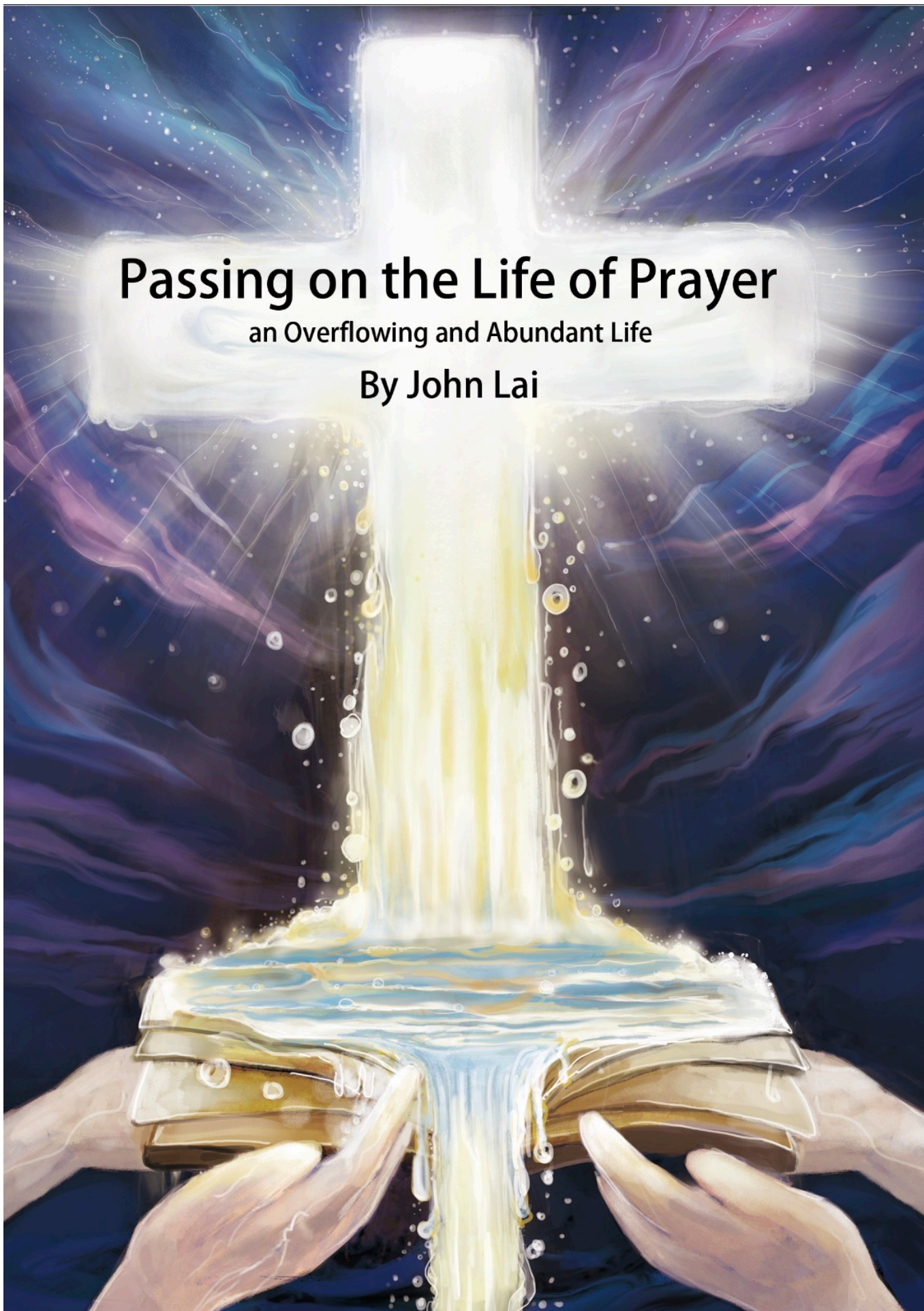


Passing on the Life of Prayer

an Overflowing and Abundant Life

By John Lai



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Sharing Life
Encouraging Growth
Impacting Others
Passing On the Life of Prayer

United Prayer Training Center

Title: **Passing On the Life of Prayer**
an Overflowing and Abundant Life

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**To my beloved wife Esther Lai
and two children Angela and Jonathan
who support me without reservation**

Introduction

This book aims to equip followers of Christ and mobilize the church to mature in the practice of prayer. This English version is translated from the original manuscript in Chinese. We hope that the life transformation from cultivating the discipline of prayer can be accessible to people who speak different languages.

1. Four Parts

Part One: Prayer on the Foundation of God's Word

Part Two: Cultivating a Life of Prayer

Part Three: Passing On the Life of Prayer

Part Four: Testimony Sharing

Part One discusses the four elements of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Part Two introduces nine different practices to cultivate a life of prayer. Part Three describes an approach to invite your faith community into *Praying in Pairs toward Four Goals (PPFG)*. Part Four is a collection of testimonies from a cloud of witnesses among brothers and sisters who participated in this training.

The book integrates materials developed at the United Prayer Training Center. Through PPFG training, we hope to empower every Christian to pray for at least 30 minutes daily and to expand this discipline of prayer from individuals to small groups and finally the whole church body.

2. The Approach: Praying in Pairs toward Four Goals (PPFG)

The PPFG approach centers on two (or more) individuals journeying together as prayer partners. Rooted in a prayerful relationship, these individuals go on to engage the whole church in *sharing life, encouraging growth, impacting others, and passing on* the spiritual discipline of unceasing prayer.

3. Use this Book...

- In small groups of two or more people
- In preaching and training as a prompt for reflection and small group sharing.
- In practicing adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication as a whole church for members needing prayer.
- In catalyzing the formation of prayer partners and small groups that continue passing on this discipline of prayer to others.

4. Our Vision

Retreating to the mountains fans the flame of prayer.

Returning to the church nurtures servants of prayer.

For every church to become a “house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7), we must not neglect the prayer life of individual believers. In addition, we must encourage people to pray continually until all who believe in the LORD “always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1).

Foreword

This book by John Lai is the inspiring but practical legacy of a man who built his church and his ministry on prayer. The purpose of the book is not so much to teach you to pray as to guide you to become a fully fruitful member of a world-wide movement of prayer. When I first became acquainted with John Lai at Home of Christ Church, I thought his elders and other leaders were convinced that he prayed too much. But Lai thought he didn't intercede enough. Read the book and you'll see who is right.

Everything John Lai does is carefully thought out and planned. This quality comes through in the book and is made clear even in the table of contents. The book uses some great exegetical sermonic material like the saga of Saul, David and Jonathan and the fall and rise of the gospel writer, Mark, a missionary. Lai has also collected 12 diverse testimonies of persons who have caught the prayer life and put it into the practice. Pastors and leaders who are looking for a strategy to implement a Prayer movement in their churches will find nine practices to raise up intercessors to be an infectious prayer development strategy. Buy a copy of *Passing on the Life of Prayer* for yourself and at least two others to share with fellow leaders.

Dr. Rick Durst,
senior professor of Historical Theology,
Gateway Seminary, Ontario, California.
October, 2023

Preface

This book is birthed from the integration of two different publications “Disciplines of Prayer” and “Disciplines of Discipleship” released in 2019 by the United Prayer Training Center. Not only did the material undergo major rewriting and restructuring, but the manuscript went through significant pruning and polishing with the goal of highlighting the thematic thread. My deepest gratitude goes to Rev. Kam Sam Yiu and his coworker Minister Shui Mei Law, who poured their heart into completing this work throughout this long and arduous process. I give thanks to my Father God for sending such faithful servants to fulfill this crucial task.

The material in this book has been tried and tested at my church across contexts such as Sunday school and discipleship training classes. It has been shared at other churches and proven effective and fruitful. The hope is for more Christians to benefit from the material through the publication of this book. In particular, I would like to thank several co-laborers in Christ: sister Shu Fen Yang, sister Xiao Jun Wang, sister Sharon Yen, and Pastor Kai Yong Wei. I have had the honor of serving God side by side with these individuals over many years. Their support and encouragement were key to the successful completion and publication of this work.

The book was first released at the Bay Area Chinese Christian Prayer Conference in July 2021, with 600 copies printed as free gifts for brothers and sisters with the conviction to cultivate deeper discipline in prayer. Encouraging feedback led the United Prayer Training Center to reprint the book and work with a publisher to distribute this work more widely. We also decided to publish an English version to benefit readers who do not read Chinese but desire to grow in their prayer lives. I would like to thank sister Cheri Chan for her translation support and blessing to our English-speaking brethren.

Last but not least, my heartfelt thanks go to my fellow servants in Christ who took time to share their testimonies about their prayer journey. Each had a different starting point, with some being veteran prayer warriors and others being new to prayer as a spiritual discipline. Some attend other churches. Uniting all the testimonies is an authenticity that will bless and encourage all of us. For me, the testimonies have given me greater conviction about the value of cultivating the spiritual discipline of prayer, as well as greater motivation to urge others to grow in their prayer lives. The testimonies converge on the key purpose of this book: It is not enough to *know about* the importance of prayer. If we want to grow spiritually, we must pursue prayer as a daily discipline and action.

My prayer for each reader is this: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22) When we have learned the Biblical truth about prayer, we must put it into action and practice. May God use this book to bless every follower of Christ with a burden for prayer and a willing heart to deepen their prayer lives.

John Lai
Home of Christ United Prayer Training Center
October, 2023

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Part One

Prayer on the Foundation of God's Word

Chapters 1 to 3 lay the foundation for the practice of prayer, and a life in prayer, based on God's Word—the Holy Bible.

Chapter One

Foundation 1: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication

Based on the Bible, our prayers as Church and as followers of Christ comprise a minimum of four elements:

1. Adoration
2. Confession
3. Thanksgiving
4. Supplication

Put together, the four words make up the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication). The very word “*acts*” reminds us that spiritual disciplines call for our *action*. Only by responding in action can we reach maturity as an individual and as a community of believers.

1. Adoration

Ephesians 5:19

“...speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.”

Psalms 22:3

“Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.”

John 4:23

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

Exodus 15:11

“Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?”

Psalms 145:1

“I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.”

Isaiah 9:6b

“And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Psalms 145:17

“The Lord is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.”

2. Confession

Hebrews 12:14

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

Psalm 66:18

“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

Psalm 51:17

“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

Psalm 139:24

“See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

James 5:16

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

3. Thanksgiving

Psalm 50:23

“Those who sacrifice thank offerings honor me, and to the blameless I will show my salvation.”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

“...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Romans 8:28

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Psalm 103:2

“Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

Psalm 139:17-18

“How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you.”

4. Supplication

Ephesians 6:18

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

Jude 20

“...praying in the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 12:12

“...faithful in prayer.”

Colossians 4:12

“...wrestling in prayer for you.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17

“...pray continually...”

5. Putting ACTS into action

Whether as individuals or a community in Christ, we are called to act. Not only are we called to saturate our prayers in Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication, but we are also to make it our daily discipline.

A: Adoration is to worship and praise the LORD, to make music to the LORD with psalms and songs.

C: Confession is to let God examine and cleanse our hearts and minds, words and actions. Ask God to search our hearts for anything that does not please Him.

T: Thanksgiving is being filled with thankfulness to the LORD. We thank God for His grace in our past, present, and days to come.

S: Supplication is to pray continually. Develop a habit of taking note of prayer requests and the needs of others, then entrust each need to God in prayer. We can pray for the nations— our own and around the world— to repent and return to God. We can pray for the people in our cities, neighborhoods, and communities to be saved. We can pray for missionaries near and far. We can pray for those among our family and friends who have yet to accept Jesus. We can pray for the strengthening of individuals who are sick or weak. We can pray for our families, our pastors, and individuals we know who are serving the Lord.

Chapter Two

Foundation Two: Worship God

Read: John 4:20-26

Woman by the well: *Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.*

Jesus: *Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*

Woman by the well: *I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.*

Jesus: *I, the one speaking to you—I am he.*

This dialogue is an excerpt from a longer passage (42 verses) about an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman by the well. There are three main sections:

Section 1: verses 1 to 19

Section 2: verses 20 to 26 (shown above)

Section 3: verses 27 to 42

Section 1 centers on *living water*. Every person needs living water. Jesus is *able* to offer us living water. Jesus is *willing* to offer us living water. In verses 20 to 26, the Samaritan woman desired to receive this living water. To our surprise, Jesus did not give it to her right away. Instead, he asked the woman to bring her husband!

Why?

Because Jesus knew the Samaritan woman completely. Until she was willing to look squarely at herself and the life she led, she was unable to put her trust in Jesus. When Jesus shone light on the details of her life, she was shocked. Clearly, this was no ordinary person, but a prophet!

Confronted about her shameful past and present, the Samaritan woman digressed to a different theme: worship. In response, Jesus gently entered a discussion about worship, opening both her eyes to see him as the Messiah and her heart to receive salvation in Christ.

What Jesus taught the woman by the well continues to offer clear and critical guidance to every child of God who might be wondering: What does it mean to worship God?

The Greek word for *worship* can be used to mean:

1. To surrender completely
2. To kiss

The two meanings converge because God is worthy of our complete surrender and fervent love. Worship goes beyond ritual and is rooted in relationship. Spending two hours in praise, prayer, and Bible reading might look ritualistic. Still, they serve as sincere expressions of our intimacy with God.

In fact, our relationship with God is rooted in worship, day by day, moment by moment. Not confined to just one or two hours, worship is 24/7 for the rest of our lives. It is through worship that we enter into the presence of God to give Him our surrender, honor, and love. This is the true meaning of worship.

Next, let us examine three truths about worship that Jesus touched upon in his conversation with the Samaritan woman.

1. Jesus is the only way for people to worship the one true God.

“You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know.” (4:22)

Jesus mentioned two groups of people—the Samaritans and the Jews—each with their own way of worship. In particular, the Samaritans worshipped “*what they did not know*”. In other words, it was not that the Samaritans were ignorant about the need to worship God. Rather, the very foundation of their worship lives was misplaced.

Specifically, the Samaritans accepted only the Torah (or the *Pentateuch*: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) as canonical and the foundation for their faith. The Jews, in the meantime, considered canonical a broader set of revelations from God including the *Nevi'im* (or *Prophets*) and the *Ketuvim* (or *Writings*), in which the books of history, prophecy, and psalms are located. With only the Torah as their guide, the Samaritans had notable gaps in their understanding of God. Specifically, the Samaritans would have missed learning about the resurrection of Christ (in the Psalms), the Davidic ancestry of Jesus (in the historical books), and the suffering of Jesus as Messiah (in the Latter Prophets). In addition, pagan practices immersed the Samaritans in syncretism, which further left them worshipping what they “did not know”.

In John 4:22, Jesus declared, “Salvation is from the Jews.” To the Jews, God revealed the true way of worship, one that anticipated the coming of Christ and our salvation through Christ alone. Just as the purpose of worship rests on salvation, the mystery of worship meets daybreak with the coming of Christ.

However, the sacrificial system of worship revealed in the Old Testament served only to foreshadow the ultimate sacrifice and worship fulfilled by the death of Christ on the cross. As Hebrews 10:19-20 exhorts, “...brothers and sisters, [...] we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.”

By the blood of Jesus, our sins are forgiven, opening a way for us to confidently come before the LORD and have fellowship with Him. Without Jesus, our sins come in the way. No matter how zealous we are or how hard we try, we cannot come before the LORD.

In other words, Jesus Christ is the only way for us to worship the LORD.

Our praises and prayers are accepted by God through Christ alone. Therefore, Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

2. In Jesus, worship is not limited by time and space

Jesus said, “Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” (verse 21) The Jews of the Old Testament worship God on the Sabbath. Now that Jesus Christ is revealed as the only way to worship God, worship is no longer confined to the Sabbath and the holy temple in Jerusalem.

The New Testament church worshipped God “*every day...in the temple courts...in their homes*” (Acts 2:46). Thus, the Sabbath served only as a shadow that prefigured the reality of Christ (see Colossians 2:16-17).

In Christ, we can truly rest. In Christ, we can keep the Sabbath every day (see Romans 14:5). Through Christ, we can always rest in the presence of the LORD.

Some churches in Europe gather to worship not on Sundays, but on Mondays. Why? Because many congregants work in the restaurant industry. Sundays are the busiest day at restaurants, so Mondays are set apart for Sabbath and worshipping the LORD. In fact, even the popular tradition of reserving Sunday for worship does not have to do with the Jewish calendar. Instead, it is a commemoration of Christ’s resurrection one day after the Sabbath— the first day of the week.

As a final caveat, though we now have the freedom to worship God anytime and anywhere, it remains God’s will for His people to worship together at a set time and place. Worshipping in community at a set time and place creates a context where we get to encourage and spur one another towards love and good deeds (see Hebrews 10:25).

Jesus helps us break beyond the confines of time and place, but why is this important? It is all for our benefit, that we may receive more of God’s grace and help. “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*” (Hebrews 4:16)

The throne of God is simultaneously:

- the seat of judgment
- the seat of mercy.

But thanks be to Christ and His shed blood, our sins are forgiven. We are no longer condemned for our sins. For believers, the throne of God is where we receive only mercy and grace.

Praise the LORD for His great mercy! This mercy, flowing from God's throne of grace, frees His children to live as testimonies of God's goodness.

One testimony comes from a sister at my church. Her mother, living overseas and advanced in years, would get up at four every morning to spend two hours in worship and prayer. One year, the sister decided to bring her child to reunite with her husband in the United States. As her mother prayed, God granted affirmation of His will through Isaiah 55:12: "*You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace.*" Sure enough, the visa process unfolded smoothly; her daughter and grandchild arrived in the United States to start a blessed chapter under God's mercy.

The throne of our abundant God is a throne of mercy. As we worship Him, God pours out His grace upon us.

3. Jesus teaches us the correct way to worship

"*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*" (verse 24) Here, we are taught to worship in the Spirit and in truth. Why? There are two reasons:

First, this is the command of the Father: "*they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks*" (verse 23)

Second, "God is spirit" (verse 24). Our worship of God, who is spiritual in essence, cannot be based on physical artifacts like fruit or sacrifices.

But what does it mean to worship "in the Spirit and in truth"? From what I understand, Jesus meant that we should worship in obedience to the Holy Spirit and rooted in Biblical truth. While many earthly religions talk about worshipping with sincere and devoted hearts, it is not enough. God's desire is for us to obey the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, and to worship Him rooted in this truth.

Let us consider another two passages. The first is Ephesians 5:17-21. When a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, one naturally lives out the experience and fruit of worship.

- Experience of worship: singing, making music from your heart, giving thanks to God
- Fruit of worship: submitting to one another

The second passage is Colossians 3:16-17. When the message of Christ dwells richly among God's children, we observe a similar picture.

- Experience of worship: singing and giving thanks to God
- Fruit of worship: teaching and admonishing one another, with gratitude in your hearts

Only when moved by the Holy Spirit and awakened to the Word of God can a person have the experience of worship and bear the fruit of worship.

Thus, whether gathering in silence or singing praises to God, we must seek to be filled and led by the Holy Spirit. We must seek to be taught by God through His Word with clarity and authority. Only by doing so will we achieve the true purpose of worship.

The best example of worshipping God is our LORD Jesus Christ. Every moment, Jesus was filled with the Spirit, obeying the Spirit's guidance, and fully surrendered to God: "...Christ...through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God" (Hebrews 9:14)

With his life, Jesus obeyed the will of the Father all the way to the cross, fulfilling the victory of redeeming humankind from sin and death. Even in his suffering, Jesus prayed, "Father...not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

In conclusion, the true meaning of worship is two-fold: surrender to the Holy Spirit *and* obey the Word of God. When these two actions are woven together and practiced day by day, our hearts and lives will remain rooted in intimacy with God.

Chapter Three

Foundation 3: Worship Jesus

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

*“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”*

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

In the original text, right before the phrase “Magi from the east” (verse 1) is a Greek word equivalent to “Behold!” in English, unveiling a spotlight on the Magi’s worship of Jesus. This scene begins in worship (verse 2) and closes in worship (verse 11). Hence, the theme of this passage is: Worship Jesus!

Worship describes the correct posture of the created toward the Creator. While we may love and respect people, we do not worship them, because worship is set apart for God.

True worship must come from the heart. It is not just external behavior. “*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain.*” (Matthew 15:8-10)

Worship must be rooted in God’s Word and dependent on the Holy Spirit. All religions ask for sincere hearts of devotion, but sincerity is not enough for Christians. Instead, followers of Christ worship based in truth and the Spirit.

This posture of worship is exemplified by Jesus Christ himself. He “*through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God*”, proclaiming “*I have come to do your (the Father’s) will (truth), my God.*” (Hebrews 9:14, 10:7). Likewise, the Magi from the east bless us with examples worth emulating.

1. The Magi desired to meet Jesus (verses 1 and 2)

To worship Jesus, there must first be a desire to meet Him. Otherwise, how could one speak of worship? Only a true desire to meet Jesus could have led the Magi to embark this quest, asking, “*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?*” (verse 2) Evidently, the Magi had long studied about the coming of the Messiah and yearned to meet Him.

When Jesus was born, the Jews had been without their own king for several centuries (since the exile of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah). The Roman-appointed king Herod was an Edomite. How, then, could there be someone “*born king of the Jews*”? Yet, the Magi sought to discern the heart of God, who promised to establish David’s throne forever and that the Messiah would reign on it. Numbers 24:17 foretold, “*a star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.*” So, when a star appeared in the east, the Magi were ready to respond. By faith, they followed the star to worship their long-awaited LORD. They pursued God all the way, undeterred neither by the months it took to travel from “the east” (Persia) to Jerusalem, nor by costs and dangers associated with this arduous journey. This sacrifice was nothing compared to their longing to meet Jesus and worship Him.

