

Prayerful Dependence
Sunday, February 15th, 2026
By Ryan Perry

Scripture:

John 16:13

[13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Ephesians 6:16–18

[16] In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18] praying 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...

Let's Pray

Introduction

Illustration:

A sailor sets out on a small sailboat, confident that he can row across a wide lake without any help. He starts out well and feels like he's making great progress, when all of a sudden the wind picks up, and the waves begin to overwhelm him.

The sailor at this point finds himself exhausted, frustrated, and about to give up until he realizes that he hasn't yet let down his sails. So, he opens them up, they begin to catch the wind, and the man makes it safely and swiftly to the other side of the lake.

The point is that this man almost failed to cross the lake because he was so insistent on getting there by his own strength that he forgot to depend on his sails and the wind to do the work for him.

Church, I want to confess something to you this morning. When it comes to living the Christian life, I am exactly like this man.

I can tell you, until I am blue in the face, that you need to put your full hope in what Jesus has done on your behalf, and that you need to depend on his Spirit for everything, and yet I can live as if this life is somehow fully dependent upon me.

I often find myself, like the sailor; frustrated, exhausted, and at times ready to give up, because I'm trying to row the boat of my life, instead of trusting Christ and his Spirit to be the wind in my sails.

And yet, I know that I'm not alone in this struggle. As I look around this room, I see a group of believers who genuinely and enthusiastically affirm the idea that we are completely dependent upon God and his Spirit for everything in the Christian life.

I am truly grateful for this, because it means that we all know and believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we need the Spirit to be working in our lives if we are going to live a fruit-filled Christian life, and accomplish the mission of **“inviting people to follow Christ,”** and with it, the vision of becoming **“backyard missionaries”** right where we live.

We also know that if we are going to continue to be a people who genuinely **“Worship our Sovereign Father,”** are deeply **“Rooted in the Word,”** and **“Build one another up in Christ,”** God will need to be working in us and through us, **by his Spirit.** And the reason we believe this because we have taken Paul's words to heart in Philippians 2:12-13.

[12] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

All of this is true of our church. But that doesn't mean that we don't struggle to live it out. In fact, every person in the room, at one point or another struggles with things like worry, doubt, prayerlessness, self-reliance, pride, stress, control, anger, frustration, and exhaustion.

This happens because we have seasons, **either big or small,** where we become like the people that the prophet talks about in Jeremiah 2:13 when he says:

***[13] for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns that can hold no water.***

We stop depending on the living fountain of Christ and his Spirit to lead, guide, and to transform us, and we turn to manmade cisterns and efforts that slowly but surely crowd out the life-giving peace and joy that God has promised us as his people.

So, realizing that we all experience this disconnect between what we believe about the Spirit and how we live by the Spirit, we found it necessary to have one of our values point us back to our continually need to depend on **God's Holy Spirit**.

This brings us to our fourth value, as a church, and main point for today's message.

Value 4

Prayerful Dependence on the Spirit

Main Idea: Because Christ has given us his Spirit, the Christian life is about continual and prayerful dependance on Him.

I want to say this again, I struggle with living out this kind of dependance on the Spirit, and I am too often like the sailor rowing against the wind. So, as we talk about prayerful dependance today, I am a lot like the quote from D.T. Niles which says, **"I'm just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."**

Therefore, it is my hope that God will sink this message deep within all of our hearts so that we can collectively experience the guidance, comfort, and empowerment that he provides as we seek to live faithful and fruitful lives within each of our own backyards.

But if we are going experience the Spirit in this way, then we need to begin by making sure that we are **"Trusting the Spirit."**

1. Trust in the Spirit

Illustration:

I've already mentioned a couple of times that I can often be like the sailor in my opening illustration. I'm all too confident that I can row across the lake, even as the wind picks up and the waves overwhelm me.

But the difference between the sailor and myself is that he forgot about his sails and therefore, didn't put them down. I, on the other hand, know they are there, and yet, often refuse to **trust them**, which is why I don't put them down.

And so, I row and I row, and try harder and harder, until I'm exhausted and have no other choice but to let down my sails so that the wind can do its work.

I think if we are all honest, we've experienced something similar. And when we dig down to the root cause of why we are working so hard and seeing so little progress, at times, in our Christian lives, there is a good chance that we have stopped putting our trust in the Spirit's work in our lives.

So, if that's true, then we need to spend some time asking ourselves, **“What are we supposed to be trusting the Spirit to do in our lives?”** I believe that scripture tells us that there are three major things that we need to be trusting him to do for us.

To give us new life

Romans 8:11

[11] If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Many of us know well Paul famous words in Ephesians 2:8-9 which remind us that salvation is a gift from God and not from our works. **That Jesus lived a perfect life on our behalf, died on the cross for us, took the punishment for our sins, and that he gives new life to all who believe in him.**

We also know from John 6:44 that the Father is the one who is working, by his Spirit, to draw us to himself so that we will believe in Christ.

