

St. John's Parish Church

Community Group on Prayer

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God

by Tim Keller

Desiring Prayer Week 1

The Necessity of Prayer (ch.1, pg. 7-18)

The Greatness of Prayer (ch.2, pg. 19-32)

For this week's study please read chapter 1 and chapter 2 in the book "Prayer" by Timothy Keller. If you have any observations or questions in the reading please feel welcome to bring them to your Group.

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

Primary Bible Scripture for the week:

Ephesians 1:15-19 (ESV):

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

Questions for Reflection and Response:

1. In the first chapter of "Prayer," Tim Keller admits to his previous lack of self-discipline when it came to prayer (pg.9).
- In this week's primary scripture above (Eph. 1:15-19) what do you observe regarding the frequency of the Apostle Paul's prayers?

 - What is your honest assessment of your own prayer life?

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

There should be a healthy balance between intellectually understanding Bible doctrine and experiencing the power of God in your everyday life. Keller compares doctrine and spiritual experience in pages 14-17 (section titled: intelligent mysticism).

Read the last paragraph (pg.16-17) of this section. Observe that in Ephesians 1:17-18 Paul prays that the church have the eyes of their hearts enlightened. Notice the beauty of this statement and how it combines the worlds of intellect and feeling; knowledge and experience; head and heart. Take a moment and pray earnestly, asking the Holy Spirit to help you “experience your theology”; to have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened.”

3. In every one of Paul's prayers through the New Testament he never asks God to change the readers' circumstances (cf. the first sentence at the top of pg.20 in Keller).

Read Ephesians 1:15-19. Paul's letters (Epistles) were written during a time of terrible persecution and hardship for new Christ followers and it would not have been surprising for Paul to ask God for help in their circumstances. However, Paul does not do this; his primary request and focus is simply for the church to know God better. He prays that God reveal more and more of himself to His children. For Paul, prayer is primarily used to deepen a relationship with God (it comes before personal requests and desires).

- How might Paul's insights influence the attitude and focus of your prayer time?

4. Spiritual integrity is evidenced by the way that we pray in private (cf. Matthew 6:5-6) (see Keller, pgs. 22—23). What you spend time thinking about in private reveals the real you.

- Take a moment to reflect on the things you think about when you are alone. Do your thoughts go toward things related to God and helping others (i.e. loving God and loving your neighbor) or do you mostly think of worldly and material things (stuff you want, things you wish to acquire, plans you are making)?

- What does Paul's prayer for the Ephesians exemplify and demonstrate?

- If you prayed privately more often, what kind of effect would this have on your thought life in general?