

Kingdom Come Leadership

Inspiring Your Church
Toward Spiritual Maturity

by Bill Simpson

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all of the pastors, bishops, missionaries, evangelists, elders, deacons, ministry directors, and church leaders all around the world who work diligently to advance Jesus' kingdom. Because we are held to a higher degree of accountability regarding how we lead God's people, I pray this book will bring you encouragement and clarity in your *responsibility to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ*. Ephesians 4:12 HCSB

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CHAPTER 1 – YOUR LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

God has called you to an enormous task.

Regardless of whether you're a senior pastor or an elder or deacon, our Father has called you to lead those you serve towards spiritual maturity. In his final charge to the elders of the Ephesian church, Paul gave them a momentous directive: *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood* (Acts 20:28). Peter gave a similar charge to church leaders to *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock* (1 Peter 5:-3). The verb translated in Acts 20:8 “to care” is the same word in Peter’s passage to “shepherd”. It’s a common biblical metaphor that obviously means to lead, protect, defend, feed, and nurture. And Paul, from his

preeminent passage about the purpose of church, calls for leaders to *equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:12-13).

You understand this high calling. You have likely quivered in your boots at this high calling our Father in the heavens has placed on you. You want nothing more than to help people grow in their dedication to Jesus and their dependence on his Spirit. And, you have a million things you feel you need to accomplish. You face new pressures and challenges every day. Leading your church or ministry organization can be all-consuming. Let's face it, you often feel completely overwhelmed, and you're not sure what to prioritize. So, what exactly should you be doing to properly shepherd God's flock entrusted to your care? What are the key, mission-critical tasks that will build your church up in unity and maturity? What should take priority over all the other to-dos on your list that are clamoring for immediate attention?

Let's consider how the Kingdom's two greatest leaders prioritized their responsibilities.

The Greatest Leaders

Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Most High God, is certainly the preeminent leader; unlike anyone the world has ever known. He is unsurpassed and incomparable. And it can be very intimidating for a mere mortal to try to imitate the leadership of King Jesus. It is my deep conviction that God's second greatest leader was the Apostle Paul, and we can most definitely lead those

entrusted to our care in the same way Paul led those under his spiritual guidance.

After his conversion, Paul was instrumental in leading thousands to believe in Jesus Christ as he and his team birthed churches throughout the Roman Empire. As a writer, Paul's influence is undeniable. His Spirit-inspired letters have had immeasurable impact on more than a billion people through the centuries, and they've been translated into more than 1,500 unique languages.

Therefore, as the leaders of God's people, shouldn't we be taking our leadership cues from Jesus and Paul? Imitating these two great leaders will position you to have the maximum Kingdom influence on everyone in your church or organization. Let's consider how each prioritized their days.

Prayer is Leadership

How did Jesus and Paul live out their leadership roles within their relationship to the Father? How did they become God's greatest leaders? Through constant communion with their Father. They spoke with him nonstop. Prayer was not a religious duty. Prayer was their lifeline because prayer is simply talking with our Father in the heavens about everything and everyone important to us and to him. As in every significant relationship we have, regular conversations are natural and essential. We simply can't have a close relationship if we don't regularly communicate. The closer the relationship, the more frequent and personal the conversations will be. The more we converse with our Father, the more powerful and effective our influence will be.

Jesus regularly left the disciples to be alone with his Father in prayer. Whether it was on a mountain, in the wilderness, or in some other desolate place, Jesus spent hours talking with his Father. That's part of what he is doing even now. The Bible tells us that Jesus continually intercedes for his followers (Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25). Try to picture Jesus talking to his Father about that current situation weighing so heavily on you. He knows the pressures and challenges you are facing, and he is constantly speaking with his Father about you and your leadership responsibilities. What do you think he's asking his Father to do, specifically? Take a few moments and think about that. What is Jesus' perspective on your immediate ministry challenge?

