

Learning to Pray in the Spirit and the Word (Part One)

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes the vital role of prayer in the Christian life, encouraging believers to pray in the Spirit and seek God's guidance for their lives.

Duration: 38:48

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 4:10-11

Topics: "Corporate Prayer", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of corporate prayer and encourages the audience to participate in it. He shares his personal experience of attending prayer meetings and how they have impacted his life and ministry. The speaker then introduces the story of Jabez from the Bible, who prayed for God's blessings and protection. He challenges the listeners to have a vision for their lives and to persistently seek God's favor and guidance, just like Jabez did.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of Jude, verses 17 through 25. But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, in the last time there shall be mockers following after their own ungodly lusts.

These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some who are doubting, save others snatching them out of the fire, and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless, with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen. Father in heaven, I ask for your help now again, in this last Sunday of the year 2000, to open the meaning of praying in the Holy Spirit.

From verse 20. Lord, I long to live there and breathe there, and I long for this church, the other churches that are represented here, to breathe, to live in this experience of praying in the Spirit. And so I ask that you'd come and help me in these two Sundays that we dwell on this.

Give me your heart and your mind, your demeanor, your truth. Let there be an anointing on these services so that people are awakened from the slumbers of prayerlessness into vigilance that keeps them in the love of God. So come and help me now, I ask in Jesus' name, the name we always pray in, so that you, through Him, might be glorified.

Amen. We begin every year this way because prayer is the breath of the Christian life. It's the breathing of the Christian life.

You breathe out prayer and you breathe in grace. Don't go an hour without breathing, you might suffocate. And because nothing decays in the Christian life like the desire to pray.

It's there, it's strong, the year gets off to a good start, and then it decays. And so it's the most vital and the most vulnerable thing, isn't it? So vital and so vulnerable. That's why we start.

You know, I can imagine naysayers saying, Oh, why do you do a prayer week? You're supposed to pray all year, why have a prayer week? Well, because we're so weak and it's so important. That's why you got to stoke the fires again and again and again in order for this thing to be real. And so I'm praying that as we enter 2001 in a few hours, God will move on you and He will set you to praying with books or prayer meetings or messages or whatever.

He'll set you to praying alone in your closet. May He give you a place and a time this year and set you to praying in families. If you have children, get them together, dads, and pray with them.

If you don't and you're just a couple or after the kids are in bed, couples pray together. Yeah, it's hard sometimes. It's a real barometer of your life together, whether you can open your mouth and pray.

There have been times when Noel and I got on our knees, we couldn't pray together. Things were so bad among us, between us. And that's good to know.

Peter said your prayers will be hindered if you don't love her according to knowledge and cherish her as a joint heir of life. It's good to know when you can't pray together. It's good to know that.

And then fix it, work on it, whatever it costs, pray together as spouses. And then pray in small groups. Make prayer central in small groups, praying for each other.

Pray here in prayer meetings. We have six prayer meetings a week stated in this church. Just watch the bulletin.

I go to four of them every week and lead them. And those half hours go by just like that. They're open to the whole church and they are powerful times.

I love Friday morning especially because that's when I begin my sermon thinking hard. And to be bathed in a half an hour of fellowship of prayer out there in the commons is very precious to me. It would be precious no matter what your walk of life.

Don't let this year go by without being in a room with people who pray corporately with each other. And then pray all day. Pray without ceasing.

Pray in your car and pray at work and pray while you're fixing the meals and changing the diapers and washing the clothes and washing the walls and shoveling snow. Pray. We breathe.

Don't go an hour without breathing spiritually. You might suffocate. That's my prayer.

Let's be a praying people. Well every time I come to this week the Lord helps me. Does unusual things for me because the Lord loves to hear his people pray.

And so he stirs up pastors to get excited about prayer when they need to. And he does it in a different way almost every year. This year he did it by bringing across my path a little book by Bruce Wilkinson called *The Prayer of Jabez*.

And the reason this book hooked me, I haven't read the whole thing and I'm told there are some things in it I wouldn't like. It's okay. I read books like that too.

And you can read discerningly. But what hooked me about this book is that it's all based on an experience he had with the word 30 years ago from a pastor who was my pastor while I was in college in the last two years, namely Richard Sumi, who was also a chaplain at Dallas where Bruce experienced him. And what I remember about Richard Sumi, and it ties in with this book, is that he was known for taking absolutely obscure texts and finding diamonds in them.

