

LOVERS

IN A DANGEROUS TIME

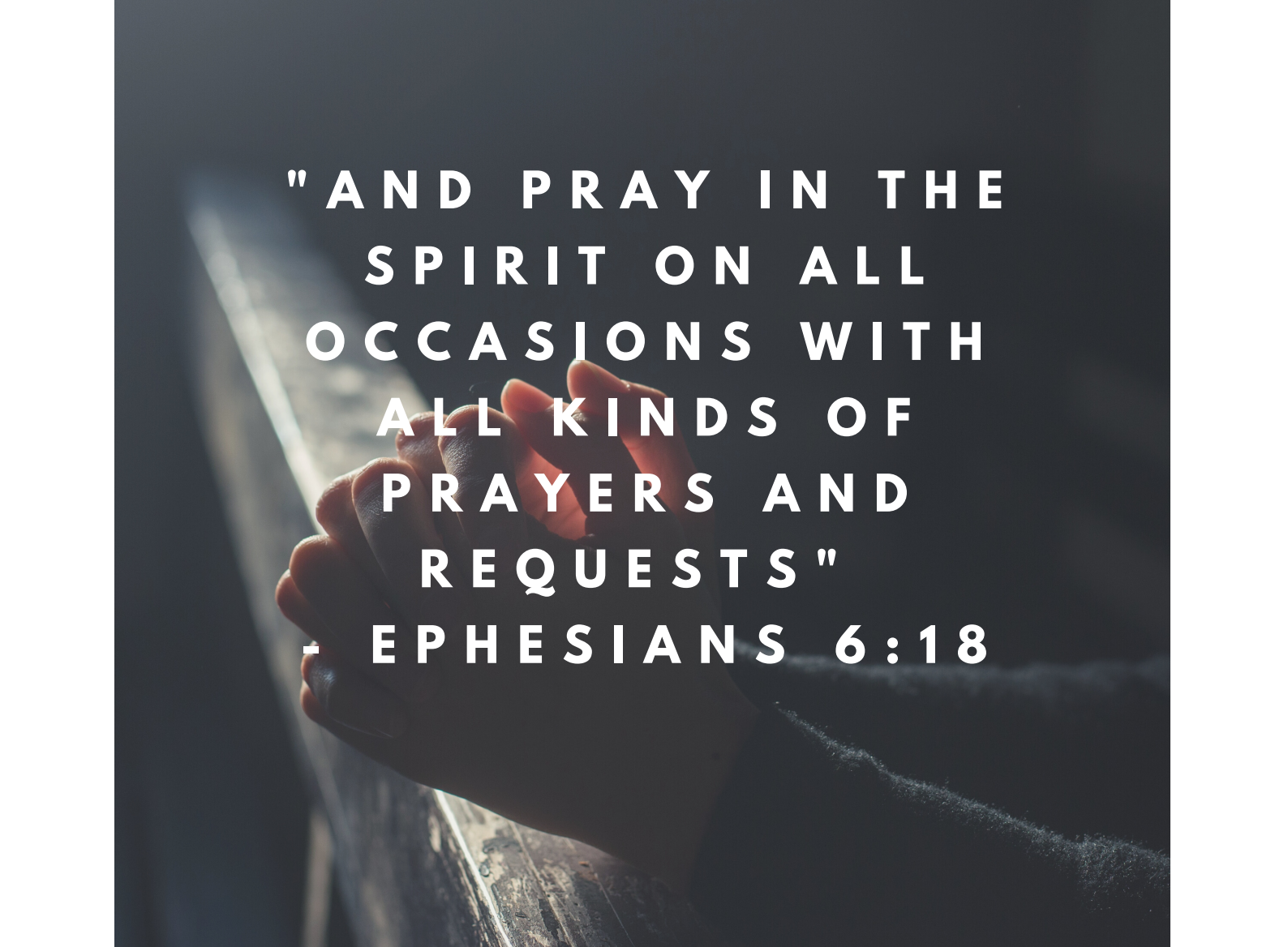


EVERYDAY
HABITS
FOR
FAITH
FORMATION

SUMMIT DRIVE CHURCH

JANUARY//FEBRUARY 2021

PART THREE: PRAYER



" AND PRAY IN THE
SPIRIT ON ALL
OCCASIONS WITH
ALL KINDS OF
PRAYERS AND
REQUESTS "
- EPHESIANS 6:18

PART THREE: PRAYER

Prayer in Every Key

If you were to ask me what the most difficult part of the Christian life is, I would probably say "prayer." I realize this is strange for a Christian leader to admit. Prayer is difficult for a number of reasons. Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard says, "True prayer is struggle with God, in which one triumphs through the victory of God." When I first read that I thought, "I guess I'm not alone."

And if you asked me what the most important practice of the Christian life is I'd also say "prayer." Which is another reason why it may be difficult: it's not just *about* God, like Bible study, or *about* justice or serving; things we can at least 'seem' to manage pretty well on our own. In prayer we are dealing directly *with* God. How wonderful, and challenging, if we're honest.

Barry Jones says it well: "First, prayer is difficult because it requires attentiveness." In a distracted age, full of noise of various kinds, our times of 'getting quiet' is so we can commune with God. But that requires real commitment, effort, and ultimately, love on our part.

