

How to Pray Like an Apostle

by Tim Conway

Tim Conway emphasizes the importance of being devoted to prayer, both individually and corporately, as modeled by the early church.

Duration: 1:21:30

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, focusing on Paul's example in Ephesians 1 where he prays for the Ephesians to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. The sermon highlights the significance of unceasing prayer, giving thanks before making requests, interceding for others, addressing God by His names, petitioning for spiritual growth, and expecting God to answer prayers.

Transcript

Brethren, would you open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1. We're going to resume our study. Ephesians, where we find ourselves today, I believe fits just perfectly with us launching out into a week of prayer and fasting. Ephesians chapter 1, I'm just going to read verses 15, 16, 17.

Ephesians chapter 1, verse 15. 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. You just noticed the word there, prayers.

We enter into a week of prayer and fasting. These verses speak of prayer. Paul says, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

And this is what he's praying, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. So, before we launch into the text itself, I just want to stress two things by way of introduction. Ever since our church began to meet together in 2001, we have sought, you know, right after our church started, it was in June, so we came to June 2001.

So, opening day 2002, somewhere in those six months that we had been at church, I learned that John Piper's church started every year with a week of prayer and fasting. I thought that was a tremendous idea. We need the Lord.

We need to lay hold on Him. And so, I wanted us to do the same thing. So, ever since we've been at church, we have sought to devote the first week, first full week, Sunday to Sunday, to prayer and fasting.

And listen to the word I'm using, devote. I love that word when it comes to prayer, when it comes to fasting. Devote.

I hope that that word characterizes what our prayer and fasting looks like in the week ahead. Devoted. Devoted.

A church devoted to prayer. That's a great word. More than that, I pray that our prayer meetings... James was talking in the first hour about somebody saying to him they had concerns about the prayer meetings.

I really hope that our prayer meetings in 2017 will reflect that same thing. A devotedness to prayer. By the way, this isn't something that I'm dreaming up.

I love that idea of devotedness to prayer. It's not something that I've dreamt up. It's something that we actually find in Scripture.

Listen to this. In fact, I want you to see this. The early church.

Look at the book of Acts. Acts 1. The first chapter of the book that deals with a narrative of the early church. Jesus Christ is ascended.

What do we have? The church. The church in the book of Acts. And what do we find? Very significantly, we find in Acts 1. Notice this.

Acts 1.14. We know that 120 gathered in the upper room. We know that the Spirit of God is going to be poured out on the early church. But I want you to notice this.

Christ has ascended into heaven. And what do His people do? All these with one accord were devoting. That's what the ESV says.

Your Bible may say continuing in. To be devoted to. It's to continue in.

It's to give yourself to this. They were devoting themselves to prayer together. We're talking corporate here.

This isn't just a devotedness in your prayer closet. This is a devotedness to the church gathering to pray. Together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers.

So you have the book of Acts. Narrative of the early church. First chapter.

What do you find? Prayer. They're devoted. What does devote mean? It means to give yourself to.

It means to continue in. It means to pay persistent attention to. To attend to this constantly.

That's the idea. To be loyal to. Or to keep close company with.

That's the idea of devoted. Now, go a little further. Acts 2 v. 42.

Notice this. Early church. Acts 2 v. 42 is a text that I often go to.

I often think about. Because when people say, I've heard recently, I've heard the accusation came from somebody about the church down in Manawa that they were not like the church in the book of Acts. I heard that accusation being made.

Well, I don't know on what basis that's being said. But I can tell you this. If you want to know what the church was like, what the early church, what God's people were like as they were coming together in the book of Acts, Acts 2 v. 42 is one of the best representative texts in all the book of Acts about what the early church did.

Well worth coming back to over and over and over again. Again, the ESV uses the term devote. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Now, some of your Bibles don't say the prayers. They leave the article out. You know what? The ESV has it right here.

The is in the original. There's an article. You say, why are you stressing that? Because it's one thing to give yourself to prayer.

It's another thing to give yourself to the prayers. The prayers indicates that there are designated times of prayer. Now, in the early church, we know what? Peter and John went up to pray.

You know that? They went to the temple. You've got the man that sat at the beautiful gate. Well, there were appointed times of prayer.

The early church gave themselves to. We're talking corporate here. The prayers.

Not just private prayers. They gave themselves to the prayers. They were devoted to that.

If our church is going to imitate that early church, yes, we could look at apostles' doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread and all those things. But you know what? We're headed into a week of prayer and fasting. Brethren, if we want to be like the early church, this is what the early church was like.

They devoted themselves to this kind of thing. In chapter 1, they're devoted to corporate prayer. In chapter 2, we see a devotion to corporate prayer.

Let's go a little further. Acts 6.4 You know Acts 6. The choosing of the seven. Probably a precursor to deacons, if not deacons themselves.

But, in Acts 6.4, what we have is the apostles say that they are not going to serve tables. They need to appoint some men to do this. Why? Because we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.

Now, you want to know about the early church? They were devoted to corporate prayer meetings. Their elders, their leaders were devoted to prayer. By the way, brethren, if you're going to think about somebody who might be fit for the office of eldership, the office of overseer in this church, you do not want to neglect their prayer life.

You want to know what it is. You don't want leaders that don't pray. Prayerless leadership is not healthy for the church.

Let's look at one more thing. Romans 12.12 Jump past Acts, go to Romans. Romans 12.12 Some general instruction as Paul enters into Romans 12.

He's leaving off all the rich doctrinal treatment of the first 11 chapters. Romans 12. He's diving into now some of the practical implications of this glorious gospel that he's just unfolded.

