

“... one of my favorite books on prayer.”

—Mark Dever



Pray

About

EVERYTHING

Cultivating God-Dependency

PAUL TAUTGES

Foreword by Jerry Bridges

Paul Tautges has produced yet another small, usable handbook to assist busy pastors in a critical aspect of ministry—the cultivation of a congregational sense of God-dependency expressed through prayer. After underscoring the biblical emphasis on ordinary believers being in constant prayer, Tautges presents seven informative, stimulating prayer meeting messages, ranging from praying in Jesus’ name to praying for unbelievers and government leaders. The heart of the book is then buttressed with several helpful appendices, providing practical ideas to ministers for stirring up prayer in their local church. The idea of beginning each year with nine days of emphasis on prayer (including four sermons on prayer), in which each family lists reasons for praise and requests for prayer, so that the entire flock learns to pray informatively for each other as a church family, is just one of several exciting possibilities. Use *Pray About Everything* as a springboard to cultivate your own ideas on how you as a pastor or church leader can cultivate prayer in your church in our day of widespread prayerlessness and spiritual amnesia.

—**Dr. Joel R. Beeke**, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Paul Tautges has produced this excellent resource for instructing and inspiring effectual prayer. I highly recommend this book, not to be read, but read and implemented. It will be transforming!

—**Daniel P. Fredericks**, Church and Pastoral Ministries Consultant, IFCA International

“Another book on prayer? Yes! When it is this biblically sound and practically helpful. Paul Tautges has done a tremendous service to both pastors and church members with this little gem of a book. Pastors, you hold in your hands a local church blueprint to lead your church to a fresh focus of both corporate and private prayer. Like all his writings, Tautges is a careful expositor of Scripture and guides us through it like a loving pastor longing for us to meet with God and trust him more. I highly recommended this book!”

—**Brian Croft**, Senior Pastor, Auburndale Baptist Church;
Founder, Practical Shepherding; Senior Fellow, Church
Revitalization Center, SBTS



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To David Ehler, a faithful brother in Christ, whose life commitment to prayer, as a high priority in the life of the local church, continues to challenge my own heart and to bless the ministry of the church.

6 Pray About EVERYTHING

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FOREWORD

Why another book on prayer? It seems a new book on prayer appears so often to take its place alongside other books that have been on our shelves for a long time. So why another one? I can think of three reasons.

First, we need to be continually reminded of the basic truths of Scripture, especially in this day when we all experience information-overload. We forget so easily unless we are constantly reminded. It was for this reason that, even in the early days of the New Testament church, the Apostle Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:12, “Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.” And this reminder is especially needed in the area of prayer.

Second, prayer is hard work. Paul calls it “striving” (Rom. 15:30) and “laboring earnestly” (Col. 4:12). Even Bible study and, for the pastor or teacher, message preparation seems easier to do than to struggle in prayer. So we need continual encouragement to pray.

Third, and this reason is unique to this book, *Pray About Everything* is directed primarily toward congregational prayer in the context of the local church. My observation is that most books on prayer tend to focus on our individual prayer lives, and even in that area we need to be reminded, instructed, and exhorted. But the whole idea of corporate prayer seems to be gradually disappearing, even among our Bible-centered evangelical churches.

We proliferate our programs while at the same time we marginalize congregational prayer. The old-fashioned Wednesday night prayer meeting has virtually disappeared. And though there is nothing sacred about Wednesday night as a prayer meeting time, there certainly is something sacred about the corporate prayer of believers. This emphasis makes Paul Tautges’ book a valuable contribution to our theology and practice of prayer.

Paul Tautges not only encourages us to pray corporately, but he also instructs us to pray biblically. Again, my observation is that much of the congregational prayer we do engage in is basically

centered on our own health and financial needs. By contrast, Pastor Tautges directs us to the prayers of the Bible, which are basically God-centered.

This is a book that will prove valuable to every member of a congregation. All of us need encouragement and instruction in the discipline of prayer, and this book will help us to that end.