"Second, we find prayer difficult because it requires a decentering of the self." When Jesus teaches us to pray, we are to say: "Your will be done," which also means praying *against* ourselves: "and...not my will." That's why his prayer starts with praise - it moves us toward God's goodness, and away from preoccupation with self.

"Third, we find prayer difficult because it requires honesty." In prayer we can't dodge God, or our own guilt or garbage - those parts of our immaturity we'd rather ignore. That's why we will, regularly, pray "forgive us our trespasses," and "deliver us from evil," because we'll become aware of our own shortcomings, our sins.

Last, Jones says prayer is difficult "because it requires trust"; it requires the vulnerability of entrusting our concerns to another. This act of trust can be hard since God may not answer our prayers as we expected, or hoped, and perhaps not in the timeframe we wanted.

Yet for all the challenges, being with "Our Father" in prayer is the greatest privilege and joy life affords.



REFLECT

01 READ LUKE 11:1-4

What do Jesus' disciples ask for here?

Consider: Jesus' followers were pious Jews who had been praying all their lives, yet they too are seeking help to know how to pray - especially in a way that Jesus would instruct them. They admittedly want to *grow* in their practice of prayer.

Look at Jesus' answer to their question. If you were to summarize the focus of each phrase what would they be? (See also Matthew 6:9-13 for another example of the "Jesus-Prayer" that includes a few more details).

Which area of this do you find easiest to approach God with? Most difficult?

