

St. John's Parish Church

Community Group on Prayer

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God

by Tim Keller

Learning Prayer

Week 5- "Letters on Prayer"

Study Guide and Discussions Questions

Week 5 (3/9)

Letters on Prayer (ch. 6, pg. 81-96)

For this week's study please read chapter 6 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.

Main point for the Study:

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)

Primary Bible Scripture for the week:

Ephesians 3:16—19 (ESV)

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.

Psalm 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)

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 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.

St. John's Parish Church

Reflection and Response Questions:

This study will primarily focus on pages 84—88, in Keller's book *Prayer* (chapter 6). In this chapter Keller touches on 4 significant principles on the practice of prayer addressed by St. Augustine in his letter #130, written to Anicia Proba (see Keller, *Prayer*, pg. 84—88). This week's primary question is #4.

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.

What does Paul 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 with your group.

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 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)?

St. John's Parish Church

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.**