So he'd go to the genealogies of First Chronicles, you know. All these names. And he would go there and he'd find one where the author said a little something about the person.

And that's who Jabez was. Jabez. And this little book is called *The Prayer of Jabez*.

And Jabez gets two verses in the Bible. That's all. We don't know anything before.

We don't know anything after. We just know two verses about Jabez in First Chronicles 4, 10, and 11. Let me read them to you, and then tell you what Wilkinson experienced when Sumi preached from these two verses.

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez, saying, because I bore him with pain. Now Jabez called on God, the God of Israel, saying, O that you would bless me, and indeed enlarge my border, and that your right hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from harm, that it may not pain me. And God granted what he requested.

And that's the end of the story. He appears in redemptive history. He prays a big, expansive prayer.

God answers him. End of story. And Sumi preached on that, and challenged everybody to be like Jabez, and lay hold on God for some great blessing in your life, for the nations, and for kingdom purposes.

And here's what happened after he heard that sermon. Pulling a chair up to the yellow counter, I bent over my Bible, and reading the prayer over and over, I searched with all my heart for the future God had for someone as ordinary as I. The next morning, I prayed Jabez's prayer, word for word. And the next, and the next.

Thirty years later, I haven't stopped. If you ask me what sentence, other than my prayer for salvation, that has revolutionized my life and my ministry the most, I would tell you that it was the cry of a gimper named Jabez, who is still remembered, not for what he did, but for what he prayed, and what happened next. So here's my question for me, and you.

What are we, from the Bible, laying hold on as a vision for our lives, and not letting go of God until He gives it? You got a vision for your life? Do you know why you're on planet Earth? Is there something that has captured your imagination and your dream from the Bible so much that you'll take hold of God and say, I won't let you go until you do this great thing through me for you and your kingdom. Is there anything you'd think that way? So what I did when I read that, is I stepped back and I just asked myself, Okay, what have I prayed for 30 years? What's been my Jabez prayer? And to be honest, I had to say, the prayer I have prayed probably most often the last 30 years is that God would save my kids. Then maybe that God would keep me married and faithful.

But let's ask the question just a little differently, because those are just little prayers. I mean, they're incredibly important. Why else do we pray them every day? But let's ask, what have I prayed? What has John Piper prayed of a kingdom kind, of a larger kind, over and over? What's been the most frequent prayer that God would do? So I had to ponder this.

And I'm not sure about this, because memories are really fallible, right? But here's what I think for the last 30 years would be the case. I think it would be some form of, God, let my life count for the hallowing of your name. Hallowed be thy name, unpacked.

Hallowed be thy name, let me hallow your name. Let me be a means of others hallowing your name. Oh God, that my life might count for the hallowing of your name.

I can remember, this is what came back to me, I can remember 30 years ago in seminary, at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, for three years I'd jog down one side of Orange Grove Boulevard, and then turn around and come back eastward, and the sun would be often rising as I finished this two, three mile jog. And I would force myself the last hundred yards or so to sprint, just to push myself. And I can remember how the heart would beat so hard, the thought would come into my mind, I'm going to die.

I'm going to drop dead, I'm going to have a heart attack. I'm only 24. And I would push myself right on through, and I would raise my hands like this as I ran, just like an Eric Little kind of tape break, you know.

And I would say, God, I couldn't say it out loud because I'm just... In my mind I would say, God, don't let me live one minute longer than I can be an instrument of hallowing your name in this world. And I still do that. Thursday morning, I was up running.

And I finished with the same sprint, at age 54, I did with 24, and my heart was beating so fast, I said, I really could die, now I'm 54. And I did exactly the same thing, and I wasn't planning for this illustration either. I didn't think of this until yesterday.

I said, Lord, if I die, let me die. But if I live, don't let me live any longer than I can be an instrument in hallowing your name. Doing it myself, and bringing others into the hallowing of the name of God.

Hallowing, hallowing, hallowing. Old-fashioned word, right? Sanctified, it means treasuring the name of God, reverencing the name of God, honoring the name of God, glorifying, cherishing, esteeming, praising the name of God. I want to be used to bring others into the experience of knowing and loving and honoring

and cherishing and treasuring and magnifying God.

