

The Focus of Prayer

A balanced prayer life

by Ian Fallis



New Tribes Mission

THE FOCUS OF PRAYER

Copyright 2015

Published by New Tribes Mission

All rights reserved

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

[Author's Foreword](#) 5

The Setup

[Day 1: Capturing light](#) 6

Week 1: Praying for yourself

[Day 2: All about selfies](#) 7

[Day 3: Let's be honest](#) 8

[Day 4: Time to listen](#) 9

[Day 5: Trust Him](#) 10

[Day 6: Because of Who He is](#) 11

[Day 7: Getting what we want](#) 12

[Day 8: Shaped and soft](#) 13

Week 2: Praying for your community

[Day 9: How wide is our focus?](#) 14

[Day 10: Do you want to be effective?](#) 15

[Day 11: Getting on the same page](#) 16

[Day 12: Diversity in the body](#) 17

[Day 13: Discover and fulfill your role](#) 18

[Day 14: Love in action](#) 19

[Day 15: Loving believers is practice for loving the lost](#) 20

Week 3: Praying for what's on God's heart

[Day 16: How moving are our prayers?](#) 21

[Day 17: The desire of God](#) 22

[Day 18: Too few laborers](#) 23

[Day 19: Harvesting is hard work](#) 24

[Day 20: Sending](#) 25

[Day 21: It's not an isolated prayer](#) 26

[Day 22: Trusting His promises](#) 27

Week 4: Balancing our prayers

<u>Day 23: How can this be possible?</u>	<u>28</u>
<u>Day 24: Putting God first</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Day 25: Praying for the senders</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Day 26: Praying for the laborers</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>Day 27: Praying as we ought</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>Day 28: Strength for the journey</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>Day 29: Putting it all together</u>	<u>34</u>

Wrapping it all up

<u>Day 30: The circle of eternal life</u>	<u>35</u>
---	---------------------------

<u>What's next?</u>	<u>36</u>
---	---------------------------

<u>About the Author</u>	<u>37</u>
---	---------------------------

Author's Foreword

I'd like to think that discovering an important yet overlooked fact about prayer would change a person's life.

Unfortunately, it does not.

Years ago, I learned something significant about prayer. But when I started to write this book, it was truly ironic that I was writing about prayer. I had the third-worst prayer life of any Christian in the Western Hemisphere. (It's true – I took a quiz on Facebook.)

So writing this book was a great fit for me, for two reasons.

First, this was the perfect place for a writer to be. I had no qualifications to say to you, "Here is the right way." I couldn't set myself up as an example. I could only let God be God. I could only point to what I've seen in His Word and, with wonder and excitement, say, "Hey, come over here! Look what I found!"

Second, working through this book allowed me to apply that fact to my prayer life. And it helped. Tremendously. Facts don't change people. God changes people. God frequently uses prayer to reorient our hearts toward Him, and that's when change begins.

So here's my invitation to join me as, together, we explore and pray through what God says about prayer. I'll show you what God used to change my prayers, and thus, my life. Let's find joy on this journey ...

Ian Fallis

PS I trust this devotional will bless you daily as you read through it. I also hope you will consider going deeper by downloading this personal study guide and following along:

go.ntm.org/prayerguide

The Setup

Day 1: Capturing light

Ever tried to capture light?

You probably have. That's what photography is, and it's everywhere these days. Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr and more are built around photos. You probably have a camera everywhere you go, in your pocket or purse. It seems as if everyone does.

Let's compare photography and prayer.

Good photos balance three elements essential to capturing light. The size of the hole the light comes through influences how much of the photo appears to be in focus. The length of time the light is allowed to come through the hole can "freeze" an image or blur it. The light sensitivity of the material the light falls on determines whether an image is "grainy" or fine.

Balancing these three elements brings out a depth, breadth and richness that are missing in so much point-and-shoot photography.

As with photography, there's depth, breadth and richness to be found in prayers that are balanced according to what we find in Scripture. That's what this book is about. Welcome to the journey.

Let's start with praying for ...

- God to focus our thoughts on prayer;
- A heart that is sensitive to God; and
- The ability and the will to put time and effort into balancing our prayers.

Next, we'll see what we can do about selfies in our prayer lives.

Week 1: Praying for yourself

Day 2: All about selfies

Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I go away and am no more. Psalm 39:12-14

If selfies are so awful, why do we keep taking them?

The truth is, it's not always wrong to focus on yourself, whether we're talking about photographs or prayer. A quick glance at the Psalms makes that obvious. David, a man after God's own heart, frequently painted word pictures of his circumstances and prayed about the situations he found himself in.

And let's be honest: Sometimes it seems like he was being whiny.

So it's perfectly normal to focus on yourself when you pray. No one else has your perspective on your circumstances. No one else really knows how you're feeling and what you're experiencing. You can bring those to God in a way that no one else can.

It's definitely a problem if we never see beyond ourselves, and we'll spend time on that later. But first, let's look at how we can be most effective in praying for ourselves.