Jerry Bridges,

International speaker and author of *The Pursuit of Holiness*

Introduction

A life of prayer is irrefutable proof of God-dependency. This is true not only of the individual believer, but also of the life of the church, as evidenced in the New Testament historical accounts and the epistles. Churches therefore need to learn how to pray. But who will teach them? Pastors and elders must not only tell the members of their flocks to pray, they must also teach them how to bring their needs to God's throne of grace. Those of us who are teaching must regularly instruct them in the biblical principles, examples, and commands concerning a life of prayer. In short, our churches need a biblical theology of prayer—a God-centered way of thinking as it relates to speaking to our Creator and our Redeemer. This will only develop when we commit ourselves to the faithful teaching of all that God has revealed in his Word concerning prayer.

Prayer is the only form of communication with God available to the believer. It is crucial, therefore, that we understand how God directs us to speak with him. R. L. Dabney (1820–1898) defined prayer as “an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.”¹ Since our hearts are utterly depraved and able to corrupt even our most sincere intentions (Jer. 17:9), the only means by which we may hope to ask God “for things agreeable to His will” is by learning to pray according to the revelation of his will contained in his written Word. Anything else presumes on God. Dabney concurs:

The proper rule of prayer is the whole Word of God. Not only are its instances of inspired devotion our exemplars, and its promises our warrant; its precepts are the measure of our petitions, and its threatenings the stimulants. There is no part of Scripture which may not minister to the guidance of the Christian's prayers. But further, the Word of God is the rule of our prayers also in this sense, that all which it does not authorize, is excluded. Prayer being a homage to God, it

is for Him to say what worship he will accept; all else is not homage, but presumption.²

Scripture has more to say about prayer than we can ever hope to master in one lifetime. Hence, a desire to continually be taught how to pray is a mark of growth toward spiritual maturity. The more a believer grows in Christ, the less he or she is governed by a spirit of independence and the more his or her life becomes marked by habitual God-dependency.

This book is submitted as an aid to ordinary Christians as well as to Christian leaders as a challenge not merely to pray more, but to think more biblically about prayer and about the God to whom we pray. All in all, it is the author's hope that believers will be strengthened and energized by a renewed commitment to the constancy of prayer.

Part 1

Prayer—an Expression of God-Dependency

Part 1

In the first two chapters I begin to demonstrate that prayer was the very lifeblood of the New Testament church; that is, the early believers in Christ truly lived out an attitude of God-dependency. Prayer, not self-sufficiency, was their habitual practice. That is, they did not trust in their own abilities, or in their own cleverness and wisdom, but on the power of God to accomplish his mighty work through the Spirit and the gospel. However, this confidence in the instrumental causes of salvation (the Word and the Spirit) did not leave them passive, just waiting for God to act; rather they became active in the labor of communication with him by means of fervent prayer. Their example, as preserved for us in the Scriptures, testifies that they wholeheartedly believed the words of Jesus when he said, “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), prayer was to be one of the chief evidences of their constant abiding in Christ.

Chapter 1 takes a peek into a Jerusalem prayer meeting as the believers gather in one heart and one mind to seek the Lord. This look at a historical narrative in the book of Acts reveals the role of prayer in transforming common believers into uncommon servants whose humble yet passionate and unified dependence upon God contributed to the display of his glory.

Chapter 2 examines three quick-fire commands from the apostle Paul, which are interconnected expressions of God-dependency, at the end of his first epistle to the believers in Thessalonica. It is almost as if the apostle, as he puts the finishing touches to his letter, quickly reminds his readers of some bare essentials of communion with God. Today, our churches desperately need to listen to this apostolic instruction.

Chapter 1

Common People in Constant Prayer

(Acts 1:12–14)

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **The need for “whole-church prayer”**
- **Common people for an uncommon use**
- **Praying with unity and devotion**

1

The outstanding thing about these men is that they were not outstanding.