That's what my life is about. I think I've prayed that more than any other kingdom prayer for the last 30 years. What are you praying over and over again? What are you laying hold on God for? Think about it.

That's what this week is for. That's what New Year's resolutions are for. Step back, reassess 2000.

Nobody's satisfied with 2000, right? Nobody in this room says, I feel really good about my prayer life in the year 2000. Nobody. Everybody feels, I've got to do better.

I want to do better. I can do better. God helping me.

And so, let this week be a gift to you. It's the beginning of the rest of your life. You don't have to be strapped into what you were.

God Almighty is in you. He will take you forward into something great and better. But, linger over the word until you get a Jabez prayer.

And then pray it over and over. Until God, in His mercy, grants it to you. Pray, pray, pray.

Let's go to the text. Jude, next to the last book of the Bible. Verses 20 and 21.

I want to use it to put authority under what I've just said. That's all just John Piper exhortation there. I think it's biblical.

I want to try to show from this text how crucial and biblical and God supported these exhortations are. So, here we are at Jude. One chapter, Jude verses 20 and 21.

We'll be on it today and next Sunday. Let's read it. But you, beloved.

You, loved ones. Building yourselves up on your most holy faith. Praying in the Holy Spirit.

Keep yourselves in the love of God. Waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Thomas Manton is a Puritan 300 years ago.

He wrote a commentary on Jude. 23 pages on these two verses. Rich, dense, gloriously God-centered pages on two verses.

Every phrase in the verse deserves two sermons at least. So, this phrase is going to get two sermons and that's all. Then we'll do other things.

So, the phrase is praying in the Holy Spirit. What is that? Praying in the Holy Spirit. So, I have one observation today and it isn't going to be the one you had thought.

That's next week. Not going to tell you what it is today. I'm going to tell you that praying in the Spirit is a divine means that God has appointed for keeping us in the love of God and safe for eternal life.

I'll say that again. It's the main point. The only point of the message that's now underway.

Praying in the Spirit is God's appointed means by which we keep ourselves in the love of God and thus safe for eternal life. That's the point of the message. Now, I don't know whether in your vocabulary the phrase means of grace is there.

I want it to be there. I'm going to put it there now and hope that you will embrace it as a very helpful way of describing the relationship between God's decisive work and my dependent work. This is last Sunday sermon again.

God does things decisively in and through us. We do things dependently on His doing within us. How are those related? How do we talk about that? One way to talk about it is to say God has grace that is powerful to bring about changes in our lives, but He also has means of grace that we're engaged in.

Our wills are engaged in. Our bodies are engaged in. Our minds are engaged in.

Our emotions are engaged in. They're all means by which He is sovereignly working out His purposes. So, means becomes a crucial word to handle biblical, theological vision of life.

So, we'll see this. We'll see this here. Let's look at the context.

Verse 20. You, beloved, building yourselves up. I want you to notice the participles here and how they lead toward the main verbs.

It's very important. If you have a version that doesn't show them that way, then change versions. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.

Now comes the main verb. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Now, the reason that's important is because these two participles at the beginning are ways to do the main verb.

Building yourselves up, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God. So, a way to keep yourself in the love of God, and that's crucial for your life. He who has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed, Paul said.

Staying in the love of God, whether it's my love for God or His love for me, doesn't matter right here. Both are absolutely crucial that we stay in them. Depends on my praying in the Spirit and my building myself up on faith.

On faith. Now, this is all about perseverance, therefore. That is, it's about staying in the love of God.

That's what this little book, Jude, is about. It's about this big word, perseverance, or keeping, or enduring. Staying in the love of God.

Oh, so many Christians have mechanical views of the Christian life. You get in and then everything's mechanical after that. You get in by praying a prayer, signing a card, and then it's mechanical.

And what you do has nothing to do with it. That's not the biblical vision of the Christian life. This text says, keep yourself in the love of God.

How? Praying in the Holy Spirit, building yourself up. Praying is a means, a means, of keeping yourself in the love of God. How do you stay in the love of God? Keep yourself in the love of God.

This is something you do. You do this. Isn't that amazing? You keep yourself in the love of God.

You keep yourself in the love of God. Keep yourself in the love of God. You do this.

That's part of the context. Here's another part. Verse 1. Same chapter.

No chapter divisions here. Verse 1. Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, brother of James, to those who are called. Oh, don't you love to be called? Called, Christian.