So take a moment to gather your thoughts. What is it about your life that you would like to see change? What do you want to be different? Let's not worry about the solutions right now. Simply bring your concerns to God. Quiet your mind and speak to the Lord on your own behalf.

Day 3: Let's be honest

How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Psalm 13:1-2

Do you ever get angry with God? Does it ever seem like He's not listening? Do you get discouraged?

David certainly did.

The big difference between us and David is what he did with those feelings. Maybe at first he bottled them up, or he grumbled to himself. But whether he did or not, he let God know what he was thinking and how he was feeling. And he didn't hold back.

Picture yourself speaking to God that way:

"Hey, Father, have You forgotten about me? Are You hiding from me? Have You not noticed that I'm crying myself to sleep each and every night? Are You just going to let this drag on and on? Don't You care?"

How would you feel about saying that to God?

The thing is, we sometimes think that way, but we hesitate to say that to God. Why? He knows exactly what we're thinking. And more important, He cares about us. He loves us unconditionally.

It makes a lot of sense to simply be honest with God.

Tell Him how you're feeling. Let Him know what you're thinking. Lay it all out there. He prefers it that way. How do we know He wants to hear our raw feelings and fears? Because He had David write out his own struggles for us to see and to learn from.

Day 4: Time to listen

Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed against him"; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

Psalm 13:3-4

If it feels awkward to speak to God the way David did, it's even more challenging to say, "enlighten my eyes." David is asking God to show him the situation as God sees it.

That's often the missing ingredient when we're feeling downtrodden, discouraged and damaged. And that's one of the benefits of prayer. We can let all of that out. We can honestly tell God how we're feeling and what we're thinking. We can even come right out and say, "This is all Your fault!"

And then it's time to ask Him to enlighten our eyes, and then be still and listen.

That may sound odd. You may think, "God doesn't talk to me." You may even think, "Wow, this guy thinks God speaks to him. He must be crazy." Maybe, but not in this case. Jesus said, "He who is of God hears God's words" (John 8:47), and "My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:27). God's Word not only tells us to listen to Him, it's evidence that He speaks to us.

Think about not only how He gave us the Bible, but why. We can open His Word and hear His voice whenever we want to. God desires to communicate with us, so He's made it possible for us to hear Him.

From the very beginning of the Bible, what do we see God doing? Talking with Adam and Eve. After they sinned, He did not wait for them to come to Him and apologize. He went to them, and He talked with them.

OK, now I'm going to stop writing, and you're going to stop reading, and bow your head and listen expectantly for His perspective on your circumstances. You may need to open His Word and read prayerfully. And you do need to compare whatever you believe you hear to His Word; He will not contradict Himself.

Day 5: Trust Him

But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me. Psalm 13:5-6

With his heart opened, then stilled by God, David comes back to solid ground: “I have trusted in your mercy.” Some translations render “mercy” as love or kindness. It’s the same Hebrew word the King James Version renders in other places as “lovingkindness,” and it speaks to the relationship David had with God.

Some Bible teachers point to parallels between the lovingkindness of the Old Testament and the relationship of grace and unconditional love that believers have through Christ in the New Testament.

David is not simply trusting in God; he is trusting in the relationship he has with God. Because that’s completely God’s doing—neither David nor we did anything to earn or merit God’s love and grace—we can trust in that relationship.

And then we can move on, just as David did. We can go straight from trusting to rejoicing and praising the Lord.

It’s as if David is saying, “I’m going to keep right on trusting you, and because I trust you, now it’s time to celebrate what you’re going to do with joy and praise.”

So once again we see David taking that extra step that doesn’t come naturally. Pour out your heart to God, and then listen. Listening and gaining His perspective reminds you that you can trust Him. Then, like David, it’s time to celebrate what you have not yet seen, and praise Him.

We could dwell on praising God for an entire devotional, and more. Praise is an indispensable part of prayer, and praise in and of itself can straighten out our perspective. I would go so far as to say that you’re doing well if you sometimes do nothing in prayer except praise Him.

For now, however, let’s get back to mimicking David’s approach in his prayer. We’ve been honest with God. We’ve listened, and calmed down and trusted Him. Now, celebrate what He is going to do. Thank Him, and praise Him.

Day 6: Because of Who He is

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! Psalm 46:10

You may not realize it, but we have, in effect, completely turned the focus ring.

We've gone from focusing up close and personal on ourselves, to focusing on the infinite – on God. We started out thinking about our circumstances. Focused on ourselves, we let out our feelings to God. And then we left it up to Him. We listened and we trusted, and then we celebrated with thanksgiving and praise.

Maybe you need God's help to get out of an abusive relationship, a difficult position at work, a legal issue or a crushing mountain of debt or other obligations. Maybe you or a family member has a serious health problem. I get it. More important, God gets it. Go ahead and ask Him for help. Each time you feel you need it. Your Father in Heaven cares about you and loves you.

At the same time, we can be blessed even in the most trying times by allowing God to use the circumstances we are in to change us. We need to pray for His perspective and seek His perspective in the Word so we can see what He is teaching us. And we need to pray for His guidance, so we can see where He is leading us.