—Kenneth O. Gangel

How sad is the state of the modern church relative to the practice of whole-church prayer! Robert Duncan Culver laments,

This is a day of going and doing, of activity. The mid-week prayer meeting has largely been lost in the contest for a slot in the weekly schedule when people are free to attend. Everything else seems more important. The old time mid-weekly prayer routines are not sacred, nor are the time-worn methods of proclaiming the Word, but proclamation and prayer are at the heart of the Savior's program for His church. They dare not be laid aside. If we have scheduled them out we must again schedule them in. The forms may change, but the essentials must not be neglected and lost.¹

Though prayerlessness may be very apparent in Christianity today, prayer was not an afterthought to the New Testament church. Far from being a leftover offered to God once their primary energies had been dispensed on the “more urgent” activities of church life, prayer was considered by the early believers to be a staple they could not live without. They were truly God-dependent people.

This is obvious from the foundation-forming days of the church. Immediately following Jesus' ascension to the right hand of God, the disciples obeyed his last command to wait for the Holy Spirit at least in part by devoting themselves to prayer, as witnessed by Acts 1:12–14. As we examine this passage of Scripture, it is as if we climb a stepladder in order to peek into the second-story window of a

house in Jerusalem. There we see a large room where the disciples have gathered for one purpose—to pray.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 1:12–14

Our observation of this Jerusalem prayer meeting focuses on three elements: a common place, filled with common people, who are involved in constant prayer.

Common place (v. 12)

First, we see the believers gathered in a common place. Verse 12 reads, “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying.” Gathered in this second-story room are the eyewitnesses of the ascension, which took place on “the mount called Olivet.” They have returned to Jerusalem just as Jesus commanded them (Acts 1:4), having descended 200 feet from the mount to Jerusalem, a journey providing a magnificent view of the city. According to Luke, they were on the mountain near Bethany (Luke 24:50), a “Sabbath day's journey away.” This does not mean the event occurred on a Sabbath, since Jesus ascended on a Thursday, forty days after his resurrection. The phrase “a Sabbath day's journey” was a measurement of time, or better, of distance. It referred to the distance the Jewish rabbis considered acceptable for travel on a Sabbath: 2,000 cubits or about three-fourths of a mile. Jewish historian Josephus confirms the distance of the Mount of

Olives as being 3,000 feet, or 2,000 cubits, from Jerusalem.² This limited distance was first established in the Old Testament, when all Israel was encamped around the tabernacle. No tent was placed further than 2,000 cubits away.

The upper room where the believers gathered was a large space in a house where they were “staying,” and apparently a regular meeting place for the purpose of prayer. The use of the definite article “the” (“the upper room”) seems to indicate that it was probably the same upper room where they had shared the Last Supper with Jesus (Mark 14:12–26) and where the Lord gave his promise to send the Holy Spirit, for whom they were now waiting (Acts 1:8). It was in this place that the disciples joined their hearts and minds together for the purpose of prayer.

Common people (vv. 13–14)

Second, from the top of our ladder we observe common people: “Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James ... along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (1:13–14). Along with these there were enough brethren to form a prayer meeting 120 people strong. In particular, the Eleven were there, listed in the same way as in Luke 6:14–16 but in a different order and without Judas, for by this time he had hung himself (Acts 1:16–18).

Peter, John, and James are probably listed first because Luke had already planned to focus on their ministries later in his book. Peter and John were fishermen. Peter is always listed first in the biblical record, no doubt in recognition of his budding leadership. John, the younger brother of James, was one of the “sons of thunder” known for their religious zeal. He is often called “the apostle of love” or the one “whom Jesus loved,” due to the close relationship he had with Jesus (John 13:23), which shines through in his writings. John wrote much about love in his three epistles (1, 2, and 3 John), and much about Christ in the book of Revelation. James, the brother of John, was also a common fisherman who later became the chief leader in

the church of Jerusalem and was ultimately killed by Herod (Acts 12:2).

Andrew was another fisherman, being the brother of Simon Peter. It was Andrew who was called by Jesus first and who then found Peter and said, “We have found the Messiah,” bringing Peter to Jesus (John 1:41–42). Andrew was the quiet one who lived in the shadow of his big brother.

