

# Intimate Prayer

Personal.

Persistent.

Purposeful.

By Mari Keisling

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Thank you, Lord Jesus, for praying for me long before I was.  
You knew I'd be here and had already started making plans for my life.  
May my entire life be an answer to your prayers for me.  
I join with a heart devoted to you in your prayers for those  
who seek you and are called by your name.

Thank you for taking a moment to stop and look, to see what God is doing. Each day we have opportunities placed all around us to notice and participate with God in His kingdom here on earth. Prayer, our conversations with God, can happen at a moment's notice. When you choose to look God's way, He will grab you by the hand and lead you on the adventure of a lifetime. As your heart opens to Him, it will open to others as well. He has plans for you. Choose to join Him.

I'd love to have you visit me at [www.marikeisling.com](http://www.marikeisling.com). You can subscribe to my quarterly newsletter, sign up to receive my weekly blog, LYF Moments ... because faith happens, and check out other resources available for individual or group study.

You can also connect with me on Facebook at Live Your Faith Ministries and Twitter as @MariKeisling. I love to hear and share stories about what God is doing in our lives and through our lives to touch others in the name of Jesus. In Him, we become a new creation and do things we never dreamed we do. As we share these stories and real-life examples of His work, others are inspired to step out in faith and do what seems impossible all for His glory.

And know that I am praying for you as you step out to live your faith with courage, confidence and conviction every day. May your time in this study be a blessing and encouragement knowing and trusting your prayers are heard.

In Christ's Love,  
Mari

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# Contents



<i>Intimate Prayer Introduction</i> .....	5
<i>Intimate Prayer is Personal</i> .....	7
<i>Intimate Prayer is Persistent</i> .....	14
<i>Intimate Prayer is Purposeful</i> .....	21
<i>References</i> .....	29

# Intimate Prayer



*“You make known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”*

Psalm 16:11

Prayer is personal. Prayer is persistent. Prayer is purposeful. God desires an intimate relationship with each of us and it begins with a conversation. God approaches us making clear His desire. He already knows us completely so He invites us to know Him as well.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that God knows you? That He wants you to know Him? Do you believe He makes His intentions clear? And if you do believe it, how do you even begin to know the Creator of the universe, the Creator of all things?

Prayer is powerful. It's a tool we all have access to yet few utilize to its fullest capacity regularly. Consistently.

People throw up little prayers to God when they want something to go well and when they are at their wits end. Why do we wait? Why do we wait until we've hit rock bottom before we open our hearts to God? And those prayers for blessing and good tidings? What if those prayers were not as much about our success, but were more for God's glory?

In the middle of casual requests and gut wrenching need is an ongoing conversation of the most intimate kind. It's where we walk with God in the garden of life and share the details, desires, concerns and hopes for our future and for His praise.

Intimate prayer develops a firm foundation and a consistent, unwavering heart for God. He gives us wisdom, knowledge and understanding of His ways. We share in His joy as we come to understand His great love for us. And our purpose in this world takes on a new meaning as we recognize where it is all leading.

Will you take time to know God?

Will you let Him lead you in all aspects of your life?

Will you be honest with God about the state of your heart toward Him, toward others and toward yourself? A conversation with God does more than give us information. It transforms our

hearts and minds. We think we want everything outside of us to be changed and affected by God, but through intimate prayer, it's what's inside us that's changed so we can affect our surroundings for God. We move from self-centered to God-centered and from self-serving to serving others.

To understand this better, we're going to look at Psalm 16:11 in relation to Jesus' prayer in John 17. Jesus has just finished teaching His disciples about how to know God, about the Holy Spirit, and about abiding in Him. He also teaches them about the world's hatred of them because of Him and about using His name in prayer. He lets them know that because He has overcome the world, they can have peace in their troubles. Intimate prayer brings that peace because we know God knows our situation and is with us.

You're going to want to grab a Bible, a journal and a pen. Let's join Him in what He is already doing.

# Intimate Prayer is Personal



*“You make known to me the path of life;”*

Psalm 16:11a

Personal prayer is intimate, secret, special and particular. While God treats all of His children the same – with the same love and the same justice – He also knows what’s unique about each of us and He takes the opportunity to come to each of us in just the way we need, with just the right words that will touch us personally. Nothing He says will ever contradict who He is and nothing He says will ever contradict who you are in Him.

How does God know the specifics about me and about you? Aren’t we all just like little ants running around under His feet subjugated to His rule? If God is the Author of Life and there is so much life in this world, what could God actually care to know and remember about me?

- ❖ Take a moment and read Psalm 139. List or underline everything God knows about you according to these verses.

God doesn’t just remember who you are and the creation He made. God is still aware of all you are. He sees you coming and going, standing up and lying down. He knows your every movement. He knows what you think, how you feel, and what you want to say even before you do. He is intimately aware of what makes you tick: your passions, dreams and desires.

God created you in your mother’s womb putting each piece of you in place. Nothing about you is hidden from God. His hand is on you and He has a perfect plan for your life; a purpose beyond what you on your own could even imagine.

Psalm 139 ends with our desire for God to go even deeper by searching the depths of our heart and testing us by revealing to us those things that are displeasing to Him. The only reason to know what displeases God is so it can change us; so that as we understand our purpose in Him, we can

let go of all the things keeping us from our purpose for Him. When we ask Him to reveal those attitudes and ways that get in the way of our relationship, our heart opens to His work.

God does incredible things when our hearts are open to Him.