In verse 12, he says, Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant. The New American Standard says, Devoted to prayer, continuing steadfastly, instant, some of your Bibles may say. In prayer, be constant, be devoted.

Now here, we may include our personal prayer lives. Brethren, you want to characterize the early New Testament church? It's this, they were devoted to corporate prayer. Their elders were devoted to prayer.

And they themselves were devoted. Devoted to the designated times of prayer. Elders who give themselves in devoted fashion to prayer.

Each of us individually devoted. You ever wonder what a healthy church looks like? And quite honestly, that accusation made about the church in Nicaragua, I don't think holds substance. Because if you just think about these things here, I see them happening down there.

Devoted to prayer. What is that? Our souls often rising up before the Lord. We need a people who are constant in this, devoted to this.

Who give the Lord no rest. Some of you are familiar with the text out of Isaiah 62. Listen to this, You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give Him no rest, until He establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.

Do you recognize God Himself says to you, church? Give Me no rest. I want to be sought often by you. You don't take rest, and give Me no rest.

In other words, bother Me. Bother Me with your frequent prayers. Come.

You say it's too trivial. He says, bother Me. It's too great.

He says, bother Me. I've already asked Him 50 times. He says, bother Me.

Give Me no rest. That's what we're being told. What's the opposite of devoted? You can say, well, not devoted.

But it's basically neglect. It's apathy. It's indifference.

If you're not devoted to prayer, if you are devoted to prayer, they look different. And we need to ask ourselves going into this year, hey, early church, apostolic charge? Be devoted to prayer. The example of the early church? Devoted to the prayers.

The prayer times. As we enter into this year, are we committed to that? I mean, would you basically say that 2016, if what James said was right, if the Wednesday prayer meetings, and I'll tell you this, in the history of our church, I believe in these 16 years, our prayer meetings have been well attended. But if that's beginning to fall off, somebody's devotion to it is falling off.

That's just a reality. And you know what? If your devotion to the prayers are falling off, it means you're becoming more devoted to something else. Something else is trumping that time.

And you just need to ask yourself in light of Scripture, are you making a good exchange? Is it a thing that you're becoming more devoted to? Because I know you have reasons. People have reasons as to why they don't come and corporately pray. But you have to ask yourself, is that a good exchange? Is it a fair exchange? Is it in line with what we find to be a reality about the New Testament church? Because I can tell you this, the same people that devoted themselves to the prayers, their lives were just like yours.

They had a bunch of children. They had work to go to the next morning. All the same things.

And yet, they devoted themselves to it. It's amazing when your heart is full. It's charged up with the things of the Lord when you're excited for the Lord.

When there's a freshness. Where are we at with regards to this? Do we see a pattern of praying both corporately and privately that actually looks something like devotion to prayer? May God help us in 2017, brethren. You know what? Scripture says don't be weary in well-doing.

And you can get weary in praying. For 26 years, I've been coming to the prayer meeting. And even when I wasn't an elder, I saw it, I mean, Ruby can tell you, it was mandatory in our lives.

Unless we were just wrought through and through with sickness of the severest kind, the prayer meeting was mandatory. Why? Because we were laying hold on the Lord. It was necessary.

Brethren, don't become weary in this. You have to remember this, brethren. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.

And if there's anywhere the devil's going to try to wear us out, it's in our prayer. Because our prayers bring down his strongholds. And you know what? You can hear it whispered in your ear.

Ah, it's best to stay home, get a lot of rest, be able to rise early in the morning, kids get full rest, all that. Brethren, don't be deceived. Satan does not like praying churches.

He loves it when the prayer meetings begin to diminish. Brethren, prayer unleashes the power of God and he knows it. Don't give in to this.

I mean, if some of you are not showing forth a devotedness to corporate prayer, brethren, I call you, repent of that. Turn. Don't go down that path.

And it can become easy. You justify it once, you justify it a second time, a fifth time. Well, the kids.

Brethren, don't do that. Now look, maybe there's some things we have to do. I mean, maybe our elders be open.

If there are things we can do with regards to our prayer meeting, I know we don't always start on time, whatever it is, but brethren, I'm telling you, do not forsake this. Because if you do, you're going the way that the early church did not go. Don't do this.

You want to go down the path to ineffectiveness? You want to go down the path to weakness? Then don't pray. It's not good. Now, I want to make a second observation before we actually dive into the Ephesians.

You said you read Ephesians 1 at the beginning. Are we ever going to get there? We're going to get there. But I just want to make another observation here in the beginning concerning prayer.

We don't just start every year with prayer and fasting. We have typically tried three or four times throughout the year. Often it's when needs crop up.

Sometimes it's coordinated with some missionaries on the mission field that are asking for prayer. We've tried to set aside certain weeks throughout the year. Over these 16 years, when we announce, church, we're wanting to ask you to consider giving yourself very particularly to some prayer and fasting during a given time.

Not that you shouldn't be thinking about it during other times, but just calling the church to really give some special consideration. Repeatedly over the years, I have had people come to me and say, I don't know about fasting. Could you help me? Could you teach me? Could you give me something to help me to know how to do this? They're basically not familiar with it.

They come from churches where it wasn't practiced. But, in the 16 years, I can never remember anybody coming to me and asking me about prayer. And I wonder, what does that mean? Why questions about fasting and not prayer? I mean, does that imply that most of us approach prayer as something that we've basically mastered? I mean, maybe not.

Maybe fasting is just more of a foreign animal to us than prayer. But why not? More questions. Brethren, you have to remember what prayer is.

Prayer is speaking to God. That's what we're talking about. Those who simply recite their prayers, those who are very mechanical, those who repeat their prayers, probably prayer's not a big deal.