Philip was probably also a common fisherman. In John 6:7 we find him exasperated at the sight of 5,000 hungry men and their families: “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not enough to feed this crowd.” Though sometimes lacking in faith, Philip later became a successful evangelist (Acts 8).

Thomas, also known as “The Twin,” will forever go down in history as “Doubting Thomas.” Absent from the upper room when the resurrected Jesus made his first appearance to the Eleven (John 20:24), Thomas refused to believe their testimony that Jesus had risen from the grave. Eight days later, Jesus, abounding in patience, said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing” (John 20:27).

Bartholomew is another name for Nathanael. He was born in Cana, where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water into wine (John 2:1–11). Bartholomew was a friend of Philip, who brought him to Jesus (John 1:45).

Matthew was a tax collector (Matt. 10:3). As such, he lived in the lower class of society along with other undesirables, fellow tax collectors, and common sinners.

James, the son of Alphaeus, is also referred to as “James the Less” (Mark 15:40). All we really know about him is his name. He was not a prominent guy.

Simon was a member of a political party known as the Zealots (Matt. 10:4). The desire of this Jewish group was to take over society. They had hoped that the Messiah would come to help them overthrow the Romans and aid them in their fierce advocacy of Mosaic ritual.

Judas the son of James was also known as Thaddaeus (Mark

3:18). Judas appears in the Gospels as a tender-hearted, humble kind of man.

So what is the point of all this? The point is that these now-famous men were nothing more than mere men, yet they were God-dependent men, men whom the Spirit of God used mightily to advance the cause of the gospel. Of these eleven disciples, Kenneth Gangel writes, “The outstanding thing about these men is that they were not outstanding. God chose ordinary men to do an extraordinary task.”³ Chosen not for their innate qualities or natural abilities, these common men remain examples of God’s choice of those whom the world views as least likely to succeed. This, the apostle Paul argues, is for the purpose of making God’s power and glory more obvious:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.

1 Cor. 1:26–29

One of the pleasures of God is to take ordinary, common sinners, redeem them, and then empower them with the Spirit to walk in God-dependency. And the clearest mark of their humble, God-dependent spirit is their dedication to prayer.

Praying with these eleven ordinary men were also “the women,” undoubtedly the ones who followed Jesus from Galilee. Included were Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary and Martha, Salome, and others. Mary “the mother of Jesus” is also mentioned here for the last time in the Scriptures.

The brothers of Jesus, who until recently had been unbelievers, were also present at this Jerusalem prayer meeting. Approximately six months prior to the crucifixion of Jesus, it was said of them that

“not even His brothers were believing in Him” (John 7:5). They are listed in Mark 6:3 as James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. Two—James and Judas (Jude)—wrote portions of Scripture, both referring to themselves as “bond-servants” of Jesus Christ (James 1:1; Jude 1:1). The absence of a reference to their family relationship to Jesus in the introductions to their letters provides an insight into their meekness and servanthood. These men had no desire to be big shots, but rather yearned only to love and serve the One they had denied for so long. It was common people like these toward whom God turned his listening ear as they devoted themselves to prayer.

Constant prayer (v. 14)

Third—and most applicable to the conviction of this book—while peering through the window, we observe their loyalty to prayer. All 120 of them were “with one mind ... continually devoting themselves to prayer.” During the ten days between the ascension of Jesus and the feast of Pentecost the believers attended to prayer. This does not mean that they prayed nonstop; Luke 24:52–53 indicates they were also praising God in the temple and freely moving about the city. But we may suppose, as some commentators do, that they gathered at their common meeting place at least once a day for prayer. What they specifically prayed for is not mentioned, although the context suggests a few matters that must have been on their minds: the wait for the promise of the Spirit, the command to become worldwide witnesses for Christ, the need to replace Judas, and the preparations for the feast of Pentecost. Most noteworthy is the habit that prayer had already become for the early believers. This is made clear by two characteristics.

