

A COURSE IN PRAYER

TAZEWELL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



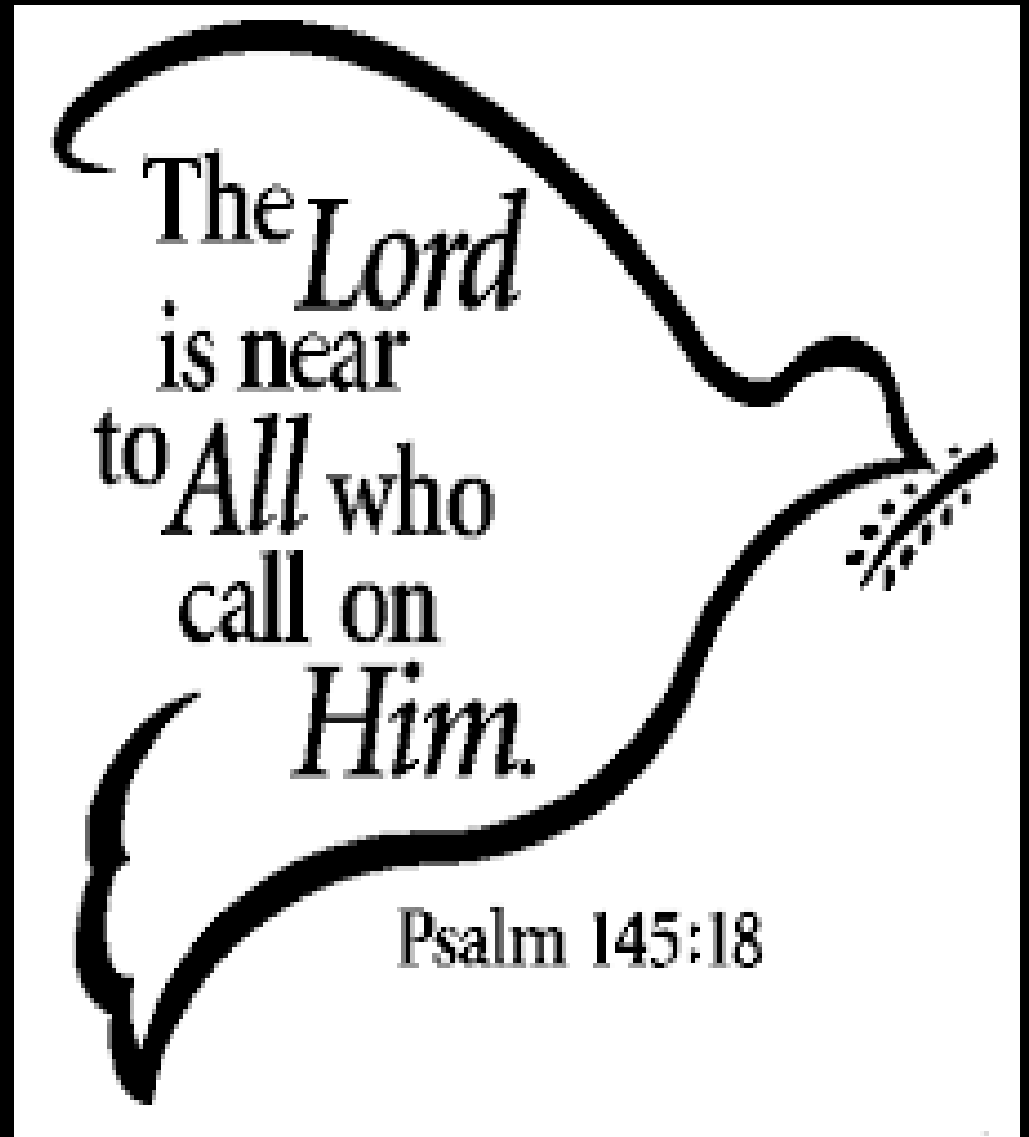
Why?

- When it comes to “learning prayer” isn’t the Lord’s Prayer enough?
- Aren’t we always going to be “amateurs at prayer”?
- What is to be gained from spending time talking about prayer?



Reasons

- Never taught
- Communion & Kingdom
- Through Duty to Delight
- Needed
 - World
 - Church



“It is a difficult and even formidable thing to write on prayer, and one fears to touch the Ark. . . . But perhaps also the effort . . . may be graciously regarded by Him who ever liveth to make intercession as itself a prayer to know better how to pray.”