But brethren, the moment anybody begins to take prayer seriously, the moment anybody begins to really meditate on what prayer is and coming into the presence of God, and the fact is there is a reward, and the fact is, you know what I find interesting? That you have not because you ask not. In other words, there are things we could ask for and have. The only reason we don't have them is because we don't ask.

And Scripture does say that there are those who ask wrongly. You know, we can ask for things in a wrong fashion. There's right ways.

There's wrong ways. We're approaching God. It's just like if a child approaches his parents asking for something.

There's a right way. There's a wrong way. Sometimes we deal with God as though He's impersonal.

Brethren, He's not. He's not impersonal. He's transcendent.

He's high and lifted up. He's holy, holy, holy. But He is not impersonal.

He desires relationship. He desires communion and communication. And brethren, there are some people who are more effective in their prayers than other people because they interact with God in a way that is more acceptable and more pleasing to Him.

Brethren, this idea of prayer is something that we need to seek to master. There is a science to it. God help us to not believe we've mastered prayer.

Because anybody that seeks to really think about it or seeks to read a biography of somebody who is a mighty man or woman of prayer, you begin to recognize very quickly that we have not prayed much, maybe as we ought. But there is so much more to learn. So much more.

Brethren, prayer is one of the deepest and most profound exercises of the Christian life. Now I've been convinced of this in my Christian walk, that reading Scripture, that's not near as difficult to keep consistent in your life as prayer. I'm not talking saying your prayers.

I'm talking communing with God. Maintaining it. Having it rich.

Having it deep. Having it what it should be. And perhaps all it takes is a glance at somebody like Paul to recognize how little we actually know about prayer.

You look at how the apostles prayed. You look at how our Lord Jesus prayed. You look at how godly men and women of Scripture prayed.

Brethren, we ought to seek to master those. We ought to seek to embrace, to dive in, to feel, to learn. I can remember Brother Charles Leiter telling me that he was in a prayer meeting one time and he said, Bill McLeod began to pray.

And he said it was like there was a giant in the room. You ever heard that? You ever been in a prayer meeting? It's like one person, another person, and then all of a sudden somebody prays. And it's like, wow! What's the difference? There is a difference and you know there is.

But why? Brethren, there's an art to prayer. And some people have mastered it. And I can tell you it's like many things.

Often times the best way to master something is to give yourself to doing it. To practicing it. To being involved.

One of the greatest ways to learn is to be attempting things and make mistakes and learn and correct and study. Look at the lives of men and women who knew what it was to pray. But even more than that, who knew what it was to prevail with God.

Men like Mueller. Men like Hudson Taylor. There is so much to learn when you study the lives of such people.

When a man prays, he is speaking to God. I'm afraid, lest we be too casual. You know, just thinking along this line, can you imagine the disciples? Can you imagine what it was like to hear Jesus pray? I once did a message called, The Empty Bed.

So often we think about the empty tomb. But you know, I thought, I had this picture in my mind of the empty bed. You say, what are you talking about? I'm talking about the disciples waking up in the middle of the night.

And Jesus' bed is empty. Where was He? Up on the mountainside praying. If ever there was a perfect man.

If ever there was one who perfectly knew how to pray. If ever there was one that in all of His praise, every single prayer that He ever uttered, could have the Father say, this is My beloved Son in whom I'm well

pleased. He was pleased in every prayer.

Totally pleased. And you can imagine, listen, if somebody like Charles Leiter is floored by Bill McLeod, what do you think these guys felt when they were off there? I mean, some of these guys were with an ear shot in the Garden of Gethsemane. You talk about a prayer of prayers.

When this Christ is sweating, as it were, great drops of blood, and He's crying out for His very soul, as He's anticipating the cross. They heard those prayers. They said, they asked, Lord, teach us to pray.

Why? Peter? James? John? Andrew? Thomas? Weren't they already Christians? Jesus says in John 17, they kept Your Word. They were already keepers of God's Word. Had they never prayed? Why are they asking to be taught to pray? Well, brethren, this is like the basketball player who asked Michael Jordan, teach me to play basketball.

You say, what? You've never played basketball before? No, that's not it. I have played basketball before, but I've never played like him. You see, they recognize that.

Lord, teach us to pray. Because they heard Him praying. And this was no Bill McCloud praying.

This was one no flaw could be found with His prayers. Perfect in every sense. And they knew it.

It wasn't just that God knew it. They recognized as they listened, He prays. He doesn't pray like we do.

We recognize that there's a difference here. Lord, teach us to pray. Lord, teach us to pray.

Because no matter how long we've walked with the Lord, none of us pray like Jesus prayed. And there is more to be taught. There's more to be learned.

There are higher degrees, higher planes for us to arrive at. Why? Because we're communing with God in this. We're talking to God.

Brethren, these men were on the right track. They recognized that there was more to be learned when it came to the art of prayer. They knew that there was more to be considered when approaching the living God than what they had already considered.

Brethren, if you think about it, what is one of the greatest ways to excel in anything? It's going to be to recognize that I've yet not attained to the highest possible level. And you know what? You don't want to go ask somebody whose life is not characterized by devotedness to prayer to teach you how to pray. You want to sit at the feet of those who knew what it was.

You see, that's what I want us to do. Because what we're going to do here in Ephesians, we're going to look at the prayer of Paul. Brethren, we want to pay close attention to the apostolic prayers.

Because here's the thing, it's not just Paul's a champion of the faith, and I get to sit at his feet. I mean, if that were all, that's great. I mean, to imitate his example.

