5).

"Moses said, "Please show me your glory."" (Exodus 33:18).

II. Paul, Our Guide to Prayer

The appendix of this outline lists Paul's prayers, his description of these prayers, his requests for prayer, and his instruction about prayer. It is an impressive list! Consider reading through all these verses in one sitting some time this week. Look at some of the themes that emerge just from counting the most prominent words:

15x Father

59x (123x) Son, Jesus, Christ, or Lord

13x Spirit

14x grace

17x thank(-s, -sgiving)

13x comfort

16x love

86x you

Ephesians 1:3-23 is the fullest of Paul's prayers recorded in the New Testament and it serves as a pattern for prayer. Note the similarities (and differences) with the Lord's prayer:

1:3-6	Glory to God
1:7-10	Access through Christ
1:11-14	Confidence in the gospel and the Spirit
1:15-16	Thanksgiving
1:17-23	Requests

III. A Starter Plan for Daily Prayer³

APPROACHING

Think of the privilege of prayer. Realize God is present Ask him to help you pray.

MEDITATION

Read a Scripture passage. Discern one or two truths you learn there. Choose the one that most impresses you and write it in a sentence. Now ask: How does this truth help me praise God? How does it show me a sin to confess? How does it show me something to ask God for?

WORD PRAYER

Now turn the answers to the three questions into a prayer—adoration, petition, and supplication.

FREE PRAYER

Pray about whatever needs are on your heart. Also spend time thanking God for the ways you see him working in your life and caring for you.

CONTEMPLATION

Take a moment to thank and admire God for what he has showed you today. End with a note of praise.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF OUR PRAYERS

“The model of a personal relationship with a father is as helpful [a description of prayer] as any. If a boy asks his father for several things, all within the father’s power to give, the father may give him one of them right away, delay giving him another, decline to give him a third, set up a condition for the fourth. The child is not assured of receiving something because he has used the right incantation: that would be magic. The father may decline to give something because he knows it is not in the child’s best interests. He may delay giving something else because he knows that so many requests from his young son are temporary and whimsical. He may also withhold something that he knows the child needs until the child asks for it in an appropriate way. **But above all, the wise father is more interested in a relationship with his son than in merely giving him things.** Giving him things constitutes part of that relationship but certainly not all of it. The father and son may enjoy simply going out for walks together. Often the son will talk with his father not to obtain something, or even to find out something, but simply because he likes to be with him.”⁴

³ Keller, 254-5.

⁴ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 31.

APPENDIX: A LIST OF PAUL'S PRAYERS

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you." (Romans 1:8–10).

"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." (Romans 10:1).

"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." (Romans 12:12).

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:5–6).

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Romans 15:13).

"I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen." (Romans 15:30–33).

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:4–9).

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." (1 Corinthians 16:23).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort." (2 Corinthians 1:3–7).

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

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“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:12–15).

“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).

“But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.” (2 Corinthians 13:7–9).

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.” (Galatians 6:18).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:3–14).

“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 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, 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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:15–23).

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“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:14–21).

“and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Ephesians 6:19–20).

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:3–6).

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9–11).

“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:5–7).

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” (Philippians 4:23).

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13–14).

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.” (Colossians 4:2–4).

“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3).

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!” (1 Thessalonians 2:13–16).

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“For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” (1 Thessalonians 3:9–13).

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24).

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:28).

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.” (2 Thessalonians 1:3–4).

“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12).

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.” (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17).

“and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 3:2–5).

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.” (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

“I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,” (1 Timothy 1:12).

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” (1 Timothy 2:1–7).

“I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your

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grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Timothy 1:3–7).

“May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.” (2 Timothy 1:16–18).

“The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.” (2 Timothy 4:22).

“Grace be with you all.” (Titus 3:15).

“I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.” (Philemon 4–7).

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” (Philemon 25).