You're not surprised how much Jesus prayed during his life on earth. We expect that from him. But can you and I truly pray as the Son of God did? Can we regularly pull all-nighters conversing with our heavenly Father? Probably not. You may want to. I wish I had that in me. However, we will never know the intimacy shared between the Son and Father, at least not on this side of eternity. So, thinking we can imitate Jesus' leadership impact according to how he prayed is probably out of reach for most of us.

Therefore, we need someone we can more closely identify with, who shares our limitations. If we're going to lead in such a way as to produce the kind of fruit that honors our Father, we need a mentor. We need someone we can both emulate in his leadership and his praying. We need a coach and a guide we can relate to, who shared similar challenges and setbacks.

Leaning into Paul

The man we can learn to most emulate is, in my opinion, the second greatest leader God has given to this world, Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul. Remember, Saul was his Hebrew name, and Paul was his Roman name. Since he was a Jewish, Roman citizen, he used both names depending on the context (Acts 13:9). Because his ministry was primarily to non-Jews, Luke used his Roman name throughout most of Acts, especially from chapter 14 onward.

A practical leadership question is: How did Paul spend the majority of his time? What were his daily priorities? How did he lead his own team, while having so much influence on multiple churches? Realize Paul always worked with a small group of revolving co-ministers as he traveled throughout the Roman world. He not only influenced thousands with his teaching, he was continually mentoring those who traveled with him.

So, two critically important questions are: What did his daily to-do list look like, and how did he prioritize those activities? He certainly spent a lot of time teaching and preaching the fantastic reality of forgiveness from sins through faith in Jesus Christ. And in some towns, he spent time making tents to help fund the ministry. But *what* was his daily priority? Every great leader has to prioritize their time. How did Paul balance mentoring his team members with reaching the lost and equipping the found?

He prayed. He taught his team how to pray. They prayed together. They prayed for each other. They prayed for all the believers in every church. They prayed for the lost, the chosen, and for government leaders.

They prayed daily, consistently, and fervently. They prayed for the Kingdom to come.

Praying for the churches was Paul's highest priority. Teaching his team members how to pray was next on his list. From reading his letters in the New Testament, we get the idea he led his team in regular times of prayer for the believers in the various churches every day, and possibly, multiple times throughout each day and night. Let's take a look at how Paul described his and his team's prayer priority to better understand his commitment to, and reliance upon, asking his Father for help.

Paul's Prayer Priority

At least 13 of the New Testament's 27 letters were authored by the Apostle Paul. There is ongoing debate as to the authorship of the letter to the Hebrews, so Paul's total may even be 14. In 11 of those 13 letters, Paul described his prayer priority, detailing how he and his team prayed for the believers in each church. As you read these passages, underline key phrases about prayer that stand out to you.

To the **Roman** church he wrote;

1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

To the **Corinthian** church Paul wrote in his second letter;

⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.

Paul spent more time in Ephesus than anywhere else, so he knew these believers extremely well. To the **Ephesian** church he wrote;

^{1:15} For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

^{3:14} For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

Paul was especially inspired by the Philippian church's continual demonstration of faith through their love and sacrificial giving (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Notice how the Apostle prayed for the **Philippian** church;

^{1:3} I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

^{1:9} And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,

Paul's letters to the Ephesian, Philippian, and Colossian churches were written during his imprisonment in Rome. They carry similarities but also emphasize unique aspects of faith in Christ. Paul and his team, especially a man named Epaphras, prayed continuously for these churches. To the **Colossians** he was inspired by God to write;

1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

1:9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

The churches in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were all located in the region called Macedonia. These three churches were birthed during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16-17). Read how he emphasized prayer in both of his letters addressed to the **Thessalonians**;

1 Thessalonians 1:2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

3:9 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

2 Thessalonians 1:11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul also wrote three letters that are referred to as “pastoral letters.” Two of these letters were written to the young evangelist, Timothy, and one to Paul’s faithful companion, Titus. Timothy traveled with Paul throughout most of his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22 and 20:4). Titus apparently traveled with Paul during the same timeframe as did Timothy. Paul gave Titus the mission-critical task of appointing elders in many of the newly birthed churches. There is no doubt that Paul continually prayed for Titus even though he does not mention it in his short letter to his trusted minister. No doubt, Paul prayed for Titus in the same way he prayed for all of those who traveled with him, as he expressed in his second letter to **Timothy**.