Loved in God, the Father. Don't you love to be told you are loved? And here's the key one. Kept.

Either by Jesus Christ, as some versions have it, which is okay and right, or for Jesus Christ. The Greek can handle either one. There's no way to know.

Whether you know Greek or not doesn't matter here. The ambiguity is there. But what's clear is, this is a passive verb and you're not doing it.

You're being kept in verse 1. You're being kept. So you're doing it in verse 21. Keep.

Same verb. Greek and English. Keep yourself in the love of God.

You do it. Verse 1. You are being kept by another. Who's that? Well, the NIV says it's Jesus.

The NASB says it's for Jesus and somebody else must be doing it. Who's doing it? Why did the NASB translate it for Jesus instead of by Jesus? Kept by Jesus. I'm sure I'm being kept by Jesus.

The blood of Jesus. The intercession of Jesus. The spirit of Jesus.

I know that's true theologically. Why did the NASB not translate it that way? And I know why. They're smart.

They looked at the whole context. Let's go to the end of the story. Sometimes the beginning of the story is illuminated by the end of the story.

Very famous doxology. Verse 24. Let's read it.

Now to him who is able to... What? Tell me. Keep. Now to him who is able to keep you.

So, who is it? Who is it in verse 24? Do we get told here? We do indeed get told here. Crystal clear who it is who keeps us in verse 24. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and make you stand in the presence of his glory.

This is what I want. Isn't it what you want, Christian? You want somebody with almighty power to keep you so that you will stand before the Son of Man when He comes and not shrink back in fear of His wrath. Amen.

That's what we all want. If it depends on me, ultimately I'm a goner. So I need a sovereign intervening of somebody to keep me, hold me in the love of God.

Who is it? Read on. Verse 25. Namely, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ.

So the keeper is God the Father. Through Jesus Christ. Now I'm not going to quibble about that translation in verse 1. It's absolutely right.

Jesus keeps us because when the Father does it through the Son, the Son is our keeper as well as the Father. And so is the Spirit. We'll see this Trinitarian thing next week when we look at this praying in the Spirit, praying in the name of Jesus, praying to the Father.

Prayer is a massive Trinitarian event. So let's not quibble about the by or for Jesus. Let's know that the verb in verse 1, kept, is illuminated by verse 24 and 25.

Namely, God Almighty, the Father and the Son, conspire by the Spirit to keep me for His glory. None let me fall. A man came up to me after the first service.

Ah, this is so good. I wish I had thought of it. He said, have you ever heard any old preacher say like I did one time, it's very hard to stumble when you're on your knees.

See the word stumble there in verse 24? Who's able to keep you from stumbling, or your version may say falling. Very hard to fall or stumble when you're on your knees. In other words, prayer is the means.

This is the point I'm going to make in just a minute. Prayer is the means that God uses, God uses, now we know it's God, verse 1, verse 24, this is God, uses to enable me to keep myself in the love of God by prayer. Now, does anybody here last Sunday's message coming through? We got a decisive worker here called God.

We got a dependent worker here called me and you. And these two works are essential for eternal life. But the second one, mine, depends on the first one, God's.

God's decisive work enables my dependent work. And my dependent work enabled by God's decisive work is absolutely essential for my perseverance in eternal life. Oh, that we might rid ourselves of the mechanical notion of eternal security.

Mechanical notion, not the reality. I'm a believer in eternal security to the soles of my feet because of Romans 8.30. Those whom He justified, He glorified. No question, God's people will endure.

But how can they be sure they'll endure? Well, the mechanical view says it doesn't matter what they do, doesn't matter how they act, doesn't matter whether they pray or not, just they're secure, period. They pray, they're safe, they're in. Not biblical.

Keep yourself in the love of God. Well, doesn't that make me secure? No, because God is at work in you to will and to do His good purpose. It makes you utterly dependent, not on God at the beginning of your Christian life, but utterly dependent on the sovereignty of God moment by moment in your Christian life.

That's a big view of God. That's a big view of the grace of God. Some people have grace nicely tucked away here at the beginning and then they're going to work their way either or not, and it doesn't really make any difference whether they do or not because they're in.

The Bible does not have a static mechanical view of security. It has a dynamic, engaged view of security. In other words, don't be like the cynic who hears these things and says, well, if I'm kept by a sovereign God to be presented as blameless before the throne of God, it doesn't matter whether I'm vigilant in prayer to keep myself in the love of God or not.