Jesus lives in our hearts today. Are we longing to worship Jesus like the Magi did? Or, are we longing after material wealth, life satisfaction, career success, or other goals? When our desire for God fades, our worship lives also wane.

The Magi longed to see God’s promises fulfilled, just as Simon longed to see Jesus Christ (see Luke 2:25-26) and David longed to see God’s face. “*By your hand save me from such people, Lord, from those of this world whose reward is in this life. May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, and may there be leftovers for their little ones. As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.*” (Psalm 17:14-15)

2. The Magi rejoiced in Jesus Christ

When the Magi saw the star, they were *overjoyed* (verse 10) because soon they would see Jesus. After months and months, the search was over. Just the thought alone was cause for celebration.

Looking past the surface, however, the Magi were not only happy to see Jesus; they rejoiced in the LORD! In other words, they felt joyful to have the Messiah. *Christ alone* was the foundation of their joy. When the Magi came into the house, the Christ child alone consumed their attention, and they bowed down and worshipped. Convention would have the Magi greet the father and mother first. But they did not pay heed to Mary and went straight to Jesus and worshipped, rejoicing in the LORD.

In stark contrast, king Herod felt “disturbed” (verse 3). He reigned on the throne, yet there was no joy in his heart. Nor was there joy among the people of Jerusalem. What irony! After waiting for a few hundred years, now that the Messiah was finally here, they found themselves disturbed. Herod was a tyrant known to be cruel and ruthless. Heralding Jesus as king would certainly bring disaster on themselves. And soon enough, out of his fear and jealousy, Herod gave orders to kill all the boys under two years of age.

From here, we discover how hard it is for one who runs from suffering to experience true joy, even when there is a true intent to honor Jesus as king. Even Herod had the intent to go and worship Jesus, but with a murderous motive. There can be no joy in Christ for those who bow down to Jesus with their own selfish agenda and not purely seeking Christ alone.

True worship is seen in the lives of the Magi, who overflowed with joy. True joy belongs to those who surrender to God in all circumstances. When Hudson Taylor preached the gospel in China, his wife Maria died at age 32, leaving four young children who all died in China. Still, the faithful missionary trusted in God’s plan. Despite his sorrow and tears, he was strengthened by an abiding joy as he surrendered his life to the LORD.

3. The Magi brought offerings (verse 11)

Worshipping God requires sacrifice, and the Magi offered the most precious gifts to Jesus. The Old Testament commands us not to appear before the LORD empty-handed. We are to offer not only what is good, but what is first and best. In Old Testament times, God asked the Israelites to bring their first fruits, or the first agricultural produce of the harvest, to honor the LORD.

In our culture, we can be very particular about gift giving. We search high and low for the best gift when blessing a family member, a teacher, or a respected leader, let alone our glorious God! Isn’t God worth the best of our best? But before we offer anything, we must offer ourselves to the LORD. In other words, God takes pleasure in our gifts but only when we first surrender our hearts. The Magi journeyed thousands of miles to dedicate their gifts. They dedicated their lives to God, who accepted their offering. As the Magi worshipped in this way, they receive a unique blessing from God— His guidance.

It was God’s guidance that led them to find Christ. It was God’s guidance that enabled them to bring a pleasing sacrifice. On our own journeys, we need God’s guidance in all that we do. When we lead a godly life of worship, we will be blessed. When we seek, we will find; when we knock, the door will be opened, just as the Magi sought Christ and ultimately found Him.

Though the Magi got lost in Jerusalem, God guided their steps to find and worship Jesus, in Bethlehem. Likewise, there may be times when we feel lost, but God will lead us on the right path according to His will, as He has promised.

Part Two

Cultivating a Life of Prayer

Chapters 4 to 12 introduces nine different disciplines to cultivate a life of prayer:

Priorities in Prayer

Praise and Thanksgiving

Confession

Forgiveness

Intercession

Fasting Prayer

Battling Prayer

Half-Hour Prayer

Unceasing Prayer

Chapter 13 introduces a 12-week plan that invites individuals or small groups to embark on prayer journeys that last three months at a time.

Chapter Four

The First Practice: Priorities in Prayer

Read: Matthew 6:5-13

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today 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 the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

As simple as prayer may seem, it is also a challenging spiritual discipline. It is simple because even a child can pray. Yet it is a challenge to keep a rich and consistent life of prayer. Indeed, prayer is a lifelong lesson for all of us.

Regarding the state of our prayer lives, it is not uncommon for people to feel weak in prayer or be tempted to give up when their prayers are not answered. Many churches, with only a few exceptions, lament over low attendance at weekly prayer meetings. Despite the church events and programs that crowd our schedules, few of them focus squarely on prayer.

When our Lord dwelled on the earth, He invited us to always pray and never lose heart. Jesus lamented, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) Already, Jesus knew that even at His second coming, one will be hard-pressed to find individuals who are full of faith and deep in prayer to God.

Back in Old Testament times, King Solomon built God’s temple for worship, sacrifices, and most importantly, for prayer. Prayer was the emphasis in Solomon’s dedication of the temple, which was to be a house of prayer for all nations. When our LORD Jesus entered the temple, he was heartbroken to see a flurry of action. Not the act of prayer and worship, but the ungodly hustle of money changers, of people buying and selling oxen, sheep, and doves. Jesus was furious. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. He drove away the oxen and the sheep with a whip. “Zeal for your house will consume me” (John 2:17) was used to show the intensity of Jesus’ emotions. What was once dedicated to God

as a “house of prayer” had become “a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13). Oh, that we may follow in Jesus’ example and restore the Church as a house of prayer!

The nine verses in Matthew 6:5-13 come from what is traditionally called the Sermon of the Mount. Verses 5 to 7 describe the true purpose of prayer as well as how this was misunderstood by the pagans. Even the Pharisees were described as hypocrites who prayed to be seen by others, not to God. Therefore, they already received their reward in full— accolades from people, not the blessing from God. In the next section, we will focus on verses 7 to 13, reflecting on three key questions regarding prayer:

1. Why do we need to pray?
2. What are the steps to follow in prayer?
3. What is the end purpose of prayer?

1. The Reason for Prayer

Matthew 6:8 “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Jesus reminded His disciples not to pray like the pagans, who thought repeated petitions made them heard. By doing so, the pagans exposed their ignorance; they did not know God at all! Mistakenly, they used repeated words to “remind” God to hear their prayers and “help” God understand their needs. But our God Almighty is omniscient— He knows everything, including our every need. This is why we can be straightforward in prayer, not wasting a single word. Why, then, do followers of Jesus sometimes pray with repeated words? Here, repeated words express the passion and intensity of our hearts, not a way to make sure God hears our prayer.

Not only does Matthew 6:8 serve as a warning, it raises a question worth pondering. Jesus said clearly that “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” In other words, our omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Father knows our every need. He knows when we lose our jobs and need employment. He knows when we fall sick and need healing. He knows when our families face difficulties. He knows when the church needs a building. He knows when we need pastors and Sunday school teachers.

Not only is God all-knowing, but He is also all-powerful. Nothing is impossible with God. And so, we ask: why would an all-powerful, all-loving God *not* provide everything we need? Why is it that we, as humble and weak people, are invited to pray for our own needs? How come the manifestation of God’s power appears to hinge on human prayers?

The answer lies in the principle of how God works. Prayer is an important way by which God responds to our needs (see Matthew 7:7-11). This principle shows up frequently in the Bible.

In a familiar passage in Luke 10:2-3, Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Jesus clearly knew the extent of need in the harvest field. Yet He does not ask us to go out at once to recruit workers to meet this need. In contrast, He instructs us to start with prayer. We are to pray

and “ask the Lord of the harvest”, who will move the hearts of workers to fulfill the needs on the harvest field!

It is not uncommon to find within Chinese churches tension between the congregation and the pastor, or conflict among the elders and deacons. There can be a myriad of reasons involved, yet the common root of dissension is simply: a lack of prayer! When a church fails to take ample time to discern God’s will, the church might rush to hire a pastor, only to find major clashes in approach. Conflict brews. The result? Churches divide. Hearts break and grieve.

John 15 describes the relationship between the vine and the branches. To bear fruit for the Lord, we must pray. Without prayer, we cannot bear fruit, even when we think we are abiding in Christ and know God’s Word. According to John 15:7-8, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, *ask whatever you wish*, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Consider this age-old account from the Old Testament of how Moses led the Israelites into battle with the Amalekites. It was Joshua who went out with the men of Israel to fight, while Moses took Aaron and Hur to the top of the hill. Standing on the top of the hill, Moses held up his hands and looked upon the LORD. Whenever Moses held up his hands, the Israelites had the edge; whenever Moses lowered his hands, the Amalekites had the edge. In other words, when Moses prayed to God, the battle was won; whenever his prayers ceased, the battle was lost!

From this, we see that prayer is a means, established by God for His people, to reveal God’s power and God’s work. Therefore, we must pray.

When our LORD came in the flesh, He fulfilled the will of the Father and completed his work on earth *through prayer*. The apostle Paul, the anointed servant of God, *prayed continually*. When the Holy Spirit ushered in great revivals throughout history, there were always faithful servants and saints on their knees in prayer behind the scenes.

We praise our God Almighty: while God could have sent angels to fulfill His will, He chose us humans— the weak, the foolish, the despised— as instruments to fulfill His will through prayer. How humble our LORD is— condescending Himself to be with us, longing for us to co-labor with Him. How blessed we are to be conferred this great privilege and authority: to be able to pray to God! With thankful hearts, let us gladly take up the challenge and blessing of prayer.

2. Steps to follow in prayer

Matthew 6:9-13 lays out clear steps that we should take in prayer. Verses 9 to 10 relate to God. Verses 11 to 13 relate to us. In other words, we pray about the matters of God before praying about matters of our own. Let us now unpack Jesus’ teaching about prayer on the matters of God.

First: “Hallowed be your name.” (Matthew 6:9)

Prayer is centered on the name of God. What is the name of God? In the Old Testament, it is **Yahweh**. In the New Testament, it is Jesus. What do we mean when we say **Yahweh**? The

first time God declared His name to man, He self-identified as “I AM” or “HE IS” when referred by others. When God, in the wilderness, called Moses to set His people free from slavery in Egypt, Moses was reluctant, offering excuse after excuse to wriggle out of God’s call. In particular, Moses insisted that the Israelites would not believe that God sent Moses but would ask: who is **Yahweh**? What is His name? So, God said to Moses to tell the Israelites, “I AM WHO I AM.” (Exodus 3:14)

In Hebrews 11:6 (NASB), God says, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that *He is* and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” God refers to Himself as “I AM” and we refer to God as “He *is*”. What are the implications? The name of God encompasses all that we need. As David declares, “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2-3)

When God gave Israel the tablets of covenant law for the second time, He proclaimed His name: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6-7) This verse richly describes God’s character: holy, righteous, and full of lovingkindness.

These qualities are exactly what we need. We need God’s holiness. We need God’s righteousness. We need God’s lovingkindness. But how might we personally experience God’s character? In Jesus Christ, it is possible. As Paul said, “It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” (1 Corinthians 1:30) All that we need can be found in His name.

Hallelujah! How precious is the name of the LORD! In the New Testament, the name of God is Jesus. Etymologically, *Je-* means “the LORD” and *-sus* means “to save”. Put together, the name *Jesus* means “the LORD saves” echoing the angel’s message to Joseph: “She [Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

The Father and Son are one. One in status, honor, and glory. The Father is the same as the Son in terms of God’s nature and essence. Thus, when Jesus Christ lived in the world, He also used “I AM” to refer to Himself. We can find many instances in the Gospel of John: “*I am* the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (10:11) “*I am* the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.” (10:9) “*I am* the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (6:35) “*I am* the way and the truth and the life.” (14:6)

Jesus even said to the Jews, “...if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.” (8:24) He proclaimed directly, “I and the Father are one.” (10:30) When the Jews heard that, they picked up stones to stone him, for it was blasphemy for a mere man (as they perceived Jesus) to claim to be God! Brothers and sisters, consider God’s name and how precious it is. As stated by the Apostle Peter, “...(apart from Jesus) there is no other name under heaven given to

mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) Jesus taught us to hallow the name of the LORD, for He is worthy.

Second: “Your kingdom come.” (Matthew 6:10)

The word *kingdom* refers to the kingdom of God, which has come to the world in the form of the Gospel. As recorded in Luke 17:20-21, when the Pharisees asked Jesus *when* the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God is in your midst.” The kingdom of God has come through the salvation grace of the LORD Jesus Christ.

What, then, does it mean to pray “Your kingdom come” as taught in the LORD’s prayer? It means the full manifestation of God’s kingdom on earth when Christ returns and reigns for a thousand years. Until then, God’s kingdom comes to all who believe in Jesus and submit to His lordship. In contrast, people who have not believed (“the whole world”) are still under the control of the evil one. Only when our LORD Jesus returns will the whole world submit to the sovereignty of God. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is LORD. Stripped of all authority and power, Satan will be seized and bound for a thousand years.

How long must we wait before Christ returns and God’s kingdom comes? Not until the full number of Gentiles has come in (Romans 11:25). Thus, our prayers play the role of quickening God’s people to offer ourselves to His work. God’s kingdom comes when the full number are saved. When that happens, God’s people will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Third: “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

We pray for God’s will to be done freely on earth. The will of God is rich beyond what we can fathom, but every instance is marked by the same characteristics: *good, pleasing (or, acceptable) and perfect* (Romans 12:2).

Though God’s will for us *can* be done, often we are rebellious and reluctant to do His will. In contrast, Jesus freely sacrificed His life for us. Through the obedience of Christ, the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven. Hours before being nailed to the cross, Jesus cried out to God in prayer, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39) As portrayed in Hebrews 5:7, Jesus “offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”

On the way to the cross, Christ suffered unimaginable grief and pain. Death by crucifixion is cruelty beyond what our human flesh is built to bear. In his own words, Jesus was “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:34) Yet, even in the midst of the greatest grief, our LORD prayed and prevailed over the struggles of the flesh. He persevered to the point of death on the cross. He made possible the grace of salvation for all mankind.

Likewise, imagine the grace upon grace to come upon many, when you and I follow Christ’s example and obey God’s will. Surrender and obedience are not easy. Through prayer, we can grow in Christlikeness. Therefore, God’s will is fulfilled through prayer.

Next, let us consider how we can pray for ourselves:

- i. Pray for material needs: “Give us today our daily bread.” (6:11) Our daily bread refers to our most basic, everyday needs. Jesus reminds us to wait on God in even the smallest moments, for everything we need comes from God, our provider.
- ii. Pray for a holy life: “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (6:12) Our debts refer to our transgressions— the sins you and I have committed. We must ask God to forgive our sins and abide in close fellowship with Him. God delights in a life free from sin, a holy life set apart for Him.
- iii. Pray for protection from stumbling: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (6:13) Our LORD knows how weak we are and how ferocious our enemy— the evil one— is, “prowl[ing] around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8) It is God’s will for us to overcome temptation and be delivered from the evil one.

Jesus taught us to pray for ourselves, so that (1) we may depend on God for everything, (2) lead a holy life for God, and (3) stand firm in God’s protection.

3. The End Purpose of Prayer

“For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.” (6:13b)

The end purpose of prayer is God Himself. These final words in the LORD’s Prayer could not be found in the earliest manuscripts. In later manuscripts, these words reiterate the purpose of prayer and find corroboration across the rest of Scripture. Clearly, as we pray for God’s name to be hallowed, for God’s kingdom to come, and for God’s will to be done, we desire to ascribe the kingdom, the power, and the glory to the LORD.

Indeed, even as we pray for God’s provision for each day, for His help to lead holy lives, and for His protection from the evil one, we are not praying for ourselves but for God’s glory. In other words, God is glorified whenever we have sufficient grace to serve Him, whenever we are holy and set apart from the world, and whenever we stand firm in God’s way of truth. Imagine a father who provides good things to his children. When the children receive glory, this glory points toward the glory of the father.

In everything, we are called to shift our focus from being self-centered to being God-centered. This is the crux of prayer as demonstrated by our LORD Jesus Christ.

Chapter Five

The Second Practice: Praise and Thanksgiving

I. The Practice of Praise

In the Bible, praise and worship go hand in hand. If pressed to distinguish between the two, then *worship* is a posture of surrender to our God Most High, whereas *praise* is an outpouring of love and admiration toward God and His ways. Praise flows through our mouths as a response to God.

Psalm 22:3 depicts our LORD being enthroned on the praises of Israel. In the original Hebrew, God's throne is described as "being woven together by praises", on which God Himself sits. The throne of God invokes two concurrent themes:

1. A seat of mercy, and
2. A seat of judgment

God is merciful *and* God is just— His judgment is righteous. It follows that God is worthy of our praise in both *who He is* (love and righteousness) and *what He does*.

An exhortation in the New Testament states, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name." (Hebrews 13:15) We are enabled to continually praise God because, through Jesus, we can tangibly experience God in both His being and His doing. Christ embodies the fullness of who God is (ref: Colossians 2:9, John 1:18). Through Christ, God makes known His holiness, wisdom, lovingkindness (who God is) and work of redemption (what God does).

Our praise to the Father becomes deeper and more specific through Christ— the Son of God—the Word made flesh to dwell among humankind. Through Christ, we praise the LORD in all circumstances. Through Christ, we affirm that God's plans and purposes are good and praise our Father in heaven even in the midst of trials and affliction. We remember our brothers Paul and Silas, who sang praises to God while being in chains (ref: Acts 16:25). We remember our brother Job who, losing all the people dear to his heart (Job 1:21-22), still praised God and trusted in the One who never errs. As the psalmist proclaims, "The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King forever." (Psalm 29:10)

Praising God continually is a posture that is central to the Christian prayer life. We share in the psalmist's desire to praise God seven times a day (ref: Psalm 119:164).

II. The Practice of Thanksgiving

Read: Psalm 103:1-2

"Bless the Lord, my soul, and all that is within me, *bless* His holy name.
Bless the Lord, my soul, and do not forget any of His benefits."

In prayer, we remember all the ways that our LORD has been gracious to us. The Bible teaches us to give thanks every day and in all circumstances. Psalm 103:1-2 offer two vital ways to cultivate the character of thanksgiving.

First, keep God's grace on your mind.

The psalmist tells us not to forget any of God's benefits. Instead, we are urged to count the blessings of God one by one. Forgetting is human nature. When Jesus healed the ten lepers, only one returned to thank Him! Even Jesus was surprised, asking, "Where are the other nine?"

It delights God when we give thanks and count His blessings. In fact, when we count the ways that God blessed us in the past, even challenging times can become seasons of thanksgiving.

Second, examine your heart.

Giving thanks is natural when life is good, but can we still give thanks when bad things happen and the going gets tough? Yes! For God says in Romans 8:28, "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him." Take layoffs for example. No one wants to be laid off, but God works for our good by helping us draw near to Him, lean on Him, and experience His faithful provision. God shapes our character to be more humble, more perseverant, and more resilient to withstand the storms of life.

One day I met an elderly sister with only days left to live—the doctor estimated three or four days at the most. We were invited by her daughter-in-law to visit and strengthen her faith while she was still mentally alert. With heavy hearts, we brought along the communion bread and wine, fully expecting to meet a weak, bedridden woman about to breathe her last. To our astonishment, when we walked into the room, we found ourselves welcomed by the elderly sister herself! Reclined on a chair, she had rosy cheeks and light in her eyes. Radiant with a beaming smile, she shook hands with all of us. We felt taken aback by sheer joy that we witnessed.

When we served the Lord's supper, our dear sister wanted to sing a hymn entitled "One Hundred Sheep". In short, the lyrics talk about God who has one hundred sheep. One of the sheep gets lost and cannot find the way. But Jesus, our good shepherd, searches high and low through dangers, toil, and snare, He goes after the lost sheep until it is found. Our sister saw herself as this lost sheep who was found by Jesus. Back in the fold and safe in Jesus' everlasting arms, she offered her unceasing praise and thanksgiving.

The sister sang through all five stanzas of the hymn in one go. We felt so moved and filled with joy. She went on to tell us her story. She was baptized a long time ago, but drifted away from God, falling back into idol worship. Her family kept quiet, afraid to correct her for fear of her strong personality. Some time later, she fell sick. Under great pain and transferring in and out of the hospital, her family members were at the brink of burnout taking care of her. Yet it was also in this season that she came to her senses: she was the lost sheep and Jesus wanted to find her and bring her home! She repented, got rid of all the books and items about idol worship, and

turned back to Jesus with full resolve. Also, she decided to terminate her medical treatments (which brought immense pain on her) and prepare her heart to go home with the LORD.

Her peace and joy shone brightly for all to see. When her friends came to see her, she urged them to get baptized soon so that they could reunite in heaven. For this sister, sickness and suffering renewed her faith. Her testimony powerfully demonstrates that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.”

In the traditional hymn “Thanks to God”, the lyrics go:

*Thanks for prayers that Thou hast answered,
Thanks for what Thou dost deny!*

*Thanks for roses by the wayside,
Thanks for thorns their stems contain!*

*Thanks for pleasant, balmy springtime,
Thanks for dark and stormy fall!*

*Thanks for storms that I have weathered,
Thanks for all Thou dost supply!*

*Thanks for tears by now forgotten,
Thanks for peace within my soul!*

We count God’s blessings and refuse to forget His benefits, for all things (even the bleak and the devastating) carry the glorious will and ways of God. Therefore, we give thanks, not only when lying down in green pastures but also when fighting through stormy waters. No circumstance can stop us from lifting up our heartfelt praise and thanksgivings to God.

