WHY AND WHAT TO PRAY PREVIEW

From Shopping Lists to Bearing Fruit

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For Jamie, my husband, hero, and best friend. You have exemplified a life of prayer. Thank you for the amazing example you have been to me and all those we have served.

Preface

Prayer has not always been easy for me. Maybe you have felt that way, too.

Like many believers, I spent years praying mostly about the things immediately in front of me. Health. Finances. Family. The next challenge. The next problem to solve. None of those things is wrong to pray about, but I wanted more from my prayer life than simply wandering the grocery store of prayer looking for what I wanted.

When my husband Jamie and I left for Africa in 1987, I thought I wanted answers. I wanted to know how everything would work out. I wanted God to show me the whole picture before I said yes. Instead, He taught me to trust Him one step at a time.

Over the years, through church planting, raising a family, serving in different nations, experiencing both victories and disappointments, and watching God work in ways I never expected, I began to understand that I wasn't meant to pray as if I were reciting a shopping list of needs. Prayer was meant to be a conversation. More than that, prayer was God's way of aligning my heart with His.

I came across Paul's prayer in Colossians 1 many years ago. As I read through it, I realized there was more to prayer than met my eye. I was struck by what he prayed for. He prayed for faith, love, hope, wisdom, understanding, fruitfulness, patience, joy, and strength. His prayers were focused on lives transformed by God and fruit that would last for eternity.

That changed me.

It caused me to ask questions about my own prayer life. Why do I pray? What should I be praying for? Am I primarily concerned with my own comfort, or am I learning to care about the things that matter most to God?

This small study was born out of those questions.

My hope is that these pages will encourage you to move beyond simply bringing requests to God and into a deeper conversation with Him. As you study Paul's prayer for the Colossians, I pray that you will discover not only why and what to pray, but also the joy of walking closely with God and bearing fruit for His Kingdom.

May this study help you move from shopping lists to bearing fruit.

Lea Peters

Introduction

Often, our prayers are quite limited. We tend to pray for obvious things like health, finances, and family. When a crisis happens in the world, we also pray for God to intervene. I admit I pray randomly at times, not really thinking about why I'm praying or what I'm asking for. It's easy to fall into the pattern of praying "me-centered" prayers.

Bless me.

Help me.

Go with me.

Prayer becomes more of a shopping list than what it's intended to be: an ongoing conversation with God.

Give me this, I want that, on my never-ending shopping list!

Our prayer lives, like our faith (**Luke 17:5-6**), are meant to develop over time. Just as children grow their vocabulary, they eventually learn to have conversations. At first, childish talks on the playground are simple. Whose dad is the strongest, and when is it time to go home?

Much like childhood conversations, prayer should not be difficult. However, it also shouldn't be something we do

without thought. When you observe young children playing and talking, their conversations seem simple. In reality, they are carefully considering what to say. Maybe that simplicity stems from their early stages of learning to speak.

Do we really know how to communicate in our prayers? Do we think about what we are saying?

Prayer is a two-way conversation with God that is meant to grow and mature over time.

CONVERSATION

Conversations between friends deepen as the friendship grows. I remember when Jamie (my husband) and I first met. At that time, I was a shy wallflower. Those of you who know me might find this hard to believe, but it's the truth. I didn't have strong communication skills. It took a lot of time and patience, especially from Jamie, for me to learn how to communicate effectively.

Now, I am quite different from who I was back then. As I write this, Jamie is on a trip to the USA (we live in Africa). He called yesterday, and we talked nonstop for almost an hour. I didn't realize how much time had passed until I looked at my watch. Unlike in our early days when I found communication difficult, we now know how to talk and can easily spend hours together.

God desires this kind of conversation with Him. I couldn't wait to talk to Jamie yesterday, and I'm curious to see when he'll call today. I also eagerly looked forward to speaking with God this morning. Before my day began, I set aside time just to talk to Him; I understood what to pray for and why. The conversation was natural; it felt like talking to a wiser Friend.

PICKING UP THE PHONE

I don't usually talk on the phone much, except with friends and family. I need to prepare myself mentally before spending time on the phone. I work well with written communication and face-to-face conversations. The phone? Not so much. It's funny because once I get on the call, I find it easy to talk after breaking the ice. It's all about making the effort to dial the number and start the conversation.