But did you know that it is the Holy Spirit who actually brings new life to your souls?

You can't earn your new life in Christ, you can't affect your new life in Christ, and you can't lose your new life in Christ, because the Spirit of God who dwells within you has given you that life and has secured it within you forever. As Paul says in Ephesians 1:13:

[13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

This means that we can stop worrying about whether or not we are truly God's children and we can stop working so hard to try to earn God's favor. Because the Spirit of God has made us new creations, he has applied Christ's perfect standing with the Father to us, and he has secured our forever relationship with God.

So, we can trust that our new creation lives are perfectly held in his hands.

To teach us what is true

John 16:13

[13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

In the age of never-ending online content and a 24/7 news cycle it can be really difficult to discern truth from fiction, right from wrong, or even AI from a real person. As a result, we are becoming increasingly skeptical as Americans, and at times we are very unsure about who we can trust.

But Jesus let's us know that we aren't left to do this work of discernment on our own. Instead, God, through Christ, gave us his Spirit so that he could guide us into what is true.

But how does he do that?

First and most importantly, he teaches us all of the truth that he hears from God. This means that he is revealing to us the meaning and the truth of God's Word.

So, when you read the Bible, listen to a sermon, or do a Bible study, you are able to know what it means and how to apply it to your life and the world because the Spirit of God is making it's meaning and application plain to you.

Two, the Spirit gives us wisdom and discernment. As Jesus' brother wrote in James 1:5:

[5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

In the age of spam, bots, and fake news, there is a good chance that we will continue to struggle with what is fact or fiction online. But because we have the Spirit of God living within us, we will always be able to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and biblical truth from worldly wisdom.

And even if there is a moment where we feel unsure about these things, we have a God who will generously provide his understanding so we will always know how to think and live in the world.

All we have to do is ask, and trust that he will provide it to us through his Spirit.

To be our helper and guide

John 14:26

[26] But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

I've purposely highlighted the word Helper, not only because it is a proper name given to the Holy Spirit, but the Greek word *parakletos* tells us that the Spirit's primary role is to "help and give aid" to God's people.

No matter what we go through and no matter how much we might be struggling with things like family decisions, work conflicts, financial hardships, health issues, spiritual battles, and even persecution, he will lead us in what is right and will help us through any situation that we face. As Paul says at the beginning of Romans 8:26:

[26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

But if we are truly going to receive that help, then our first step must be to "trust in God's Spirit" to provide it.

However, we can't simply stop at trusting the Spirit, **because genuine trust also requires action.** This brings us to our second point for this morning, which is that we need to "Rely on the Spirit."

2. Rely on the Spirit

Illustration:

There was a point where the sailor was ready to give up on being able to cross the lake. He had tried and tried to row against the wind and the waves, and he was exhausted and on the verge of turning back.

Fortunately, that's when he realized that he hadn't put down his sails. So he quickly untied them, let them down, and allowed them to carry him to the other side while he manned the rutter to make sure the wind stayed in his sails.

Now, try to imagine what would have happened if he let down his sails, but still decided that he still needed to row. **Would his sails have been as effective? No.** Because the rutter would be all over the place and he wouldn't be able to keep them in the wind.

So, he would eventually end up right back where he started. Trying to get to the other side of the lake with his own strength even though it was clear that he couldn't.

This is exactly what we are doing if we claim to **“trust in the Spirit,”** but don't take any steps to actually **“rely on the Spirit.”**

And I have to say that I am guilty of this more often than I would like to admit. With my mind, heart, and words I say things like, **“Lord, I know that everything I have comes from you. I trust you with my life. Lead me by your Spirit and change me so that I may know you deeply, serve you fully, and honor you with my life.”**

However, when the rubber meets the road, I'm right back to rowing the boat. Trying to live my Christian existence as if it is up to me instead of a work of God's Spirit in my life. So, I still end up tired and frustrated, wondering why I see so little joy and fruit in my life.

My point here is that if we are going to experience a faithful and fruit-filled existence as God's people, we need to move beyond merely saying that we trust in the Spirit, we need to make actual choices to rely on him so that he can be the **true wind in our sails.**

Just like the first point, there are three things that we need to rely on him to do for us.

To intercede for us

Romans 8:26-27

[26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

One of the things that can feel super frustrating about prayer is that there are times when we feel so overwhelmed that we don't even know what to say. Or, when we pray, we either struggle to stay focused or feel like our prayers are ineffective and going nowhere.

If I had to guess, I imagine that we all have felt each of these at one point or another.

But the good news is that this doesn't mean that our prayers are ineffective or that God isn't hearing them. Because the outcome of our prayers is not dependent upon having the right words, the right feelings, or the perfect prayer time with God.

Rather, our prayers are dependent upon God responding to and answering the Holy Spirit as he prays through us and in accordance with the will of God.