2:3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

Finally, Paul shared with his friend Philemon how he constantly prayed for him. It’s helpful to note that **Philemon** was a member of the church in Colossae.

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that the

sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

Take a moment to re-read those passages again and focus on what you underlined. What is your Father speaking to you?

Is there any doubt about what head lined the Apostle's daily to-do list? He and his team members continually prayed for the believers in the various churches and for their co-workers, both night and day.

Can you do that? Can you commit to praying diligently for those you shepherd? You may be thinking, "I doubt it." I don't blame you. As a missionary and a senior pastor, I often lacked Paul's commitment to praying for those I led. Of course, I prayed for them, but it could in no way be compared to how Paul prayed or how he taught his team members to pray.

So, what do you and I need to do to ramp up our commitment to prioritizing prayer to resemble Paul's? First, obedience to God's word is how we show Jesus we truly love him. "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*" declared our Lord and Savior. If you're not willing to obey *all* of Jesus' teachings, which means the entirety of the Old and New Testaments, then go find another religion to follow. That's a little harsh. But seriously, we must wrap our hearts and heads around the fact that obeying all of the Bible is not an option. Obedience is to be our highest goal. And obedience in prayer is how we strengthen our dependence on our heavenly Father. Just like every other important relationship you have, regular communication is essential.

What Paul Taught About Prayer

In the same way Paul prayed, he also instructed the believers in those churches to be constant in prayer, just as Jesus taught (Matthew 6:6-8 and 7:7-11; and Luke 11:9-13). Maybe the best-known instruction from Paul about persistence in praying is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – *Pray without ceasing*. The original Greek adverb means continually, unintermittedly, and incessantly. The New Living Translation worded it this way; *Never stop praying*.

Read the following additional instructions from the Apostle to the various churches, and to Timothy, about how believers are to pray. Again, as you read, underline the key phrases that stand out to you.

Romans

12:12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

15:30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,

1 Corinthians (regarding intimacy in marriage)

7:5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

2 Corinthians

1:11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

9:14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.

Ephesians

6:16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Philippians

1:19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,

4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Colossians

4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison — ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

1 Thessalonians

5:16 Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

5:25 Brothers, pray for us.

2 Thessalonians

3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

1 Timothy

2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

2:8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

5:5 She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, ⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

Philemon

1:22 At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

Read what you underlined from these passages. What is God impressing on your heart and mind about how you and your church are to pray?

I hope it's not guilt, but it may well be. It's difficult to read these exhortations without feeling guilty because you don't consistently pray that way. But you can. That's the purpose of this book – to help you grow in your confidence that you and your fellow leaders can pray like Paul and his team. Because your Father's desire is to advance his kingdom through your leadership, he wants you to learn how to pray in a similar manner to Paul.

The power of prayer is undeniable. Our call to pray is unquestionable. Our direct access to the Father is inescapable. God's unequivocal desire is that we ask for his help in everything and with everyone. So why in the world is praying such a challenge for the vast majority of Kingdom leaders? We must take a deeper dive into the Scriptures to learn the answer.

Without Ceasing?

What does it mean to *continue steadfastly in prayer* and to *pray without ceasing*? Did Paul intend all of Jesus' followers to pray 24/7? Or did he intend just a select few ministers should develop an effective, ongoing, conversational prayer with their Father similar to he and his team members practiced? Is this command just for pastors, bishops, and church elders? Through the inspiration of

the Spirit of Jesus, Paul encouraged all believers to practice an on-going conversation with the Father. But this type of praying must be modeled by leaders first and foremost.