Chapter Six

The Third Practice: Confession

Read: Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, you, God, will not despise. May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Once, the IRS received a letter from a taxpayer. In the letter, the taxpayer confessed that he did not pay the full amount of what he owed in taxes last fiscal year. Since then, he was tormented by insomnia. He wanted to pay back \$500 so that he could sleep again. If \$500 was not enough, he added, then he would return the full amount of what he owed.

This humorous anecdote was shared by Pastor Ray Stedman. It is not a true story, but it depicts an important truth: lies and dishonesty breed a guilty conscience. As followers of Jesus, we are accepted by God and our sins are forgiven. Cleared of guilt and shame, we are blessed to dwell in peace and happiness. But what if we fall back into a pattern of sin? We experience pain and suffering. How, then, can a Christian break free from sinful behavior? What can we do to be delivered from darkness into light? Psalm 51 sheds light on a path forward.

1. The Horror of Sin (see verses 2, 3, 7, 8, 11)

The Bible gives a full account of how King David fell into sin. Lusting after beautiful Bathsheba, the king committed adultery and murdered her husband to cover up his crime. Not only did his sin bring pain to others, David himself was cut to the heart. In Psalm 51, he lamented over his sins that were like bloody stains on the king's new robe. He would give anything to be cleansed from his transgressions (verse 2). His sin was always before him (verse 3). Under great distress, David was not unlike Shakespeare's Macbeth, who was tormented by dark hallucinations of his blood-guilt and murder. David felt the despair of isolation: people kept a safe distance from him as if he were an untouchable leper (verse 7). His bones felt crushed, as his guilty conscience and spiritual remorse weighed down heavily on him (verse 8). Most of all, he feared being cast out from God's presence and having the Holy Spirit taken from him, like the tragic downfall of Saul (note: the Bible assures us that the Holy Spirit dwells eternally in those who are born again in Jesus Christ, but it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit when we do not put off the old self and put on the new.)

From David's suffering, we witness the horror of sin. But how did David find deliverance from the depths of such horror? Only by the forgiveness of God.

2. The Assurance of Forgiveness (verse 1)

David turned to the LORD, praying and asking for forgiveness. This verse is clear about the full assurance we can have when praying to God for our sins to be forgiven. Our assurance rests on two important attributes of God highlighted in this verse: lovingkindness and mercy.

In Hebrew, *lovingkindness* refers to God's faithful, covenantal love. God honors the covenant that He made to bless Abraham and the people of Israel. Likewise, our LORD Jesus showed the same faithful love through establishing a covenant with us with His own flesh and blood.

The word *mercy* shares the same root as the Hebrew word for the mother's *womb*. God's love for us is like the fiercely intimate love that a mother has for her precious baby born after ten months of nourishment in her own womb. A mother's love overflows from this deep blood relationship. A mother cries when her child cries. Her heart is broken when her child feels sad. God loves us with the same compassion.

When the prophet Nathan confronted David about his sins, David confessed at once. Although prophet pronounced the sins forgiven, David still had to suffer the consequences: "...the sword will never depart from your house...out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight...your son born to you will die." (2 Samuel 12:10-14)

Do these consequences mean that David's sins were not actually forgiven? But God had clearly declared through his prophet, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die." (2 Samuel 12:13) Therefore, the consequences were part of God's way of disciplining David in order to set him apart from sin in the future.

Let me explain with an everyday example. When my son accidentally broke a window with his ball, I was furious. Feeling shaken, my son apologized. I forgave him, but at the same time, I made two requests. First, he had to find a company to repair the window at an affordable price. Second, he had to pay for the repair. The requests were my way of disciplining my son to help him learn that wrongdoing breeds consequences.

The second son borne to David and Bathsheba was named Solomon. Yet, God sent word through the prophet Nathan to name him Jedidiah, which meant “beloved of the LORD”. David suffered great agony under the disciplining rod of God. But God never let him go, carrying him through the pain with grace and mercy. As David himself beautifully described in Psalm 23: “Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.” (verse 6) These observations converge on the fact that God had completely forgiven David’s sins.

3. Asking for Forgiveness (Psalm 51:3-6, 16-17)

When David went from darkness into light, from the horrors of sin into the joy of forgiveness, he had an important thing to do: to confess his sins sincerely and wholeheartedly.

David’s confession was sincere. Out of the 19 verses making up Psalm 51, there are 11 appeals for God’s forgiveness and 12 references to his sins.

Readers are privy to *what* David confessed, *how* he went about the confession, and the grief he suffered from his transgressions. He confessed his sinfulness from birth and his evil doing in God’s sight. He admitted that he was a sinner with no goodness in him. David did not blame Bathsheba but took upon himself the full responsibility for his sins— not fifty percent, not ninety percent, but one hundred percent of his sins.

David was not only sincere but also grieved by his sins. His grief was not motivated by a fear of punishment, but by his sincere anguish over the heinous actions. David was so pained that status and reputation were no longer important to him. How do we know that? Because this psalm was not only read by Bathsheba, Nathan, and Joab (those who were aware of David’s crimes) but by the entire people of Israel. In fact, the psalm was given to the director music to be sung by the choir in broad daylight!

Brothers and sisters! Have you experienced this kind of grief over your sins? Indeed, David is a man after God’s own heart. The mark of “one after God’s own heart” is not the absence of sin but the presence of true remorse and repentance over one’s sin. This person grieves over sin and comes before God in thorough confession. It is David’s attitude that so pleased the LORD. I can resonate with David’s cries from the heart. Each time I am pained by my sins, I can offer nothing more important to God than a broken and contrite heart.

4. Light Returns (see verses 13-15, 18-19)

When we confess and repent of our sins wholeheartedly, we can have assurance about God’s forgiveness. Our spiritual lives are restored by the light of God. With his conscience cleared, David vowed to teach transgressors God’s ways, to sing aloud of God’s deliverance, and to

worship God with burnt offerings. The three actions evidence a transformation in David's heart. The moment when he received God's forgiveness, David's soul was revived by the return of God's light. In verse 18, he prayed for Zion and Jerusalem. As a king, David felt burdened for the wellbeing of his people. He did not want them to suffer on account of his wrongdoing. Verse 19 opens with the word *then*, closing the whole psalm with a picture of hope: with David's sins forgiven, God once again delighted in his sacrifices and offering. Like David, I experience deep joy each time God's light is restored in my heart. Like David, when I confess my sins and receive God's forgiveness, I am empowered to teach the ways of God to other transgressors.

Are you stumbling in the dark because of certain sins? Are you feeling drained of joy and far from God? If so, I pray that you will be stirred by David's experience. May our hearts break in grief over our sins. May we come before the LORD and confess our sins to Him sincerely and with our whole hearts. *Then*, God, who does not despise but delights in our repentant hearts, will forgive us in his unfailing love and mercy. When this happens, we will be reconciled with God, who will deliver us from darkness into light.

Chapter Seven

The Fourth Practice: Forgiveness

Read: Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Unanswered prayers point to a root issue in our hearts: unforgiveness.

As recorded in Matthew 6:14-15 and Mark 11:25-26, Jesus taught about this connection. The same warning was given by apostle Peter about prayers being hindered when husband and wife refuse to reconcile (see 1 Peter 3:7). Let us examine three questions about forgiveness as taught in the Bible:

1. What are the benefits of forgiving others?

Unforgiveness brews toxic bitterness in the soul. A Californian man committed a horrific crime: he raped a girl, cut off her arms, and left her to die. The whole nation flew into an outrage, demanding justice for the girl and punishment for the perpetrator. Before the man was caught, however, the girl was interviewed and asked to share her feelings on air. Expecting words of anger, grief, and hatred, the reporter was shocked to hear the girl's reply, "I have forgiven the man. He hurt my body, so I cannot let him hurt my soul, too."

Unforgiveness, and the toxic resentment that results, can damage our health by causing high blood pressure or psychological stress. In contrast, forgiveness restores our mental health and frees us to bless others. I have a friend who grew up feeling resentful against her parents for their actions when she was young. When she became a Christian, the LORD shone light on her heart, empowering her to forgive her parents. Later in life, her mother was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. My friend visited her mother weekly at the hospital, from the day her mother was admitted at age 65 till her mother finally believed in Jesus and went home to be with the LORD— at peace and with a smile— at age 77. My friend's father spent his early life enslaved by alcohol and aggression. Astonished by his daughter's forgiveness and love, he gave his life to Christ and was finally delivered from the strongholds that bound him.

2. Why do we have to forgive others?

The parable in Matthew 18:23-35 discusses two principles of forgiveness. First, we have been forgiven by God. Second, if we refuse to forgive others, we will be disciplined, not forgiven, by God. If the king has forgiven our massive debt totaling ten thousand bags of gold, how can we withhold forgiveness from someone who owes us just a hundred silver coins? Furthermore, any

amount of debt can only pale in comparison to the immeasurable cost paid by the blood of Jesus for our sins.

Joseph was betrayed and sold into slavery by his own brothers. Despite his treacherous life, he forgave his brothers. Why? Because Joseph experienced, firsthand, the grace of God. From the pits of slavery, God raised Joseph to a seat of utmost authority— the prime minister of Egypt. God did this to save his whole family and preserve them through the famine (see Genesis 50:20-21). If we refuse to forgive others, God has ways to discipline us and empower us to forgive.

3. Is it really possible to forgive others?

Can we really forgive others? Is it really possible to love our enemies and pray for them, as Jesus commanded? (see Matthew 5:44) The answer is: yes, absolutely!

The apostle Paul (or formally, Saul) is a perfect example. In the past, Saul persecuted and killed those who followed Jesus; he had only hatred for them. After encountering and believing in Jesus, Saul was transformed. As he later faced persecution, he responded with forgiveness (see 1 Corinthians 4:12). If forgiveness was possible with Paul, it is possible with us. Why?

Because God's love is "poured out" into our hearts (see Romans 5:5). The moment we believe in Jesus, God fills us with His own love that never runs out but endures eternally. The Greek word for "poured out" is perfective in terms of grammatical aspect. In other words, the act of pouring is complete. It is finished, once and for all. All we need to do is to make up our minds and pray for our enemies, by faith and not by feelings. Then, we will experience the love that God "poured out" into our hearts, the love that empowers us to forgive and love others. How amazing!

An older woman lived together with her daughter-in-law, who did not share her faith in Jesus. They fell into serious conflict. After a long night of prayer before God, the older woman chose to respond in compassion. She moved out but continued to take care of her grandchildren, so that her daughter-in-law could be free to focus on her work. Gradually, there was harmony in the family. Her daughter-in-law even became open to going to church and drawing closer to God!

In conclusion, Jesus taught us the importance of forgiveness. If we do not forgive others, our prayers will not be answered.

Chapter Eight

The Fifth Practice: Intercession

Read: Isaiah 62:6-7

I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

* * *

This Bible passage shows that God blesses His church through His people. Notice the two verbs “post” and “establish”, which describe two actions of God. Who are the watchmen *posted* by God? The watchmen refer to people who pray. From our side, we cry out to God in prayer. From God’s side, He moves to *establish* Jerusalem!

Nothing is impossible with God. He speaks and it comes into being. He commands and it stands firm. Yet, it pleases God to accomplish His work and will through the prayers of His people! So, brothers and sisters, if you do not want to pray, then God will enable others to complete His work through prayer. The loss will be yours, as you will miss out on the opportunity to co-labor with God, experience His wisdom and power, and share in God’s glory.

The Pentecostal church came into being through the prayers of 120 followers of Jesus. Likewise, in the history of the church, countless revivals and spiritual awakenings followed God’s stirring of His people to pray. In fact, there cannot be revival without prayer as the foundation.

Prayer was a clear priority for our LORD Jesus, the Son of God, as He served on earth to fulfill God’s will. Jesus said, “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.” (John 5:19) Therefore, everything Jesus did on earth was in obedience to the will of the Father.

How did the Son “see” what the Father wanted him to do? By unceasing prayer and fellowship with the Father. Throughout his three years of public ministry on earth, Jesus prayed. At His baptism, Jesus prayed, and heaven opened with God’s voice affirming Jesus as His beloved Son. In the wilderness, Jesus fasted and prayed before he overcame the devil’s testing. Before dawn, Jesus often went into the wilderness for solitary prayer to prepare for His ministry in the day ahead. After feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, Jesus went up the mountain by Himself to pray and flee the temptation from the crowds who wanted to make Him a king. Before calling the twelve disciples, Jesus prayed overnight. On the way to the cross, Jesus prayed for His disciples in Gethsemane. Even as he breathed his last, Jesus prayed, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) From the prayerfulness of Jesus’ life, we can see how important prayer is in God’s eyes.

There are many aspects to the discipline of prayer. In this chapter, I will focus on intercession: prayer for other people.

1. Intercessory Prayer: The What

One thing that our LORD Jesus continues to do after ascending to heaven is intercessory prayer. Hebrews 7:25 says, “He [Christ] always lives to make intercession for them [those who come to God through Him].” In other words, Jesus is eternally praying on our behalf. Likewise, let us persist in interceding for others until the day when we are face to face with our LORD.

Next, we might ask: what is Jesus praying for on our behalf? The Bible does not give a direct answer. Instead, the Bible records some of Jesus’ prayers while in the flesh “on earth”. In these prayers, Jesus emphasized three important areas:

First, Jesus prays for our *salvation*.

Even when dying on the cross, our LORD interceded for the people who offended, shamed, and crucified Him, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) Jesus asked the Father to forgive them and for none to perish but all to repent and be saved, fulfilling the prophecy about the Messiah “interceding for the wrongdoers” (Isaiah 53:12).

Second, Jesus prays for our *faith*.

Three times, Peter denied the LORD. Before it happened, however, Jesus had prayed for Peter’s faith not to fail so that Peter would turn back and strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:32). At first, Peter seemed crushed by his failure, not doing much except feebly going out to fish with a few of Jesus’ disciples. Years later, however, Peter matured into a faithful leader, who strengthened his coworker, Mark. In turn, Mark rose up from his past failure and became a trusted partner in the ministry (see 1 Peter 5:13). In particular, Mark’s written account on the life of Christ using Peter as his source became the Gospel of Mark that we have in the Bible today.

Third, Jesus prays for our *unity*.

Before Jesus died on the cross, He specifically prayed for unity among all who followed Him (John 17). Widely known as the High Priestly Prayer, the prayer mentions *being one in unity* five times. Unity draws the world’s attention to see and prompts people to believe in Jesus. God’s great love is glorified through the oneness of the saints (see verses 20-21 and Acts 2:46-47).

2. Intercessory Prayer – The How

Next, how should we approach intercessory prayer? I recommend doing so with the heart of a pastor. Jesus Christ is our perfect example of a pastor, or shepherd of the flock, who “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3). Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me.” (verse 14)

In the same way, Jesus reminds us to intercede for other people *by name*. I know and pray for all kinds of people. Some know me and are known to me. Others are known to me, but do not know me. Still others are known to me only by name, but I have not met them. We are invited to pray for all of them. While we may not *feel* like praying for strangers whom we do not know, I trust

that as long as we are *willing* to pray for them, our LORD knows and hears our prayers. When we take this step of obedience to intercede for others, our love for even “strangers” will grow. How amazing and wonderful is the love of God! The fruit of the Spirit is first characterized by love. Through intercessory prayer, the Holy Spirit births love in our hearts for the people named in our prayers.

Years ago, a coworker at my church asked if I could add her family to my prayer list. I said yes. That was before I read the names of her sister-in-law’s three children: Alexandra, Augustus, and Aries. All three were names of ancient rulers and royalty, but I struggled at remembering them. Later, because all the names began with the letter *A*, I found a helpful mnemonic: Triple A!

Recently, I ran into this coworker and inquired after her family. Specifically, I added, “How are Triple A doing?” She was surprised that I still knew their names, and she realized that I was not merely asking a question in passing. Instead, my question came from a sincere heart of concern for her family. This love is not from myself but from the Holy Spirit who bears the fruit of love in our hearts.

In this way, intercessory prayer is one expression of shepherding love.

How much time should we spend on intercession? I recommend setting aside thirty minutes every day: one minute for each person. So, 30 minutes equal 30 people.

What is the value of committing a fixed amount of time to intercession? Because prayer is a spiritual battle that requires our discipline and focus.

Reading the Bible for 30 minutes is easy. Praying for 30 minutes is more challenging. Each day that we set aside 30 minutes to pray, we can expect to overflow with strength from the LORD. The Son of God enjoyed a life of unceasing prayer. “Jesus came out and went, as was His habit, to the Mount of Olives.” (Luke 22:39-40) What did Jesus do at the Mount of Olives? To pray. Brother Witness Lee once said, “A life without daily prayer is a life without prayer.” In short, daily prayer is the heartbeat of Christian life.

3. Intercessory Prayer – The Blessing

Intercession brings blessings to others. Paul described God’s favor granted to him and his fellow servants through the prayers of the church in Corinth (see 2 Corinthians 1:11). This favor, I believe, includes experiencing God’s rescue and deliverance from their afflictions in Asia.

God delights in our intercession for others. Recently, I was on a mission trip to Taiwan where I experienced the amazing grace of God. Twice, I preached the Sunday sermon. Both times, I was overcome by the power and work of God in an unusual way. On the second Sunday, when I gave the altar call, even the pastor’s own son came to the front to commit his life to serving the LORD. To this day, I can picture the pastor’s wife shedding tears of thanksgiving to see her son take this important step of obedience. All of this was the fruit of many people’s prayers for me.

The apostle Paul was a gifted preacher with great boldness. But even Paul kept asking brothers and sisters to pray for his speech and boldness when preaching the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20). Likewise, how much more do we need others' intercession for the gospel to be heard by people far and near!

Clearly, intercession is a blessing to those receiving it, but it is also a blessing to the intercessors before the LORD (see Job 42:10)! After Job came through his extraordinary suffering, God asked him to intercede on behalf of his three friends. Imagine being asked to bless the very "friends" who caused you so much strife with their endless criticism! But Job obeyed God. The outcome? His intercession brought about transformation— a turning point— in his own life. God restored Job's fortunes, blessing him with twice of what he had before.

Chapter Nine

The Sixth Practice: Fasting

Pray: “Lord Jesus, hear my prayer and make me a warrior in my prayer group.”

Fasting prayer is a subject that receives less attention. Here, we will focus on three main areas:

1. What is fasting prayer?

The purpose of fasting prayer is to usher us into encounters with the LORD and be mobilized to love others in action. Be reminded that if we are no longer abiding in the love of Christ, any attempt at fasting prayer is devoid of meaning. The correct way to fast and pray is to seek the LORD, be filled with God’s love, and let His love overflow to others.

This description of fasting prayer was shared many years ago by Pastor Peter Ning-ya Yang at Taipei Truth Lutheran Church (TTLC). For over 40 years, this church of over 4000 worshippers has held 40-day fasting prayer campaigns three times a year.

Pastor Yang is a dear brother of mine dating back to our university days. We were both staying at the Lutheran residences at TTLC. In those days, the spiritual climate at TTLC was saddening to a point where I wanted to leave. It was Pastor Yang who encouraged me to stay and keep praying for the church together.

That was how we began meeting every Saturday afternoon to pray for our church. We fasted and prayed for our fellowship and witnessed God flourishing the group. Many years later, Pastor Yang observed that not one couple got divorced in this church of over 4000—a blessing that he believed was rooted in fasting prayer.

Fasting prayer can be defined as a spiritual discipline. We fast and pray not to earn merit or even God’s blessing. We do so to nurture a more intimate relationship with God. It is the reflection of our love for God. It is our response in action rooted in our desire to obey and follow God’s will.

2. The Need for Fasting Prayer

Some churches do not teach people to fast and pray because Paul never taught about it in his letters. Yet, Jesus Christ himself taught, “But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.” (Mark 2:18-20)

In the joy of being with Jesus, it was not the time for the disciples to tightly heed Jewish customs and fast at every opportunity. But with the bridegroom no longer with us, the time comes to fast and pray. And this “time” is now!

When Jesus was on earth, He reminded his disciples to “watch and pray so that [they would not] fall into temptation.” (Matthew 26:41) This reminder continues to stand until the day of Jesus’ return. Fasting is also discussed in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. “When you *fast*...put oil on

your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16-18) From this Bible verse, our LORD Jesus never opposed the act of fasting but exhorted us to be clear about *why* we fast.

Once, when the disciples came in private to Jesus and asked, “Why could we not cast out [the demon]?” Jesus replied, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:19-21) Did Jesus mean that by fasting we earn the authority to cast out demons? Absolutely not. By fasting and praying, we connect with God and demonstrate our complete offering and reliance on Him. Fasting is an expression of our faith in what God is going to accomplish.

How do we gauge the faith of a Christian? The simple answer is: through one’s prayers.

The first location that we purchased for our church had an attic space of 400 sq. ft. that we had hoped to convert into a library and two offices. But the city pushed back, requesting us to add an extra flight of stairs or an elevator. However, doing so would use up too much of the space and defeat the original purpose. Discouraged, I sighed, “This location must be a mistake!” A sister was unfazed, saying, “Pastor, let us pray to God.”

With that suggestion, a 24-hour prayer chain was launched. Every week, during a 24-hour period from Friday noon to Saturday noon, brothers and sisters signed up for 1-hour intervals to fast and pray. As a church community, we prayed from lunch until midnight and through dawn into the new day. After two weeks, the verdict came. We were cleared to renovate as planned, with no additional conditions! How miraculous it was for all of us to witness what God accomplished as we fasted and prayed. To this day, the 24-hour prayer chain has continued and over 70 brothers and sisters have joined in. Our church calls this the “Great Commission Prayer”.