But you have to recognize this, that when Paul writes what he writes in these three verses, 15, 16, 17, first chapter of Ephesians, he's under inspiration. It's God moving Paul to specifically record this for us about prayer. It's one thing if you get a spiritual man and he tells you something about his experience.

It's a whole other thing when you've got a man being carried along by the Holy Spirit to give us inspired language. And what God is doing here is He's giving us His own teaching on prayer. So we do well to pay close attention to the apostolic prayers.

Look at our verses again. Turn back to Ephesians 1 if you're not there. Ephesians 1.15 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.

So, as we face this whole science of prayer, especially in this upcoming week of prayer and fasting and in this year of 2017, which I hope will be characterized by a church devoted to prayer. Corporate prayer. Elders praying.

You in your own prayer closets. We can do no better than to study the prayer of one of the champions of the faith. Inspired examples right here in Ephesians.

So I've got seven things that I want to draw out of Paul. Now this isn't actually Paul praying. You all recognize that.

But it's Paul telling the Ephesians about his praying. Which is just as beneficial. Because he's going to tell us what his prayers are like.

So, seven things. The first one, I want you to notice, brethren, I want you to notice these. I'm hoping that these seven characteristics of Paul's prayers will impact you and your prayer life.

The first one is this. It's the manner of prayer. It's unceasing.

You see that? 16, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. This is the same apostle who also said, don't turn to these, but just listen, to the Thessalonians. He said, pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5.17 Later in the Ephesians letter here, chapter 6, praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. Colossians 4.2 Continue steadfastly in prayer. Be watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Think about this. All the time. Christian.

Prayer isn't just something, you know, okay, I'm going to set aside five minutes a day or I'm going to go to prayer meeting on Wednesday. We're talking that the life of a Christian is to be characterized by prayer all the time. Unceasing doesn't mean that that's all that you ever do and you don't do anything else.

But unceasing is a picture of a life characterized by prayer. Brethren, how significant is prayer in your life? Unceasing. I would say in light of that, it's probably not as significant as it ought to be.

I mean, would we all agree that it's probably not more possible for us to be more characterized by an unceasing prayer life than currently that term would adequately describe exactly what's true in our lives? Some of us pray more than others. Some of us less. Brethren, we need a church where all of our lives are characterized this way.

Let's be honest with one another. If you and I pray without ceasing, there's going to be a pattern of prayer that's going to resemble that unceasing. He prays all the time.

She prays all the time. We know we use language like that. It doesn't literally mean all the time.

We've got to sleep. You don't pray when you sleep. But you can wake up in the middle of the night and go to praying.

You wake up in the morning, you go to praying. Prayer speaking to the Lord. A pattern that is going to resemble this.

And I can't tell you exactly what it's going to look like. We all have our own schedules. We all have our own lives.

But whatever your prayer life looks like, obviously prayer in the life of a Christian is going to be a significant part of it. Prayerless Christians are not apostolically condoned. Not at all.

You cannot continue steadfastly in prayer, pray at all times, or pray without ceasing without it taking up a significant amount of your time. Look, don't say, well, I give God quality time, just not much of it. There is no way you can pray unceasingly or be constant in prayer or continue steadfastly or pray at all times without it taking up a significant part of your life.

There's just no getting around that. Taking up significant time, significant energy, significant attention. Now, some of you might be thinking, well, wait a second.

I mean, what is there to pray about that would have me praying all the time? I mean, there aren't that many things to pray about. Brethren, we need to stop and just think about this for what it is. When we talk about praying without ceasing, I'm not talking about you just standing there asking God for things all the time.

One of the things that we need to recognize is that unceasing prayer, think about it. What is prayer? Prayer is speaking to the Lord. You recognize what God is desiring of His people? Do you know Paul's under inspiration when he says pray without ceasing? Be steadfast, constant.

This is God speaking. He's inspired. This is God saying, Don't look at His sitting on Santa Claus' lap just give Me, give Me, give Me, give Me.

Yes, we're a needy people. We are. And we need all manner of things.

But you have to take this in its fullness. It's communing with the Lord. It's talking with the Lord.

It's walking and talking with Him. It's living your life and talking to Him. You're going through life and in your mind, you're in a meeting at work and you're dealing with people, but you're holding a conversation with the Lord too.

Lord, help me here. Help me get along with the guy over here that's not easy to get along with. Help me to have some good ideas here that would actually help the company and make it worth them to employ me here.

Lord, help me to stay awake. This thing is incredibly boring and I'm ready to fall asleep. And if my boss looks me in the eye and sees my eyes... I'm serious about that.

You're talking to Him all the time. Lord, thank You so much for that drive into work today and for that song I listened to. Lord, help me with this.

Lord, I feel depressed. Please, Lord, I just feel some darkness on me. Lord, cause the sun to come out.

You're just communing all the time. Lord, help. Lord, thank You.

Lord, You're so good. Lord, that's what we're talking about here. Each of these calls for constancy in prayer is God saying over and over and over again, talk to me all the time.

That's what God wants. Have you never recognized eternal life? It's to know Him. It's fellowship with Him.

It's communion with Him. God didn't save us to leave us separated from Himself. He saved us to make us His people.

He saved us to bring us into communion with Him. Adam walked with God in the cool of the day. That's what was lost when Adam and Eve fell and were kicked out of the garden.

What this is, the cross, is all about is us being restored, brethren. And prayer is a huge part of that. It's not drudgery.

Is it drudgery? If a young man meets a young woman and they fall in love and they want to talk to each other? You see, if prayer has become that, then you've missed the very essence and the reality, the life of Christianity. It's not slavery. It's God saying, My people, talk to Me.