Then, secure in our knowledge of God and His character, it's time to trust, and to celebrate and praise. To exalt His name.

Day 7: Getting what we want

Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. Psalm 37:4-5

I just gave you what amounts to a formula for prayer:

- Tell God what you're feeling and how you're thinking
- Listen for His response and His perspective
- Trust in His love and goodness
- Praise Him and worship Him

You want God to answer your prayers, right? And do you want God to give you the answers you want? Well, here's how you do it: Want the things that God wants.

If you find your delight in God, and trust Him, He'll give you what you want because it's what He wants. John wrote something very similar: *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* (1 John 5:14)

The key is to spend so much quality time with God, in prayer and in His Word, that we think more and more like He thinks.

I headed off to college to become a globe-trotting journalist. But shortly after I began attending a Bible-teaching church, God spoke to me about being a missionary. I did not want to do that.

As the years passed and I grew to know Him and to love Him, I began to see His calling on my life not as a burden, but a promise. I wanted what He wanted for my life. And He made me a missionary. In fact, He made me a globe-trotting journalist for God.

When you allow God to shape your heart—to help you desire what He desires—He can do amazing things in your life. I'm not saying you'll get exactly what you wanted to begin with. But when you find your delight in God, you get what you and He want.

So let's pray. Let's ask God to shape our hearts, and to make His desires our desires. Let's put our future in His hands, and trust Him with it.

Day 8: Shaped and soft

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

Nothing should keep you from going to God in prayer, even if all you can do is sigh, throw your hands up in dismay, or simply be still. God has this covered—His Spirit is not only interceding for us, but also praying for us according to God’s will.

Romans 8 specifically speaks about suffering—about the things we go through because we’re children of God in a fallen world. But God also reminds us that nothing can separate us from His love.

The point of the Spirit’s prayer is not to remove the suffering, but to use it to grow us and guide us to be more like Christ.

In the midst of the pain and difficulty, it’s tough for us to remember that. We might be discouraged, confused or distracted. We might ask for the wrong things or ask with the wrong motivation.

That’s why the Spirit is praying for us, “according to the will of God.”

As we pray today, let’s ask God to stretch our minds a bit, as we start to think about praying not only for ourselves, but for our fellow believers and for what’s on God’s heart. You don’t need to be any more specific than that. You know God wants us to pray for others, and to pray for what He wants. If there’s a gap in our prayer, we’ll trust the Holy Spirit to fill it in.

Praying for self | Praying for believers | Praying with God

Before we go any further ...

I'm encouraged that you've come this far, and it's my prayer that this devotional is blessing you.

By their nature, devotionals can be thought-provoking but not particularly deep. They're a good start, and a push in the right direction, but I feel the need to encourage you to look at these topics in more depth.

If you're already involved in a deeper study as part of your private time with God, great! If not, I suggest you download this personal study guide, and go deeper as you follow along:

go.ntm.org/prayerguide

Week 2: Praying for your community

Day 9: How *wide* is our focus?

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:13

The whole premise of 1 Corinthians 12—that all believers are one body in Christ—is contrary to our natures.

If you're looking at your class photo, a photo of your family, or any group you are in, who do you look for first? Most people look for themselves. And then they'll judge the overall photo by how they look in the photo.

We are naturally self-focused. In fact, you might even say we're wired to be self-focused. The parietal lobe of our brain keeps track of where each of us begins and ends. That's why we don't constantly bump into things. But it also helps isolate us, constantly separating our world between "me" and "everything else."

Yet scientists have discovered that in prayer, that distinction between us and others can melt away. We can embrace the concept that our fellow believers are one with us.

So let's adjust our lens, zooming from a tight telephoto shot of ourselves, to a wide-angle shot of the body of believers. We can and should wrap our heads around the fact that the church is far more than a building where we meet. It's even an understatement to say church is the people who meet there. We are one.

So bow your head and flex your mind. Try to wrap your thoughts around your fellow believers. Then let's pray for others in the body as we have learned to pray for ourselves. Let's focus not on their circumstances, but on the change God desires to bring to their lives.

Day 10: Do you want to be effective?

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16

The passage in which this verse appears (James 5:13-18) seems to zig and zag through individual and corporate prayer. That may be why so many people take one sentence from verse 16— *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*—and interpret it as saying that if we are in right standing with God, praying for His will and praying earnestly, our prayers will be effective.

But there's more to this statement when it's taken in context—and we should always understand any portion of Scripture by what's around it. James first tells us to pray for one another, and after this, gives us an example: Elijah, praying for rain on behalf of all those in Israel who had not bowed to idols.

Therefore, if we adjust our lens and zoom out on this verse, we see that we really should understand the last part of verse 16 to say: When we're in right standing with God, praying for His will and praying earnestly for our fellow believers, our prayers will be effective.

So let's pray for God to give us His perspective on our own lives, so we can see where we are or are not lining up with His will for us. Let's pray for His will to be done in the lives of our fellow believers, and pray for them.