When we face challenges, we must fight in prayer and even fasting. Back to the testimony of TTLCC, it has to be God’s work for over 4000 congregants to be protected from divorce. Fasting means to demolish the strongholds of the devil through prayer. Our LORD Jesus did the same: in prayer and fasting, He overcame the temptations of the devil. Luke Chapter 4 describes how the devil tempted Jesus with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and how Jesus overcame all temptation rooted in fasting prayer (Luke 4:1-2) and the Word of God!

3. Examples of Fasting Prayer

In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul described his life as a servant of God. “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God...” Here, “sleepless nights and hunger” refers to fasting prayer.

I always examine myself: as a servant of God, have I been an example for others like Paul? Let us read Acts 13:1-3: “Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the

tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

It was during *fasting* that the Holy Spirit told the Antioch church, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (verse 2) In response, the church fasted and prayed before placing their hands on the two servants and sending them off. Clearly, this was not an easy decision to make. Barnabas and Paul were gifted servants. If they left, who could carry on the ministry?

Nevertheless, after fasting and praying together as a church body, they took heart and sent their brothers off.

After this incident, we read about Paul (Saul) and Barnabas returning from their first missionary journey with encouraging news: God’s miracles followed them...the Holy Spirit filled them...many churches were built up. Soon afterwards, in Acts 14:23, they “appointed elders in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the LORD, in whom they had put their trust”.

What is the meaning of these accounts? One message is clear: the spiritual battle never stops! Our “enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Persecution was so relentless at the time that Paul exhorted the churches, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

Brothers and sisters, the persecution that we face may not be the same as what was faced by the apostles and the early church. While we may not have to suffer physically like the apostles, we are still attacked on every side in the way we think and live our lives. In this age of secularism, we have compromised our values in pursuit of human liberty. We have become accepting of divorce and homosexuality and succumbed to the devil’s schemes. In prayer and fasting, the apostles were able to discern the spiritual battlelines and come through victorious.

Finally, I would like to recommend two books. The first one is Pastor Ning-ya Yang’s “Prepare Yourself for Prayer and Fasting”, which talks about the Biblical basis of fasting prayer. The second one is Bill Bright’s “The Transforming Power of Fasting and Prayer”, which draws from three experiences of 40-day fasting prayer.

Today, the church faces two enormous challenges. The first challenge is the lack of workers to pick up the baton for the next generation. Recently, I met an elderly pastor who told me he was about to retire that year. The pastor asked me how old I was. I said I was sixty-six. Wistfully, he responded, “I’m 80 this year, but I’m still waiting to find my successor!” Yes, the pastor was a faithful servant, but what about the future of the church?

The second challenge is that many Christians are reluctant to share the gospel. Without sharing the gospel, the church will surely die! How did Jesus deal with the lack of workers? He did not go to the seminary president asking for people. Instead, Jesus said, “*Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*” (Matthew 9:38). To “ask” is to pray.

What can we do if the gospel is not preached? In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul said, “Be alert and always keep on praying...pray also for me...so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.” (Ephesians 6:18-19) In his letter to the Colossians, Paul requested, “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ.” (Colossians 4:3)

Chapter 10

The Seventh Practice: “Battling” Prayer

Read: Luke 22:39-46

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, father of modern China, was often seen as a threat for his role in the revolution against the Qing dynasty. Once, he escaped to London. One Sunday, on his way to church, he was approached by two Chinese men who bundled him into the Chinese Legation controlled by the Qing courts. For about a week, no one knew what happened to him. As he despaired of all hope, he remembered His mighty God and repented. Night and day, he prayed fervently and continually to the LORD. On the seventh day, God’s comfort and peace filled his heart. He knew that God was going to rescue Him. Eventually, he had an opportunity to send a message to his teacher in England through food delivery workers. Persistently knocking on many doors, his teacher convinced the press to take the situation seriously, which led to Dr. Sun’s release at last.

The period from 1862 to 1863 was one of the darkest times in American history. A war had broken out between the North and the South, contending over the future of slavery in America. As the North kept losing major battles, the war arrived at a critical point. On March 30th, 1863, President Lincoln (who stood for the emancipation of slaves) called the whole nation to fast and pray to God. But on May 9th, the North lost again. *Did God really hear their prayers?*

At this juncture, the South launched an invasion into the North. When Lincoln heard this, he went into his room, locked the door, and prayed to God. He made a vow to God, saying, “If You give us victory, I will stand by You, and I will take a stand for You every opportunity I have.” Lincoln shared with his commander-general that his constant prayer was for God’s victory. He wanted to be certain that He was on God’s side.

On the next day, the North won a decisive battle, which became a turning point in the war and led to continued victory. This is the historical account of how Lincoln achieved victory in the American Civil War through prayer. When one of his advisors gave thanks for God being on their side, Lincoln replied, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God’s side.” This was why God answered Lincoln’s prayer.

Through Moses, God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. On the way, the Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites. When Joshua led the army into battle, Moses took Aaron and Hur to the top of the hill. When Moses held up his hands in prayer to God, Joshua and the Israelites were winning; but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, Aaron and Hur brought a stone for Moses to sit on. They themselves sat to the left and right of Moses, holding his hands up until the sun went down!

Joshua's defeat of the Amalekites depended completely on Moses' raised hands in prayer on the hill. Clearly, the key to victory in battle is found in prayer. This principle is true not only for our earthly battles but also (and even more) for our spiritual battles. As we follow Jesus, our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. The devil is scheming continually to destroy God's work and come between God and His people. Every single day of life on earth is filled with spiritual battles big and small. But do not fear, for "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (the devil)." (1 John 4:4) What we need to do is to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." (Ephesians 6:18) Indeed, prayer is the most important weapon we have to fight any spiritual battle.

Let us reflect on the greatest spiritual battle and victory in human history— Jesus Christ's prayer at Gethsemane. Read Luke 22:39-46 again and observe how prayer played the pivotal role in Jesus' victory. In contrast, the disciples failed sorely in their battles. Peter denied the LORD three times and the other disciples were scattered because they did not stand firm in prayer. Even Peter's comeback resulted from Jesus' prayers for his faith not to fail (Luke 22:32)! Jesus lived out the best possible example of a prayerful life. We can learn from three main aspects:

1. "As Usual" (Luke 22:39)

This verse states that Jesus went out "as usual" to the Mount of Olives. In many other places in Scripture, we read about Jesus retreating to the wilderness or up the hill in order to pray. Here, "as usual" indicates that Jesus often prayed at the Mount of Olives.

In our everyday lives, we do many things "as usual": we eat "as usual", after dinner we pick up the newspaper or the phone "as usual" or sit in front of the television to watch dramas "as usual", after which we go to bed "as usual". The next day, we get up "as usual", go to work or school "as usual", and we meet up with people "as usual". Whatever we deem worthy of our time, we do "as usual". Now consider what Jesus did "as usual": prayer. It is evident how important prayer was to Jesus; prayer played as big a part as anything else we need to do on a daily basis.

How can we make prayer something we do "as usual"? First, we must let prayer take first place in our daily lives and become something we cannot do without. Why do we go to work every day and even work overtime? Is it because we need to work for money, which we cannot do without? What, then, makes prayer so indispensable? This short poem reveals the answer:

More prayer, more power;
Less prayer, less power;
No prayer, no power.

Everyone needs to be empowered and strengthened. No Christian wants to be without strength. We all need to eat and gain strength for the day. Likewise, we all need to pray and ask for the spiritual power and strength to fight the LORD's battles.

What is the biggest challenge in our modern lifestyle? We are too busy to pray. Take life in the Bay Area for example. Tremendous pressure. Working over 10 hours each day. Physically too exhausted to sustain a prayer life. Sadly, this describes the lives of many Christians.

A brother once shared a testimony about a challenging time at work. He was under great stress with a project deadline fast approaching but problems far from being solved. My brother intentionally chose to spend more time than usual in prayer. He also continued to serve as usual at church. What happened with the project in the end? Through God's wisdom, all the challenges at work were solved and the project was completed on time! Similarly, we often hear anointed preachers share how much time they spend every day on their knees in prayer.

Our LORD Jesus led a busy life, too. He preached to crowds, healed people, and cast out demons. Not only was he surrounded by people all day long, but he also had people constantly plotting to bring him down. At the same time, we read about Jesus walking away from the crowds and retreating to the wilderness or up a hill to pray. Before ministering in public, Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. When the devil came to test Him, Jesus overcame every temptation with God's Word. Running out of tricks, the devil fled from Jesus.

From that time onwards, Jesus began each day in prayer and ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit. I can resonate with that. Since I began the discipline of daily prayer, the Holy Spirit has empowered me to serve as a teacher of the Word. Whenever I prepare for a Sunday School class, I feel undeserving and sorely aware of my lack of understanding. All I can do is pray continually for God's help while drafting each lesson. When I look back at the lesson, I am often amazed: *is it possible for this content come out of me!?* Clearly, it is God's power made perfect in my weakness. The experience of divine grace spurs me on to pray even more.

2. "Earnestly" (Luke 22:44)

Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow as He approached the certain fate of humiliating death on the cross. The Gospels portray Jesus praying again and again. Luke described this as praying so *earnestly* such that "his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"!

In our prayer lives, we are not only called to be faithful, but we also want to be earnest. Prayer life loses its essence when it is reduced to outward motions. If we are merely checking "daily prayer" off a task list, we are no longer praying, only reporting. Earnest prayer comes from the heart. God looks into our hearts and sees everything. If you don't care about it yourself, why should God answer your prayer? If you are not serious about it yourself, why should God be serious about you? There is a saying that prayer is like drilling a hole in a mountain. We are drilling on one end and God is working on the other end. The moment as the hole goes all the way through is God opening the door for us to pray.

Hudson Taylor's mother loved the LORD. Every day, wherever she went, she was pray for her son's salvation. Once, she was invited to a place over 200 miles away from home. After the meal, she retreated into a room, shut the door, and prayed for her son as usual. She knelt down and pleaded with God to answer. She kept praying until God answered her. That afternoon, the Holy Spirit revealed that her son Hudson had repented of his sins. God answered her prayers! She thanked and praised God at once.

What happened from her son's perspective? For Hudson, it was a holiday and he was bored, with nothing special to do. He picked up a book in his father's study and started reading to pass the hours. He skipped through anything that touched on religious matters. Suddenly, something caught his eye: the words "*It is finished*". To his surprise, Hudson felt stirred, wondering aloud, "What was finished?" Then, he continued talking to himself, "He fulfilled the perfect salvation. He paid the price for our sins, not only ours but also for the sins of every person on earth. Since it is finished, then what do I have left to do?" Right at that moment, the Holy Spirit shone light on his heart. Moved by the Spirit, Hudson knelt down and received the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

That was more to the story. While Mrs. Taylor earnestly prayed for her son's salvation, Hudson's older sister was also battling in prayer for him. One day, he accidentally picked up a notebook mistaking it for his own. It was his sister's diary, where she described her conviction to pray for Hudson until he gave his life to Christ. Then, the date of the entry caught his eye. Exactly one month after his sister started praying for his salvation, Hudson was born again! What an example of earnest prayer that powerfully transformed another person's life.

3. Obedience (Luke 22:42)

Jesus prayed in this way, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (verse 42) Putting together the accounts from all four gospels, we witness Jesus praying this again and again for three times. The intensity of the spiritual battle facing Jesus was unimaginable.

Jesus wished to be spared from "this cup". What was the cup? After Jesus was nailed to the cross, He cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) The Father hid His face from the Son, who bore the sins of the whole world. For eternity, the Father and Son are one. Yet, at this moment, Jesus is called to endure the torturing pain of separation from the Father, and Jesus was pleading to be spared from this cup.

We witness Jesus quickly surrendering in full obedience. It was for this very purpose that Jesus came into the world. The pivotal moment had arrived. He declared, "Yet not my will, but yours be done." (verse 36) The salvation of mankind awaited fulfillment through Christ's obedience. By one man's obedience, many are made righteous.

When Jesus surrendered His own will, an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened Him to walk the whole way to the cross. Jesus' obedience laid the groundwork for His resurrection, as He rises from the dead and overcomes the power of death. Through His victory, Jesus Christ now receives the highest glory. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him.

God's will may require much of us. What we need to do is surrender and obey, because God will take care of the rest. He will grant us strength to follow Him and share in His glory. Obedience is difficult to learn for we are self-centered by nature, desiring to have our own way. Once we are aware of how weak we really are and how powerful God is, then obedience comes naturally.

The first forty years in Moses' life showcased the peak of his strength. Having been raised in the palace and given the best education, Moses was full of himself. He was eager to save his people with his own strength. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and hid the dead body in the sand. When news of the murder came to light, Moses fled to escape the wrath of the Pharaoh. This was why Moses spent his next forty years in the wilderness taking care of sheep. During his exile, Moses recognized his weakness. When God's calling came to him, he pushed it away, insisting on his weakness. However, what God wanted Moses to learn was this: Yes, we cannot, but God can! When Moses eventually surrendered his own will and obeyed God, God's power was made manifest through his life.

As we learn the lesson of obedience, the most important step is to acknowledge that we cannot do it in our own strength, but all we need to do is simply respond to God's will. When that happens, God's power will be made perfect in our weakness, and all glory will be given to Him.

Chapter 11

The Eighth Practice: “Half Hour” Prayer

Read: Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

The Bible offers two specific “best practices” for practicing a life of prayer.

Best Practice 1: Keep watch for “an hour”.

Best Practice 2: Pray unceasingly.

The night before Jesus was nailed on the cross, His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Taking His three most trusted disciples Peter, James, and John along with Him, Jesus went to a place called Gethsemane to watch and pray.

After praying, Jesus returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for *one hour*?” he asked Peter (verse 40).

Jesus continued to teach his disciples, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. (verse 41a) He went on to explain that the reason why the men could not keep watch for an hour was this: “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (verse 41b)

To keep watch for “an hour” is to overcome our natural weakness as human and take up the discipline of unceasing prayer.

The Jews living in New Testament times divided each day into 12 “hours”. In other words, one hour in Jesus’ time is equivalent to two hours for us. Thus, when Jesus asked his disciples to “keep watch with him for an hour”, he meant two hours in our modern day.

The night before the arrest. Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow and fear about the impending trial and crucifixion. He needed prayers to strengthen His soul, so He brought the three disciples along and asked them to keep watch with him for two short hours in prayer. Yet the disciples fell short even at this important request.

In my own spiritual disciplines, it is a priority for me to spend two hours each day in prayer. At the beginning, it may feel like a struggle. What I encourage brothers and sisters to do is to set apart 30 minutes to pray every day and to go from there.

As part of our training on prayer, there is an activity called “three for two”.

“Three”: Start by praying for 30 minutes daily.

“Two”: Seek to spend 2 hours in prayer daily.

The training is aligned with Praying in Pairs toward Four Goals (PPFG). Two individuals pair up to become prayer partners, supporting each other in cultivating the habit of praying for at least 30 minutes day by day.

This is the guidance that I offer to brothers and sisters who are learning to watch and pray for an hour every day.

Chapter 12

The Ninth Practice: “Unceasing” Prayer

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Another best practice is to pray *unceasingly*, or *continually*.

From the Bible passage above, we can learn from three aspects:

1. Unceasing prayer is important.

*Rejoice always,
Pray continually,
Give thanks in all circumstances.*

Why are they important? Because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus! (verse 18b)

2. Unceasing prayer is doable.

Ephesians 6:18-19 offers a path of action: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Pray also for me...”

The guarantee for this to work is found in the words “pray in the Spirit”. Why are we able to pray *in* the Holy Spirit?

A) The Holy Spirit quickens us to pray.

Zechariah 12:10 declares, “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me...”

B) The Holy Spirit prepares us emotionally for prayer.

Romans 5:5 “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

Matthew 5:44 “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

C) The Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray.

Romans 8:26 “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

3. Unceasing prayer is beneficial.

A) It cultivates the life of an overcomer.

Philippians 4:6-7 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Psalms 16:8-9 “I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure.”

B) It brings about spiritual maturity.

Paul shared in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, “or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

In the Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus’ teaching on the parable of the persistent widow and the judge. “...to show them they should always pray and not give up... And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?” (Luke 18:1, 8)

Jesus taught us to always pray and mentioned that God was “putting them off”. When does God need to put us off? The correct interpretation: God waits for us to mature spiritually before giving us what we need. This is like wise parents who wait for the ripe moment to provide their children with what they need.

C) Unceasing prayer bears fruit.

Unceasing prayer helps us lead a life in Christ’s victory and fills us with peace, joy, and rest. Furthermore, unceasing prayer helps us mature and grow in humility and perseverance.

Rick Warren preached at length on how the goal of prayer is not to convince God to meet our requests. The goal is to transform us to be more like Jesus, including in our prayer lives.

Through prayer, Jesus was filled with the power, wisdom, and love of God. Through prayer, Jesus ultimately obeyed the will of the Father. Indeed, prayer is not about getting what we want. Rather, it is to foster our spiritual growth in the depth of our knowledge of Christ, experience of Him, and life in Him.

Rick Warren gives an example of a little child maturing through making requests of the father and gradually understanding the heart of the father through interaction. Likewise, it is through interacting with our Father in heaven through unceasing prayer that we mature spiritually.

Pastor Warren suggests five areas of note related to cultivating a habit of unceasing prayer:

Focus, No, Slow, Grow, and Go

1. *Focus*: When praying, we are to focus on God, instead of our challenges or ourselves. Why? Because in doing so, we can rest secure in the fullness of joy like David did (see Psalm 16:9,11) and be kept in the peace of God that transcends all understanding (see Philippians 4:6-7).
2. *No*: When our prayers are not answered, we learn that those things are not in the will of God.
3. *Slow*: When our prayers are not answered right away, we learn that God's time has not come and we need to wait.
4. *Grow*: In prayer, we continually discern the will of God and mature in our understanding of His heart.
5. *Go*: When our prayers are answered right away, we know that the prayer is in fitting with God's will and timing.

When we practice unceasing prayer, we get to experience all five areas, through which God shapes our spiritual lives. How amazing!

While being imprisoned, Paul wrote some of his most important spiritual work, the four prison epistles Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In these epistles, generations of Christ followers have been nourished by spiritual food, living water, and light for the soul.

Paul was able to accomplish this work because, while there were many things he could not do inside the prison, he was able to spend time on unceasing prayer! As a result, Paul's life was tightly intertwined with God spiritually, cognitively, and emotionally. Abiding in Christ, Paul transcended his chains— including the affliction and pain, helplessness, and loneliness as a prisoner— and offered this spiritual feast for generations of Christians to come. Through Paul's writing, our eyes are opened to the light of Christ's glory and wisdom, joy and love.

Chapter 13

12-Week Prayer Plan

The practice of prayer begins with our personal prayer lives. From there, prayer partners can join hands to exercise prayer life as a community. In this way, the heartbeat of prayer will continue to pulse through the whole body of Christ, generation after generation.

Prayer rallies typically last for a set number of days, as a focused yet encapsulated experience for the whole church family. However, these efforts mark only a beginning, at best. The crucial test is: what do our prayer lives look like *after* the excitement ends and the dust settles? Does transformation continue in the life of the individual and the church?

In this book, we offer a plan for practicing a life of prayer. The plan resets every three months, or 12 weeks. Each new cycle brings a longer prayer time. It is helpful both for individuals seeking to cultivate a deeper prayer life and for prayer partners desiring to journey together.

This plan follows the guidance in brother Andrew Murray (1828-1917)'s book *The Secret of Intercession*. Our goal is to complete all 31 sections in 11 weeks and end with a time of review in Week 12.

Scan this QR code to download the electronic version:



<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/65006920/the-secret-of-intercession-by-andrew-murray>

What to Do Next:

I. The Three Steps

First, make it your weekly goal to complete three days from *The Secret of Intercession*. Each day, commit the opening Scripture to heart and copy it to your journal from memory.

Second, list thirty families on your heart for whom you will commit to intercessory prayer. Search your heart for your friends, friends of your friends and neighbors, church brethren, and other groups that you may know.

In Weeks 1 to 5, spend 15 minutes every day to pray for these families. In Weeks 6 to 10, extend the duration to 20 minutes. In Weeks 10 to 12, further extend your prayer time to 30 minutes. As you cycle through the second, third, and fourth iterations of this exercise, you will find yourself spending more and more time interceding for others every day.

When interceding for your family and friends, focus on:

1. Salvation of the seekers
2. Strengthening of faith and love among believers

Third, in the first three weeks of each 3-month cycle, reach out to the 30 families on your prayer list whom you will be praying for by name daily. At the end of the prayer cycle, reach out again to see how they experienced the fruit of your prayers.

II. Homework

Keep a record of your prayer journey and the content of your prayers in a journal.

Example:

Week 1: Days 1 to 3

1. Write from memory: James 5:16, 2 Kings 6:17 & 20, Psalm 115:16
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 2: Days 4 to 6

1. Write from memory: Psalm 65:2, Isaiah 59:16, Hebrews 7:25
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 3: Days 7 to 9

1. Write from memory: Isaiah 62:6-7, Hebrews 5:7, John 16:24 & 26
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 4: Days 10 to 12

1. Write from memory: Galatians 4:6, Isaiah 53:12, Matthew 26:42
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 5: Days 13 to 15

1. Write from memory: Isaiah 62:6-7, Acts 1:14, Ephesians 3:14-16
2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:

Week 6: Days 16 to 18

1. Write from memory: Matthew 9:37-38, Ephesians 6:19, Colossians 4:3, 2 Thessalonians 3:1
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 7: Days 19 to 21

1. Write from memory: Ephesians 6:18, Acts 13:3, Colossians 4:2-3
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 8: Days 22 to 24

1. Write from memory: Ephesians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Luke 11:2
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 9: Days 25 to 27

1. Write from memory: Psalm 132:13-14, Psalm 37:4, Psalm 27:4
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
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Week 10: Days 28 to 29

1. Write from memory: Luke 18:7, Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 8:1
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 11: Days 30 to 31

1. Write from memory: Jeremiah 33:3, Revelations 8:3
 2. Reflections on this week's prayer journey:
-

Week 12

Journal your reflections and experiences of growth based on your prayer journey in the past three months.