Talk to Me. Talk to Me. Come to Me.

Bring Me your wants. Bring Me your fears. Come and commune with Me.

Admire My beauty. Come and dwell in My presence. Come and experience My joy.

Keep close company with Me. Brethren, brethren, brethren, the reluctance of a Christian to dwell in God's presence, what is that? That's terrible. And if you come to the place where, you know, I've got better things to do than go to that prayer meeting.

I don't know, I don't feel God's presence so much there. It feels better to devote myself to other things. But I'm telling you, where two or three are gathered together in His name, and even though that text is directly dealing with church discipline, still the truth goes, where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

What does that mean? It means that Christ's presence, though it be everywhere, is significant where two or three gather together in His name. It means something, some manifestation, something is a reality there. Don't lose that.

Don't miss that. We have too many who would rather hear of God, or speak of God, than speak to God. Prayer.

So that's the first thing. Unceasing. Unceasing.

Second thing. The order of prayer. What do I have in mind? Just namely this.

Thanks before petition. Notice. 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, and then he goes on to pray for them.

Thanks before petition, not brethren. I'm not being exhaustive here. In other words, I'm not looking at every text in our Bibles that have to do with prayer.

There may be aspects of prayer. Confession, for instance. They're not here.

We're looking at this text. I'm wanting us to glean from this text. There's more that can be said.

This is not the exhaustive word on prayer by any means. So don't take it as that. Does this mean that we can't petition God before we offer Him thanks? I'm not saying that.

I'm not saying that this is some rigid formula. I'm just wanting you to notice that Paul thanked the Lord before he went to asking something of the Lord. Can you imagine, little child? You give the child a thousand gifts.

No thanks. He just comes to you demanding another thing. Christian, don't always run into God's presence with give me, give me, give me.

Paul didn't do that. Do you realize how much God does give to you? You see, when you're not offering thanks, you're not acknowledging what God has done for you. You're going to ask something more from Him.

Brethren, do you recognize how much God has done for you? If you are a child of God, do you recognize? Have you forgotten the first 14 verses? Have you forgotten that you're chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world? Have you forgotten you're sealed with the Holy Spirit? Have you forgotten that you've been pardoned by the blood of Jesus Christ? Have you forgotten that your children are not yet in hell? Have you forgotten that you're not in hell and have not been dealt with according to your sins? There are so many things that God does for us. Innumerable things. You don't want to just run into His presence all the time without acknowledging those things that He's done for you.

He's given you life. He's given you breath. He's given you His Son.

He's given you His Spirit. He's given you Himself. What God has done for us, if you're a Christian, I mean, if you're not a Christian and you're here today, there are multitudes of kindnesses that He has given to you, but not kindnesses that are meant to lead you to think everything is okay between you and Him.

There are some kindnesses that are meant to lead you to repentance. If you're a Christian, you are the recipient of untold gifts and mercies and graces. Untold.

What we have to remember about prayer is this, it's not just a mechanism by which we acquire things from God. It is that. I mean, it is a mechanism for asking God to give us what we need.

But that's not all it is. It's so much more than that. It's a mechanism for worshiping God.

Brethren, one of the things you want to think about in the way you commune with God is worship. Worship has to do with His worthiness. It has to do with His greatness.

It has to do with honoring Him and glorifying Him. We all do well to remember that there in Romans 1, when it says that the wrath of God has been revealed from Heaven, you might just want to remember that the wrath of God has been revealed because they suppressed the truth. They did not honor God or give Him thanks.

Have you ever read that? One of the great ways to dishonor God is not acknowledge Him for what you have. You know what this tells us? It's really good to constantly do inventory on your life as to what God has given to you and thank Him for it. Remember, we're dealing with a person.

We're dealing with a personal Godhead. Just like if we gave a thousand gifts to our child and they just run into our presence demanding more. You know how that would sit with you? No gratitude? Are we going to make God out to be impersonal as though He's unaffected by that? No.

He's very much affected by it because it slights His honor. It's basically not honoring Him because it's not acknowledging Him for what He's done. You see, thankfulness is a way that we worship in our prayer.

God is worshiped when we recognize Him and we thank Him. Brethren, here's the thing. If you're constantly the sort of people who ask much of God but thank Him little, it doesn't speak about Him and His character.

It's a direct reflection on you. It says massive amounts about you if you're not grateful. This is a call for constant... We sing a song, Count Your Blessings.

There's something to that. There's something for you remembering all the time and taking that into the prayer. That's the second thing.

Third thing, the act of prayer. Intercession. Notice this, for this reason, because I've heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you... Notice the you.

Remembering you in my prayers. Isn't it interesting how well equipped we are to remember ourselves when we pray? Paul, here's a giant in the faith. Here's a giant as far as examples of prayer.

And I want you to notice this, his prayers, oh, we could look all through the New Testament and it's his epistles and how much he prayed for the churches, characterized by intercession. We just considered, when we talked about thankfulness, how prayer is a mechanism of worship, but I want us to think about how prayer is a mechanism of love. Just think with me.

Just think about the sort of expression of love that it is. Paul is remembering the Ephesians in prayer. He doesn't just run into God's presence and say, Oh, I need this and I need that.

Give me, give me, give me. I need, I need, I need, I need. You know what? He goes to the Lord and he says, Lord, they need, she needs, He needs.

This is somebody who felt the needs of others. He loved others. Brethren, we all know what it is to ask somebody else for prayer.

We hope they pray for us. But we've asked. Have you ever had somebody come to you and say, Brother, I pray for you all the time? I can tell you, that is one of the most powerful expressions of love to me.