Day 11: Getting on the same page

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. Ephesians 4:4-6

English doesn't differentiate between you (singular) and you (plural). So the translators of this passage resorted to the Southern vernacular to make this passage abundantly clear: Be united, because God the Father is in y'all.

How many bodies are we? Our parietal lobes tell us each of us is a body. But Paul tells us that together we're one body, just as there is one Spirit.

Paul even tells us how we can be united, and it starts with walking the walk we were called to walk: Humble, patient, loving and peace-seeking.

That's important, because if there's one body, that means that your church and my church and – oh my – *that* church over *there* too – are one. You know which church I'm talking about.

- The one that emphasizes the wrong things (because our church has it right).
- The one that has those people who irritate us and are unteachable (because we're never irritating and always teachable).
- The one that isn't loving (because we always are).
- The one that created the division in the first place (because they, not us, were at fault).

Wait a minute. What happened to being humble, patient, loving and peace-seeking?

We are one. *Pray for one another* means to pray for them too. And I don't think God means, "pray for them to change so they're just like us." I think He wants you and me to pray that all of us, through humility, patience, love and peace-seeking, work together for His glory in unison.

Will you pray for that right now?

Day 12: Diversity in the body

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He ... gave gifts to men." Ephesians 4:7-8

Immediately after talking about y'all, Paul begins to talk about each of us. He writes in verses 11-16 about some of the gifts, as he does in 1 Corinthians 12:1-12. And in the following verses he ties it all together. We're all one, but we're each uniquely gifted for a specific purpose, none more important or less important than another: *But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."* (1 Corinthians 12:20-21)

Paul's examples are intended to be absurd. Your eye can see a coffee cup, but it can't pick it up without your hand. Your head can't get anywhere without your feet. For that matter, the only one that can talk or hear is your head, and only with the help of your mouth and your ears.

I am recovering from a leg injury. I could not sit for long, stand for long or walk for long. When I did walk, I called on other muscles to work harder so the bruised one didn't have to do as much. That strained those muscles. I finally discovered that stretching and working at walking normally allowed my whole leg to heal.

Do you know what we need to stretch? We need to stretch our minds around facts like these:

- Believers are different ... and God loves them all unconditionally.
- Believers have different gifts ... and no one is better or more valuable than another.
- Believers have different roles ... and sometimes we need to step out of the way so others can fulfill their roles.

Only in prayer will we find the discernment to embody these principles. Only in prayer will we find the ability to value others as God values them. Prayer strengthens the community by freeing us each to fill the roles we are given.

Let's pray for discernment. Pray that God helps us love people who are different, and value them as He does. Pray that we each take on the roles we're intended to, and that we get out of the way and let others do His work.

Day 13: Discover and fulfill your role

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. 1 Corinthians 12:7

Remember what you have and why. We have spiritual gifts “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). And Paul writes in the next verse that this leads to “the unity of the faith.”

Paul wraps up his discussion of the body of Christ in Ephesians 4:16 with this: “The whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Do you know what your spiritual gift is? All believers have one. If you don’t know what it is, ask God to reveal it to you through your pastor or other teachers or leaders in your church. Seek the Lord and those qualified for help discovering it. You can find tools online for this, but I recommend you go to your local body of believers. That’s where, in most cases, you’ll be expected to use your gift.

If you know what your gift is, are you using it to build up the body? That’s what it’s for. It’s not vain to ask for opportunities to use your gift. But it may be prideful to assume you know exactly what those opportunities are. Again, go to your church leaders. Ask them in a spirit of humility where your gift can be used.

And pray for opportunities to use your spiritual gift, to build up the body and foster unity.

Day 14: Love in action

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Acts 4:32

It's odd to me that giving to our fellow believers is so rare today. It's one of the few types of giving spoken about in the New Testament. We see this not only in Acts, but in several of the epistles, where Paul talks about an offering for the suffering believers in Jerusalem.

In fact, in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul says the poverty-stricken believers in Philippi—having first given themselves to God (verse 5) — freely gave more than they could afford, even begging him for the opportunity to be part of the effort. He urged the wealthy Corinthians to also give, so that “your abundance may supply their lack” (verse 14).

We foster unity when we demonstrate love for one another and for God through generosity to our fellow believers.

I'm not going to ask you to pray about whether you ought to give. You already know you should. The Bible says so. I'm not going to ask you to pray about how much you can afford. The Bible encourages us to follow God's leading and act in faith — perhaps even giving more than we can afford, and trusting God to take care of us.

Instead, I'm asking you to pray for wisdom and discernment to see opportunities to foster unity by giving to your fellow believers, and for the courage and faith to act on those opportunities.

Day 15: Loving believers is practice for loving the lost

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 1 John 4:20

Sometimes it's not easy to love our brothers and sisters.

Our brothers and sisters can gossip. On occasion they undermine each other. They may compete for things like power and funding and prestige and popularity. They can be greedy and self-serving.

They sound like people, don't they? People Christ died for. People in whom God still has work to do.