III. Progress Tracker

Below is an example of how you can track your progress on this prayer journey.

Week	<i>The Secret of Intercession</i> by Andrew Murray	Scripture Memorization	Daily Time in Prayer
1	Days 1 to 3	Assignment 1: Write down the Bible verses in your journal from memory	15 minutes
2	Days 4 to 6		
3	Days 7 to 9		
4	Days 10 to 12		
5	Days 13 to 15		
6	Days 16 to 18		20 minutes
7	Days 19 to 21		
8	Days 22 to 24		
9	Days 25 to 27		
10	Days 28 to 29		30 minutes
11	Days 30 to 31		
12		Assignment 2: Write down your reflections on the 3-month prayer journey	

IV. Building Prayer Communities

1. Based on the needs of your group, adjust the duration of each cycle. For example, the 3-month cycle can be shortened or lengthened as needed.
2. Invite every group member to keep a journal as a simple record of prayer requests. This will become a testimony of God's work and glory.
3. The goal of this exercise is for every participant to develop the discipline of spending at least 30 minutes before the LORD in daily prayer and remain in deep intimacy with Him.
4. Pray with your prayer partner or group at least once a week.

Part Three

Passing On the Life of Prayer

How might this life of prayer be passed on to renew the whole church body? We must begin with the prayer lives of individuals. From the individuals, prayer groups will be formed and, in turn, lead to the transformation of the whole church body.

I describe this approach as “Praying in Pairs toward Four Goals” (PPFG): to *share life*, *encourage growth*, *impact others*, and *pass on* the life of prayer within a faith community in Christ.

Chapter 14 discusses the core elements of PPFG.

Chapters 15 to 18 describe in greater detail what it looks like to share life, encourage growth, impact others, and pass on the life of prayer.

Chapter 14

Praying in Pairs toward Four Goals (PPFG)

1. What is PPFG?

PPFG is a discipleship strategy at the United Prayer Training Center. Through PPFG, we seek to cultivate prayer partnerships of two or more people journeying toward four specific goals: *sharing life, encouraging growth, impacting others, and passing on the life of prayer in Christ.* The ultimate goal is to fan the flame of transformation throughout the entire church body.

The emphasis of PPFG is on process rather than results. We recognize that spiritual growth is a lifelong process that varies based on individual circumstances. In other words, training is never one-size-fits-all but tends to be experienced differently in approach, timing, and even content.

While examples are offered for your inspiration, I encourage seeking God's guidance to set the parameters most appropriate for you and your prayer partners. Consider the partnership between Paul and Barnabas (see 2 Timothy 1:3-7), which lasted at least twenty years. In contrast, Paul and Onesimus co-labored shoulder to shoulder only when they were both in the Roman prison. Note that PPFG can include more than two people. One example involves Paul and the elders in Ephesus, who supported and interceded for one another for many years (see Acts 20:31).

Elements of PPFG can be seen from the life of our LORD Jesus. He spent three full years to unite his twelve disciples in spiritual fellowship before commissioning them to preach the gospel. In turn, each disciple went on to form PPFG connections with other followers of Christ.

PPFG is the engine of small group ministry. When rooted in consistent prayer toward the four goals of sharing life, encouraging growth, impacting others, and passing on the life of prayer, a group is likely to flourish spiritually and witness breakthrough in ministry for the LORD.

2. Forming Prayer Partnerships

God delights in our drawing near to Him in prayer not only as an individual, but also as a team, as a family, as a church. Our Father delights in His children joining together in prayer to Him. This is the starting point of PPFG.

Consider God's Word in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."*

When our LORD Jesus taught people to pray, He often used the plural to depict more than one person praying together. For example, in John 14:13, "And I will do whatever you (plural) ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You (plural) may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

The Bible is filled with examples of people praying together toward the four goals:

Peter and John partnered in prayer. When God miraculously healed the man who was lame through Peter, the two disciples were going to the temple for prayer (see Acts 3:1-2, 6-7). Because of this, more than five thousand people repented and believed in Jesus.

Peter prayed with James and John as a group of three. Through prayer, they had deep fellowship and spiritual growth (see Luke 9:28). In particular, Peter's faith was strengthened when he witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. This spiritual experience impacted him greatly for the rest of his life (see 1 Peter 1:16), encouraging and strengthening Peter especially in the face of ministry challenges.

Daniel and his three friends prayed together as a group of four. Together, they experienced God raising them up from the depths of danger and destitution into places of peace and prosperity. In particular, when King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to kill all the wise men in Babylon because no one could interpret the king's forgotten dream, God answered the four friends' united prayers for mercy. In the response to God's deliverance, King Nebuchadnezzar elevated the four prayer warriors to positions of influence in Babylon (see Daniel 2:1-8, 13-19, 24, 48-49).

Finally, the book of Acts records the united prayers of five servants at the Antioch church led by Barnabas. In response, God granted them His vision for missions, prompting the spread of the gospel from Asia to Europe (see Acts 12:1-16).

All these examples converge on one picture: when Christ followers unite in prayer, the whole church is blessed. Imagine the great joy experienced by the church when, in response to their united prayers, an angel of the LORD delivered Peter from his prison chains (see Acts 12:1-16)!

When I look back on my daughter's experience of giving birth to her second child, I am filled with thanksgiving to the LORD. Her first child was delivered by C-section, so we were expecting the same arrangement for her second child. When the doctor advised against a second surgery, we looked to God for mercy. I invited prayer warriors around the world to intercede for my daughter. When both mother and baby came through safely, there was immeasurable joy! My daughter and her husband named their second child Abigail, which, in Hebrew, means *joy*.

The beauty of PPFG shines as the prayer action grows from two people to three, from three to four, then to five and even six, until the heart of discipleship saturates the whole church body.

At the Home of Christ Church in Newark (美國基督之家第六家), there is a prayer group of six that meets weekly on Tuesdays over the phone for an hour of intercession. Their commitment to sharing life, encouraging growth, impacting others, and passing on the life of prayer has brought God's blessing on many individuals and the whole church.

Every year, the United Prayer Training Center (美國基督之家聯合禱告訓練中心) gathers pastors and servants of God in the Bay Area together at the Fasting Prayer Mountain in Scotts Valley for a focused time of united prayer before the LORD. Every month, we continue to pray

over the phone and God has blessed His ministries. Furthermore, participants of this prayer meeting have matured into servants ready to pass on the life of prayer to others.

3. Mobilizing the Church

PPFG starts small, with just two people praying together. But as the prayer movement grows, the whole church is mobilized to fulfill the Great Commission by first kneeling before the LORD.

Both the Old and New Testaments emphasize God's temple as a house of prayer for the nations. In Isaiah 56:7, God declares, "These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." In Matthew 21:13, Jesus echoed, "It is written [that] my house will be called a house of prayer."

Have we seen this promise fulfilled? Absolutely. In fact, two such churches (houses of prayer for all nations) are described in the New Testament. In Acts, "they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." (1:14), "those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (2:41-42) Evidently, the believers in Jerusalem were joined together as a church in prayer before and after the spread of the gospel.

Shortly afterwards, two apostles were arrested and put into prison. "On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them."...After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." (Acts 4:23-24, 31)

Later, Peter was arrested again. The night before Peter's trial and likely execution, the whole church joined in prayer for his release. "After arresting him, [Herod] put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." (Acts 12:4-5)

What happened next? God performed a miracle, sending an angel to rescue Peter. After being miraculously delivered, Peter "...he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying." (12:12) Not only was the church in Jerusalem a house of prayer, so was the church in Antioch! Here, we can find clues to how God mobilizes a church into a house of prayer (see Acts 1-3):

1. Interaction with God
2. Interaction with people
3. The church in action
4. Stay in action
5. God-fueled action

6. Glory to God

First, interaction with God. We talk about the need for dreams and visions, but all these have to originate from God! The church in Antioch had a vision for missions. But it was God who granted the vision while the church leaders were fasting and praying. Paul, too, had a vision for missions. But it was our resurrected LORD who opened Paul's eyes to see and have the vision spoken to him. "Interaction with God" means to be in communication with God. In other words, through prayer, the word of God, and confirmation from the environment, we can seek clarity from God about the dream and vision He has for us—the good works that God has prepared for us to do, instead of what we want to accomplish for ourselves.

Second, interaction with people. Dreams and visions coming to an individual must be shared with key co-laborers and the core team so that God's direction can be discerned together. For example, the vision for missions probably did not dawn on all five church leaders in Antioch at the same time. Instead, the vision was likely seeded first in the hearts of a few individuals before being shared with the team for discernment. Similarly, Paul's missional vision awaited affirmation from co-laborers before he could go forth with their blessings (see Acts 20:4-6).

Third, the church in action. The vision, revealed by God and then affirmed by core leaders, is now brought to the whole congregation. Time is taken to share the vision, to mobilize God's people, and to seek support in order to accomplish the will of God.

Fourth, to stay in action. Even after giving the blessing, the congregation must continue to be engaged in the vision and mobilized to make it happen until God's will is fulfilled.

Fifth, God-fueled action. Until the vision turns into reality, we pray continually, seek God for strength and wisdom, and nurture wholehearted engagement among the entire congregation.

Finally, we give glory to God as the vision becomes reality. The whole church now bears witness to how it is not man, but God, who accomplishes His own ministry. We share in the joy and glory of co-laboring with our glorious God.

Of the six principles of mobilization, the middle three are the most critical: the church in action, staying in action, and God-fueled action. Clearly, the vision for missions (both at the church in Antioch and in Paul's heart) came to fruition through the support of the whole church. It also took a long time—15 years. Across a span of years, there were bound to be obstacles and difficulties. Only with God's help can we accomplish His vision.

At least four times on his missionary trips, Paul encountered discouragement, dangers, and was distressed far beyond his ability to endure. But the angel of the LORD appeared to Paul (see Acts 18:9-11, 23:11; 27:22-26; 2 Timothy 4:17) to strengthen and encourage him to keep going.

The churches in Jerusalem and Antioch were rooted in prayer because their spiritual leaders were prayerful people. When they received visions from God in prayer, they passed on the vision to the church, impacting the lives of the brethren. Both churches were made up of small groups that

committed to the six principles outlined above and witnessed the whole church mobilized to participate in the missional vision.

Therefore, to see our church communities remain rooted in prayer, we must commit to the six principles over a long period of time. But take heart! As we persevere and trust in God (from whom this vision flows), we will see the vision transformed into reality: our church will become a church of prayer, just like the early churches in Jerusalem and Antioch in the apostles' day.

4. Implementing PPF: an example

The following example is prepared by sister Xiao Jun Wang to illustrate how PPF—praying in pairs toward four goals—can be implemented in your church context from A to Z.

- A) Curriculum: the contents of this book.
- B) Audience: All born-again followers of Jesus with a burden for prayer and the willingness to cultivate the discipline of prayer.
- C) Timeline: Weekly* 2-hour sessions for three to six months. *meeting interval is flexible depending on the situation of each group
- D) Purpose:
 - a. Grasp the foundational Biblical teaching about prayer.
 - b. Teach and practice the life of prayer.
 - c. Pray for at least 30 minutes daily for transformation and renewal in one's prayer life.
 - d. Journey with God in a deeper, more authentic way through an elevated prayer life.
- E) Practice Goals:
 - a. Devote at least 30 minutes to prayer daily and make prayer an everyday habit. Develop an intimate relationship with God. Enjoy prayer that flows from Christ abiding in me and I in Christ. Be completely vulnerable and open your heart to God.
 - b. Prayer requires sacrifice. It takes significant time to cultivate a prayer life that honors the truth of "my beloved being mine and I being his". One must stay committed to guarding quiet time, gathering prayer requests, and entering a deeper, more authentic place of prayer. Doing so will spur spiritual growth in faith, steadfastness, and rootedness in a prayer warrior wanting to wait, trust, and give thanks in all circumstances.
 - c. Discipline in prayer broadens one's vision and territory. No longer will we be content in praying for our small lives and limited spheres. Prepare a prayer journal for noting down prayer requests and the names of individuals needing prayer. These notes help you become a more faithful intercessor who prays continually.
 - d. Never stop practicing this life of prayer. Keep being renewed and growing. Pray for others at prayer meetings, public contexts, over the phone, and face-to-face

encounters. Set your heart on being a prayer warrior. Do not settle for a muted existence as a child of God.

- e. Be watchful and nurture a discerning spirit by staying close to God. Intercede for kingdom matters, for the Church, for brothers and sisters in Christ. Fight a good fight for the LORD in this spiritual battle.
- f. Pray and ask God to raise up prayer partners for mutual encouragement, love, and accountability. When we help one another, we also help ourselves grow in godliness, which is pleasing to our LORD.

Chapter 15

The Four Goals of PPF: (1) Sharing Life

Read: 2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Read: 1 Samuel 18; 19:4-7; 20:4, 13-16

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well.

When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had departed from Saul. So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him. When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the Lord." For Saul said to himself, "I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!"

But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my family or my clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?" So when the time came for Merab, Saul's daughter, to be given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah.

Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. "I will give her to him," he thought, "so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." So Saul said to David, "Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law."

Then Saul ordered his attendants: "Speak to David privately and say, 'Look, the king likes you, and his attendants all love you; now become his son-in-law.'"

They repeated these words to David. But David said, "Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known."

When Saul's servants told him what David had said, Saul replied, "Say to David, 'The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.'" Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.

When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king's son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed, David took his men with him and went out and killed two hundred Philistines and brought back their foreskins. They counted out the full number to the king so that David might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.

When Saul realized that the Lord was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days. The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known.

Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, saying, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"

Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death." So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you... But if my father intends to harm you, may the Lord deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unflinching kindness like the Lord's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord call David’s enemies to account.”

Sharing life is exemplified by Jesus, who poured out his own life for us to receive life and spiritual blessing. In turn, we are called to share life to help others live and grow and become useful in our Master’s hand.

The excerpts from the first book of Samuel relive Israel’s victory over the Philistines after David killed Goliath. Then, David was brought by Abner, commander of the army before King Saul and his son Jonathan.

From the first three verses in 1 Samuel 18, we can see the love that Jonathan had for David. Only *true love* can free a person to share their lives with someone else. Moved by love, parents pour out all that they have for their children. Let us learn how to share life with others from the example of Jonathan.

1. A Giving Heart (see 1 Samuel 18:4)

On their first meeting, Jonathan took off his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and belt and gave them all to David. By giving away his prized weapons, Jonathan shared his honor as a prince with David. Jonathan demonstrated an extent of *giving* that made David feel deeply valued.

In contrast, David was seldom valued by his own family. When Samuel visited the house of his father Jesse, David was sent away to the wilderness to keep watch over the flock, while his six older brothers were brought before the prophet. The brothers themselves looked down on David. When David offered to fight Goliath, the brothers retorted in anger and spite. Growing up in this environment, David must have felt comforted to be seen by Jonathan as precious. Jonathan’s giving heart and actions laid a strong foundation for his lifelong friendship with David.

Likewise, when a prayer group is made up of people with generous, giving hearts committed to loving one another, it is bound to grow strong and united. This picture reminds me of a prayer group (named *Good Friends*) at my church that truly flourished. The key appeared to be the generosity with which the leaders opened their home and their lives with brothers and sisters. In this environment, love and joy multiplied and the group grew in size and deepened in bonding.

2. A Protective Presence (see 1 Samuel 19:4-7)

Jonathan spoke in defense of David and persuaded King Saul, his father, to spare his beloved friend from harm. Convinced by Jonathan’s pledge, David returned to his position as captain of the bodyguard for the king.

Words are powerful. As described in Proverbs 18:21, “The tongue has the power of life and death.” A person, even empires, can be built up or destroyed by words. Since the fall of our ancestors Adam and Eve into sin, love and trust no longer reigned in human relationships. Not

only are we too hardened to speak kindly on behalf of others, we are prone to criticizing, complaining, and judging our fellow human beings.

How might we defend and build up other people with our words? First, we can actively recognize other people's strengths and gifts, instead of being hung up on their weaknesses. When we start seeing people in a positive light, words of blessing will naturally flow out of our hearts and mouths.

One of God's servants in Taiwan, Bishop Shih-Yuan Kou, was known for teaching four principles:

Number 1: Appreciate the strengths of others.

Number 2: Be gracious with the weaknesses of others.

Number 3: Call to mind the goodness of others.

Number 4: Carry the burdens of others.

A person who chooses to do all four will naturally speak for the defense and benefit of others. When a prayer group is filled with such people, there will be unity, as members become tightly bound in love.

3. An Equipping Spirit

Not only did Jonathan help David flee from danger, but he also helped David fulfill his dream of becoming Israel's next king. He affirmed David's qualities for kingship, and he understood that God had anointed David to become the king of Israel. With this discernment, Jonathan did everything he could to protect David from his father Saul's murderous attempts. How generous and righteous Jonathan's heart was!

In the same way, through sharing our lives, we help brothers and sisters fulfill their calling in God's kingdom. From Ephesians 4:11-12, we learn that God sent His servants to the Church "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry" (4:12). The whole body of Christ is called to equip one another for God's kingdom.

I thank God for surrounding me with many 'Jonathan's along my spiritual and ministry journey. These generous individuals shared their lives with me, protected me, and helped me discern and fulfill God's calling. Our churches need more 'Jonathan's to help followers of Jesus become useful instruments in God's hands.

People who give of themselves will themselves be blessed by the grace of God. In our example, Jonathan gave this life to protect his friend David. Later, God used David to protect and bless Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth. Not only was Mephibosheth invited to eat at the king's table all of his days, but he was given back all the possessions and riches of the late king Saul.

Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you." (Luke 6:38) When one gives to the poor and those who cannot repay us, Jesus said this person "will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:13-14)

People who give generously tend to lead vibrant lives, bringing to mind the Sea of Galilee. In contrast, people who keep things to themselves are stagnant like the Dead Sea, always receiving but never sharing.

Finally, let us ponder on an important question: How might you and I become more like Jonathan? What is the secret to his generosity?

Rethink the situation: Jonathan was the next in line for the throne. But it was Saul, not Jonathan, who got overcome by jealousy. Intriguingly, the same praise (“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.”) that precipitated Saul’s anger did not affect Jonathan. Instead, the words further affirmed Jonathan’s conviction to help David rise to the throne. Wherein lies the secret?

Read 1 Samuel 20:13-16 closely. In the short span of four verses, the word **the LORD** appears five times. Frequently, Jonathan spoke of the LORD, including in his conversations with David. God was continually on his mind and heart. In other words, Jonathan truly saw God as sovereign over his life. By seeking God’s heart, Jonathan discerned the fates of David, his father, and even himself. The same spiritual discernment was shown by how Jonathan understood God’s will. In particular, it was God’s will for David to rule Israel and lead the people to worship and please God. At the same time, Jonathan understood why God departed from his father. As for Jonathan, he chose to walk in the will of the LORD.

Now we realize why Jonathan decided to offer his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and belt to David at their very first meeting. He was demonstrating his conviction to offer David his princely status and position as the heir to the throne of Israel. From a human perspective, Jonathan’s actions make no sense. No matter how well David performed as a warrior, it was an entirely different and grave responsibility to be the king of Israel. Jonathan’s actions reflected the depth of his spiritual discernment originating from his fear of God.

Are we willing to follow Jonathan’s example and nurture true spiritual discernment? May God mature us spiritually, move us to share our lives with others, and use us to minister for deeper and more lasting impact.

Chapter 16

The Four Goals of PPF: (2) Encouraging Growth

Read: 2 Timothy 4:11

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

Encouragement is a win-win spiritual ministry. It is fulfilling to be used by God to encourage others, and growth happens for the person giving encouragement, too.

Encouraging others is the second of the four goals of PPF, which will be described in detail later in the book. In this chapter, we will examine the journey of Mark to learn what the ministry of encouragement might look like. These are the Bible passages that describe the life and times of Mark: Luke 10:1; Mark 14:51-52; Acts 1:13, 12:12, 12:25, 13:1-5, 13:13, 15:36-40; 1 Peter 5:13; 2 Timothy 4:11 and Colossians 4:10.

There are four stages in the life of Mark:

1. The Youthful Years

Mark was born in a wealthy family. His father passed away early. His mother, Mary (see Acts 12:12), had a house in Jerusalem. The disciples often gathered in this house for prayer.

It is widely believed that Mark was one of the seventy disciples whom the LORD Jesus sent to preach the kingdom of God. Also, Mark was likely the person who opened his home for the disciples to prepare the Passover meal for Jesus.

As speculation has it: on the night Jesus was betrayed, Mark could not fall asleep. It was so hot and humid that he threw a linen cloth around his body and went outside. Running past the city walls, Mark arrived at the brook Kidron and went into the Garden of Gethsemane. There, he heard Jesus praying intensely to the Father. Soon afterwards, Roman soldiers arrived with Judas to arrest Jesus. At that moment, a young man was spotted; but as the soldiers seized him, the young man abandoned the linen cloth and fled naked. Many Bible scholars believe that this young man recorded in the Gospel of Mark was Mark himself (see 14:51-52).

After resurrecting from the dead, Jesus appeared to the disciples, who gathered at Mark's house frequently to pray. Mark grew up around these spiritual mentors and role models in an atmosphere of spiritual fervor. Furthermore, his cousin Barnabas, a well-respected apostle of Jesus, often brought Mark along when serving in ministry.