And I just recently had two men, two pastors in other places, tell me, Brother, I pray for you and the elders there all the time. Another brother, we don't miss praying for you and your church in any of our prayer meetings. I can remember an old Englishman that used to come over here.

He said he put a picture of our family up on the mantle there in their home before he went in the nursing home. He said he prayed all the time. My wife has told me that my sister-in-law prays for me all the time.

What an expression of love. You know what? What we're able to do for one another in expressions of love, we can give to one another. We can give out of our pockets.

But what we can do for one another is extremely limited compared to what God can do for us. And if I lay hold on God in your behalf, brethren, what an investment in other people's lives when you pray for them. I just remember one time, I think it was when I was over in China, but I remember Andy Hamilton mentioning to me, we brought up a pastor who I know and am fairly close with, but I know Andy's not.

And yet, in the conversation that I had with Andy, it became apparent to me, he prays for this guy. Andy prays for this pastor who's way out there. I mean, not a close relationship with him.

If he prays for somebody that's that distant in his relationship to, how much does he pray for the people that are closer? I just recognized, and I've heard, I think when Andy was here, perhaps some of the men were pressing him when he spoke at the Men's Grace House one time. Something I picked up, that he has a specific time of the day when he devotes himself to prayer only intercessory. What an expression of love.

And I've often considered it to be a significant measure of a person's spiritual maturity to simply ask somebody, how much do you pray for others? How much are you very much self-absorbed with your own needs? Look, this is no small thing. God hears prayer. God answers prayer.

In fact, I was thinking in preparing for this, if this whole church picked one person and just began praying for them unceasingly for a month, and that person didn't know, I have a feeling they would know at the end of that month. Because such things would happen in their life that would be different. You see, my point is this, Rebecca Hamilton, many of you know, many of you have heard, that she said to Andy, what day is today? Well, today's Thursday, Thursday morning, which is exactly the same time the churches back here in the U.S. are praying.

She said, I knew it. The churches at home are praying right now. She said she can feel it.

She can sense it. Brethren, if you think that because God is sovereign and God is going to do what He does, that your prayers do not specifically have impact and a result on people's lives, you've missed what Scripture teaches about prayer. Scripture says you do not have because you do not ask.

Which specifically means there are things that would happen if you asked. Which specifically means that if we prayed in an intercessory fashion for one another, we would see more happen. You say, how does that fit with sovereignty? Listen, it does.

It fits with the Scriptural idea of sovereignty. And if your idea does not line up with that, it's not lining up properly. You need to understand what Scripture speaks.

It says, ask and you will receive. It doesn't say that if you don't ask, it doesn't matter, because you're going to receive anyway because God's sovereign. That is not what Scripture teaches.

You have to recognize this. Paul prayed for these people and God heard those prayers and did things He would not have otherwise have done. And if that prayer for those people is multiplied, God works through prayer.

And that lines up totally consistently with His sovereignty. Even if you can't figure it out, it does. How about a fourth thing? The recipient of prayer.

It's the Father. You see that. 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 revelation.

I just very quickly note this. Paul prays to God the Father. You know, the disciples came to Jesus and they said, Lord, teach us to pray.

What did He say? Pray this way. Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Now, look, I'm not saying that Scripture forbids you to speak to Christ or to speak to the Spirit.

It doesn't. But the reality is that generally speaking, we are taught to address our prayers to God the Father. Brethren, what Scripture creates for us is a picture of Jesus being the mediator.

And it's interesting, over and over we get things like this. Even a little bit later here in Ephesians. Through Christ, we both have access, Jew and Gentile, in one Spirit to the Father.

Christ gives us access. Again and again, Christ is seen as the mediator. Christ is seen as the intercessor.

Christ is seen as the one who gives us access to the Father. Over and over. You know this, John 14.6, No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Or how about 1 Peter 3.18? Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God. You see, Christ is bringing us to God. We have access to God.

No one comes to the Father except through Christ. Or Hebrews, how often we get this, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him. He's the mediator.

Anyway, just throw that at you because it's obvious there. And if we're thinking about Paul's example, that jumps out. The address of prayer.

And specifically I have in mind here the names of God. How does Paul address God? Notice the titles or the names. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Father of Glory. Now, we thought about prayer as a mechanism for love. Now I want to come back to prayer again as a mechanism for worship.

We looked at its worshipful aspect concerning thanksgiving. But now I want to draw out some other aspect of how it's a mechanism for worship. You say, how so? The way we address God when we pray.

The way we address God when we come to Him. Notice how Paul describes the God he prays to. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Father of Glory. The names we use to address God are significant. Now listen, don't turn to this, but I want you just to hear something.

In the Old Testament, back in Exodus, you have this. God says to Moses, He said, I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by My name, I am the Lord, or I am Yahweh. He says, I did not make Myself known to them.

Notice, what I want you to get is this. God makes Himself known to us by His names and by His titles. The names of God are the very descriptions by which God makes Himself known.

Each of God's names carries very rich, deep, weighty meaning. Brethren, if you go to God, you need something powerful to happen. Lord, here's a desperate, depraved sinner.

I mean, it's going to take a miracle. It's going to take a mighty demonstration of the power of God to save him. If you come and you address Him as the mighty God, Isaiah 9. El Gabor.

You approach Him that way. Brethren, there's significance in that. The Almighty.

I mean, the names that we give to God. I'll tell you this, you want to really hone the science of prayer? Learn the names of God. And as you're praying to Him, address Him by those names.

Not just in mechanical fashion, but really understanding what they mean. Because brethren, as you pray these different names, Paul doesn't pull these things indiscriminately out of the air. He uses the terms that he uses right here because they have to do with what he's talking about.