You might think this example of talking on the phone is good, but impractical. How can someone talk to God? He is invisible and doesn't have a physical mouth; how can we hear from Him? It seems prayer is more like a one-way conversation than a give-and-take between friends.

GOD SPEAKS IN OUR SPIRITS

God speaks to us in different ways if we listen for His voice. He communicates within us, **in our spirits**. This becomes easier as you grow closer to God. Recognizing His voice takes time. Once you do, you'll see that prayer isn't just a once-a-day activity. He speaks to us all day long.

John 16:5-15 (ESV)

vs 13 *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."*

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS WORD

God speaks to us through our spirits, and He also speaks to us **through His Word** when we read it. I have read the Bible many times, and often a word or phrase catches my

attention. That is God speaking. I always make a point of noting those verses and referring back to them for a clearer understanding of what God is telling me.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Psalm 119:105 (ESV)

GOD USES PEOPLE

There have been times when I've been a bit *"thick."* During those moments, **God has used people** I don't know to say things that remind me of His promises. I've felt burdened for the nation of Egypt for many years. As time goes on, I often forget that burden. God takes great care to remind me of His Word. He has promised that one day I'll see a church planted in Egypt.

Even if they are unaware of it, God uses people. For example, years ago, I was in a store looking at carpets when some ladies nearby were speaking another language and also looking at carpets. We started talking, and they asked where I was from. I said I was from Africa. They smiled and replied, *"We are from Africa too, we are from Egypt."* They didn't know I had been carrying a burden for planting a church in Egypt. Through them, God was reminding me not to lay that burden down.

PRAYING FOR MORE THAN A SHOPPING LIST

If you're looking to go beyond the usual *"bless my shopping list"* prayers, join me. We'll study **chapter 1** of the book of **Colossians** to understand why and what to pray. I hope this small study helps you move away from *"shopping list"*

prayers and leads to a deeper, more natural conversation with the Father.

In preparation, I ask that you read **Colossians 1:1-13**. Make notes of any points that come to mind; it may be that God is speaking to you! We'll start together and discover why and what to pray, as well as what moved Paul to say:

"In our prayers for you we always thank God..."
Colossians 1:3a (NKJV)

REVIEW

- God speaks in our spirits
- God speaks through His Word
- God uses people
- Prayer is more than a shopping list

Reading

Our text comes from **Colossians 1:1-13**. Take time to read it thoroughly.

Consider

- What points stand out to you from **Colossians 1:1-13**? Make note of those points.
- What do you think God is saying from those verses that spoke to you?
- Do any of the points you noted help you understand why and what to pray for?

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Thanksgiving, Faith, and Love

We introduced our study on *Why and What to Pray* by highlighting the importance of elevating our prayers beyond mere shopping lists. God wants to have a daily conversation with us. He actively seeks to communicate with us through our spirits, His Word, and other people. God can use anything or anyone to get our attention. Unfortunately, we are often so unaccustomed to hearing Him that we miss many of His messages along the way.

DIGGING IN

In this chapter, we begin exploring **Colossians 1:1-4** and discover why Paul's prayers began with thanksgiving. Along the way, we'll see how faith, love, humility, and a life of continual prayer shape our approach to God. Our goal today is to understand the significance of thanksgiving in prayer. We will discuss how our lives reflect a continuous attitude of prayer, maintaining a prayerful mindset throughout the day, from morning until night. This starts

the moment we wake up and continues until we fall asleep. We will also connect the relationship between faith and love in our prayers. This will set the stage for the next chapter, where we will explore the roles of hope and grace in our prayers.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;"

Colossians 1:1-4 (NKJV)

THE FIRST TWO **verses** include the customary greetings found in letters from that time. Paul, the apostle, along with Timothy, greets the believers by asking for grace and peace to be upon them. After this, verses three and four begin the first part of our study on why we pray. Paul explains his reasons in detail in these verses. We do not simply pray and aimlessly send words into the air.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,"

Colossians 1:3 (NKJV)

A recurring theme in Colossians about prayer is the emphasis on thanksgiving. We see this in the verse above and a few chapters later in **Colossians 4:2 (NKJV)**: *"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving."* Thanksgiving acts as the antidote to ingratitude. It's easy to

forget to be thankful for the people in our lives and to overlook our blessings when things aren't going our way. Before praying for anyone or anything, remember to give thanks! The simple act of saying, *"Thank you,"* is the remedy we all need when ingratitude tries to take hold. We've all been guilty of forgetting the blessings we have. Maybe we prayed long and hard for a spouse, family, close friends, or a job. When disagreements happen, things can get a little out of hand. We might find ourselves saying, "If I'd have known they were going to be like this..." Ingratitude can make things seem even worse than they really are. The solution is to be thankful. Remember, they are answers to prayer. When we give thanks, we break the power of ingratitude in our lives.