2. Mark Failed

When Paul and Barnabas embarked on their first missionary journey, Mark joined them as an assistant. But upon arriving in Perga in Pamphylia (with more than two thirds of the journey left to be traversed), Mark left them to return to Jerusalem.

Speculations abound for Mark's premature departure. The most likely reasons have to do with his protected upbringing; he simply could not handle the discomfort. Malaria was rampant in Perga, and mosquitoes were everywhere. Were they to continue on to Pisidian Antioch, which was 4000 feet above sea level, they would have to climb the dangerous road over the Taurus Mountains, where robbers (and more mosquitoes) were known to frequent. Given the threatening outlook, chances were that Mark left Barnabas and Paul out of his aversion to danger and discomfort.

Whatever the reason was for Mark's desertion, he had failed the mission. Back in Jerusalem, facing fellow believers who had all heard about the incident, Mark's feelings of defeat and humiliation were not difficult to imagine.

3. The Comeback

When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey to Antioch, they wanted to go a second time. In addition to visiting the believers and churches planted on their first journey, they were eager to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to more places. Paul thought it was unwise to take someone with a poor track record of abandoning the mission. Barnabas, however, was determined to take Mark along. Their disagreement got so sharp that they even parted ways. Paul chose Silas to go with him; Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus.

So, who was right, Paul or Barnabas? It was likely for each side to be correct in some ways and wrong in others. However, when two parties in an argument insist on their own views, they miss out on benefiting from new ways of looking at the situation.

From a ministry standpoint, Paul saw Mark as a risk and threat to the success of the mission. From a relational standpoint, Barnabas did not want to further discourage this young servant and leave him in a place of defeat and humiliation. From a third standpoint, Paul and Mark both erred by being adamant and refusing to work through their disagreement peacefully.

In the end, Paul took Silas and successfully completed the second missionary trip. Barnabas took Mark and also completed their missionary trip across a smaller territory. Although the Bible does not further depict Barnabas' mission and the outcomes, we know for a fact that Mark was encouraged and lifted up by Barnabas.

Later in life, Mark received encouragement from also Peter, who affectionately called him his "son" (see 1 Peter 5:13). Mark served as a faithful helper for Peter as Peter traveled through Rome, Judah, and Asia Minor to preach the word of God.

4. Outstanding Accomplishments

After Mark's comeback, he was known for three key accomplishments:

First, in terms of ministry, Mark was eventually reaffirmed by the apostle Paul. In his final season inside the Roman prison, Paul asked for Mark, who became his assistant. Mark's great accomplishment was his example of generously offering help to someone who once rejected him. How did he do it— to overcome the pain of being rejected? It is only possible for someone who longs for God's kingdom with a pure, open heart. Mark saw that it was God's will to use Paul and by helping Paul he was participating in God's kingdom work. Furthermore, Mark must have deeply experienced Christ's love on the cross. Because of Jesus, Mark and Paul were intimately part of one family in Christ. Because they were family, it was possible to show forgiveness and grace to one another. After all, we cannot (and would not desire to) bring our grudges into heaven.

Second, in terms of gifting, Mark turned out to be a creative soul. When he served with Peter, he heard Peter preach and share extensively about the life of Jesus Christ. In turn, Mark wrote down what he heard in words, and this became the first completed gospel account: the gospel according to Mark (or, in fact, according to Peter). With a concise narrative style, the gospel of Mark was used as an authoritative blueprint for the gospels of Luke and Matthew that followed.

Third, in terms of pioneering work, historical research suggests that Mark later brought his written scrolls to Africa, where he served as the very first missionary of Christ on this vast continent. It is believed that it was Mark who planted the first church in the great city of Alexandria!

However, before Mark could mature into a renowned follower of Jesus, servant of God, and role model for the Church, he had to rise up from his failures. This was made possible by the encouragement received first from Barnabas and then from Peter.

In our lives, we are bound to face failures and need the help of others to stand up once again. Who is my Barnabas? Am I willing to look for the Barnabas in my life? Meanwhile, am I willing to be Barnabas for someone? Are we willing to be Mark for someone? On our spiritual journeys, there will be times when we are called to be Mark and other times when we are called to be Barnabas.

As for Paul, who served with boldness and faithfulness all of his life. Yet, when he ran the the final part of his race inside the Roman prison, he requested the help of Mark. How poignant it was for Mark to come full circle and minister to Paul by being his Barnabas.

God saved us and delivered us into a special team, that is, the church. God's desire is for us to learn to encourage one another within our churches and step into the lived experiences of Barnabas and Mark. In this way, God's glory is revealed among us as we love one another. Those who witness this love will know that we are followers of Christ.

To encourage the growth of others is not only a win-win spiritual ministry, but also reaping a harvest for the LORD. In our prayer groups, we strive for deeper spiritual bonding through encouraging growth in one another.

Chapter 17

The Four Goals of PPF: (3) Impacting Others

Read: Acts 4:36-37, 11:24

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the LORD.

Thirty years ago, my Bible teacher said something that impressed deeply on my heart, “You truly love someone when you are committed to draw out the best in that person.”

The Bible has a similar teaching, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Philippians 2:3 NKJV) It is not difficult to identify places where *others* are *better* than ourselves. What we are called to do is to focus on those places and help others grow and fulfill their giftings. This is what it looks like to impact the lives of others.

God saved us and granted us new lives through and in Christ— a spiritual life that is good and abundant. This new life can be considered in character and in gifting. Growth in both areas helps us mature and ready for our LORD’s use to impact the lives of others.

In the opening Bible passages, we are introduced to Barnabas, a spiritually mature person, a “good man” who offered his all to God and was filled with the Holy Spirit and faith. He was impactful and a great number of people were brought to the LORD because of Barnabas. Only a spiritually mature person can influence others in such a way.

Let us spend some time to observe Barnabas’ impact on the life of Paul and role in helping Paul be a useful instrument for God. In particular, we can learn from three central ways in which Barnabas impacted Paul:

1. Barnabas trusted Paul (see Acts 9:26-29)

Barnabas received Paul with trust and acceptance. Not long ago, Paul, then named Saul, was still persecuting the church and putting the followers of Jesus to death. None of the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem dared to believe in Saul, and they all doubted the authenticity of his conversion. Surprisingly, Barnabas was confident about the sincerity of Paul’s repentance before God. But what formed the basis for his trust?

First, Barnabas had complete trust in God. A person with complete trust in God has no fear of man, for fear comes from insecurity. When we are secure in God, we do not need to be afraid of others. We are certain that nothing can happen to us without the permission of God.

Second, Barnabas was not threatened by what Paul had done in the past and knew that Paul would undergo transformation, for “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) Before knowing Jesus, we were enslaved by our sinful nature and upbringing. After entrusting our lives to Jesus, we are a new creation, transformed by God’s grace, power, and blessings. Holding firmly to this truth, Barnabas was able to receive Paul with trust and acceptance.

When I was a graduate student in the United States, I met a young fellow from Hong Kong pursuing his undergraduate degree at the same university. He claimed to be a Christian, but he did not look or sound like one. On the contrary, he seemed like a hippie, with his long hair and unruly speech. When he was about to graduate, people felt hesitant about referring him to job opportunities.

Thanks be to God, who had the two of us live in the same off-campus residence. There, I had the chance to hear this young man share more about his unconventional upbringing. In a nutshell, his mother was an impressive mahjong player, ranking third in Hong Kong. At home, he grew up listening to his mother’s cursing and foul language on the phone. Later, he was on the verge of joining the Hong Kong triad but jumped ship just in time, “fleeing” Hong Kong to continue his studies in the United States.

The same young man was now a follower of Jesus with a consistent church life and a passion to share about God’s work on him. Of course, time was needed for his lifestyle and behavior to change and conform to what one might expect of a Christian.

I thank our LORD for how He guided and blessed this brother in Christ. Years later, he sent me a marriage announcement, so I had the chance to attend his wedding with my wife. How blessed it was to be introduced to his beautiful wife, to meet the three pastors in attendance who mentored the bride as godfather, and to hear about my friend’s success as an entrepreneur. God’s work on this brother was clear to see, even though it was not as evident early in his spiritual journey. But God knows.

Trust is the prerequisite to impacting the lives of others. With trust, there is hope. We need to believe that everyone has the potential for growth and breakthrough. Everyone means people around you but also, yourself. One day, you will be surprised to see how much you, too, have grown spiritually.

According to a Chinese idiom, “one’s character at age three predicts one’s character at age eighty”. I beg to differ. Rather than reading a person’s character based on a single time point, let us consider the fuller story line. Rather than believing, “Today a failure, forever a failure”, let us recognize and reaffirm, “People can change. Today’s failure is tomorrow’s success.” The grace of God, plus time, allows a person to slowly grow toward maturity.

Two recent events from my life attest to these convictions. Earlier, I was in Beijing to lead two seminars on “How to Study the Bible”, a culmination of my over thirty years of learning and experience. In fact, I began getting invited to lead this seminar more than thirty years ago! But

each time, I said no. In those days, I lacked the confidence to fulfill this role, but now I am ready to serve.

Another example is a message I preached to my co-laborers and brethren in the East Bay. I had only 15 minutes to exhort my brothers and sisters on a critical theme: “Pray for Revival, Impact the Times”. Even though I had started preparing two months ahead and even reached out to two professors and scholars for ideas, I felt stuck. Three days before the event, God enlightened my mind and provided a clear way forward. Everyone felt encouraged by the message.

The first “success” was the fruit of over thirty years of experience. The second “success” was entirely the power of God. Let us have faith and be expectant that we can impact one another and multiply growth. In this way, it becomes easier to trust in others.

2. Barnabas valued Paul (see Acts 11:25-26)

Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Paul. Then, they served shoulder to shoulder and built up the church in Antioch. This church was new and attracted a great number of Gentile believers. Why didn't Barnabas seek the help of Peter or the other apostles? Because Barnabas knew that Paul was gifted in ministry and set apart by God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Barnabas valued Paul's vision and ability (or, gifts), and “he found him” (verse 26). Behind these three small words was an arduous search process. Seven or eight years had passed since the two men last met, so finding Paul was easier said than done. When we value our coworkers, we must persist in “finding” them for the purpose of prospering God's ministry.

Paul finally arrived in Antioch and embarked on a beautiful partnership with Barnabas. Together, they taught great numbers of people for a whole year. The believers in Antioch were so greatly transformed that, in that very place, the disciples of Christ were first called “Christians”, which translates literally as “little Christ”. To be like Christ is a noble thing and the fruit of Paul and Barnabas' united partnership.

“Finding” our co-laborers requires patience and wisdom. One famous illustration is “Three Visits to the Thatched Cottage” (San1 Gu4 Mao2 Lu2)— an account from ancient Chinese history. The story describes the sincere persistence of Liu Bei— a small but humane warlord— who showed great persistence in finding and inviting the famous statesman and strategist, Zhuge Liang, to be the counsel for his army.

Our dearly beloved Rev. Paul Shen is now at home with the LORD. In his last ten years on earth, he poured out everything he had to equip God's servants in hermeneutics and expository preaching. He taught ten seminar series (with six in the U.S.) on Biblical hermeneutics. But none of this would have been possible if Rev. Timothy Lin had not first “found” him. It all started when Rev. Lin reached out to Rev. Shen, inviting him teach hermeneutics at the China Evangelical Seminary in Taiwan. Out of humility, Rev. Shen did not accept this invitation and stood firm for some time, until Rev. Lin pointed out, “Brother Shen, do you keep your gifts to yourself all your life until the day you're laid inside a coffin?” This wake-up call prompted Rev. Shen to finally take up the teaching position and offer himself to the LORD. The rest is history.

As a pastor, I have the honor of doing the same for my brothers and sisters in Christ: to identify their gifts and encourage them to offer their gifts to God, so that other people can be impacted and blessed.

3. Barnabas let Paul take the lead (see Acts 13:1-2, 15:2)

To enable others to fulfill their potential, we have to let them take the lead. The Scriptures above show a clear reversal in spiritual leadership occurring at the Antioch church. Specifically, Acts 13:1-2 reads “Barnabas and Paul” whereas Acts 15:2 reads “Paul and Barnabas”. The most likely explanation for this change is: Barnabas invited Paul to take the lead.

It was true that Paul was more gifted than Barnabas. Though Paul arrived in Antioch after Barnabas did, he hit the ground running and ministered faithfully. So, Barnabas let Paul take the lead. In contrast, when everyone insists on being first, who would accept the second place? In the Chinese classic “Romance of the Three Kingdoms”, right before Zhou Yu breathed his last, he lamented, “O God, since you made Zhou Yu, why did you also create Zhuge Liang (his rival who kept outsmarting him)?”

Being human, we never like to admit defeat. For example, managers tend to resent employees who eclipse him or her in achievement. However, if we do not step aside for people who are more talented, there will be two consequences:

1. Conflict brews.
2. People miss out on opportunities to use their talents for positive impact.

Here, I want to briefly share my experience at Home of Christ Church in Newark (HOC6) in the past 10+ years. God blessed our church with a Barnabas. His name is Elder Zhang, a good man who impacted the lives of many, including mine. Many years ago, I reached out to him and his wife, inviting them to help serve at HOC6 with us. After several invitations, they finally agreed.

We thank God for blessing and building up HOC6 over the years. One day, I reached out again to Elder Zhang, inviting him to lead our church, with me as his assistant. But he refused. Instead, he encouraged me to lead, with him as my assistant. I was greatly humbled: Elder Zhang was more well-rounded in his gifting, yet still he let me lead. He even mentored and nurtured me as I learned to take on the role of “Paul”. I cannot help but overflow with gratitude for this brother.

As a blessing for my 60-year-old birthday, Elder Zhang surprised me with a DVD containing precious, never-before-seen moments from my ministry journey. I felt so touched. HOC6 is known for being a warm and tightknit community in which each person is enabled to live out his or her unique calling from God. Central to this quality is our culture of humble generosity, in which people are given a chance to take the lead in their areas of gifting.

Chapter 18

The Four Goals of PPF: (4) Passing On the Life of Prayer

Read: 2 Timothy 1:3-7, 2:1-2

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. Therefore, I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The climax of PPF is found in *passing on the life of prayer*. Think about passing on and picking up a baton; or transferring and taking up a vision. The gospel that we preach, the spiritual lives that we lead, and the ministry in which we get to partake are never meant to be solo ventures. Instead, they need to be passed on to others until the day of Christ's return.

The topic of "*passing on*" triggers concern in churches today. We hear pastors lamenting over the struggle to find new pastors to carry on the good work, new servants to bring ministries into the next season, and new generations to inherit the faith for generations to come.

At the same time, there are some successful examples. One of them is Hudson Taylor, whose descendants (into the fifth generation and counting) have served as missionaries among the Chinese. Another example is Bishop Shih-Yuan Kou. All of his four sons are giving their lives as full-time ministers and coworkers. Let us examine the Bible for guidance on *passing on the life of prayer* faithfully and fruitfully.

1. Caring about others (2 Timothy 1:3-4)

Paul cared for Timothy deeply. We can see this in two ways.

First, Paul remembered Timothy in prayer *without ceasing*. Night and day, Paul was praying for Timothy to God. Like Jesus praying for Peter, Paul asked God to watch over Timothy's spiritual life and keep his faith from failing (see Luke 22:31-32). Our LORD Jesus prayed without ceasing for his disciples. Likewise, the first thing we need to do for our coworkers is to pray for each of them, without ceasing.

Second, Paul longed to be with Timothy. Although there was a time when Paul and Timothy were ministering the gospel in separate cities, it was not Paul's desire to be apart. As Paul wrote

in his letter, he greatly desired to see Timothy and described how a reunion would fill him with joy (2 Timothy 1:4).

This sense of longing was reciprocated. Timothy was likely one of the people in Ephesus who wept and grieved when Paul boarded the ship toward Jerusalem. When we lead coworkers, it is not enough to pray for them; we need to spend time and be with them. Why? Because ministry is less about delegating tasks or even teamwork, but more about passing on your life to impact the lives of others. Only by spending time together will our lives be passed on thoroughly for coworkers to observe and follow.

At seminary, I was always busy juggling the competing demands of ministry and study. As a result, I spent very little time at home. One day, my 7-year-old son asked me, “Daddy, what do you do for work?” I answered, “I’m a pastor.” My son said, “Daddy, I don’t want you to be a pastor.” Taken back, I asked, “Why do you say that?” (I was secretly hoping that my son would grow up to be a pastor.) With his usual innocence, he said, “Because I never get to see you!”

These words coming from my 7-year-old son hit me like a wake-up call. From that day onwards, I became intentional about spending time with my son, going camping and swimming in the summer, among many other activities. To this day, I continually seek quality time with my son. Although my son is not yet a pastor, he no longer abhors but appreciates that his father is one.

Discipleship training is core to the ministries of both Rev. Patrick So in Hong Kong and Rev. Ning-ya Yang in Taiwan. Both pastors spend quality time with their team, making it a priority to care for and pray for everyone serving with him. Rooted in authentic relationship with the pastor, each team is able to grasp and carry on the vision, lifestyle, and approach of the ministry. When we take time to care for our coworkers, our relationships deepen and life impact follows.

Once, I returned to Hong Kong to be with my mother when she underwent cataract surgery. Most of my time was spent with my her. We had almost every meal together. We followed the latest TV series together. My mother was so happy. When the time came for me to leave, my mother insisted on seeing me off at the airport. She had never done that before. Back in the U.S., I called my mother for a casual check-in, expecting to chit-chat about the new episodes of the drama. To my surprise, my mother got emotional and admitted how she struggled to accept that I was gone. For a couple of days, she literally felt like I was still by her side. My mother always loved me but never had she expressed her feelings so intensely. It was because I took so much time to be with her. When there is relational intimacy, life gets passed on effortlessly.

2. Understanding others (2 Timothy 1:5)

Paul gave thanks for the genuine faith that was in Timothy. This genuine faith was inherited from his mother Eunice who in turn received it from his grandmother Lois. I believe that Paul learned about this heritage of faith not only because Timothy told him, but also because Paul had a true desire to understand Timothy’s family background. Paul must have visited these precious sisters in Christ (especially if his grandmother Lois were still alive), who impacted Timothy so deeply. We can only lead others if we care enough to take time to understand them.

Paul did not stop at understanding Timothy in his strengths, such as his genuine faith. Paul also understood Timothy's places of struggle: his youth (see 1 Timothy 4:12), his timidity (see 2 Timothy 1:7), and his physical illnesses (see 1 Timothy 5:23). A complete understanding of our co-laborers includes the understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

A popular saying goes, "I know you love me, but you don't know who I am." Love without understanding is not true love. It is a one-sided, delusive kind of love at best.

The San Jose News Mercury once published a cover story about the touching reconciliation of a man with his estranged son. At the young age of 6, his son showed signs of prodigious talent, asking big questions about the universe and aspiring to build a spaceship. With excitement, the man laid out a road map for his son's success. Following this road map, his son would graduate from university at age 11, receive the Nobel prize at age 16, and have his name listed among the top geniuses around the world. Compelled by father's zealous "love", the boy had no choice but to work hard and follow the plan, which did not reflect an understanding of the boy's true needs. Still, the boy got accepted by a university at age 8 and graduated at age 11 as planned.

Sadly, by age 12, the boy buckled under the tremendous stress from his father's expectations. He wanted to quit the plan and even his family name. He sought help from law enforcement to be removed from his father. The young prodigy was adopted into foster care. Starting afresh from 7th grade, the boy finally had his childhood back. By then, he no longer liked studying. He spent all his time on having fun. His grades hovered around Cs and Ds. Everything he did was about redeeming lost time, especially the childhood was ripped from him. By the time the boy returned to university, he did not have much confidence left about life. When he turned 24, he found a tech job eventually after quite an ordeal. Years later, the father was diagnosed with cancer. At the brink of death, he was allowed to reunite with his son, and he asked his son for forgiveness. The remorseful father admitted that his forceful "love" had been one-sided, coming from his own agenda for his son to be successful. Yet, what this "love" ended up doing was to deny his son of many precious years of life and maturing.

In summary, to love others is to seek to understand them and consider their perspectives, instead of demanding compliance with our own points of view.

3. Encouraging others (see 2 Timothy 1:6)

What prompted Paul to encourage Timothy? Because of Timothy's fearful and timid spirit. After his mentor's imprisonment, Timothy started wavering in his resolve to testify for Jesus Christ (see 2 Timothy 1:8) "Therefore, I remind you" (1:6) This was Paul's encouragement to Timothy: *considering God's gift of genuine faith in Timothy, do not fear but stir up the gift of God that is in him.* The "gift" mentioned here refers to gifts of shepherding, teaching, and preaching from God, gifts that await fuller use by Timothy to help the body of Christ.

Children need encouragement. As a psychologist once observed, for every hurtful thing spoken to a child, it takes seven words of encouragement to bring healing. Adults, too, need encouragement. During one of my visits to Hong Kong, I met up with an old friend from my high school days. We had not seen each other for close to forty years. Back in the day, we served

the LORD together along with many other high school graduates. As a young man, my friend was extremely devoted to God. He attended seminary to train as a preacher. Afterwards, something happened, causing him to shrink away from God's calling. Twenty years passed before an older pastor's encouragement made him turn back to God, rest in His embrace, and serve Him once again. How important it is to "be strong" in spirit! As much as my friend loved the LORD, his spiritual struggles put his ministry life on hold for twenty years. Similarly, before Timothy's renewal in Christ, he even stopped using his gifts in ministry. In contrast, being strong in spirit, Paul praised the LORD and penned letters of encouragement even when he was in chains.