P.T. Forsythe
early 20th century British writer

Introduction and Overview



Part One

Desiring Prayer

The Necessity of Prayer
The Greatness of Prayer

Part Two

Understanding Prayer

What is Prayer?
Conversing with God
Encountering God

Part Three

Learning Prayer

Letters on Prayer/ Rules for Prayer
The Prayer of Prayers
The Touchstones of Prayer

Part Four

Deepening Prayer

As Conversation: Meditating on God's Word
As Encounter: Seeking God's Face

Part Five

Doing Prayer

Awe: Praising God's Glory
Intimacy: Finding God's Grace
Struggle: Asking God's Help
Practice: Daily Prayer

Part One

Desiring Prayer

The Necessity of Prayer
The Greatness of Prayer



1. The Necessity of Prayer



I am deeply convince that the necessity of prayer, and to pray unceasingly, is not as much based on our desire for God as on God's desire for us. It is God's passionate pursuit of us that calls us to prayer.

— *Henri Nouwen* —

AZ QUOTES

Well, what do YOU think?

Is prayer necessary?

Why?



- *“We’re Not Going to Make It”*

*“In the second half of my life,
I discovered prayer. I had to.”*

-Timothy Keller



The great “WHAT IF?”
(Crucial nightly pill
for lethal condition)



THE SEARCH “to *get* prayer”

- Reading
- Experimentation
- Setting a discipline
and resuming



- *“Can’t Anyone Teach Me to Pray?”*

Flannery O’Connor



“Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth’s shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon . . . What I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow that is nothing. I do not know You God because I am in the way.”

-Flannery O’Connor

At the end of one entry, she simply called out,
“Can’t anyone teach me to pray?”

There is a sense of the necessity of prayer --- we *have* to pray.

But how?

"A Confusing Landscape"



Find the Divine
Directory of Retreat Centers, Conference Centers, Retreats and more...



**Within the Christian church,
there has been an explosion
of interest in prayer.**

There is a strong movement toward ancient meditation and contemplative practices. We now have a small empire of institutions, organizations, networks, and practitioners that teaches and coaches in methods such as:

- Centering prayer
- Contemplative prayer
- “Listening” prayer
- Lectio Divina*
- And many others of what are now called “spiritual disciplines”

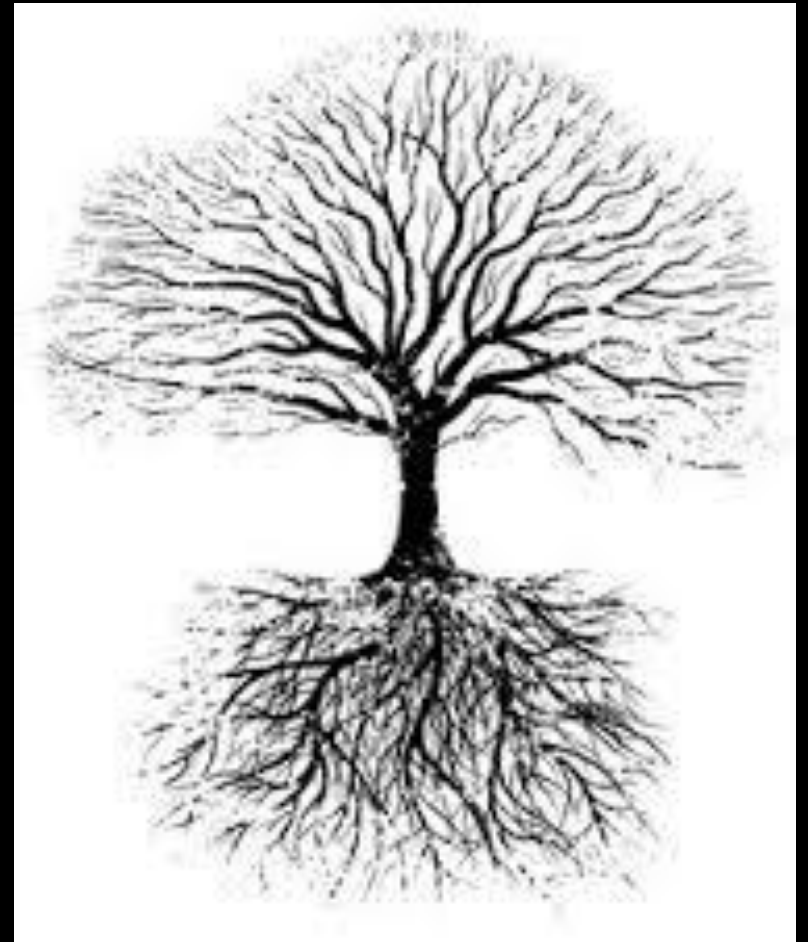
- *Not a single, coherent “wave”*
- *rather a set of powerful “cross-currents”*
- *dangerous choppy waters for inquirers?*

There has been substantial criticisms lodged against much of the new emphasis on contemplative spirituality, within both the Catholic and Protestant churches.