- ❖ Look at Jeremiah 29:12-13. God tells us exactly how we can be heard by Him and how we can know Him. What does this verse mean to you? What does it tell you about God's character?

God promises that He will listen to you and you will find Him when you call on Him in prayer and seek Him with all your heart. If you want to know God, you can. He's made a promise that if your heart is set on Him, you will find Him. He will listen to you.

Imagine that! You *can* find God. He *will* listen to you. But you do have to *want* to know Him. You have to *want* to find Him. Too often we want God to hear us, just in case He exists, just in case He can really do something, but we rarely want to actually enter into a relationship with Him because somewhere deep down, we know it will cost us something. It will cost us those things that displease Him.

Is He worth it? The One who formed you? The One who is waiting to set you free from everything that holds you back and weighs you down?

He most certainly is, but it's in the knowing Him that you realize just how deep His love for you runs. You begin to understand that not only do you need to be willing to sacrifice some things, but that He has already made the ultimate sacrifice for you. His one and only Son died for you before you were even born.

All because God loves you. All because God wants you to know Him.

As we dive into John 17, Jesus is about to be arrested and put to death. His purpose on earth for God's glory and for His love for you is almost finished.

- ❖ Read John 17:1-5. What do you notice from Jesus' prayer for Himself that shows He knows God?

In chapters 14-16, Jesus is giving the disciples one final lesson on what it means to know Him. Who He is, what He's come to do, and what we do because of it matters. All of it matters. The last thing Jesus does is pray. Again, He doesn't just toss up a little prayer, a just in case prayer. He calls to His Father, looking toward heaven with His disciples there, inviting them into this intimate, personal conversation.

This prayer, this conversation starts with Jesus stating, "Father, the hour has come."

In the Message version, it says, “It’s time.” What a simple statement with such a huge meaning, a huge impact.

When you think of this phrase, are there situations that come to mind where you would use this statement? Are there certain people you would need to be speaking to in order for them to know what you are talking about?

I imagine a pregnant wife looking at her husband and saying, “It’s time.” You know exactly what’s going to happen. He’s not asking any questions. He’s getting off his bottom and grabbing her bag and his car keys.

I also imagine a son in the military with his mother. “Mom, it’s time.” The tears and the hugs follow before she watches him walk to the plane.

If you walked up to a stranger on the street and said, “It’s time,” they’d have no idea what you are talking about. And they shouldn’t. They don’t know you and you don’t know them. You have no relationship.

But the one who knows you intimately, the one who understands what you’re going through in your life will understand exactly what you’re talking about. And the response will be appropriate.

Jesus doesn’t need to go into all the details surrounding His situation, but He does review the plan.

“Okay, Dad, here’s what’s supposed to happen, here’s what I’ve done, and now I’m trusting you to do what you said you would do once this is finished. I’m still working the plan, expecting the outcome you promised. I’m trusting you with it.”

From these verses in John, we learn three things about personal prayer.

### 1. **Prayer is constant.**

Prayer is constant, continuous. There is never a time we can’t or shouldn’t pray. Day or night, we call out, sometimes cry out to God with the joys and concerns of our heart. We ask for guidance, confirmation, clarity, understanding, and wisdom. We ask for a change in our situation or a change in our heart. We ask Him to strengthen us as we walk through the difficulties and we praise Him simply for whom He is.

Jesus tells us in Luke 18 to pray and never give up.

❖ What situation do you need to bring constantly before God in prayer?

Regardless of how long it takes to see an answer, keep praying. We don’t know what God is doing behind the scenes, how He’s preparing hearts and situations or what He may want us to do first. Jesus’ point is that a lack of prayer leads to a lack of faith. Constant communication with God

keeps God and His promises firmly planted in our hearts and minds. We doubt less even though the answer is taking longer than we like or isn't the answer we want.

In this way, we are regularly devoted to time with God; faithful in our purpose; steadfast in our faith. Just like Jesus in John 17, we remember what He's already done, what He's currently doing and what He's said He'll do in the future.

He will hear us.

When we turn to God in prayer, we will find Him. He makes known the path of life. Jesus is that path. He will respond when we trust Him. He will supply what we need in order to finish the work He's given us.

## 2. **Prayer is honest.**

There isn't much point to prayer if we aren't willing to say what we really want, need, think or feel. God wants to hear the good, the bad and the really ugly. He is the one who is able to discern and fully understand our hearts as we pour out our souls to Him. He doesn't judge our requests, but He does check our motives.

As I said in the previous point, God may want to change our hearts before He will answer our prayer because if our heart is changed, more in alignment with His ways, we will respond differently to the answered prayer. Our motives and desires in our prayers matter.

As we saw in Psalm 139, God already knows every word before we speak them. He knows the reasons we say and do everything even when we don't. We can be completely honest with God and He will help shape our prayers so we truly can have and receive the best possible outcome.

There are times and situations where we just need to be alone with God. Our prayers are for those we love and it's not our place to share it with anyone else. We need direction and guidance about things that could, if made public, cause us to become prideful or be misunderstood. God ultimately wants us to wrestle with Him first and foremost because He is the One who is able.

There are also times when we need a close group of trusted friends to come along side us and join with us in our prayers and petitions. In forming an intimate relationship with God, we can form intimate relationships with others in the family of God through prayer.