Life is about *being* more than it is about *doing*. With a strong *being*, we can flourish even when our days are filled with ministry. When we are merely *doing*, ministry becomes a set of tasks; and we soon buckle under the weight.

4. Entrusting to others (see 2 Timothy 2:1-2, 3:10-11)

What did Paul mean to *entrust* his teachings to others? It means to teach others what we have learned so that they, in turn, can pass on what they have learned to others. The word "entrust" (NIV: *commit*) can be understood from four different angles:

- i. God entrusting to Paul (not mentioned in this verse)
- ii. Paul entrusting to Timothy
- iii. Timothy entrusting to faithful men able to teach others
- iv. The faithful teachers entrusting to others

The act of *entrusting* involves passing something along from generation to generation, not unlike the torchbearers with the Olympic flame. What, then, are we called to pass along? What Paul taught Timothy was the faith passed down by the apostles (apostolic faith)—the foundation of what we continue to believe as followers of Christ today.

We are called to pass on God's truth clearly and completely to others. This includes the accurate exposition and application of God's Word. The most important reminder from Paul to Timothy was Jesus Christ's Great Commission: "...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:20)

How can a person fulfill the task of passing on God's truth?

First, one needs to teach others with *faithfulness*.

Second, one needs to be *able* to teach others.

What does *faithfulness* look like? It is to teach continually and consistently. What does it mean to be *able* to teach others? It is to be equipped and qualified to teach. Furthermore, when we pass on God's truth, we must serve not only with our words but also through our example. Not only are we to understand the truth, we must also live out the truth.

Paul was a faithful and able teacher of the Word because of his life example. Timothy, too, was a faithful and able teacher of the Word for he followed Paul's example and became an example for others (see 2 Timothy 3:11).

The Bible describes the life example of Paul in terms of nine areas:

1. Teaching
2. Way of life
3. Purpose
4. Faith
5. Patience
6. Love
7. Endurance
8. Persecutions
9. Suffering

Are we able to lead our co-laborers as well as Paul did? Probably not. Can we do the work of passing on? The answer is: Absolutely! By being strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ (see 2 Timothy 2:1).

God has already given His grace to us through spiritual gifts. God has also granted us His spiritual life so that we can manifest the virtues of God, such as love, faith, and patience. In other words, we have been equipped with all we need to pass on the truth and life of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, every Christian can pass on the life of Christ by being strengthened in Him to share the spiritual gifts and virtues granted to us. In the process, we make an impact on the lives of others and lead by example. God never asks us to do anything beyond what we are able. He has given us not only spiritual gifts and virtues, but also guidance on how to use them, in addition to the strength we need to fulfill the calling of passing on His life. Hallelujah!

Part Four: Testimony Sharing

*“You might have sent from heaven above
The Angelic hosts to tell the story,
but inside Your condescending love,
on men You have conferred the glory.”
Excerpt from the hymn “My Trust”*

This classic hymn has exhorted us to be strong and take heart as we respond to Christ’s calling to preach His gospel. The words remind us that nothing is impossible with God. Out of love, parents commit to provide their best to their children; no hardship can stop their outpoured love. In the eyes of their children, nothing is impossible for their parents. As part of a spiritual family in Christ, we, too, have come to know our God as true and omnipotent. Yet, God chose the path of condescending love as He entrusts the gospel to us, His children. Why? To invite His children into the glory of being ambassadors of the gospel.

Prayer is a vital part of the gospel mission. We must pray with vision, conviction, and sacrifice. The first three parts of the book offer a clear discussion. Part Four is a collection of testimonies that reveal the glory and great love of God. As we serve through prayer, the Holy Spirit guides us to be faithful with the gospel entrusted to us. In doing so, we witness God’s amazing ways, time and time again. All glory, honor, and praise to God alone, from now to forever more!

Testimony 1

Thomas Yu - “Praying is like breathing”

Some people have likened prayer to breathing. I find this analogy quite apt. In his book *“With Christ in the School of Prayer”*, Andrew Murray elaborates, *“With every breath we expel the impure air which would soon cause our death, and inhale again the fresh air to which we owe our life. So we give out from us, in confession the sins, in prayer the needs and the desires of our heart. And in drawing in our breath again, we inhale the fresh air of the promises, and the love, and the life of God in Christ.”* Recently, I revisited the prayer disciplines offered in HOC6 357 Training Web and found myself deeply blessed. In particular, I see the many ways in which prayer is vital to the Christian life just as breathing is vital to physical life.

1. The Infant’s First Breath— the First Prayer

The first thing that a newborn baby needs to do outside the mother’s womb is to breathe in the fresh air, already prepared by God. This first breath pronounces the birth of a new life!

With every new baby, a new soul arrives in the world. In addition to the gift of fresh air, God has prepared for each soul the grace of salvation in Christ. However, not every newborn is able to breathe instinctively. When this happens, the obstetrician firmly slaps the baby on the rear end. The baby starts crying and also begins to breathe. Isn’t this like us on the journey to being born again in Christ? Before we heard the gospel, our souls were asleep in sin. Like the obstetrician, God calls us to come to Him, “He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.” (Psalm 23:3)

Just like newborns taking their first breath, we utter our first prayer at the moment we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Through this prayer, we become connected to the “oxygen” in Christ, the source of our spiritual lives. From that point onward, prayer, like breathing, remains a vital part of our lives.

2. Reflexive breathing— Unceasing Prayer

All living creatures have a regulatory system that controls the breathing reflex. Even when we are unconscious in sleep, breathing continues to sustain our lives. Prayer is breathing for the soul. However, there is no prayer reflex and we typically do not pray outside our consciousness. Thus, we need to develop the habit, or discipline, of prayer.

Without prayer as a discipline and extended periods of conversing with God, we run out of strength in our souls, just as our bodies run out of strength when low on oxygen. God has prepared what we need. Just as we can’t stay for too long inside a sealed room and must open the windows for air, in the same way, we must open the windows of our soul to receive God’s blessings. When we do that, the words “rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances” can become a reality in our lives.

3. Deep Breathing— Daily 30-minute Prayer

While reflexive breathing sustains a person for regular activities and survival, proper breathing techniques elevate a person's performance. That is why athletes and singers engage in specific training on breathing technique. I once had a personal trainer at the gym. I remember how the trainer asked me to practice deep breathing during "weight-bearing" exercises toward the end of a session. Proper breathing techniques provide the fatigued body with extra power to go the next mile. Thus, deep breathing is crucial for building muscles and elevating our fitness levels.

Similarly, to elevate our spiritual lives, we must learn to pray in "deep breaths". The life of prayer begins when we join a spiritual family, but much of our prayers are mere habits lacking in depth. For example, when we say grace for a meal, do we consider what we are praying for, or are we just repeating empty words? Jesus at Gethsemane reprimanded His disciples for not being able to "keep watch" in prayer (Mark 14:37). This training on prayer disciplines can help us pray in "deep breaths". As we pray for 30 minutes daily to confess and repent over everything that we have sinned against God, it is like a deep exhalation. When we entrust each difficulty and dream to God and wait upon His will, it is like a huge inhalation. Such moments of deeper prayer renew my heart with great joy and faith.

4. Elevating Spiritual Fitness— Intercession

Workers who sit in the office all day soon start declining in fitness. Medical professionals might suggest aerobic exercises to boost one's breathing rates and lung capacity for better fitness. It is the same with our prayer lives. Affliction turns our eyes onto Jesus, and we pray with greater fervor. In contrast, days of ease and affluence can leave us weak and lazy in prayer.

When our prayer lives become weak, we must train our prayer muscles in the same way that we train our physical muscles. One excellent workout is intercession, to pray for others. Intercession requires us to confront and overcome two common barriers in prayer.

The first barrier is doubt about the power of prayer. We may not be sure if God will answer our prayers. For example, when we pray for someone who is sick, we might wonder: *is God going to answer my prayer? Do I have the gift of healing prayer?* Our courage is sapped right from the start! Intercession trains our faith and opens our eyes to see what God can do. When we pray for a challenging situation, we are challenging our own faith. As Andrew Murray reiterates in his book, when we truly believe that "everyone who asks, receives" (Matthew 7:8), we stop dismissing the power of prayer.

The second barrier is a lack of zeal for prayer. We don't see our prayers as necessary for God's will to be done. Remember that our prayers are not merely for a given situation, but for the kingdom and glory of God to come. From this standpoint, we quickly realize that every situation needs God's blessing. John Calvin once said, "In prayer, we have the responsibility to love others. There is no doubt that our first concern is on the saints other than ourselves." Paul echoes this in his letter, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." (Ephesians 6:18-19) Here, being alert means to press on even when tired. When we remember our identity as a holy priesthood, representing God, we will no longer take the role of intercession so lightly.

In conclusion, prayer is the most effortless *and* the most challenging action in the Christian life. From birth, everyone knows how to breathe, but not everyone knows how to breathe well.

Testimony 2

Shiou Ping Lee – “Fasting prayer”

Hello, everyone. My name is Shiou Ping. I am glad to share about the joy of fasting prayer with you. I experienced fasting prayer shortly after becoming a Christian. I grew up in a Buddhist environment, so idol worship was huge in my family. I had a heart for sharing the gospel with my family, but it was a struggle as I was not yet familiar with Scripture. My family members responded in different ways. Some dismissed what they heard as mere stories. Some walked away when they heard the mention of Jesus’ name. Most of all, I was terrified of my brother’s reaction. Though he was younger in age, he was bigger and taller than me. Every time I opened my mouth to share, he banged his fist on the table, jumped up, and yelled, “How could you forget your roots? You worship everything foreign! You have no respect for our ancestors!”

I prayed and prayed, but nothing seemed to change. Despairing in my heart, I declared defeat. One day, I came before the LORD and said, “O LORD, I am so sorry. I can’t do even this simple thing. Every time I try to say something, they cry “Checkmate!” I’m too weak to win them over. Today I come before You and ask You for mercy over my family. I am willing to fast and sacrifice for their salvation. My heart will not rest content until my family proclaims You as LORD and Savior.” From that day onwards, I embarked on my journey of fasting prayer.

The first time I fasted, the pastor’s wife Sister Zhang from Home of Christ Church in Fremont visited my mother. While sister Zhang and her team shared the gospel, my mother kept gushing about her bodhisattva. I was heartbroken to see my mother’s hard heart. Every “hit” in this spiritual battle ushers me back to Jesus, where He finetunes the focus of my prayers.

Praise the LORD! I didn’t have to wait very long when, one by one, my family members gave their lives to Jesus. In particular, even my brother, who flew into a rage at me, decided to be baptized in Jesus’ name. How amazing God is! There is no scientific evidence to back up fasting prayer, but I have witnessed how God’s mercy can accomplish what no one can do or change.

Twenty years have passed since my first fasting prayer. This is what I have learned: there is no age requirement for fasting prayer. Kathy Thomas, in her 20s, fasted and prayed for the economic crisis. Our elderly sister in Christ, Deng Liang Dang, in her 80s, fasted and prayed for her son. God answered them both. Fasting prayer taught them to entrust to God everything on their hearts.

All Christians can learn to cultivate this precious discipline. But remember that fasting prayer is no Aladdin’s lamp. It is not a tool for getting God to make our dreams come true. It is not a way to fulfill selfish desires for fame or success. Fasting prayer is an SOS signal that we send to God for His mercy. When I realize how small and weak I really am, I ask for God’s mercy and entrust my burdens to Him more completely. Fasting prayer trains me to seek God with all of my heart, to discern His will, and to treasure His presence. I sincerely invite you to join me in this journey of fasting prayer and experience the power and blessing of our God.

Testimony 3

Yun Bao: “30-minute daily prayer”

I’ve been a Christian for almost 20 years. Prayer has become a reflex like breathing. Without prayer, I cannot live. I bring everything, both “big” and “small”, before my God and ask for His guidance. Moment by moment, prayer is on my heart and in my every breath. Honestly, I thought my prayer life was pretty good.

A few months ago, after I completed a class on prayer as a spiritual discipline, Pastor Lai gave me an assignment: for one month, set apart at least 30 hours daily to pray for 30 individuals. At first, I thought this was simple, but as I began the exercise, I realized how much I still needed to grow in my prayer life. But thanks be to God! By His grace, I have gleaned many lessons from the process:

First, it is important to have a location set apart for prayer. I designated a room in my house for prayer. This is where I go whenever I need a quiet place to pray. Every time I begin, I sing a worship hymn to cultivate a heart of praise. Before the LORD, I quiet down and lay bare my soul, face to face with Christ alone in the inner court. “My beloved is mine and I am his” (Song 2:16) Such sweet intimacy with Christ was a rare experience for me back when I only haphazardly squeezed a few minutes out of each busy day to pray.

Next, it is important to spend time on confessing my sins to God. Before praying, I take time to examine myself and ask God to forgive all the ways in which I did not please Him. With a daily habit of confession, I have also grown more watchful and sensitive to sin in my doing and being.

In addition, we need to pray more for others. When I started the 30-day challenge, I made a commitment to seek the kingdom of God, to pray more for others, and to pray less for myself. Every week, I wrote down the names of 30 people and their needs for prayer. I prayed seriously for each person on my list. While I didn’t see their faces regularly, I stayed spiritually connected to each one. I prayed for the salvation of their souls, for the strengthening of their faith, for the healing of their bodies, and for the road ahead of them. When I remembered the needs and burdens of other people, my prayers grew more fervent.

Furthermore, persist in spending long periods in prayer. Martin Luther said, “I have so much to do today that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” I lead a busy life. My past self would never believe that it was possible to pray daily for long durations. Now, I resonate with Martin Luther. Praying 30 minutes daily has not left me struggling with less time. Instead, God blessed me in my responsibilities and made me more efficient. Truly, praying to God is the highlight and blessing of my day.

Finally, it is critical to wait on the LORD quietly after praying. Looking through my prayer list, I thank God for all the ways in which He has answered my prayers. For anything still awaiting God’s answer, I trust that God’s timing is always the best. I will persist in praying and entrusting every need to God’s hands, which is the most reliable place to be.

Testimony 4

Min Xing Ji: “Praying as an individual and as a church”

When I first attended this church, I joined a Sunday School class on prayer. At each session, there was a time of practicing individual prayer. Through this opportunity, I learned how to pray and cry out to God. By faith, I went on to attend our Wednesday prayer meeting. I prayed in repentance before God and prayed for the health of my family. I prayed for deeper intimacy with God and asked to be strengthened in my faith and trust in Him.

Every morning, I set apart 30 minutes for prayer. Every evening, I confess my sins and give thanks to God. I thank God for guiding me through this journey. Now, prayer has become the central focus on my heart. I commit to praying daily for the church, the community, and my brothers and sisters who are struggling.

Personally, my family and I have been covered and supported in prayer by Pastor Lai, the elders, the ministers, and the whole congregation. God delivered my daughter from emotional affliction and delivered me from liver cancer. He heard the cries of my brothers and sisters who took part in the church-wide 40-day fasting prayer movement. “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:19) We are living witnesses of the power of united prayer, from our pastor to the whole congregation, on me and my family. Glory to our Father in heaven!

In prayer training, there is an exercise called “two hours”, where we are challenged to pray for every member of the church body, by name. We pray for all those who are physically weak; for all the different ministries (Mandarin, Cantonese, English, children and youth); for the church to be light in our community; for our neighbors who do not know the Lord yet; for our brothers and sisters to be light and salt wherever they are planted. “These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isaiah 56:7)

Testimony 5

Sharon Yen: “Up on the prayer mountain”

I’m a person who is always on the move. It is not in my nature to sit quietly, read the Bible, and pray for a whole hour. I tried all kinds of classes and training to get my heart to quiet down and sit through to the end. But God is gracious to me.

In 2011, I had the chance to visit the Prayer Mountain in Korea, where I shut myself in a quiet little cabin for two hours. There, I read God’s Word, prayed God’s Word, read God’s Word again, received God’s response...it was unforgettable—the first time in my life to fellowship so intimately with God. That experience made me thirst for God all the more.

Another time, I had a special need to seek God’s direction for my future. My husband and I went up the Prayer Mountain. It is important for me to set apart a time and place to seek the LORD, who is faithful and promised that if we seek, we will find. Of course, we cannot visit the Prayer Mountain any time we want. Therefore, as the sweetness of God’s presence draws us to pray, we must arrange our daily rhythms in order to rest in stillness and obey the prompting of the Spirit.

Spending fellowship time alone with God takes practice. The first thing I did was to arrange my waking and sleeping hours. I used to sleep after midnight, so it was hard to wake up early. But rising late meant I would never have quality time for devotion and prayer. It meant that all day long I would be telling God how weak I was and how unhappy I was. After a focused effort, I trained myself to get up early. Ever since, I have enjoyed regular times of intimacy with God.

Each morning, I meditate on Scripture, waiting on God to speak to me through His Word. When I have questions, I pray to ask God to reveal His truth. I write down my responses to God’s Word and continue conversing with God as I journal. I pray and worship God, lifting up my praise for His faithful provision and special guidance. I tell God about my weakness and ask Him for strength. I wait on God to help my family and my church family in their needs.

After spending time with God for around an hour, I begin the day’s work strengthened in the joy of the LORD. In the evening, no matter how late it is, I do not go to sleep until I have read God’s Word and journaled my response.

A few months ago, I quit my job and found that there were numerous tasks left to be done. Being a doer in nature, I started planning and panicking inside. Meanwhile, I knew that my first priority was to guard my morning hour (or more) on meditating on Scripture and on prayer. This is the most beautiful discipline I have discovered in life: to meditate on God’s Word, dialogue with God, seek God for guidance, wait on God, respond to God, and renew my faith and trust in God.

Testimony 6

Wing Kun Wung: “A few points on the practice of prayer”

1. **Attitude:** Prayer takes first priority in our lives. Nothing can distract us from spending time alone with God. Prayer is the necessary path to growth, sanctification, and success.
2. **Understanding:** We come before God in the Spirit and in truth in order to have the heart of Christ. Prayer is not self-seeking but seeks to follow Christ and the Holy Spirit to let God accomplish His will for my life.
3. Implementation: Meditate, Confess, Give Thanks, Minister, Intercede
 - A. Meditate: the Cross, the Trinity, redemption, love
 - i. Sing a hymn to enter into the presence of the Holy Spirit. “*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*” is a good example. Look upon the Cross and reflect on the themes of election, salvation, sacrifice, suffering, sayings, heart, and love.
 - ii. Focus on something that Jesus said (such as “Do you love me more than these?”, see John 21:15-17) and reflect on God’s sacrificial offering for us; the humiliation Christ bore for us; the riches and glory Christ gave up in love for us; the way Christ was bound and stripped until He had nothing left, for us.

- B. Confession: We must deal with all the sins we committed against God and people on the day that just passed.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) Our strength for each day comes from being forgiven for the sins we confess. Confession reminds us that we are a people set apart. Confession anchors us in our reconciliation with God and our identity of being His.

- C. Thanksgiving: We must give thanks for experiences on the day that just passed.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Thanksgiving is a sacrifice that pleases our God. Therefore, we do not take thanksgiving lightly but offer it to God with a sincere heart. Thanksgiving is what God asks of His creation. Let us begin each day by giving thanks, pleasing God, and being filled with His joy and peace.

- D. Ministry: We can pray for everything we will face and need in the day ahead.

Entrust each situation to God. Prioritize people over projects. Jesus’ salvation work is for people, so we must focus on people in our prayers. Prioritize and pray for ministry— first for the inside, then for the outside; first for what is near at hand, then for what is farther away. Be sensitive to the voice of God and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of ministry is to glorify God and bless people.

E. Intercession: Saving souls comes first.

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.” (1 Timothy 2:1) Why? Because God “wants all people to be saved” (2:4). Salvation concerns life and death. Thus, praying for people’s salvation is a most urgent matter. During intercession, the biggest challenge is discouragement and the temptation to give up. Yet, when we remember that it is God who has called us to pray for all people to be saved, we know that this is our foremost responsibility.

In conclusion, prayer is intertwined with our lives, relationships, and ministry. Because of this, we must remain disciplined in prayer and stay fresh in our walk with God. We become certain of God’s sufficient grace as we seek to deepen our prayer lives. As the Scripture has said, “Your strength will equal your days.” (Deuteronomy 33:25)

Testimony 7

Na Li: “Keep on learning to pray”

In my 20 years of following Christ, I have loved to pray. There have been countless times of experiencing God’s comfort, encouragement, rebuke, and guidance. Among these, God has answered many of my prayers, especially in the area of soul winning through fasting prayer.

When I first learned to pray, I often talked to God about needs of mine or other people. Later, I learned that the true meaning of prayer is not only to share petitions. Through prayer, we express our devotion to God; we honor and worship Him. Prayer is also simply spending time alone with God— our most intimate friend. Since God has already accepted us just as we are, we no longer have to hide our weakness and struggles. In prayer, we can pour out our soul. Through prayer, we can hear God’s still, small voice as we enjoy sweet fellowship with Him.

Not only am I learning to cultivate my relationship with God through prayer, I am also praying often with seekers and my brothers and sisters in Christ. In prayer, we support and encourage one another. As a result, many have been renewed in their strength, restored in their faith, comforted in their hearts, and touched by the reality of God’s presence. Together, we walk through times of weeping and times of laughter. The church, our workplaces, and households are all places of prayer. Wherever there is a need, there a prayer altar will be found, for the Bible tells us, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” (Ephesians 6:18)

For many years, I have participated in prayer ministry at my church, praying for our nation, praying for America’s revival, praying for Israel’s return to the one true God. At my workplace, we also had a prayer group that journeyed together through several rounds of layoff. I have many vivid memories of waiting on God in prayer together. Once, I was part of a prayer group for mothers praying for their children over a long period of time. Now, these children are in college; many are serving God and carrying on in their pilgrim journey. What an encouragement to all the praying mothers, who get to experience God’s faithfulness. Some of the mothers who used to be seekers are now baptized in the name of Jesus! Glory to God!