People like you and me.

If we can't love our fellow believers, what chance do we have of loving the world?

Well, none.

The answer isn't to try harder. The answer is to pray, and let God love others through us. Face it: People are unlovely, and will be unlovely, and sometimes increasingly so. Pray for God to enable and empower you to love.

And when we love our brothers and sisters, and act on that love, we can step forward in unity to address the need that's on God's heart.

Week 3: What's on God's heart?

Day 16: How *moving* are our prayers?

Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Luke 10:2

Imagine this: You walk into a prayer meeting and sit down next to your friend. You're chatting away about how your day has been, when you realize a hush has fallen over the people behind you. And then you see why. Jesus Himself walks down the aisle past you and sits in the front row. Of course He'd sit in the front row, right?

I don't know about you, but I'd get out my phone and snap a picture of that.

And what if He raised His hand to share a prayer request? Well, I'd switch to video. I'd want pictures that moved, and sound. Then I'd post that video to Facebook and YouTube and, if He kept it brief, to Vine. I'd want the whole world to hear Jesus' prayer request. Wouldn't you?

And what if, a few weeks later, He showed up somewhere else with the same request? Can you imagine the impact it would have on God's people if Jesus shared just one prayer request, and it was important enough for Him to share it twice?

Well, He did just that. Not here and now. But then and there. Luke 10:2 and Matthew 9:37-38 contain almost identical prayer requests from Jesus, shared on two different occasions. In Luke 10, He shares this as He commissions the seventy-two to spread the word that the Kingdom of God is at hand. In Matthew 9, we're told that Jesus was moved with compassion for the needs He saw, and said, "*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*"

This request was so important that Jesus is recorded as sharing it twice. Do you think He meant for us to take notice? I do. I think integrating Jesus' prayer request is the third key to balancing our prayer lives.

So let's keep it simple and straightforward today. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

Day 17: The desire of God

*Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore **pray** the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Luke 10:2*

I'm sure you've asked people to pray for you. You've probably also asked people to pray for family members and friends. And we expect people to pray for us and our friends. But do you expect them to make those prayers personal? To take them on as if they were their own desires?

That's what Jesus is asking us to do.

Where the Bible says, "pray the Lord of the harvest," the word Jesus is quoted as using for "pray" is *deomai*. The words "pray" or "beseech" appear seventy-nine times in the King James Version, but only thirteen times is the Greek word *deomai*.

It actually means "to desire."

Jesus did not simply say this is a good thing to pray about. He didn't just say this was important to Him. He's asking us to make this important to us, and to pray earnestly for this.

Jesus wants us to make this prayer, our prayer. It's on His heart. He wants it to be on our hearts. I think it would be appropriate to get down on our knees and plead with God for laborers. It's His desire; it should be ours as well.

Day 18: Too few laborers

*Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest **to send out laborers into His harvest.**” Luke 10:2*

This is not a time to get bogged down with details.

I’ve heard at least a dozen different estimates of how many people groups are still unreached, based on a dozen different methods and systems. And I’m sure if we put a dozen believers in a room, we’d hear a dozen different definitions of what a laborer is. Neither of those is terribly important compared to a few overarching facts:

- The harvest is not yet complete.
- There’s still a lot of work to do.
- God has given this work to His people.

And let’s skip past the numbers to the people themselves. Men, women and children are living and dying with no access to the abundant, eternal life that Jesus died to make available to all of us.

It’s not unusual for people groups who hear a clear presentation of the gospel for the first time to wail for their relatives who died without access to the Truth. Or to ask, “How long have you known this? Why did it take so long for you to bring this to us?”

God could—and can—use supernatural means to draw people to Himself. He also uses technology, such as radio broadcasts, MP3 recordings of lessons and Scripture, and websites.

But the non-negotiable fact is that it takes a disciple to make a disciple. To carry out the work of His harvest takes people.

Pray for laborers. More are still needed.

Day 19: Harvesting is hard work

Then He said to them, *“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”* Luke 10:2

I loved having a vegetable garden. It was wonderful to step outside and harvest a couple of ripe tomatoes for a salad. But that’s not really the kind of harvest Jesus is talking about here.

He’s not talking about a small garden plot in a yard in the suburbs. He’s talking about an expanse of land, tilled, planted, watered and weeded in order to reach the day of harvest. Jesus wasn’t using a gardening analogy; He was using a farming analogy.

Any farmer will agree that the harvest is a great thing. It’s the day all that hard work pays off. But it’s also a far cry from plucking a couple of tomatoes and stepping inside to make a salad. It’s hard work in and of itself.

And it’s not something you can put off.

For a home gardener, it’s a bummer if you let a tomato drop off the vine and rot because you didn’t pluck it at the right time. It’s a catastrophe for the farmer if thousands of tomatoes fall and are lost forever.

Jesus is not saying, “Hey, look, it’s all just waiting for workers. It’s easy!” He’s saying, “There’s a big job out there, and it needs to be done, and it needs to be done now.”

This should drive us to pray with urgency and passion for laborers. Let’s do that.