Jesus says in Matthew 18:

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Matthew 18:19-20

Prayer requires not only honesty with God, but also honesty with others. If we are going to truly be in agreement with each other as we come before God, we must be willing to speak the truth of our hearts. God knows if we are lying, denying or rejecting the truth. Our friends don't always. They don't have the same access to our thoughts that God does so it's up to us to confess.

Sometimes, confessing just means we ask for prayer in a general way: for our marriage, our kids, our work, extended family, health, or finances. Other times, it means we get real with people: I've got an addiction, I have cancer, my anger is out of control, or I'm struggling with anxiety. When we have a few people we know we can trust to join us in prayer, they can help us stay focused on God, holding us accountable to His truth even though our feelings are drawing us another way.

Then there's a time and a place for corporate, public prayer. A large group of people with hearts set on God ready to listen and proclaim, seek and respond, ask and wait. This prayer time is often set on issues and requests pertaining to things that affect large groups of people: our neighborhoods, cities and country, our local church or the church as a whole, our world and issues that affect people everywhere. If we're going to pray for these things, we need to be willing to be honest about what God wants for all people, not just those who know Him or those who think He's the way, but those who don't know or believe in Him at all. We need to be honest that His way is the way, there is no other, because as soon as we are willing to compromise in this area, what the rest of the world is doing isn't really a problem. If there's another way, maybe their way is right. But this isn't about me being right or you being right, this is about the fact that God is right. And we need to be willing to be honest about what that means.

Take a look at Luke 22:39-46.

Jesus is about to be arrested. He will be accused, sentenced, and put to death – crucified – a criminal's death. He knows what's coming; it's why He's here. And yet...

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

Luke 22:42

Jesus is willing to be honest about His concern and desire. He would have been lying to say He had no problem with going to the cross. It was going to be more than unpleasant. It was going to be extremely painful. But even in this truth, He was willing to let His prayer, His heart be compelled by His Father's will.

Because Jesus was honest, God was able to provide the full measure of what was truly needed. Jesus was strengthened because of His prayer. He could have tried to do it on His own, but instead He received help to do all He needed. And just like with Jesus, when we are honest with God, He will provide all we need in accordance with His will.

### **3. Prayer is trusting.**

As we continue to look at Luke 22, we see that Jesus had brought along a few friends to pray with Him. In Matthew 26 it says they are to keep watch and pray.

Why would you ask someone to keep watch? Would you ask just anyone to do this? Personally, I wouldn't ask someone to keep watch if I didn't trust him or her to do so. And while the disciples

fall asleep and have a difficult time with this request, Jesus uses it to teach them a valuable lesson: prayer is essential in avoiding temptation.

Jesus doesn't just want the disciples to watch and pray for His benefit, but for their own as well. There are going to be some things happening that they don't understand and they are going to be tempted to respond outside of God's will. They are going to want to stop things from progressing. But the only way the prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 is fulfilled, is by the reality of His death.

In Matthew 4:1-2, we see that Jesus knows what it means to be tempted. He had been in the desert fasting 40 days. He was hungry; He was weak. And the disciples are now tired and exhausted from sorrow. They are trying to make sense of everything they've learned and experienced, everything Jesus is trying to help them understand.

In Matthew 4, Jesus defeated the devil by quoting God's word. He didn't need to fight or defend, only speak what He knew to be true because of His relationship with His Father. He trusted the words He'd learned and remembered. In that moment, Jesus didn't need to pray because He already had His answers.

God has given us His Word to strengthen us. He has already given us His answer. He has made a way for us to distinguish between our thoughts and desires and His. When we weigh everything against His Word, we are able to make better decisions; decisions that will help us stay focused on His will.

Temptation can cause us to question our relationship with God and His ability to work on our behalf. And Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are. Without the strengthening of His Father's Word, Jesus may have been tempted to avoid the cross. He may have been tempted to use His own strength, the power and glory He laid aside to become a man, and step into the authority that was rightfully His as the Son of God. Our enemy knows what we want, but what he offers is a cheap imitation. It seems easier in the moment, but it will cost us so much more in the long run.

And people will fail us. People have good intentions and may often keep their promises, but everyone will fail at some point. Just like the disciples didn't really understand or know how to respond to what was happening, there will be people in our lives who just don't really understand. They unknowingly tempt us to turn from the work God has given us to complete.

We see that Jesus, in His approaching God, humbles Himself on His knees. He is in a vulnerable position not seeking to defend Himself or fight for what He wants. He trusts His Father implicitly. Unlike the people in our lives, God never fails and He always keeps His promises. In our relationship with God, we can trust what He says. His Word is His promise.

As we pray and God answers, we see His love and faithfulness, not just in the lives of those we read about, but we experience it ourselves personally. He shows up in the reality of our lives; He draws us close and He gives us His strength for the work He's given us. Do you trust God to do what He says? Do you believe He will really see you through the difficult situations in life? Do you tend to focus more on your own weaknesses or do you trust in and rely on God's strength?

God will finish what He starts. He will complete His work in and through you when you trust Him.



Through Jesus Christ, God has made the path of life clear. Your prayer time spent with God investing in your relationship with Him and in understanding who you are in Him requires a heart open to Him. As you learn more about His character, you will learn more about your character and how He wants to grow you so you can be in constant communication with Him, being honest about all things and trusting Him in everything. Make this your prayer today.

# Intimate Prayer is Persistent



*“... you will fill me with joy in your presence...”*

Psalm 16:11b

Persistent prayer endures. It is resolute and steadfast. Nothing can cause it to waver. It is tenacious and unrelenting never letting go of the hope it professes.