He is the one who intercedes for us to the Father. And he does it perfectly so that God answers us and works in our lives all that is in accordance with his perfect plan.

So we must rely on the Spirit to make our prayers effective.

To transform us

2 Corinthians 3:18

[18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

I think one of the most “**tragic**” phrases that has ever made its way into the Christian culture is the saying: “**God helps those who help themselves.**”

The problem is that it is not only theologically incorrect, but it also makes us believe that we have to get our lives together before God will actually help us, **which is just dumb!** If I could actually get my life together, then I wouldn’t need God. I would just do it on my own.

And yet, how many of us struggle with sin, or worse, just accept it, because we have spent so much time trying to fight against it in our own strength.

You’ve tried all the computer programs to curb your appetite for lust. You’ve done all of the mindfulness exercises to alleviate your struggle with anxiety. You’ve continually reset your screen time limits so you can be a more attentive spouse or parent. You keep telling yourself over and over again to be happy, to rejoice, and to live a more peaceful life.

But you seem to continue to struggle with little to no progress in sight.

And yet, the issue is not with our effort. Now, on the one hand, if we are going to make progress in the Christian life it does take a lot of effort. But, on the other, we need to make sure that we are putting our efforts into the right things.

And according to 2 Cor. 3:18 our effort needs to be put into intentionally fixing our attention on the Lord—**His character, works, and Word**, so that we would love him, worship him, and be transformed by **His Spirit**.

Because genuine transformation doesn’t come by simply trying harder. Instead, it happens when we make it our aim to know Christ, to love Christ, and to rely on his Spirit to make us more like Christ.

To empower us

Acts 1:8

[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

One of the things that amazes me about myself and other believers that I talk with is how much fear and self-doubt we live with. There seems to be this feeling that we don't measure up, we don't have what it takes, or we don't have the skill, ability, or resolve to live a Christian life that is fruitful and has an eternal impact on the world.

Now, if we were left to rely on our own strength, those assumptions would be absolutely true.

But Jesus is making it clear in Acts 1:8 that we have been given the power of the Holy Spirit not only to be his witnesses in the world, but by extension, to live a full and joy-filled Christian life.

This means that no matter how we feel about ourselves, we have everything we need to accomplish the good and eternity changing work that God has given to us. Because the power, skill, and resolve needed to do it, comes wholly and fully from God, by the power of his Spirit. This is why Paul can boldly write in Philippians 4:13:

[13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

So, we can all let go of our self-doubt, because through the Spirit we have everything we need, and more to live a fruitful, Christ-honoring, and eternally impactful life.

Now, I realize that I've been up here for about 35 minutes now and I've basically told you two things. You need to **"trust in the Holy Spirit"** and you need to put that trust into action by **"relying on the Spirit."**

Which are both true and necessary if we are going to live a life of continual and fruitful dependance upon the Spirit.

But how do we begin to move from being people who tell ourselves that we need trust and rely on the Spirit, to being those who actually live it out?

The answer is through prayer.

3. Pray at all times in the Spirit

Ephesians 6:16–18

[16] In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18] praying 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,

Church, this last point is the reason why I opened with the D.T. Niles quote, **“I’m just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”** Because I know that I struggle mightily with prayer.

And God has shown me that I have spent way too many hours trying to do for God, when what I needed most was to seek and depend on God in prayer.

I want you to know that if we are going to fulfill this vision and experience the life-giving and transforming power of God at work in our lives, our church, and within the Coulee Region, then we need to be a church that continually labors in prayer.

We need to depend on the Spirit to guide us in prayer, we need to let his scriptures inform our prayers, and we need to make it a priority to devote ourselves to prayer.

Because God tells us that he listens to us (Jer. 29:12), he answers our prayers (Mark 11:24), and our prayers are powerful. As it says in James 5:16:

[16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

This is why one of our immediate goals within our 5-year vision is to gather a team of people who will labor in prayer for our growth as a church family, and for the gospel of Jesus Christ to transform lives in our space and time. **Because Jesus tells us in Matthew 18 that when we gather and pray together, God is present, and he answer us.**

So, if you are someone who is interested in being a part of this team, I want to encourage you to sign-up at the welcome center.

But, even if you aren’t apart of this team, I want to challenge each one of us to grow in our prayerful dependance on the Spirit and to be a people that continually seek God in prayer.

To stop rowing the boat of our life and to let down our sails so that the Holy Spirit can be our helper and guide.

Because we believe that if we become a people who trust the Spirit, rely on the Spirit, and labor with him in prayer, God will not only change us and conform us to the image of his son Jesus Christ, but he will powerfully work through us to build his kingdom right here in La Crescent, in La Crosse, in the Coulee Region, and to the ends of the earth.

So, let's become a people who continually and prayerfully depend on God's Holy Spirit.

Let's pray.