HUMILITY REQUIRED

We have, unfortunately, become entitled as Christians. We know that the blood of Jesus has cleansed us from sin. We understand that God loves us and desires the best for us. However, just as we deny our children harmful things, God, our Father, does the same. Not every desire or hope aligns with God's will. Sometimes God may grant us something later; this depends on our ability to receive the blessing with humility.

"But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' "

James 4:6 (NKJV)

There's nothing worse than a proud Christian. **Arrogance and pride** are two things that the Bible says God "hates" (**Proverbs 8:13**). Our only boast is in Christ and

in His work alone, for apart from Him, we are dust. We should not feel guilty over the past sins we have repented of. We must remember, as Paul did (**1 Timothy 1:15**), that it's only because of the love of God that we have gained access to God's Kingdom.

PRAYING ALWAYS

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,"

Colossians 1:3 (NKJV)

After giving thanks, we are also called to *"pray always"* for others. How can we pray always? Currently, we struggle to attend a weekly prayer meeting at church, let alone pray consistently.

Life is a prayer. Everything we say or do occurs in God's presence, for He is everywhere. Our daily lives are an extension of prayer. As we live and speak throughout the day, we are praying.

THE PUREST FORM OF PRAYER

Prayer, in its purest form, is simply communicating with God. God has provided a way for His presence to be with us, so we can continue the conversation all day long.

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not

leave you orphans; I will come to you…"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

John 14:16-18,25-26 (NKJV)

As we go through life, God's Spirit (our Helper) dwells within us. He is there to guide us, but He can only lead as much as we allow. The key to hearing God's voice through His Spirit is to deepen our relationship with Him. It's a friendship that grows as we spend time nurturing it.

FRIENDSHIP IN PRAYER

Remember how Moses was called God's friend (**Exodus 33:11**)? If you read about Moses' life, he wasn't always close to God. But after he spent enough time strengthening that relationship, he spoke to God as a friend does. The goal is to be so close to God that when He speaks, we can hear Him.

I remember years ago when we lived in Tanzania. I was driving around town looking for a guesthouse to host some visitors who were about to arrive in the country. As I drove, I felt a strong urge to make a U-turn on the dual carriageway. I ignored that urge and thought, *"Let me look just a bit more."*

After a moment, I decided it was time to make a U-turn. I moved into the turning lane and waited for traffic to clear so I could turn around. Not five seconds later, I heard the screech of tires behind me. I only had time to glance in my rear-view mirror long enough to see a large Toyota Land Cruiser heading directly toward me. I got hit on the

driver's side and was pushed into the opposite lane of traffic. Thankfully, I wasn't hit by any other vehicle and was able to walk away without serious injury.

When I heard the tires screech, I remember saying to the Lord, *"I'm sorry I didn't listen to You earlier."* God is always speaking to us; we must listen.

VISIBLE FAITH AND PRAYER

"since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;"

Colossians 1:4 (NKJV)

The Colossians must have had a strong reputation for Paul to have heard about them all the way in Rome, where he was serving his first imprisonment when he wrote this letter. Their faith in Jesus was one of the reasons Paul prayed for them. They must have had evident faith for it to be reported to Paul. People had noticed something different in the way they lived. How can faith be visible? Faith is a force that is not just an inner feeling of hope. **Faith is what we live by** (**Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38**). Therefore, **everything we do reflects our faith**.

What are the visible fruits of our lives? What do people see when they observe us? Do they notice materialistic individuals who complain, feel fear, speak harshly, and lose their tempers? Or do they see people who are grateful for what they have? Do they offer encouraging words? Do they live peacefully regardless of circumstances? We live by faith, which means o**ur actions reflect its core**. If we are courageous, this alone will lead us to examine how deeply our faith influences our lives.