I don't know about you, but I want to be tenacious and unrelenting in my prayers. I want to be so sure of the hope I profess that nothing can cause me to waiver or loosen my grip regardless of how long the answers take in coming. I want to be certain that God's purpose in the waiting is worthy of everything I endure in the process.

How can I be certain? How can I know that what I do is not in vain?

Just as the disciples experienced the physical presence of Jesus, we can experience His presence through the power of the Holy Spirit. We have joy by simply residing in the presence of Jesus.

Joy, not happiness, is a worthy venture. It is the purest and most righteous form of satisfaction possible. To have joy is to delight in and greatly appreciate that which brings about the passion or emotion. Joy goes beyond emotion. It doesn't fluctuate with our circumstances. Joy becomes a trait of our character. We become people of joy.

In John 17:13, Jesus says He wants His disciples to have the full measure of His joy within them. The way He ensures this is to share with them all He is doing and all He is going to do. When we share in the purpose of Jesus, we will experience His joy as well.

❖ Read John 17:6-19. List some of the things Jesus says He did and the outcome.

Out of all the people in the world, God gave Jesus these specific disciples. They were going to be the ones to carry His message to the rest of the world once He was gone. Their hearts had to be ripe to receive what Jesus was teaching, preaching and living.

The Jewish people had been living under the law for nearly 1,500 years. Dos and don'ts ruled. The hierarchy of holiness was limited and lifeless. And then, in walks Jesus calling the least, the outcasts of society to join Him in His work.

During His prayer, Jesus lets His disciples in on some personal information not only about His relationship with His Father, but about them and how they've responded to the love of God for them. When Jesus revealed God, they obeyed His word. They recognized Jesus as having come from God and they did what He said. They accepted the words (instructions, understanding and knowledge) Jesus spoke and had full assurance and belief that He had come from God. So in that full assurance they could hear and believe everything Jesus was now praying and everything that was going to happen going forward. They could have full faith and assurance of not only the love of God, but an active love that intervenes and interrupts their lives for His glory.

As Jesus prays, He reminds the disciples that He won't be there long. He is leaving, going back to His Father, but just as they were certain about Jesus, they could be certain about God's care for them once He was gone. Jesus had protected them and kept them safe and God would continue so that the full measure of the joy of Jesus would be with them.

Imagine that! Every step of faith in the coming days and continuing work of Jesus through them could be filled with joy. What they didn't fully understand then, but we know now, is that God would send His Spirit to fill them so they could continue to experience the presence of Jesus and know all God had for them. And we have that same gift even today. We can have joy because we are not alone to accomplish all God asks. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son is with us even today!

Even though the world hated Jesus and hates His disciples, there is joy because it's not about this world. It's about His world; His kingdom. And Jesus shares with them that it will be their work to make His kingdom known. They are here for a purpose, a greater purpose than themselves. They are here to share His word, His truth of love, and His truth of holiness for the world.

Jesus set Himself apart and brought the culture of the kingdom to earth. In following Jesus, we are, just as the disciples were, set apart to bring the culture of the kingdom to those God is calling to Himself. It's not our responsibility to convert anyone. We simply get to share the good news of Jesus with those God is calling to Himself, the ones He's giving us.

❖ What aspect of God's kingdom do you want to know and understand better so you can become more like Him?

Jesus in His prayer asks God to protect the disciples by the power of His name, not forgetting what He had done for them; to protect them from the evil one while they are still in this world; and to sanctify them by His truth so they could be set apart in their work for Him. As He's going to the cross His focus isn't just on His need. He sees the difficult challenge they will face as He dies.

From these verses in John, we learn three things about how God works in our persistent prayers.

## 1. **God unifies.**

Unity is a constant theme with Jesus. After all, He came to reconcile us to God. It makes sense he'd want us reconciled to each other as well.

But this isn't a simple we-get-along unity. This is about us being unified in faith, in trust and in message about the truth of Jesus. The disciples obeyed, accepted and believed Jesus. When we truly believe Him we will demonstrate this unity.

Jesus and the Father were one. Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing.

What do you see God doing in the world? In your community? In your life or family? Are you one with Him in purpose, mission and love for others? Are you one with others in service, in message, and in the truth of Jesus?

As you come to God in prayer, as you become one with Him, you will obey, accept and believe what He is telling you through His Word, His Spirit and those He puts in your path.

You also become part of His body. You are one with His church.

What issues do you have with His church? Do you see the church as a building, an organization, or just a bunch of people who think they have the authority to tell you what to do, but do whatever they want? Have you been hurt, misunderstood or marginalized by the church?

As someone who accepts Christ as Lord and Savior, you become the church. If you want nothing to do with the church, you want nothing to do with Jesus. Sound harsh?

John also writes in one of his letters to the churches that those who don't love their brother, can't love God.

“We love because He first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must love their brother and sister.”

1 John 4:19-21

Jesus specifically prays for the protection of His followers so they could be one just as God and He are one. We are unified in His love – not just in our love for Him, but in our love for each other.

If you struggle with the church and the idea of walking through the doors of a building, understand God has a purpose for you to be part of what He's doing through a collective body of believers. While your purpose may not be found within the four walls of a building, but in a mission field perhaps, it will still most likely be with others who are also part of the church.

Ask God to help you let go of any grudges, resentment or unforgiveness you hold against those who God has also called to love and serve Him. Ask Him to help you see the church as His presence

in this world. Ask God to help you grow in your relationship with Him and Jesus by helping you connect to, care for and love His church.