Day 20: Sending

Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Luke 10:2

It's not just that harvesting is hard work. The work that's left to do is often in the world's hard places.

- Geography makes people hard to get to.
- Countries can make it difficult for a Christian to enter.
- Cultures can create hard soil, where it's just plain tough to get seeds to sprout.

And in places, all three are true. That's why Jesus tells us to ask God to send these laborers out. Without a clear sense that God is in charge and directing their steps, these laborers cannot last.

But that's not the only thing the Bible says about sending.

After telling us that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" in Romans 10:13, Paul makes the point that someone needs to come and share God's truth, and in verse 15 writes, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"

Paul and his companions were sent out by God, and by the church at Antioch. (Acts 13:1-3) This harvest is the task before all believers, and praying is one part of the picture.

You may have heard "pray, give or go." But it's more correct to say, "pray, send and go." Every believer is called to pray for laborers. Since this task belongs to all of us, we need to share the responsibility by sending—by giving not simply to contribute, but giving in order to equip people for ministry. That means giving not what we feel like giving, but giving generously and sacrificially in order for laborers to serve. And we can all "go" wherever we are.

Do you know a missionary? Pray for them daily, and pray specifically whether God wants you to help send them. If you don't know a missionary, find one – preferably one with a connection to your church. Pray for them, and pray about being part of their sending team. Pray also for God to direct you to the place He wants you to go.

Day 21: It's not an isolated prayer

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... Matthew 28:19

If Jesus simply asked us, twice, to “*pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest,*” that would be important. But that’s not the only thing the Bible says on this topic.

It’s a central theme of Scripture, beginning with God’s covenant with Abram in Genesis 12: “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God repeated the theme in Isaiah 49:6: “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”

When the Great Commission is shared, it is not one verse in one Gospel. It is found in different forms, at different times, across all four Gospels and in Acts.

And we see the theme come to fruition in Revelation 5:9, when the twenty-four elders sing, “*You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*”

It really should be as simple as remembering John 3:16. God loves you. He loves me. He loves all the people of the world. And it’s for all the people of the world that He gave His Son.

Remember that we looked at the fact that when our prayers line up with the will of God, we’ll see answers? Praying for laborers so the world can hear sounds an awful lot like the will of God, and therefore an indispensable part of a balanced prayer life.

Pray now that you and other believers make the most of opportunities to share Christ with the lost living near you, and that God sends believers to those who have no witness near them. Pray that their hearts will be open to the truth, and they will find salvation in Christ.

Day 22: Trusting His promises

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. Revelation 7:9

It's easy to lose track of the most important things in our busy modern world. We fixate on the here and now. Our daily struggles and triumphs fill our minds.

And now I've gone and complicated it all, urging you to rethink the way you pray for yourself, and to pray for your fellow believers and pray the prayer that's on God's heart.

So before we talk about how we balance all that, let me simplify things. Let's look at what God has promised us.

You will be conformed to the image of Christ, growing and maturing. That's not a burden on you; it's a promise from God. Your role is best described as staying out of His way, and allowing Him to work in you.

Believers will be unified and, in that, God will be glorified. Again, this is a promise. You and I and other believers cannot be truly unified apart from the work of God in us and through us. Trust in Him and in this promise as well.

Fulfilling the Great Commission is also the Lord's work. It's still a huge task, and it's going to be accomplished through millions of partnerships that are, in proportion to the task, microscopic. Only He can weave those together, and since we know there will be a multitude around the throne from every nation, tribe, people and language, we can see that as a promise as well.

Take time to think on God as we will one day see Him. Allow His presence to fill you with awe and reverence. Praise Him and worship Him. Petition Him for the love and strength and courage you need to be the ambassador of Jesus in your world.

Week 4: Bringing it all into focus

Day 23: How can this be possible?

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Matthew 6:33

Have you ever grabbed your camera to take a photo at just the right time, only to be disappointed because it was out of focus, or focused on the wrong place? Wouldn't it be great if you could take the picture, then focus later?

Actually, you can. There's a novel camera technology called "light field photography" that allows people to choose the point of focus – or even bring the whole photo into focus – as they look at the photo later.

I have a hard time wrapping my head around that. It seems like magic. It's not supernatural, of course. It's technology. Technology is giving us powers and abilities that people used to just dream about.

That's sort of what we're going to do next. We're going to explore how these three seemingly unrelated topics -- praying properly for ourselves, praying for our fellow believers, and praying the prayer on God's heart – can unify in a focused prayer life.

We're going to start reordering our prayers. We're going to put God first, then others, and then ourselves. Why does God come first?

- He's God. He should come first.
- What's on God's heart is clear and specific, while we often don't know how to pray for others or even ourselves.
- Putting God first helps put our priorities in order, and orders our prayers.

Focusing on God first is the best way to bring everything else into focus. So let's get to work. Let's start by reading a Psalm of praise. Here are some choices: Psalm 18, 21, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 40, 41, 66, 105, 106, 111, 113, 116, 117, 135, 136, 138, 146, and 147. And yes, you can read more than one, you overachiever.