You know what that's like saying? It's like saying, since life is a gift to me, it doesn't matter whether I breathe or not. I'm just going to spend an hour underwater. Try it.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath. Don't say, it doesn't matter if I breathe because God gives me life. That's crazy.

That's stupid. Let me put it another way. This is a test kind of.

If you do not treasure breath, you don't treasure life. And if you don't treasure prayer, you don't treasure eternal life. Test yourself.

Is eternal life kind of just a little phrase in your head that's supposedly to get you out of another phrase called hell? Two phrases, got this hell phrase, got this prayer phrase. Yeah, I believe that stuff. Or is it a desperately needed work of God and a cherished gift to you? Do you cherish prayer? I mean, when you hear God say to you, ask and you'll receive, seek and you'll find, knock and the door will be opened.

Do you just blow up with, I can't believe you're telling me a sinner that I can relate to you that way. That I can come to you day after day and breathe out my needs and have you breathe in grace to meet my needs. Really? I mean, if you don't love prayer, you don't love God.

You don't. If you don't love prayer, you don't love God. Ask any wife.

He says he loves me, but the last thing he wants to do is talk with me. The last thing he wants to do is spend time with me. Tell her about it.

You want to hear an example of how to pray? And then I'll stop. How do you pray persevering or prayers for perseverance? That's what we're talking about here. We're saying that you are to keep yourself in the love of God.

As a means of God keeping you in the love of God. Because his work is decisive and yours is dependent. And we're saying prayer is the participle that defines how you do that.

Praying, keep yourself in the love of God. Praying, keep yourself in the love of God. Now praying then is the means by which we're kept in the love of God and thus safe for eternal life.

How do you pray? What do you say? I'll give you one example. Luke 21, 36. This is Jesus telling us.

Keep on the alert at all times. Praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place. And stand before the Son of Man.

He claps it down. Keep on the alert. Praying that you may have strength to stand before the Son of Man.

Again, what's the alternative to standing before the Son of Man? Answer, falling in judgment and fear before the Son of Man. Standing before the Son of Man means he appears and you stay on your feet with a smile on your face. Confident in the righteousness of Jesus Christ that you are accepted in the beloved.

And to cower and to fall and to cringe like many will do calling on rocks to fall on them is owing to prayerlessness. Pray, keep on the alert. Praying that you may have strength to stand before the Son of Man.

Why? Because prayer decays. Breath, the desire to breathe spiritually decays. It's an insane thing, I know.

That the desire to breathe would begin to wane and we would say, let's just spend time under water. In prayerless sin. That's the water.

Prayerless sin. Let's just spend time under there because we're kept by God. We'll make it and we don't need to breathe in order to be alive anyway.

Well, my message is over and I'm pleading with you. Breathe in 2001. Lest you suffocate.

Breathe. Breathe. Personal devotions are breathing exercises.

This is not a legalistic thing. The reason we do personal private devotions and family devotions and church devotions is because we're so prone to stop liking breathing. And we undertake exercises to keep our lungs strong and to keep our all day long kind of breathing.

So that in the car you're breathing. Oh God, help me. Bring me home safely.

Help me to have a good, tender, warm, loving spirit towards my wife when I get home. And patience with my kids who want to play when I'm dead tired. Oh God, help me, help me, help me.

All day long. I mean, if you're like me, you are one. Your heart is a factory of needs.

Longings. And therefore, if you just release that, you'll be praying all day. There won't be any breathless hours.

Let's pray. Father, tonight the year ends. The millennium ends.

Century ends. There's never been in the life of anybody in this room a better time than to lay aside the old man. All of his prayerlessness.

And to put on the new man. Clothed with prayer. Would you work it in us, please? Work it in dads to be good leaders in prayer at home.

Work it in roommates to get together and pray. Work it in teenagers so that they're forming little clusters and groups of prayer. College students, get them praying with each other.

Lord, and would you give everybody a Jabez prayer for some great kingdom purpose that they lay hold on. And now may the Lord grant you to keep yourself in the love of God by praying in the Holy Spirit. And all God's people said, amen.

Amen. This is Desiring God, 2601 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406. Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure.

Because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/7/SID7162.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/learning-to-pray-in-the-spirit-and-the-word-part-one/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net