Jesus Himself intercedes for you in this endeavor. It's the prayer of Jesus Himself that will help you accomplish this and be unified in Him. Choose to join Him in what He is already doing.

- ❖ How is God calling you to be unified with and connected to His body, the church? What new thing is God teaching you about His church?

## 2. **God protects.**

Bad things happen in this world to both those who know and trust Jesus and to those who don't. So how can we unequivocally say God protects?

God's protection supersedes the troubles of this world. It is an eternal protection that is the only protection that ultimately matters. Everything in this world will perish and come to an end, but the protection of God brings life from death. It's like being on the operating table. Your heart stops but a doctor gets it going again. In a sense you've died, but you've been brought back to life.

The difference with God is that: 1) when you've truly died and no doctor or cure can help, God will raise you to life again and 2) you don't have to wait to physically die to gain the life God has for you. In Christ, you are alive and safely protected from everything and everyone who could try to keep you from attaining all God has for you. You have already received it. You are sealed with His eternal inheritance that can never perish, fade or be removed.

God has recently given me a question to ask myself regarding this protection He provides. "What would I do in this situation if I had no fear?"

What situation, you ask? Any situation.

What are you facing right now? What situation or circumstance is consuming your attention and drawing your focus away from Jesus? In what way is your ability to trust being tested?

The joy of Jesus should supersede any fear we have as we follow Him. Our willingness to go, do, speak or act on His behalf is one way we know if we really trust Him.

Satan, the evil one, loves to play games with us. He is the one who steals, kills and destroys using fear to keep us from knowing, loving and obeying God's Word. He uses the things of this world to keep our focus on this world because if we think this is all there is, then it's possible to lose everything, and eventually, we will. But, God in His mercy and love has made a way for us to actually gain everything, because all of this is truly temporary and meaningless.

God's gift of salvation is our protection from the evil one. We don't have to listen to or give equal opportunity to the devil in our lives. He is a defeated foe with nowhere to go but the pit. We on the other hand are the children of God. And one day, we will leave this place and be brought to our Father's house. We will be safe for all time. In Christ, we have that same safety here and now.

Psalm 51:12 speaks of the joy we have in His salvation. The New Living Translation version puts it this way:

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.”  
Psalm 51:12 (NLT)

❖ Why do you think joy is so critical for obedience?

Our willingness to obey is driven by our ability to have joy in the gift of salvation found only through faith in Jesus. As you consider your own willingness to obey and the fears that keep you from moving forward in God’s plan for you, ask God to show you what life would be like if you had no fear. How is God calling you to be bold and courageous for Jesus? What difference would confident security in God’s promises make in your life? Living without fear for Jesus leads to freedom and hope for a lost world. Ask God to give you a willing spirit to sustain you so you can fully obey and have joy. Choose to join Him in what He’s already doing.

❖ In what area of your life do you need to be bold and courageous, living without fear for Jesus? If there are currently areas that are off limits to God, what will you begin to do so He can have full access?

### 3. **God sanctifies.**

God prepares His people for the work He has prepared for them to do. God never calls or sends without providing all that is needed.

There have been times when I have felt unprepared for God’s work. Not in the work He is doing in me, but in the work He is wanting me to complete based on the work He is completing in me. And the truth is I will never feel or be fully prepared right now (whenever “now” is) to do the work He will bring me to later.

It’s a work in progress. I am a work in progress. You are a work in progress.

I am not prepared today to do what God is calling me to do in ten years. I’m not even sure I’m prepared for what God will have for me tomorrow. But over the next ten years, He will be preparing me and I will be ready when I arrive. One problem we too often create for ourselves is thinking we can’t move forward in His call until we have all the pieces in place and are fully prepared now. We don’t trust God to provide in His time. We want it in our time.

(Jesus said) “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

Matthew 10:16

There is beauty in the trusting; there is innocence and purity of heart. Jesus is preparing His disciples to do the very things He’s been doing. In Matthew 10, it’s time for them to go out. He’s sending them into dangerous territory. We’ve already talked about how the devil works to get us to disobey and stop trusting the promises of God, and here Jesus is warning them to be innocent and vulnerable. It sounds like the opposite of being prepared if you ask me.

But when we are innocent and vulnerable, our motives are pure. Our hearts must rely on God because we are in no position to trust ourselves. We don’t know all there is to know and we can’t do all there is to do, so we trust and we let God lead and protect us.

So just how does God prepare us?

Sanctification is the process of preparation.

When God brought Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt and they’re at Mt Sinai, before they can approach the mountain, the people needed to consecrate, or sanctify themselves. Over three days, they rid themselves of everything that made them unclean and common and they were able to present themselves before God in a new state ready to enter a relationship with Him. They were prepared to enter His presence.

Fast forward to approximately 30 AD. Jesus has spent His entire life set apart for God’s purpose and work. He has never done anything outside of God’s will for His life. And then, over a three-day period, Jesus finishes that work which makes the way for us to be sanctified in Him. We don’t sanctify ourselves, He does. We don’t prepare ourselves for God’s work, He does. He prepares us to enter the presence of God.

Jesus does this for us. He cleans us up exchanging our sin (the things that separate us from God) for His righteousness (a right relationship with God) and He makes us new again. This all happens by the truth of God’s word when we believe. As soon as the disciples obeyed, accepted and believed Jesus, they were sanctified in His truth, God’s truth. In Christ, we are set apart because He is set apart.