PASSIONATELY UNIFIED IN MIND

First, the unity of the believers in prayer is clearly evident. Verse 14 indicates that they all prayed “with one mind,” which means “with one accord,” or “with one passion.” They were in complete agreement as to the commission Jesus had placed upon them, and were determined to obey his instructions to remain in Jerusalem

until the coming of the Holy Spirit. This tight unity among the early Christians is apparent throughout the book of Acts.

We read, for example, that they continued day by day “with one mind” in fellowship and communion (2:46), and that they prayed for boldness “with one accord” (4:24). Also, many signs and wonders took place while they were all together “with one accord” (5:12). The apostles and elders were also “of one mind” at the Jerusalem Council concerning the doctrinal correction that was needed and consequently selected and sent forth messengers to deliver their decision to the brethren at Antioch (15:25).

This same unity should mark believers in Christ today. Ephesians 4:3 exhorts us to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” as part of walking in a manner worthy of the calling of God in the gospel. Notice we are not called to *create* a unity that does not exist, such as a superficial unity without doctrinal agreement, but to *preserve* the unity that the Spirit has already knit among true believers in Christ. As we submit to the Spirit of God by submitting to his Word, we are united in mind for the labor of prayer. And as likeminded believers pray together, God knits our hearts together in deeper affection and empowers us to accomplish his work. For this reason, Paul writes this benediction toward the end of his letter to the Romans: “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus” (Rom. 15:5). Paul was convinced that the same God who produces endurance in the hearts of believers would also join together their truth-informed minds in order that they might “with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6).

EARNESTLY DEVOTED TO PRAYER

Second, the devotion to corporate prayer of those early believers is obvious and intense: “These all with one mind were *continually devoting* themselves to prayer.” This habit of constantly attending to prayer flowed from an earnest commitment to biblical priorities, which again is a pattern in the early church. For example, according to Acts 2:42, the believers were “continually devoting themselves

to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The essential aspects of their life as a church family included being continually devoted to doctrine (teaching), to fellowship (community), the Lord's Table (cross-centeredness), and to prayer (God-dependency). Later, the apostles confirmed the priority of prayer by the example they set when they assigned the solving of ministry conflicts to other godly men (Acts 6:1–7). The apostles' reasoning is clearly stated: "But *we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word*" (v. 4).

In our day, it is common for local churches that experience numerical growth to become so filled with people-related activities that prayer gradually gets marginalized, but this did not occur among the early believers. As the church continued to expand, their commitment to whole-church prayer did not waver. For example, three areas of ministry were immediately impacted by their devotion to prayer. First, major turns in missionary outreach flowed out of their constant attention to prayer. It was when "Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray" that God called him to take the gospel to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:9), thus opening a major gate to the evangelism of the Gentile world. Second, supernatural deliverance from persecution came as a direct result of a church-wide prayer meeting: "So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God" (12:5; 6–17). When he was supernaturally delivered, Peter knew exactly where to turn to first: to the house "where many were gathered together and were praying" (v. 12). Third, the matter of selecting and affirming the first missionaries came about "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting" (13:1–3), undoubtedly with prayer since the disciplines of prayer and fasting usually accompany each other (see Ps. 35:13; Dan. 9:3; Matt. 6:6–18; 17:21).

To the early church, regular prayer meetings were an indispensable part of their very existence. As J. C. Ryle writes, "Prayer is to faith what breath is to life. How a man can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a man can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too."⁴ The early believers simply could not fathom

a Christian community existing without the habit of prayer. As a result, God often supernaturally intervened on their behalf.

This brief survey of the early church's life of prayer demonstrates that we cannot survive without prayer. Devotion to prayer turns common people into uncommon servants of God. For that reason, we need to be constantly devoted to prayer. God is delighted when his people join their truth-informed minds and hearts together in the common bond of prayer.

This book has grown out of the conviction that if our congregations do not learn to pray biblically, we will not effectively carry out the will of God. We must therefore learn to pray. Pastors must teach their congregations to pray and believers must learn to become God-dependent people who constantly cry out to God for his will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.