FAITH AND LOVE WORKING IN PRAYER

The love the Colossians had for each other—both the saints and fellow believers—led Paul to pray for them, which I find interesting. First, it is noted that the Colossians' faith was acknowledged, and then their love for one another was evident.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."

Galatians 5:6 (NKJV)

These two principles, faith and love, **cannot exist independently of each othe**r. The purpose of faith is motivated by love. Without love, faith has no meaning. But when they work together, that mountain-moving faith often preached about becomes clear (see **Mark 11:23, 24**). The lack of love is why many today wonder why their "faith isn't working" and then give up.

My response to this is, *"What is your motive for 'using your faith?'"* Is it for yourself? Remember our shopping list from the introduction to our course. Or are you believing in God and having faith for the benefit of others?

SHALLOW FAITH

Everything Jesus did was for others, and we should live the same way. Believing God for prosperity alone is the **shallowest form of faith**. God is our Father and will always care for us if we genuinely trust Him (**Matthew 6:30**). He

has our best interests at heart. Do we truly believe that or not?

Corrie Ten Boom shared something meaningful about receiving answers to prayer. As you may recall, she lived through the Holocaust, lost her family during those terrible times, and continued serving God. Somehow, she remained faithful to God through everything. Not only that, but she also saw God's hand working through it all. This is what she said about God answering prayers*:*

"And our wise Father in heaven knows when we're going to need things, too. Don't run out ahead of him."

Corrie Ten Boom

If we haven't seen God's answer yet, it doesn't mean He hasn't answered. All prayer is answered (see **Matthew 7:8**). It just means we either don't need what we've asked for, or it's not the right time for it yet.

CONTENTMENT

One of the greatest assets a believer can possess is learning to be **content** regardless of their circumstances. If you've been on this earth for more than 15 minutes, you know that things are getting crazier by the minute. None of what this world offers can be taken into eternity. While there's nothing inherently wrong with nice things, we face a problem when nice things control us. There's nothing wrong with people cheering you on, but we have a problem if we live for the approval of others.

Christians can be funny. They'll say, *"Jesus is enough."* But when a rumor spreads about them, they struggle. They also struggle when they don't know how to renovate their

house to keep up with the Joneses. If someone spreads false lies about you, consider yourself in good company; they did the same to Jesus (see **Matthew 5:11-12**). The Bible tells us that when that happens, to *"rejoice and be glad."* When our homes and cars aren't brand new or on trend, we are thankful for what we have. We understand that the blessing isn't in what we possess. The real blessing is found in Who possesses us. When we learn to be content, we're kept from shallow praying.

A BUSINESS OR A KINGDOM?

"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Philippians 4:12, 13 (NKJV)

Unfortunately, some people's goal is to turn the preaching of the Gospel into a business opportunity. They promote the Gospel like taking a pill instead of sharing it as God's solution for a lost world. From them, the only valuable lesson we can learn is that this world is not all there is (**Ephesians 2:6-8**). Let's be content with what we have and trust that our Father will take care of us and go even beyond the bare minimum.

"useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

1 Timothy 6:5-7 (NKJV)

BEFORE WE GO

Take a moment to reflect on how **faith and love** influence our prayers. Also, consider how being **thankful and humble** strengthens our relationship with God. Think about the verses we have explored today. Identify specific areas where you can seek God's help. Take time to reflect on how your understanding of why and what to pray has begun to change. The wonderful thing about God is that He already knows where we need help. He's just waiting for us to realize our need for His intervention. He's ready; are we?

Reviewing Chapter 1: Why and What to Pray

From **Colossians 1:1-4,** we learned:

- The role of thanksgiving in prayer
- Humility is required for powerful praying
- The purest form of prayer is simply communicating with God in conversation
- Friendship in prayer helps us hear God, for He is always speaking
- Visible faith and prayer go together - our prayers are lived out in our lives
- Faith and love working in prayer - Paul was moved to pray for the Colossians because of their love for one another - their faith and love were obvious
- Shallow faith is praying only for our own needs

- Contentment is an asset that keeps us from shallow praying
- The Kingdom of God is not a business where we can enrich ourselves

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Continue the Journey

Thank you for reading this preview of *Why and What to Pray: From Shopping Lists to Bearing Fruit.*

To continue the study and explore the remaining chapters on hope, God's will, fruitfulness, strength, patience, and joy, purchase the full version here:

Why and What to Pray - Full Version