

REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER 3

Reflections on Tim Keller's 'Prayer' and God's word

KICKING OFF

Researchers from the Department of Psychology at the University of Waterloo and Arizona State University have recently conducted a study into the rise of individualism over the last 150 years. *Individualism is the belief that personal needs are more important than the needs of society as a whole.* The study examined the use of individualist words in books, such as 'I' and 'me', the percentage of single-child families, how many adults now live alone, divorce rates and the prevalence of unique baby names, as well as changes in infectious disease and disasters, rates of urbanisation, changes in secularism, and job trends. All of these factors, especially uniqueness, are deemed to be key drivers of individualism.

Across all cultural indicators, the researchers found evidence that individualism has been rising steadily for more than a century, since the 1860s when family size decreased and the 1880s as the number of households with multiple generations living under the same roof began to decline. 'As demands of society shifted from manual labour to office jobs, as Americans gained education and wealth, both promote self-direction and ultimately facilitate individualism.'

In an age of individualism we are often looking to improve our own personal situation over being committed to something larger than ourselves, either a corporation, community, church, or even a family or marriage.

Q: What are your thoughts on this? (Agree/disagree/reasons)

Q: How would you like your present situation to change and how is this reflected in your prayer life?

GOING DEEPER

The beginning of chapter 2 Tim Keller's 'Prayer' then is quite striking as he finds that in all of Paul's prayers for his friends contain *"no appeals for changes in their circumstances... not one petition for a better emperor, for protection from marauding armies, or even for bread for the next meal."*

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Q: What does Paul want most of all for the saints in Ephesus?

Q: What is Paul asking for when he prays "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened"?

Q: In verses 22 and 23, what is the reality that Paul's prayers are grounded in?

Now read Ephesians 3:7-21

Q: In verses 7-13, how does Paul view his own life and circumstances including even his suffering?

Q: What is God's intention for the Church?

Q: What is the *reason* (v14-15) Paul kneels before the Father in prayer? (How do verses 7-13 shape his prayers for the church in Ephesus?)

Q: In Paul's kneeling prayers, what does he pray that those in Ephesus will know and grasp?

Q: Does what Paul says in these verses (7-21) have more of an individual or corporate focus?

TAKING IT HOME

Keller concludes from Paul's prayers that *"knowing God better is what we must have above all if we are to face life in any circumstances... He does not see prayer as merely a way to get things from God but as a way to get more of God himself... By praying in this way, Paul was assuming the priority of the inner life with God. Most contemporary people base their inner life on their outward circumstances. Their inner peace is based on other people's valuation of them, and on their social status, prosperity, and performance. Christians do this as much as anyone. Paul is teaching that, for believers, it should be the other way around..."*

Q: How might the anxieties and focus of our lives change if we pray as Paul prays?

Q: Why is praying that we know God and the love and purposes of Christ more important than praying for a change in our own personal circumstances?

PRAY

Pray together, asking God to help us know him better, grasp the love of Christ, and for the reprioritising our lives as we see His will and His priorities for our church and the world.