What do you do when something good, funny, or bad happens to you? Do you fire off a text to your spouse or a close friend? If you need someone's help, you likely text them. If you need information, you send a text or email. I've stood in the grocery store countless times texting my wife because I couldn't remember what I needed to pick up on the way home. Can I get an "Amen?"

Praying to our Father in the heavens is similar. You will benefit tremendously, as will those you lead, as you begin to develop the habit of praying as frequently as you text or email. Your leadership influence will greatly increase as you speak with your Father throughout the day about the people you lead, as the Spirit brings them to your mind, and through planned times of intercession.

In a previous pastorate, the elders and I decided to divide the church family evenly between the eight of us so we could collectively pray daily for everyone in our church family. We used the Kingdom Come Prayers that will be discussed throughout the remainder of this book, coupled with specific prayer requests of which we were aware. We pledged to one another to pray for those on our list at least once daily, with several times being preferred. The elders and I then communicated our commitment to the church family so they could be confident we were partnering with them in asking our Father to grow us all towards unity and maturity. This not only helped the congregation to understand more fully the role of an elder, it also inspired them to begin to

pray similarly for their family members, friends, and small group members. The outcome was tangible.

Kingdom Life is Tough

Before we move onto how to pray, let's remind ourselves why it's mission-critical for every Kingdom member living in this sin-saturated world.

Jesus said devotion to him is like taking the narrow way which is difficult to follow, and that only a few actually make it. That's tough to hear. But life on this earth as a believer is very challenging to do, especially following him faithfully. And it's getting more and more challenging. Jesus' followers are now in the overwhelming minority and are considered to be bigots, prejudice, judgmental, and homophobic. We must recognize how obeying Jesus is difficult to do. Experiencing these challenges should inspire us to seeking and asking and knocking, as we come to understand our desperate dependence on God. As a leader, you must realize how desperately dependent on the Lord those you influence truly are, even if they don't understand it. You can only maximize your Kingdom influence on your church family as you remain in desperate need of Jesus' help.

Luke wrote in Acts 14:22 that he, Paul, and the other members of their ministry team were committed to the ministry of *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.* This is your ministry too. For every person within your circle of influence, you have the high calling to strengthen and encourage them because life is hard. The most effective

way of building them up in their faith is through asking the Father for his help, just as the Apostle Paul and his team continually did.

The Battle with Busy

We're all very busy, especially church leaders. The problems and trials your people have are never-ending. Although you know prayer is essential and powerful, it's still challenging to carve out significant time in your day to pray for your church family. There are so many other voices crying for your immediate attention.

For me, my lack of diligent intercession was due primarily to a lack of confidence. I doubted, by my very lack of interceding, that our Father would do what I asked because I really wasn't certain what I should be asking him to do. Can you relate? I lacked confidence my Father truly wanted to do what I was asking of him. And my church family was extremely diverse with a plethora of unique situations and setbacks. Each person was at a different place in their spiritual growth. How could I take the time to pray specifically for each of these individuals and families with any confidence that the time I spent praying would prove fruitful?

I began a journey of studying the Scriptures to find some answers. I wanted to believe Jesus' amazing promises about prayer in John 14-16. I wanted to understand what it means to pray "in his name" and to have his words "abide in" me, so whatever I asked I would receive. What did Jesus really intend when he promised if we would ask and keep asking, and seek and keep seeking, and knock and keep knocking, we would

indeed be given what we ask, find what we are seeking, and walk through the doors we are banging on?

The Apostle John discovered it. Therefore, after following Jesus for more than 60 years and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he wrote: *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him* (1 John 5:14).

How could John write with such bold confidence about prayer? He understood the promise of our Lord Jesus that he spoke that holy Thursday night (John 14-17). John learned how to pray for the Kingdom to come, which is exactly what Paul and his teams did so diligently. Praying the way these apostles prayed is how you can maximize your leadership impact and advance the Kingdom in and through your church, the very work you were created in Christ to do.

The next chapter explores what Jesus meant when he instructed us to ask for *the Kingdom to come*.