Then simply pray for what's on God's heart. Ask Him to send laborers into His harvest. Pause to listen. How long is between you and God. Then pray for your fellow believers. Pause for Him again. And then for yourself. And listen.

Day 24: Putting God first

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matthew 22:37

Putting God first is about more than order. It's also about priority and perspective.

We know we should want what God wants. But we get distracted by shiny things, pretty stuff, awesome gadgets and cool gear. Or by excitement, or fun. Travel and leisure. Games.

There's often room in our lives for things like that when we're walking with God. But those things are never supposed to be the focus of our lives. We need to step back daily and remember that Jesus left us with a prayer request that was clearly important to Him. That has to be a great definition of what God wants:

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Luke 10:2)

Today, a laborer carefully chooses the words in an unfamiliar language to build a relationship with her neighbor—a relationship she hopes will someday give her an opportunity to share the gospel. Will you pray for her?

Another laborer struggles to keep up with the other men on the jungle trail, anxious to invest time in understanding not only the way they speak, but the way they think, so he can present the Truth clearly. Will you pray for him?

Somewhere else, a laborer kneels by the bedside of a dying woman, agonizing as he tries to wrap concrete words around abstract concepts so she has an opportunity to meet Jesus. Will you pray?

Daily, His laborers need His sending power to renew and refresh them for the work ahead. So each day, please remember that. Don't just pray for these laborers. Let their situations and challenges pierce your heart and make Jesus' prayer, your prayer.

Ask God to send them forward. Make that a priority. Work to see the world in light of the importance Christ placed on this prayer.

Day 25: Praying for the senders

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. Philippians 1:3-5

Paul frequently writes that he thanks God for his fellow believers. He specifically thanks God for the Philippians' "fellowship in the gospel" — their participation in his ministry as a missionary, in giving, encouragement and prayer.

If we're going to follow biblical examples—and that's a good thing—we ought to start with an attitude of gratitude toward our fellow believers.

Keeping in mind what Jesus asked us to pray about, we should be thankful that men and women are coming forward to serve, and pray that God works in more hearts so more go out.

We should be thankful for the men and women who are sending those people, and pray for more senders. And we should be thankful for those standing with them in prayer, and ask God for more people to pray daily.

Let's do that, right now. But be specific. Pray for individuals you know who fall into those groups. Pray for people who go, people who send and people who pray, as well as people who are considering going, sending or praying.

Day 26: Praying for the laborers

Continue earnestly in prayer ... praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains. Colossians 4:2-3

It just makes sense that if Jesus asked us to pray for God to send laborers, we should be praying for the laborers too. Paul certainly asked people to pray for him.

Let's start with three areas of prayer to keep in mind for missionaries, based on how Jesus and Paul asked us to pray:

- Pray that they have a clear sense that God is sending them. Pray that daily God gives them encouragement, strength and provision for their work.
- Pray for opportunities for them to share the gospel and make disciples.
- Pray for their safety, and for perseverance, wisdom and boldness in the face of persecution and opposition.

Are you praying daily for a specific laborer? Are your prayers specific – are you digging through their newsletters for prayer requests? Have you asked them how you can pray for them? If you contacted a missionary and told them you wanted to pray for them daily, you would also encourage them.

If you're not already praying for a specific individual, couple or family, now is a good time to start. Here are three avenues for finding one:

- Choose a laborer your church is already involved with. Ask your pastor or other church leader for help contacting them.
- Subscribe to NTM's weekly prayer update, and connect with an individual, couple or family mentioned there. (usa.ntm.org/subscribe-to-email-updates)
- Contact a missions organization and ask if there are any missionaries living in your area—based there or on home assignment—with whom you can meet and get involved with.

Don't agonize over the organization or the specific person or the type or place of service. It's not like you're going to pray for someone daily, then get to Heaven and hear God say, "I didn't want anyone praying for that missionary."

So get praying.

Day 27: Praying as we ought

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Praying for yourself might seem very strange to you right now. You may never before have thought about yourself in terms of what God has called all of us to do—to make disciples of all nations, and to pray for laborers.

The key thing this tells us is, we need to be involved in these efforts. Perhaps even more involved than you realize.

When Jesus spoke to His followers about where they would be witnesses, He didn’t put a priority on one place over another. The way Acts 1:8 is phrased, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the end of the earth have equal priority.

So even though I spend each workday focused on making disciples at the end of the earth, I can’t stop there. I also need to be vitally involved in my local church.

Now take a look around you. You should be part of a local church, and involved there. You should also be involved as an ambassador of Christ in your own community. And chances are, the bulk of your praying and giving and going is local.

How well are you doing at the end of the earth? Jesus gave it equal priority. Yet I’ve heard it said that more than 95 percent of all the Christian workers and more than 95 percent of the all the money given to God never make it out of the local context.

Pray that God shows you how He wants you to put more priority on His work at the end of the earth.

Day 28: Strength for the journey

But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren. Luke 22:32

Faith is one of the most important building blocks in obedience.