And just as Jesus was protected from the world and the evil one in His work and death, so are we when we are set apart. We are less controlled and manipulated by the things of this world and we are better able to recognize the truth from lies. We are removed from the kingdom of this world, from those things that don’t bring value to God, others or ourselves, and we live here according to His kingdom.

It is our holy purpose to bring glory to God. As you read and know His word, the Holy Spirit will help you know and understand what it means to live in the world, but not be of it. He will help you understand how to be innocent and vulnerable as well as keenly aware of what’s going on around you. We are not called to be naïve; just to trust Jesus fully.

It's the joy we receive in trusting the truth of Jesus that compels us to share the good news of Jesus with those who have yet to meet Him. As you are sanctified, living and operating according to God's kingdom, ask God to help you remain resolute in your walk with Him choosing to do the things He calls you to do. Choose to join Him in what He is already doing.

- ❖ What truths in God's word do you struggle with? How does your ability to trust His word help you move forward in new ways with Him?



Do you live with an assumption that you are unified with others in Christ as brothers and sisters willing to let go of petty differences that easily divide? Do you believe with unwavering conviction that God's protection wins no matter what the situation so you can be unafraid of those who would seek to hurt you? Do you set yourself apart in Christ to be ready to go wherever and whenever God sends you out as His ambassador for His glory? As a disciple of Jesus, your work for Him continues every day of your life. Know that He prays for your courage and boldness to serve Him willingly. He never grows tired or impatient, but is steadfast and resolute in His prayers for you.

# Prayer is Purposeful



*“... with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”*

Psalm 16:11c

Every prayer has a purpose. Every prayer is meant to bring about a specific outcome. We have a reason to pray, a desired goal to attain. Maybe we have a plan we want to see come about or be fulfilled. Hopefully, our intention is always set on bringing about God’s perfect plan in our own lives and the lives of others.

Why do you pray what you pray? Is it for your own benefit or the benefit of someone else? Is it to bring attention and glory to yourself or to point to and bring glory to God? There is purpose in the prayer of Jesus: that God would be known and glorified, and as many people as possible could be brought into complete unity with Him.

The first step of intimate prayer is establishing a personal relationship with God the Father. The second is in our work for Him with others who are like-minded in Christ. The third step now takes a turn and is focused on those who don’t yet know Him. Our actions are not for our own benefit; they are set on bringing others to Christ and helping them grow in their relationship with Him.

Each part of this process has its challenges and rewards. Each step brings us into a deeper relationship with God, a deeper commitment to Christ and a deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit. Each of these causes us to sacrifice more and become more humble in heart. Our unwillingness to let God continue to work in us can stop us from moving forward and even worse, it will actually cause us to pull back from Him. There is no neutral ground where God is concerned. There are times of rest and growth when we may feel like we aren’t moving forward, but every time we’re obedient, even in rest, we take a step forward in faith with Him.

So as we look at this last section of John 17 remember, it’s not in our power to do any of this. Rather, we come to God and let His power at work in us help us accomplish all He has for us.

- ❖ Read John 17:20-26. Note who Jesus prays for and why.

Jesus goes on to pray for those who will hear His message through His disciples. They are going to have a lot of work ahead of them. Jesus isn't just praying for them to tell one friend and them to tell one friend. Jesus is praying for all the future disciples of every race in every nation. He's praying for the world to believe that God sent Him because He loves them so. All of this will be accomplished because of the foundational work of these first disciples.

You and I know Jesus because of this prayer. Think about that. Jesus prayed for you in the presence of the original disciples. You and I know Jesus because the disciples took their work for Jesus seriously.

Jesus is also looking forward to returning to the Father's presence in all His glory. And He's looking forward to being able to share this experience with His disciples. He wants them, all of them, to be with Him forever. He wants them to know, believe and be unified in the Father's love for them, in His love for them. He wants you to be with Him, too. Do you believe God loves you? Do you know how deep and wide the love of Jesus is for you?

In John 14, Jesus tells His disciples that this separation they are going to face isn't going to be the end of their relationship. He is going to prepare a place for them and when it's time, He'll come back to get them. This world will not be their final resting place or home.

The last thing Jesus prays is a commitment to continue to make God known so others can know His love. His love and faithfulness knows no end. Through His original twelve disciples and now, 2,000 years later, Jesus is still making Himself known through millions of followers. The more people who hear the message of Jesus through the disciples, the more people who will know the Father's love and the more people who will be returning with Him. That's one reason we share Jesus by introducing Him to people who don't yet know Him.

Just as Jesus continues to pray for people, we continue to pray for others as well.

- ❖ Read Colossians 4:12, Romans 15:30 and Hebrews 13:3. When you pray for others this way, how might you become more unified in purpose and your relationships strengthened?

When we wrestle in prayer for others, we join them in their struggle. We carry their burdens in prayer. We come alongside people, loving them, and having compassion and a desire to help them experience the love of God in their lives.

If you were suffering and struggling, how would you want someone else to pray for you? Would you want them to throw up a little prayer hoping maybe God would intervene and do something, make things a little better? Or would you want someone's heart to be all in asking God to do the seemingly impossible and completely transform your situation?