Use God's name when you pray. Why? Brethren, what that does for your faith. What that does for your confidence.

How many of us know what Jehovah Jireh means? It means the Lord provides. You need. You go to Him.

The bank account's empty. You need to pay the bills. Approach Him as Jehovah Jireh.

Or how about Jehovah Tekinu? The Lord our righteousness. You can just pull out Alpha and Omega. The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

God is given all manner of names and descriptions throughout Scripture. Learn those names. Study those names.

Some of you, when you pray, you talk to Him as God. Some, you just say Father all the time. Or Father God.

It's far more traditional. It's far more habit than it is apostolic. Look at the apostolic prayers.

Look at how God is addressed. Look at the names with which He's addressed. Approach Him by these names.

Know these names. Abba. The Ancient of Days.

El Elyon. God the Most High. Brethren, they go on and on.

The Lord of Hosts. Paul didn't pick these names indiscriminately. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you recognize what he's just been saying in the first 14 verses? He's been saying to these Ephesians, he's been saying that before the foundations of the world, you were chosen in Christ. This is the God of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's done all this.

You have been predestined to adoption through Christ. You have had your sins washed away. How? Through the blood of Christ.

You've been united together. How? In Christ. You have an inheritance.

How? In Christ. This is the God of our salvation. Brethren, when you pray, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you realize what you're saying? God.

You are the God who is identified with Christ. You sent Your Son into the world. When I go to you and pray, you see the confidence it builds? I'm not praying to an unknown God.

I'm praying to the God of my salvation. I'm praying to the God who has given His Son for my sins. It encourages and emboldens your faith.

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ. What do you think it was like for those Old Testament saints to say the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? They're talking about a covenant that was made. God made promises to Abraham.

And I identify with Abraham. Just in the same way, brethren, we identify with Christ by covenant. The blood of a new covenant.

This is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. This isn't the God of Muhammad. This isn't the God who would have us draw near to Him by Mary.

This is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, you start putting meaning to these names when you pray, and suddenly it invigorates. It inspires.

It puts fire in it. It puts hope. It puts confidence.

Where do you think our faith needs to rest? In Christ. The Father of glory. You have to think about what He's praying here for.

He's praying that these people would actually have their minds expanded to come to a fuller knowledge of God. When He says Father of glory, He is talking about the Father who reveals His glory. He is the God of glory.

He's a God of surpassing glory. But He's asking that God would reveal His glory to these people. That's what it means.

A knowledge of God. That's what He's praying for for them. Brethren, these names do not come out of nowhere.

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ certainly comes out of those first 14 verses. And now the God of glory comes out of exactly what He's asking for the people. Brethren, use the names of God.

Know the names of God. Study the names of God. And don't be so simplistic in your prayers.

Look, that's not to say you can't have a conversation with Him and use God and use Father and use Father God. But we're talking about growing in our prayer. We're talking about taking it to a higher level, to a higher degree.

Look, if you look at Paul as the example, these are the kinds of things that you learn. Let's notice the petition of prayer. I'm just about done, folks.

The petition of prayer. What's he asking for? He's asking that God would give these Ephesians a knowledge of God. Look at it.

17, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation and the knowledge of Him. What a lesson in prayer here. Paul doesn't play around.

He's not asking for their physical infirmity. I've said before, brethren, when our prayer meetings become basically asking for one physical infirmity after another, and it's become quite a bit of that lately. Brethren, one thing you see about Paul is he prays for the most important things.

I'm not saying we can't pray for one another's physical health, but I'm saying when it becomes the major item of the day, then we're not being as focused as Paul was. He knows what is most significant. You know, sometimes we get people that pray, you know, God bless this person and God bless them and God bless the other thing.

One of the things if we're going to really become more mature in our prayer lives, we need to really recognize what are the most important things in the Christian life and seek those things in behalf of others and ourselves. Think about it. Praying for somebody else that God would give them a greater knowledge of God.

I just ask you this, is this foreign to you? Does that request characterize any of your prayers? If it doesn't, may God help you to have it be so. Do you pray for others this way? What way? For their minds. For their thoughts.

For their knowledge. Now knowledge goes beyond just the black and white facts. Because we know that the term knowledge or the term know in Scripture carries in certain uses, it carries a deeper meaning than just knowing some facts about somebody.

Adam knew his wife and she conceived. A little more than just knowing some plain facts. There's an intimacy.

That's the idea. What a testimony of those things that are of greatest importance in the Christian life. You recognize that.

Here is a man under inspiration. Here is a man and he's telling this church, first, above everything else, let me tell you what I'm praying for you. When I remember you in my prayers, unceasingly giving thanks for you, you know what I pray? I pray that you would have minds given to you by God.

Listen, you need to recognize this. An ability to understand the kinds of things we need to understand to make us strong Christians does not happen automatically. It happens when God causes it to happen.

People have to be enabled. People have to have a God-given endowment, a God-given ability if they are going to perceive and if they are going to recognize and if they are going to know and if they are going to

have intimacy. Paul is praying this for the Ephesians because it's something that God gives.

It's something that God is involved with. It's not something that simply happens without God's involvement. He's asking God because if God doesn't give it, it doesn't happen.

Important for us to recognize that. This is the thing that He goes to above every other thing. He doesn't ask for their spiritual health.

He doesn't just pray some generic blessing on them. He says this, it is that you would have a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. Revelation.

What is revelation? It's things become revealed to you that were not before that revealed to you. It's having your eyes open. It's having your eyes open to God.