A confusing landscape!

“An Intelligent Mysticism”

The way forward for me
has been to go back to my spiritual roots



“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

-Romans 8:15-16

The Spirit of God:

- assures us of God’s love (adoption)
- enables us to approach and cry out to God as our loving Father
- comes alongside our spirit and adds a more direct testimony.

Paul was writing about a **profound experience of God's reality**,
an experience that was **"mystical"** in the best sense of the word

"We must not underestimate the emotional ground of experience. Some veer away from this idea because of its subjectivity, but the abuse of the subjective in some circles cannot exclude the 'mystical' and emotional dimensions of Christian experience."

-Thomas Schreiner

Martin Luther

John Calvin

Jonathan Edwards

*no choice offered between truth or Spirit,
between doctrine or experience*

“It is necessary for us to recognize that there is an intelligent mysticism in the life of faith . . . of living union and communion with the exalted and ever-present Redeemer . . . He communes with his people and his people commune with him in conscious reciprocal love. . . . The life of true faith cannot be that of cold metallic assent. It must have the passion and warmth of love and communion because communion with God is the crown and apex of true religion.”

-John Murray

Scottish Theologian

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”

- 1 Peter 1:8, 9

- It’s a marvel that Peter, in writing to the church, could address all his readers like this. He didn’t say, “Well, some of you with an advanced spirituality have begun to get periods of high joy in prayer. Hope the rest of you catch up.”
- No, he assumed that an experience of sometimes overwhelming joy in prayer was normal.

intelligent mysticism:

affections of the heart
+ convictions of the mind

Not called to choose between them
Not called to leave behind theology and
launch out to look for “something more,”
for experience, but to ask the Holy Spirit to
help me experience my theology.

Truth and doctrine
and
spiritual power and experience.



“Learning to Pray”

How, then, do we actually learn to pray? (Flannery O’Connor)



FOUR PRACTICES:

1. The Psalms
2. A time of meditation as a transitional discipline between Bible reading and time of prayer
3. Pray morning and evening
4. Pray with expectation

THE FRUIT:

-ups and downs....

-sweetness and bitterness,
-rest, but also wrestling

-see heart more clearly



2. The Greatness of Prayer



“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”

-Ephesians 1:15-19

-One long sentence

- At its grammatic heart a key insight into the greatness of prayer

“The Supremacy of Prayer”

“It is remarkable that in all of his writings Paul’s prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances.”



“Paul’s main concern, then, *is for their public and private prayer life*. He believes that the highest good is communion or fellowship with God. A rich, vibrant, consoling, hard-won prayer life is the one good that makes it possible to receive all other kinds of goods rightly and beneficially. He does not see prayer as merely a way to get things from God but as a way to get more of God himself.”

-Timothy Keller

By praying in this way, Paul was assuming “the priority of the inner life with God.”

“Most contemporary people base their inner life on their outward circumstances. Their inner peace is based on other people’s valuation of them, and on their social status, prosperity, and Performance. Christians do this as much as anyone. Paul is teaching that, for believers, it should be the other way around. Otherwise we will be whiplashed by how things are going in the world.”

-Timothy Keller

“The Integrity of Prayer”

- *“When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen . . . in secret”*

- Matthew 6: 5-6



- spiritual integrity -- private prayer
- “individualistic Christian”?

"The Hardness of Prayer"

*"I can think of nothing great
that is also easy."*

- Seasons of dryness

*"A consciousness of the absence of God
is one of the standing incidents of religious life.
Even when the forms of devotion are observed
conscientiously, the sense of the presence of
God, as an invisible Friend, whose society is a joy,
is by no means unintermittent."*

-Austin Phielps, *The Still Hour*
19th century American theologian



"The Centrality of Prayer"

- Scripture

O.T. Patriarchs, Solomon, Psalms,
Prophets

N.T. Jesus, early church/ Pentecost, Letters

- Church

unceasing prayer
reform movements

- Families

- Friendships

4th day groups



“The Richness of Prayer”

“Prayer (I)”

George Herbert (1593-1633)



Prayer should be the key of the
day and the lock of the night.

~ George Herbert

**PRAYER the Churches banquet, Angels age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;**

**Engine against th' Almightye, sinner's towre,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six daies world-transposing in an houre,
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;**

**Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,**

**Church-bels beyond the stars heard, the souls bloud,
The land of spices, something understood.**

*“Prayer is
awe,
intimacy,
struggle
--- yet the way to reality.*

*There is nothing
more important,
or harder,
or richer,
or more life-altering.*

*There is absolutely nothing
so great as prayer.”*

Timothy Keller