This is what wrestling in prayer does. It causes us to join in the struggles of another person as if they were our own. We feel their pain, empathizing with them in their need, knowing that ultimately, Jesus is the only one who can fully heal and meet that need. This is itself an answer to prayer that is not short-lived, but is continuous. It is eternal. It's what Jesus hoped for ... prayed for. That we would love each other and care for each other the way He did. That we would be willing to accept that God's will is better than our own. Sometimes this is the exact transformation that's needed.

The truth is not everyone wants God in their lives. There are many reasons. Some include bad experiences with those in the church, failings of those who should have loved them, or just a denial of their need for Jesus.

If we're not careful, we can be tempted to see ourselves as better, higher, or smarter than those who don't know Him. But we who know Jesus need Him just as much as those who don't know Him. We are all the same in our sin. No one has worse sin or more sin. We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

As we pray for practical needs, we also pray that eyes, ears, minds and hearts would be open to Jesus. While many people don't know they are even in a battle, Jesus is the one who has already won the battle. He's the one who cannot only set their hearts at peace in this world, but because of His victory, will give them peace and eternal life beyond this world.

Just as Jesus prayed in the garden that the cup be taken from Him if possible, so we pray for the troubles, trials and burdens of others to be lessened or removed. At the same time, Jesus gave us the perfect example of the best prayer: God's will be done, not our own. This is our goal, this is our hope. It's not always what others want to hear, but it is the best prayer for every situation.

As I said earlier, accepting God's will as the answer is transformational. It can also be the most difficult answer we receive. It is a true struggle to stand firm in our faith when we will knowingly face challenges and difficulties because of our faith. There are times when we can only receive God's perfect answer because we have walked through the trial rather than had it removed. If we don't trust that God's will is perfect and best, we will end up fighting Him and others rather than being unified in His love. And this unifying love of Jesus has a purpose beyond this world and our current circumstances.

❖ Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3. What does knowing God cause us to do and why?

As Jesus concludes His prayer, we are better able to understand how our knowing God makes a difference in this world. We all have a purpose in this world that will last beyond this world.

Knowing God gives purpose to our prayers and causes three things to happen in our lives that will also affect the lives of others.

### **1. Work produced by faith.**

Just like Jesus, we have work to do for God. Work can be a struggle. It can be a huge undertaking. But often, the most rewarding work is the work that challenges us to go beyond what we think we're capable of performing. This endeavor to make Jesus known is only accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith God has given us.

God gives us faith to believe Jesus and accept His word. And when we do, His Spirit takes up residence in our hearts. Even the Holy Spirit has work to do. The Holy Spirit works in us to cause us to want to do things differently than we did before knowing Jesus. He works in us to produce work through us. Our part of the equation is simply to step out in that faith and do the things He's showing us to do.

As our faith grows, our desire to do His work grows. Our faith in Jesus, the truth of God's Word, works in us to draw us closer to Him. When we begin to follow, we begin to do the things He does. These actions are works or good deeds. It's not the work that saves us, but the grace we receive by faith in Christ. There is *nothing* we can do to earn or deserve our salvation. His work on the cross has accomplished all that is needed.

But as James states, faith without works is dead. Through God's work in us, we come into agreement with His will for us accepting the work He's prepared for us in advance of us knowing that one day we would be in a relationship with Him. We work because we know the Father's love and the love of Jesus. We do it because we trust the Holy Spirit is at work with us.

If our faith doesn't cause us to do things that show His love to others, we have to ask if we really have faith at all. Do we really understand our own need for salvation? Are we willing to sacrifice so others can receive this gift of salvation as well?

Faith is based on the confidence we have that what we believe is actually true. We have faith when we act faithfully on that belief. Do you believe salvation is found only in Jesus? Do you rely fully on Him for your salvation? Do you trust Him to be faithful and carry out His promise to come back to get you when the time comes? When your outward actions reflect your inward beliefs, your faith will be at work in this world.

Jesus is the only one who saves. His work, His sacrifice makes it possible for everyone to know and be made right with God. At the same time, we sacrifice. We give up the things we thought were important before we knew Jesus. We sacrifice comfort and convenience accepting the reality of the opposition that's sure to come.

Life's not easy. At times, it's a lot of work. And faith produces work that increases our faith because we get to see God at work. We get to experience and be part of what God is doing in this world.

Our time spent with God in intimate prayer helps prepare us and strengthen us for our work. Prayer helps us know what God wants us to do. Prayer helps us have the wisdom and courage to actually do the things God wants us to do. Prayer brings us together with others who also want to do the same things for God's kingdom. Prayer increases our desire and understanding of why what we do matters.

Our work isn't based on our ability or our plan. Our work isn't based on making up for past mistakes or being perfect so we don't make future ones. Our work also isn't based on pleasing others or meeting their expectations.

Jesus had work to do. He was able to accomplish His work because He had faith in God's promise that He would be with Him once again. We have that same assurance through our faith. The work God has given us is based solely on who He is and who Christ is in us. Our work is based on the prayer of Jesus and the faith He gives us. In unity with Him, this is also our prayer.

- ❖ What gifts, skills and talents has God given you to use in your work for Him? How can you creatively use these to share His message?

## **2. Labor prompted by love.**

Work requires effort. The longer and harder we work, the more difficult our tasks may become. We get tired, worn out and weighed down. We can become fatigued mentally, physically, and emotionally. We may stop doing it the right way and start doing it the easy way. We begin to take shortcuts. We may stop relying on what we know to be true and start settling for what we hope will be good enough. It takes more energy to accomplish the same goal and our work becomes laborious.