And fear is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to obedience.

Funny how that works, isn't it?

God has been preparing you for the next step. He has been at work in your life to ensure that you are equipped for whatever He has for you now. You have the faith necessary for that.

But instead of focusing on the next step, we try to look too far ahead. We can't really tell what's up there, and it's frightening. So sometimes we choose to stop.

Yesterday's prayer—asking God to show you how He wants you to start balancing your priorities to make them His—may have put you in a spot.

Maybe He's talking to you about making more time to pray, and you don't know where to find that time. Perhaps He's asked you to give more than you think you can carve out of your budget. Or it could be that He's showing you people you need to bring the gospel to, whether that is near or far.

Take a deep breath, and let's pray.

Ask God for His peace. Ask Him for that calm that comes even in difficult times because you know you're following Him. Ask Him to simply show you the next step, and to help you focus on that next step. Ask Him for the strength to take it, and the faith to trust Him with what comes next.

Day 29: Putting it all together

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

One of our NTM missionaries once told me that the first time he asked one of the new believers to pray, the man walked up to a log and put his foot up. Then he rested his elbow on his knee, and bowed his head to rest on his hand, before he began.

That was the way the missionary had always stood while praying with them. The man was simply modeling what he'd seen. But what if there hadn't been a log handy?

Don't let the form of prayer get in the way of prayer.

Jesus told us not to pray like the Pharisees, and to go into a closet to pray (Matthew 6). His point was that we shouldn't make a show of it. Our prayers are supposed to humble us before God, not exalt us before men. Jesus often used hyperbole – or to put it another way, exaggeration as a figure of speech. He would over-emphasize something to make a point.

We don't have to pray in a closet. We can pray anywhere and everywhere. At the same time, it's important to make time alone with the Father. Luke 5:16 tells that Jesus "often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed."

Now, what Paul might be telling us when he writes "pray without ceasing" is that we ought not put a time limit on prayer or reduce it to a formula. Don't misunderstand me: aiming for a certain amount of time, or using a formula to help you remember to thank God and praise Him can be a good thing. Just don't let it limit you.

But I think Paul means something much deeper. How can we pray without ceasing? By coming back to the essence of prayer. It's communicating with God. We need to keep ourselves in a state of listening to God and speaking to Him. And Paul tells us how to keep those lines open: Rejoice always, and keep giving thanks. Worship Him with a grateful heart, continually.

It takes practice. And practice starts with doing it now. Let's pray.

Wrapping it all up

Day 30: The circle of eternal life

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. Isaiah 55:8

Chicago is one of my favorite cities. And in Chicago I love to go to the Art Institute, head to the Impressionists, and walk around in front of the paintings by Claude Monet.

I look at the paintings from a distance, and marvel at the way the scenes seem alive and real in a way that a photograph simply cannot capture. Then I get closer, and I cannot help but smile and shake my head.

Close, I can see that what looked like a green tree from a distance is actually composed of a variety of colors. It’s not just shades of green. There may be lavender, pink and burgundy, and mustard or gold. I cannot for the life of me understand how Monet chose those colors, let alone how he decided how much of each to put where. But I admire the results.

Perhaps we need to step back a little when we are looking at God’s results, too.

Up close, the results of our obedience may look like an angry splotch of red. It may seem completely out of place. Yet with a little perspective, we may realize it is a highlight on a shining breastplate of righteousness.

We may never achieve that perspective this side of Heaven. In fact, I am certain we will not be able to fully comprehend the beautiful masterpiece God is painting until we are with Him there. So we need to learn to trust Him for the results of our obedience.

We also need to learn to see beyond ourselves. We need to see, first and foremost, God. God is the One who can answer our prayers, the only One who can change our circumstances. But then we begin to realize it’s really about changing us.

Seeing beyond ourselves brings the whole community of believers into focus. And as we pray for them, and love them, we are part of God’s plan to unify His people. And His people can, together, reach out beyond themselves, even to the whole world.

Pray that God sends out laborers into His harvest.

Next steps

Your own church is your starting point, and if you don't have one, find one. There is no substitute for the church's role in the believer's life, or for the role of the believer in the church.

Look for opportunities to grow and to serve. Talk with your church leaders about your next steps. Listen to the guidance of wise believers. Develop and deepen relationships.

I also encourage you to look into New Tribes Mission. Our website, ntm.org, is a great starting point.

And if this book has been a blessing to you, or I can help you move ahead in your walk with Christ, please let me know. Thank you for investing the time and effort it took to work through this.

Ian Fallis

ian_fallis@ntm.org

About the author

After fifteen years writing and editing at daily newspapers in Southern California, Ian Fallis and his wife, Julie, joined New Tribes Mission. They serve at the mission's USA home office in Sanford, Florida. Ian has spent the last fifteen-plus years writing about and visiting remote villages and hamlets in the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America and Africa.

Ian is also the author of two series of fiction books.

Find out more about his ministry at his NTM blog, blogs.ntm.org/ian-fallis