02 READ AND CONSIDER

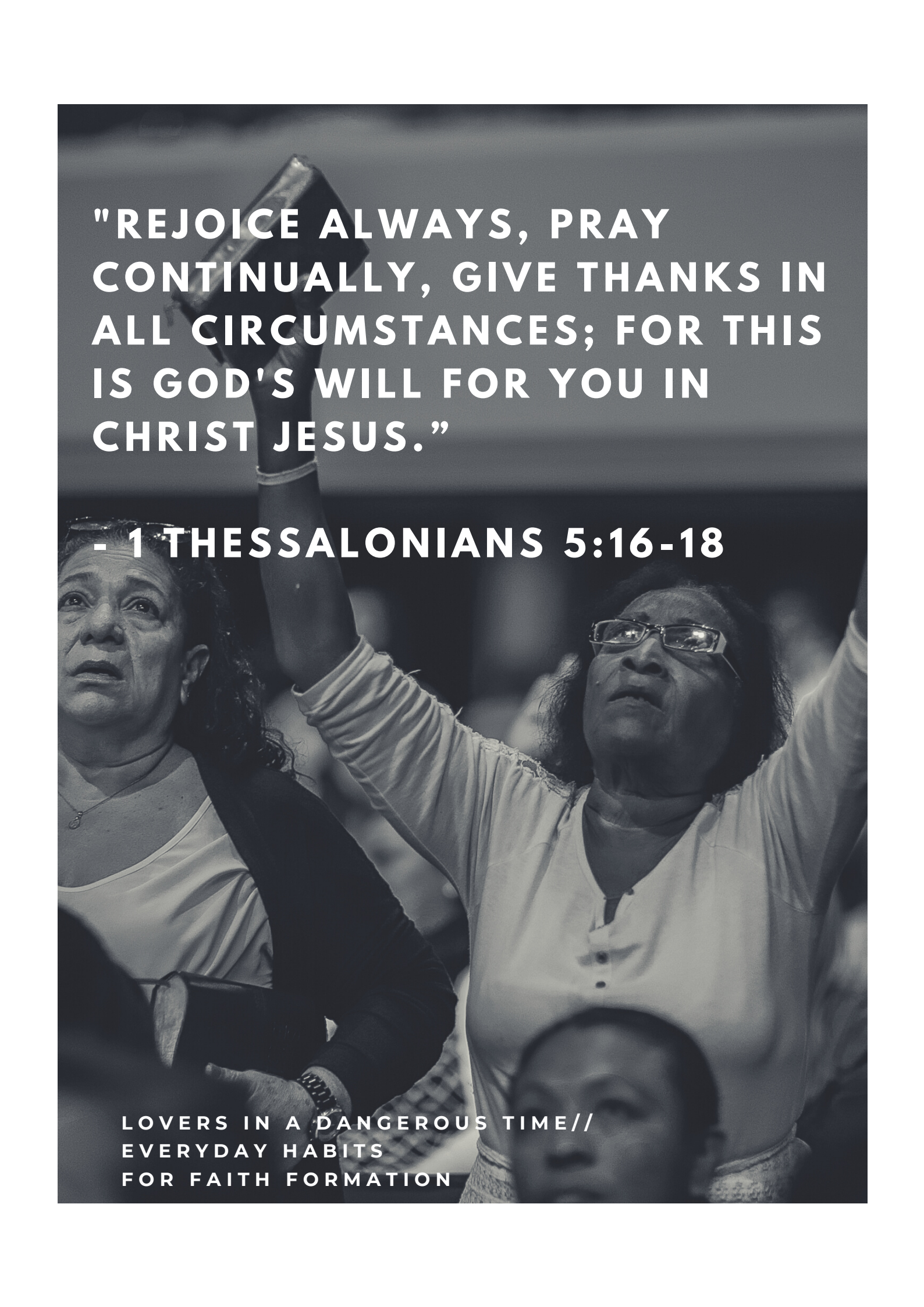
"The world says, "If you are not making good use of your time, you are useless." Jesus says: "Come spend some useless time with me." If we think about prayer in terms of its usefulness to us— what prayer will do for us, what spiritual benefits we will gain, what insights we will gain, what divine presence we may feel— God cannot easily speak to us. But if we can detach ourselves from the idea of the usefulness of prayer and the results of prayer, we become free to "waste" a precious hour with God in prayer. Gradually, we may find, our "useless" time will transform us, and everything around us will be different." - Henri J.M. Nouwen

Sometimes I hear people say, "But I'm just not getting anything out of my prayer time." Maybe you've been there too. How does Nouwen help address and reorient our expectation of prayer and what it's ultimately for?

How might you need to shift how you think of prayer in light of this? Or how have you experienced this to be true?

03 PRAYER FOCUS

Take a few minutes right now to "waste" in prayer, not with the intent of "getting something out of it" but just to "be with your Father." Maybe take Psalm 8 and pray it to God and then consider some of those "works of His hands" and give him thanks for those things.