My knowledge is limited on building up disciples in the discipline of prayer. However, I will be happy to share some things I have learned from personal experience:

1. Why Pray

Prayer is the way we communicate with God. In prayer, we not only bring our needs to God’s throne of mercy. Prayer also draws us near to God. Through prayer, we come to understand Jesus’ servant heart and His condescension to save us. At the same time, we realize our own weakness and wait upon God to guide us in His wisdom. May our prayers become as natural as the way we breathe. May we be constantly remembering our God of Trinity in our hearts.

2. Starting a Prayer Group

The best way to cultivate a deeper prayer life is for two people to partner in prayer regularly. Prayer groups of three to five people are also good but keep the number below six so that everyone can have a chance to pray aloud. Anyone can be part of a prayer group: prayer partners, members of the same family or fellowship, seekers, or pastors and coworkers involved in the same ministry team. The best frequency is weekly, meeting once or twice. Spacing meetings too far apart will cause the zeal to fizzle out quickly. The best format is to meet in person. Praying over the phone or video chat is acceptable, though not ideal. For a group that prays twice a month, for example, one prayer session can be online while the other session can be in person after church. Groups should seek the place and format that work best for their people.

3. Time Considerations

Each prayer session should be around 30 minutes. It is hard for people to commit to meetings that are too long or overrun. For years, I've noticed a phenomenon where people spend most of the time merely talking about their prayer needs, with only a few minutes left for a hasty closing prayer. I've also seen meetings overrun from the expected 30 minutes to over an hour. When this happens, people might not want to come back and attendance begins to dwindle. The leader has the responsibility to remind everyone about time control. For example, prayer requests can be gathered before the meeting so that the whole time can be spent in prayer. If people want to share more, they can do it after the time of prayer.

4. Running a Prayer Meeting

Start with a worship song or pray-reading. Then, pray for ministry or individual needs. Focus on the character of God and trust that God will feed us. The selection of the worship song and passage for pray-reading should be done prayerfully. Some considerations:

First, the worship song should be short and simple. The song is used to lead the group into a heart of worship, drawing near to God. Follow the Spirit's guidance on the specific song.

Second, the passage for pray-reading can be one or two verses. It should not be too long. Pray-reading is not the same as Bible study. Pray-reading is to "eat" the Word of God. Together, read the verses aloud several times and integrate the words into prayer. This practice is good especially for young Christians who feel unsure about what to say when they pray. Pray-reading provides words to use in prayer and allows us to store God's Word in our hearts. An example is "The LORD is my Shepherd, I lack nothing" (Psalm 23:1). Read this verse aloud several times, then repeat it in prayer. Later, when encountering someone who is looking for employment or other provision, we will be ready to share this promise with them.

5. Formats of Prayer

There are many ways to pray. With two people, the format can be very flexible. With larger groups, people can take turns to pray aloud. If there are many prayer requests, then each individual can pray for the person on their right. Most importantly, encourage everyone to pray aloud. Some seekers do not feel comfortable praying aloud. We can pray on their behalf.

After a few times, ask them if they would like to try praying for themselves. Emphasize that it is not about the words we say but about opening our hearts before God. At a church-wide prayer meeting, encourage everyone to pray aloud at the same time or divide the group into smaller groups of two to three people. Encourage those who tend to stay quiet and help them feel included.

6. What to Expect

The hope is for each person to enjoy a focused time of prayer and experience sweet fellowship with God. Through prayer, our spiritual lives and strength become refreshed, our commitment to God becomes renewed, our prayers become more fervent, and our discernment of God's guidance more sensitive. "Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5) Through prayer, we are filled with more love, more mercy, more patience, and more empathy for others. "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." (Psalm 27:4) May the Spirit of God guide us to come continually before His throne of mercy.

Testimony 8

Xiao Jun Wang: “Learning to pray: a lifelong journey”

Growing up in a Christian family, I witnessed my mother’s example of praying all the time! From a young age, I knew that prayer is our vital connection to God, just like breathing is to survival. After moving to the U.S., I walked through many joys and sorrows with my church family, times of being filled with the Holy Spirit, times of praying in the Spirit. In 2004, I joined the Home of Christ Church in Newark and met Pastor Lai who had an extraordinary burden and vision for prayer. Looking back on this season of co-laboring together and cultivating a deeper life of prayer, I would like to share a few reflections:

1. I love to pray.

Thank God for granting us the authority and blessing to pray. Let us treasure this honor and long for it all the more! Let us learn from our LORD Jesus and our fellow saints who went before us. Do not find excuses like “I’m too busy”, “I’m too tired”, “I don’t have time”, “I don’t know how to pray”. Don’t settle for being voiceless children of God.

- Prepare a prayer journal. Decide on a place and time.
- Set your heart on prayer as a responsibility and life conviction.
- Prayer is to converse with God. If you love God, you love to pray.
- I long to be more watchful in prayer and in how I spend my days.

2. I find joy in prayer.

Prayer is to enter the inner room and spend time alone with God. My prayer life needs to heed the counsel and oversight of the Holy Spirit:

- Praying at the beginning and end of each day has become my habit and need.
- Fasting prayer once a week has been my practice for many years.
- Every Saturday morning at 1am to 3am, I participate in the 24-hour Great Commission prayer chain. This has continued for 13 years.
- Morning prayers at 4:30am, 5:00am, and 6:00am – I’m working on this.
- I am active in my church and prayer meetings, including the 432 Prayer at HOC6.
- I am ready to respond to emergency prayer needs and pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

“...they saw no one except Jesus.” (Matthew 17:8) this is what I seek in prayer, whether in worship and praise, confession and thanksgiving, quiet waiting, or supplication. I pour out my soul to the LORD, there is nothing that I keep from him. I take joy in this sweet fellowship with God. Truly, “my beloved is mine and I am his”.

3. God teaches me to pray.

There is not shortcut in prayer. The journey of prayer never ends. It takes sacrifice, time, and much kneeling. I know it's not easy. The spiritual battles are many and fierce. May God help me be discerning in my spirit, be obedient to the Holy Spirit, and never to quench the Holy Spirit! I must pray even more urgently during the night, at daybreak, when I feel lazy, when I feel sleepy, when I am busy, when I am weak, and when I am in sickness or pain. I have deep experiences of being taught, reminded, and rebuked by the Holy Spirit in His perfect timing.

Rev. Yongxin Wang wrote in his book *“What Will Take Place After This”*:

“God is searching among His children for people after His heart, for people awake in their soul, for people willing to sacrifice. God needs those who are “first to be concerned and the last to take comfort”, people who have the vision and burden, who are willing to sacrifice and offer their lives, people who obey the LORD to the very end of their lives!”

All these years of cultivating a deeper prayer life have broken my heart, broadened my vision, and deepened my reach in prayer for the world, the nation, the church, the family, and individual members of the church. I have learned that prayer is not just for my own interest, not just for receiving benefits, not just for God to answer our petitions. Rather, prayer is a journey of surrender to the Holy Spirit along the perfect path that God prepared.

In the new year ahead, I commit myself to God once again. In morning prayer, God spoke to me:

“Be not contaminated by the world. Be not distracted by people and situations. Fix your eyes on the LORD Jesus Christ alone.”

O LORD, I pray to come ever closer to you, ever deeper in my life of prayer, ever more pleasing in my prayers to You.

“Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen on your walls; they will never be silent, day or night. There is no rest for you, who remind the Lord. Do not give him rest until he establishes and makes Jerusalem the praise of the earth.” (Isaiah 62:6-7)

Testimony 9

Helen Li: “My year of learning to pray”

Thank God! On a Sunday last September, God sent His faithful servant Pastor John Lai into our midst to preach to us and share the vision of the United Prayer Training Center. In the past year, I’ve had the honor of applying materials from the United Prayer Training Center in my prayer life. These are some lessons that I have gained along the way:

I followed the lessons and assignments closely, memorizing and praying God’s Word step by step. With a journal and voice recorder, I noted down prayer requests and what I wanted to remember from visitations. The training gave me a clearer understanding of prayer and helped me develop a disciplined prayer life.

Specifically, I praise the LORD for granting me the opportunity and grace to journey with a younger sister in Christ through pain. This sister was recovering from the trauma of a broken marriage. I spent time with her, listening to her pain, and prayed for her frequently. After some time, I witnessed the healing that came from God’s great love and power. With God’s help, the young woman rose up from the depths of darkness, accusation, and bitterness. She drew near to God and was restored. Every time I think of her recovery, my heart is filled with thanksgiving!

Thank God for all the ways I grew through this prayer training that lasted for almost a year. If everyone from the same small group or fellowship shares the heart of cultivating discipline in prayer, the group will surely abound in the knowledge of God and oneself. Unity will deepen and glory upon glory given to the name of Jesus!

O LORD, would you make us faithful and grant us a persevering spirit to cultivate discipline in prayer! May each child of Yours be more than conquerors as You lead us into victory through prayer!

One of my beloved hymns go like this:

*Spirit of the Living God,
Fall afresh on me,
Spirit of the Living God,
Fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.
Spirit of the Living God,
Fall afresh on me.*

I meditate on these words in my daily devotion, as I walk through the day, and as I pray. Amen!

Testimony 10

Emily Ning: “Saturating my life in prayer”

For many years, I had been a Christian who did not pray and felt afraid to pray. Today, I am a person who loves to pray continually, anytime and anywhere. My life is saturated in prayer. My heart is full of thanksgiving!

Every Christian knows about prayer and the importance of prayer. Some people have described prayer as a kind of spiritual breathing. Others have compared prayer with a switch that turns on (or off) our connection with God. The key to prayer is faith. By faith, we unlock the heavenly abundance that our Almighty God has in store for us. Each one of us is like an empty vessel that is filled with living water through prayer. Prayer is a channel for us to understand the heart of God and fellowship with Him.

Sadly, in my busy and hectic life, I had put prayer aside. I had all kinds of excuses to spend less time on prayer. Sometimes I stopped praying altogether. My job started early in the morning. When I was in a hurry, I would pray for 10 minutes or so to check in with God, but without waiting to listen to His voice, I would rush to the kitchen to make breakfast. Thank God for helping our church through Pastor John Lai to cultivate discipline in prayer. We were challenged to pray for half an hour every day. So, I started setting my morning alarm 20 minutes earlier. After struggling for the first few days, I got used to the new rhythm and soon felt more and more energized to wake up early to pray. As God promised in James 4:8, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.”

Prayer is a spiritual discipline. There is always room to mature in our prayer lives, just as we might practice the piano daily to improve our skills. In the process, God has expanded my vision in prayer. I no longer pray only for myself and my family. Now, I also pray for all peoples in all the nations. This prayer is not lip service but done in the Spirit and in truth, in surrender to the sovereignty of our God. Gradually, the time I spent in prayer has grown. Sometimes, God leads me to fast, to kneel, and weep as I pray.

I thank God for the sweet moments I have shared with Him in prayer. The more I pour into this life of prayer, the more I reap in harvest. Prayer is also like digging a well. The deeper we dig, the purer the water!

Testimony 11

Yuansheng Zhou: “Two experiences of prayer”

As a Christian, I *knew* that prayer was important, but I never took it seriously. In those days, I did not get to witness the full and astounding power of prayer. At the beginning of this year, I participated in a 3-month training on prayer taught by Pastor John Lai. The materials “Prayer Training” and “Discipleship Training” transformed my perspectives on prayer.

In particular, this intentional 3-month training process led to significant breakthrough in my prayer *action*. Before the training, I prayed just occasionally. Now, I pray every night before going to bed. I pray for myself and others whenever there are needs, burdens, or thanksgiving. Ever since practicing the life of prayer, I have had many experiences of God’s wondrous work in my life. I would like to share two of them with you:

1. My decision to enter seminary

In the fifth year of my Ph.D. program, I started sensing God’s calling for me to enter seminary upon graduation. It was toward the end of January when I first shared this with my parents. My older brother and his wife also came home to celebrate the Spring Festival. Tension filled the air as soon as the topic of seminary came up. My brother, who was an atheist, felt that my faith was causing me to lose my mind. My father, who was agnostic, declared his refusal to believe in God if I did not look for a job after completing my Ph.D. My mother, who was more open to Jesus, sympathized with me but quickly became a target of my father and brother’s anger.

For the first time, I experienced the cost of being a true follower of Jesus (see Matthew 10:36). I loved my family and especially my mother. But I could not deny God’s calling either. My decision brought trouble to my mother and disappointed my father and brother. The deeper my love for my family, the deeper the sadness in my heart. That night, I wept and prayed to God, “LORD, have mercy. Please grant me the courage to keep following you. Please bring comfort to my mother and saving grace to my father and brother.”

Thanks be to God! After a few days, the tension died down. Perhaps because of this preparation, by the time I took the step to apply for seminary this May, my father and brother no longer pushed back. Furthermore, to my amazement, God used a series of incidents to accelerate my mother’s spiritual growth and used her to bring me great comfort and encouragement.

2. God saved my grandmother

After my mother came to Christ, I started praying for my grandmother to be saved, for I knew that her remaining time on earth was short. My grandmother lived her whole life practicing Buddhism, worshipping idols and ancestors. Her heart was clearly hardened toward the gospel. But what is impossible with man is possible with God. One day, my grandmother felt sick and had to go to the hospital. I recall that it was April 5th, when Covid cases started going down in China, when my mother broke the news: my grandmother was diagnosed with gallbladder cancer. The doctors recommended conservative treatment to manage her symptoms, but she was

not expected to live for very long. But my grandmother was not yet saved! So I cried out to God, "Please, God, help my mother bring Your gospel to my grandmother when there is still time."

My mother stayed inside the hospital ward with my grandmother, taking care of her non-stop for 15 days. The power of prayer sustained her through this grueling time. When my grandmother was discharged, I reminded my mother of the urgency to keep praying for my grandmother's salvation. I also reflected on what Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:24) Could this promise be fulfilled for my grandmother who was so resistant to the gospel?

May 4th: I was wrestling in my heart as I prayed to God. All of a sudden, a peace that surpassed all understanding came upon me. I knew for sure that God was going to save my grandmother. Miraculously, after that night, my grandmother stopped burning incense to her ancestors!

June 26th: My grandmother's symptoms took a downward turn. Again, my mother and I sat with my grandmother to share with her the good news of Jesus Christ and the things of the future. When asked if she wanted to receive the gift of salvation through trusting in Jesus Christ, son of God, my grandmother finally said yes. God saved my grandmother! Hallelujah!

October 1st: Cancer took away my grandmother's physical life. But God has granted her eternal life in Christ.

Amazing testimonies like this one are too many to share. By intentionally cultivating a life of prayer in the past months, I am coming to know God more: our Almighty God can transform a person's heart and suffering into blessing. Our loving God is our help at every time of need. Our God is faithful and those who trust in Him will not be ashamed. He is my God who hears when I lift up prayers after His heart. Truly, prayer is the greatest gift that God has prepared for all of His children!

Now I spend regular time every morning and evening in quiet prayer to God. These are the moments when I feel closest to God and also the most peaceful. My dear brothers and sisters, I hope that we can together take one more step in cultivating deeper prayer lives, so that we can all receive this beautiful gift and blessing from our God.

Testimony 12

Yun Bao: “Preparing for the New Year’s Eve Prayer Meeting”

Around this time in 2019, Pastor Lai invited me to team up with sisters Na Li and Xiao Jun to coordinate our New Year’s Eve Prayer Meeting. My first response was an immediate “No”. I felt inadequate to take on such an important position. Pastor Lai pointed out, “If you haven’t even prayed about it, how can you say no?” These words from Pastor Lai reminded me not to walk in the flesh. He was right. My inadequacies might be real, but my fears were rooted in a lack of prayer and entrusting. Coming back to my senses, I agreed to spend some time in prayer first.

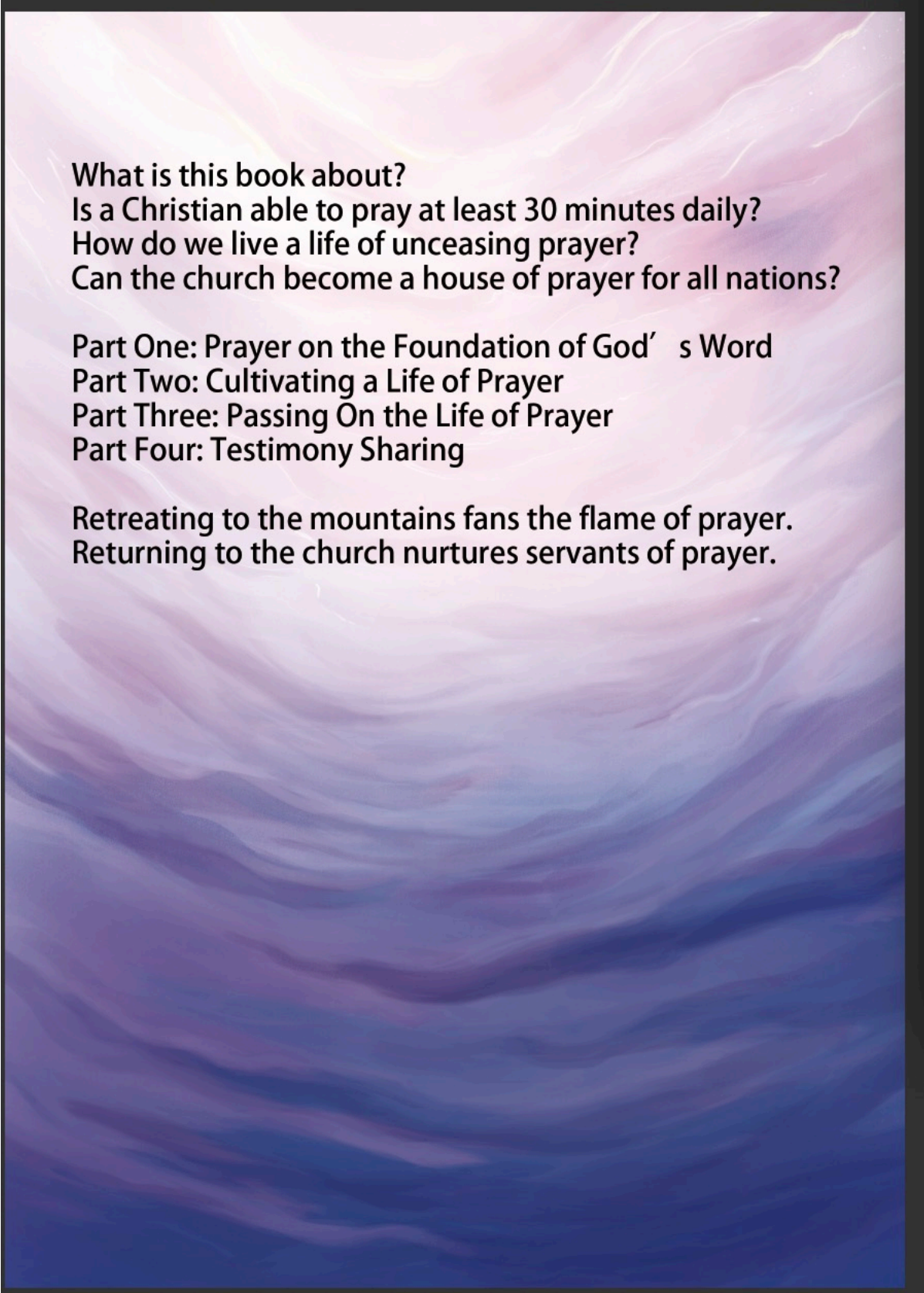
In prayer, I did not sense any barriers from God. Pastor Lai connected me with sisters Na Li and Xiao Jun, and I formally took up the coordinator role for this prayer meeting. Although I had no idea about what to do, I trusted that God was going to lead and fulfill His plans. My co-laborers Na Li and Xiao Jun are both prayer warriors, so I also got to learn a lot from serving with them.

Praise God! He provided Pastor Lai to cast the vision and mobilize the church, Elder Jerry and sister Xiao Jun to develop ideas, and sister Na Li and Elder Quan Lie to be our event hosts. Praise to the Holy Spirit for leading us! Unity and a collaborative spirit were evident as we decided on the theme, content, and format of the event. Sister Xiao Jun gathered event pictures from the past years. Pastor Lai suggested using short videos to build momentum. Sister Wei Zhu designed flyers and made promotional videos. Everything came together in a way that was beyond my expectations. Truly this was the work of God. It is God who brought us together to enjoy the beauty and goodness of co-laboring with Him.

We promoted the prayer meeting at Sunday worship sessions (both Mandarin and Cantonese). We visited each fellowship to give a presentation about this prayer meeting. Fellowship leaders encouraged their groups to join. Sister Xiao Jun made individual invitations. The whole church spent 14 days fasting and praying for the meeting. Everyone came together to contribute. Praise the LORD for His beautiful work!

When the New Year’s Eve prayer meeting finally came, more than 60 people came together from both congregations for this spiritual feast. With one heart, we worshipped, praised, examined our hearts, and prayed in the overflowing presence of the Holy Spirit. Moved by God’s love, Sister Na Li and Elder Quan Lie prepared with a faithful heart and hosted the event seamlessly. All the brothers and sisters who came experienced sweet fellowship and intimacy with the LORD. All of us committed ourselves to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Thank God for allowing me to taste the goodness of co-laboring with Him. All I can do is to thank and praise my God, and to thank my dear pastor, elders, and family in Christ for this experience of serving God together with one heart.



What is this book about?

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Can the church become a house of prayer for all nations?

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