When we start viewing God's work as a task rather than a privilege, when we begin doing God's work out of duty and obligation rather than from a place of joy, and when we start seeing people as projects rather than as unique individuals made in the image of God, our work becomes a burden. We stop at what we are capable of doing on our own and as we get more and more tired, our ability becomes less and less. We become spiritually fatigued as well.

Aren't you glad this isn't the way Jesus viewed His work? Aren't you glad Jesus didn't quit when things got hard. What made Jesus want to complete His work? What gave Jesus the strength and desire to do all the Father wanted Him to do?

Love.

The love of His Father was more than enough for Him to give everything He had to His mission. He wanted those God had given Him to be where He was. He couldn't stop short. Love wouldn't let Him. His prayer for us is that we would love like Him relying on God's love for us because God's love will always cause you to do more than you could otherwise.

When we are yoked to Jesus in His love and the Father's love, He lightens the load of our work. We are able with Him to do more than we would otherwise be able to do. Because of His help, we can put even more of ourselves into our work. Because of His love, we *want* to put even more of ourselves into our work.

John talks about the effect love has on our ability to do what God wants us to do.

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves His child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” 1 John 5:1-5

Love for God and for Jesus and their love in you for you and others will prompt you to love others as well. We love others when we obey God's commands. We love others when we do the things Jesus calls us to do. We love others when we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in us.

On our own it can feel overwhelming. In our own strength it may feel like a heavy weight. But done in the power of the Holy Spirit with the love of Jesus as the foundation, our work becomes a labor of love. This agape love seeks opportunities to do good for the welfare of all, not just those we know well or care about most. This love never works to hurt anyone. And as this love that is based solely on who God is settles in us and becomes part of us, we continue to put more and more of ourselves into our work. Eventually, we are all in and there isn't anything we won't do according to the love of Jesus working in us.

Do you love this way? Do you put all of yourself into each relationship, each interaction you have every day? If this sounds like too much, ask God to show you how He wants you to show His love in everything you do with everyone you meet. You can do it with His help and with His strength.

### **3. Endurance inspired by hope.**

Cheerful endurance.

Every time I think of these words, I picture a marathon runner. Maybe because I struggle with 3 miles, 26.2 seems like an eternity. People who run marathons don't just survive, they don't just endure; they do it with joy. They first have faith they can accomplish the task so they put in the hours of work. This work becomes a labor of love as they see results and understand that what they are doing isn't in vain. They have hope that they will not only cross the finish line, but finish strong. There is a passion deep inside that drives them on, keeps them moving, unwilling to give

up. I don't think people could run marathons if there wasn't something inside them cheering them on.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1

We are in a race. There is a cloud of witnesses, those who have run the race before us, watching and cheering us on. Through the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we are also cheered on from an internal pleasure deep inside. We are able to experience the joy of the presence of the Lord in our lives through every trial, temptation and trouble we find ourselves facing.

We endure.

We keep running.

Why? Because we believe in the hope that is only found through a relationship with Jesus Christ. We wait actively facing our difficulties. We anticipate the good that will come from our patience under pressure. We can't see what our future holds other than the truth that comes in the faithful promises of God. Jesus inspires us, He cheers us on, and we joyfully, cheerfully endure.

In Christ, we trust the words He's given us. In Christ, we believe and accept the promises His resurrection brings to fruition. In Christ, we experience eternal pleasures at His right hand beginning today. In Christ, we don't give up because we know He wins and a harvest will be reaped from the seeds we sow while running our race.

What race has God called you to run? What difficulties and challenges do you see right in front of you in your world, your country, your community, your church, your family, or in yourself? God is at work in all of them and because you are there, He invites you to join Him in what He's doing. His work in this world is finished, but the work He does through us will continue until He returns.



Do you have faith to come to God in prayer? Do you love in a way that people see your willingness to go further than you have reason? Does your hope in Christ cause you to continue when everything around says to give up?

Jesus prays for us to continue in response to His continuing in us. We work, labor and endure because we have faith, love and hope found in His presence. In Christ we are already seated at His right hand. We don't live from a place of striving to get there. Just as Jesus did what He did out of the full assurance He had that He would be returned to the presence of His Father, we do what we do out of a confident expectation that we are already in the presence of our Father because of what He did on our behalf.

- ❖ Read Colossians 1:9-12. What words stand out to you? Based on this, how can you ask others to pray for you?

Seek Jesus through the intimacy found in honest, trusting and constant prayer. He has set you apart and will protect you as your unity with Him is displayed in this world. As you draw close to Him, you will come to know and understand the work and purpose He has for you.

# References



## Intimate Prayer:

Psalm 16:11

## Intimate Prayer is Personal:

Psalm 139

Jeremiah 29:12-13

John 17:1-5

Acts 1:14

Acts 10:2

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

1 Timothy 5:5

Luke 18:1-8

Matthew 18:19-20

Matthew 14:23

Luke 9:28

Luke 22:39-46

Matthew 4:1-2

Hebrews 4:15

## Intimate Prayer is Persistent:

John 17:6-9

1 John 4:19-21

Psalm 51:12

Philippians 1:6

Ephesians 2:10

Matthew 10:16

Exodus 19:10-16

Luke 24:17-24

## Intimate Prayer is Purposeful:

John 17:20-26

John 14:1-4

Colossians 4:12

Romans 15:30

Hebrews 13:2

Galatians 6:2

1 Thessalonians 1:3

1 Corinthians 13:13

Colossians 1:9-12