Do you recognize what Paul is doing here? He's showing us one of the most critical aspects of the Christian life is our knowledge, our intimacy, our knowing, our minds grasping what they need to grasp about the truth and about the truth that has to do with God and our salvation and the Christ who He has sent. Brethren, the Christian life is fought in the mind. So much of what happens, happens in the mind.

We win or lose spiritual battles in the mind. It's our thought life. It's how we think about God that basically declares the day as to whether we're going to be successful or failures in this Christian life.

So much of it. Brethren, when you fail, you believe errors. You believe that which is wrong.

You believe lies. You don't see God to be what God really is. He's praying.

Before we get out of this letter, we're going to see this again. He says, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father. Again, prayer.

I bow my knees before the Father. Why? That you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, length, height, depth, and to know, there it is again, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. But hear what He's doing.

He's bending His knees. He's praying. Why? So that they would have strength to comprehend.

Do you recognize? It takes a God-given strength to comprehend the things that you need to comprehend in your mind that lead you to success, to walking the life of faith in Jesus Christ. Do you recognize that? And if you recognize that about yourself, do you recognize that about others? Do you recognize that the thing that will keep somebody else from falling is that they have an enabled ability to comprehend things so that when the trial comes, they don't fall? Because there's a comprehension in the mind. Something's going on in the mind.

Something's going on in the thinking. Something's going on in what they know. Brethren, this is critical.

We're coming out of a week of prayer and fasting. I hope that this week of prayer and fasting is characterized in your life by intercession for other people. But brethren, if you're going to spend the time and energy to pray for other people, pray for the best things.

And learn from the apostles what those best things are. What is so significant about this is that it shows us where most of our troubles arise in the Christian life. We can become so man-centered, but Paul starts

with God.

You want to know what people need? They need to be able to have revelations of God. They need to be able to know God. That's where it starts.

So often we look and we want to measure things on a human level. But he recognized where the problems are at. Do you recognize what Paul feared would happen to the Corinthians? That the devil would come along and take them away from some pure and sincere devotion to Christ.

It's the mind not stuck on Christ. It's the mind not focusing on a knowledge of the love, the height, the depth. It's not perceiving these things.

It's when the mind gets worldly, the mind gets on things below, not on things above, that we go wrong. That's where most of our problems lie. He recognizes victory is just these Ephesians gathering in all these glorious truths of the first 14 verses, and really knowing them, comprehending them, knowing our inheritance, knowing what the power of God, knowing what the love of God has done for us.

Brethren, when that's not in the mind, when our minds become consumed with things down here, that's where all of our failures come in. Brethren, this is eternal life. What is it? What is eternal life? Say it, brethren.

That you know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. That you know. You see what Paul's doing? He's going right to the heart of eternal life.

This is no minor side matter. You want to learn to pray for one another? Learn from the apostolic example. Brethren, I'm not saying this just so that we can fill one Sunday sermon.

I'm wanting to give this to you because I'm hoping you'll take these seven points, which by the way, are only six, but you'll go out and it will affect the way that you pray for one another. The last one is this. Notice v. 17, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you.

I just focus on may give you. Paul had an expectation. He expected God to grant what he asked.

Jesus said this, but I tell you, ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you.

You see, one of the ways that we give up praying is when we become convinced that prayer basically is ineffectual. If you get so dogged by hyper-Calvinistic thinking that you just believe it doesn't matter. God's going to do what God does and whether I pray or not just doesn't matter.

Again, I want to emphasize, Scripture does not teach you that. Scripture teaches you it does matter. Scripture teaches you if you pray, you will have.

It doesn't teach if you pray, it doesn't matter, it's going to happen anyway. It doesn't say that. Like I said before, this whole church chose to pray for a certain person.

I think they would recognize it. What I'd like to see is our whole church praying for our whole church. If you can take one of the high-ranking men in the China Inland Mission and he can go through and pray for all 800 missionaries and then all of their children, how many are in this church? Why can't on a regular basis? Even if you just chose one person, 365 days out of the year, there's not 365 people here.

There may be 300. But if you just picked one person per day to pray for, you could cover this whole church in a year. And if everybody in the church did that, I suspect that would increase the intercession for one another.

Let alone if we had somebody that would sit down and pray four and a half hours. Probably not that much. Only pray an hour and a half, you can cover everybody in this church.

That'll make a difference. You see, Paul prayed this expecting that God would give what he prayed for. Brethren, this matters.

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. Brethren, as we enter into this new year, don't give up on the prayer meetings. Don't give up on praying for one another.

Don't give up praying for the most important things. Learn the names of God. Let them inspire you.

Brethren, be constant. Be devoted to prayer. Few more rolling suns at most.

Don't become weary in praying. It will be the downfall of this church. Every church eventually deteriorates.

Every church eventually dies. Historically, it always happens. That which will keep the church going is when our love stays fervent.

It's when our passion for God stays hot. Brethren, don't grow weary. Stir up one another to love and good works.

Don't forsake the assembling of God's people. We're not done yet. It's like Andy Hamilton said.

I've told this story before. I said to him one time, it was in the course of some difficult days, and I said, brother, I'm going through a difficult time. He said, brother, we haven't even begun.

Zipped my mouth right there. Here's a guy that's going through the things he's gone through in China, and he's telling me, you know, we haven't even begun. It's like, yeah, just shut up.

It's a marathon. It's not a sprint. And it's going to get hard and probably a lot harder.

Brethren, don't grow weary. Don't grow weary. May our church be characterized as a church devoted to prayer.

May it be real. May it be true. Father, we pray to You.

May You cause there to be a spirit of supplication that would be granted to us in deeper and greater measure than has ever been given before. Lord, I pray in Christ's name, Amen. You're dismissed.

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