**"REJOICE ALWAYS, PRAY
CONTINUALLY, GIVE THANKS IN
ALL CIRCUMSTANCES; FOR THIS
IS GOD'S WILL FOR YOU IN
CHRIST JESUS."**

- 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

**LOVERS IN A DANGEROUS TIME//
EVERYDAY HABITS
FOR FAITH FORMATION**

PRACTICE//PRAYER

Cultivating Closeness With God

Dealing With Distraction: One of the biggest challenges I face is simply 'getting inside' a posture where I am ready to pray. Nouwen puts it well: "As soon as we enter into solitude, we discover how chaotic our inner life is....Instead of being prayerful we become restless and can't wait until our half hour is over."

It's normal to be distracted, and to see the 'chaos' inside ourselves. We can deal with those things in a few ways. **a) Have a focus.** I often use a Psalm or follow the pattern of Lord's Prayer and then add specific elements to it. **b) Pray those 'chaotic' elements of life back to God:** "God, my mind is busy worrying about X, Y or Z. I bring my concern to you - trust you with it." And then carry on with prayer.

c) Engage your body. We are whole, embodied creatures, and so we see that connecting with God involves our bodies too. Praying 'out loud' involves our mouths and vocal cords (Ps 28:2); kneeling demonstrates a posture of reverence and humility (Ps 95:6); opening our hands signals our trust and dependence (Ps 134:2). When you are able - engage your body in a posture described in the Bible.

1. Praying The Lord's Prayer. Memorize and regularly pray the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13), word for word, or as a template. It places us in relation to God as Father and in relation to each other since we pray "Our" - a corporate prayer. As Simone Weil says: "The Our Father contains all possible petitions," as we ask for God's kingdom and will, our daily needs, forgiveness, and help to fight back against the forces of evil.



"OUR FATHER, WHO IS IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME..."

- MATTHEW 6:9

2. Praying the Psalms. The Psalms are the "Song Book" or "Prayer Book" of the Bible - the one Jesus himself used. Honesty is the bedrock of friendship, and the Psalms show that God's people are welcome to "unload their frustration, guilt, anger, and heartache on God" (William Barry). I often begin my time of morning reflection by praying a Psalm. This habit will help you develop a 'prayer vocabulary', enable you to learn to pray in every kind of circumstance.

3. Breath Prayers. In 1 Thess 5:16-17 we read: "Rejoice always. Pray continually." How do we do that? One way is by memorizing "breath prayers" - short prayers that we can pray all throughout our day as we face various circumstances. "Take a deep, calming breath and, while exhaling, pray quietly or alone a simple phrase to reorient you to God's presence, his kingdom and his good will for you" (Mike Cosper). "Lord, have mercy on me" (Lk 18:13). Or adapting some of your favourite verses to pray them back to God: "Lord, I am weary, give me rest" (Matt 11:28); "Lord, there is no condemnation for me, because of your grace" (Rom 8:1).

5. The Prayer of Examen. Psalm 139:23-24 says: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ignatius of Loyola, in the 15th century, developed this prayer that follows the Psalmist, inviting a Spirit-guided awareness about our lives (see also Ps 26:2; 4:4). This prayer begins with **reviewing** the day. Where was there joy? Moments of consolation? Take a moment and give thanks. As you review, pray with the Psalmist: "Search me...test me..." (139:23-24); ask God to **reveal** any areas where you experience a lack of peace, need healing, correction, or forgiveness. Take a moment to turn these over to God, and trust the promise of his love and care; that he "lifts up" those who are humble (1 Peter 5:6). In response to his kindness, take a moment to **rejoice** in God's lavish love, forgiveness, and grace. (you can also download the app "Reimagining the Examen" - a helpful guide).

5. Praying Together. Though the focus here has been on personal prayer, corporate prayer is a vital aspect of a God-ward focused life. We'll see this more in upcoming weeks. Prioritize corporate prayer at every chance!