

Title: **Praying with Paul**

Author : **D. A. Carson**

Category : **Prayer**

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

Luke 11:1 ESV

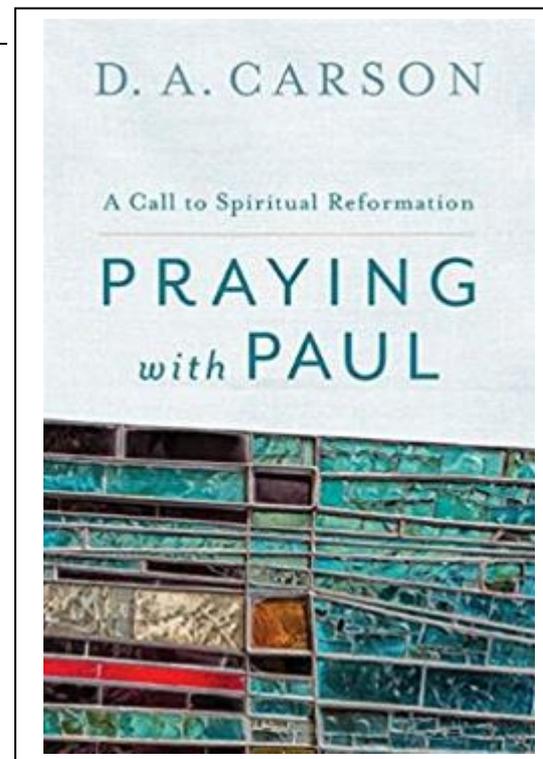
I desire a deep relationship with God. Anything that can help me do this, I am interested. Hence when I came across this book in our church library, *Praying with Paul*, I read the synopsis behind to see what the book is about. The synopsis says, “God doesn’t demand hectic church programs and frenetic schedules; He only wants His people to know Him more intimately....Praying with Paul calls believers to reject superficiality and revolutionize their lives by embracing a God-guided approach to prayer.” This certainly sounded like a book that could help me deepen my relationship with God. And the fact that it was written by D A Carson, an author I admire, is a bonus. I quickly borrowed the book. As I was the first to read it, I thought I would write a review to promote the book.

The main thrust of the book is to use certain prayers of Paul, see what Paul prays for and what we can learn from them. Substantially, each chapter covers a particular prayer of Paul. The author begins with the framework of prayer by Paul, a framework of thought that Paul keeps in mind as he prays, a framework that largely controls what Paul prays for, and why. And the author observes that the two dominant features of this framework for Paul’s prayer are: thankfulness for signs of grace, and confidence in the prospect of vindication (for believers, there will be vindication, and for others, there will be retribution).

Paul prays for deep things in his petitions for believers. Paul’s goal in praying is to seek the glorification of the Lord Jesus and the believers. Paul demonstrates a passion for people in his prayer. As the author draws and explains the things Paul prays for, I learned not only what I can pray for others, I realized I too can apply the things Paul prays for the believers in my own walk with God. Killing two birds with one stone, if you know what I mean.

The book also talks about excuses for not praying and overcoming the hurdles. Something I find interesting is the author’s take on this confusing subject, “A sovereign and personal God”, where he handles the question, “If prayer changes things, how can we believe that God is sovereign and all-knowing....if He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, then in what meaningful sense can we say that prayer changes things?” He talks about God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. Not an easy concept to come to terms with, and I thought the author handles it well.

Definitely a good book to read and I highly recommend it.



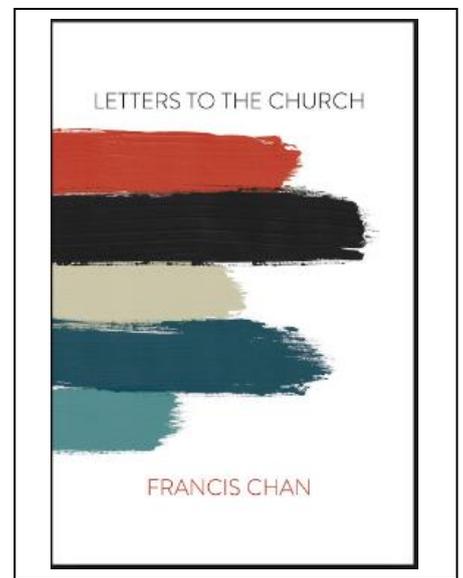
Title: **Letters to the Church**

Author : **Francis Chan**

Category : **Church/Ministries**

“For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.”

2 Corinths 13:10 ESV



Why would a pastor who built it into a mega-church and doing successfully leave it subsequently for a smaller house church supposedly to re-start all over again? Pastor Francis Chan with over 30 years pastoring experience shares his own failings as pastor leader as well as the short comings of the American church. The Lord then led him to ‘tour’ some unknown, ‘hidden’ Asian churches to learn what is most important in God’s eyes.

How does God define success? How do we do church? Is it functioning based on ‘what works?’, meeting members legitimate needs?, functioning the way pastors desire or according to church tradition? Or.....doing what pleases God most?

Each chapter of the book addresses a different struggle the church congregation, pastors and leaders face. Lest we dismiss this as the failures of a typical American church, I find the same issues and failings echoing loudly in Singapore churches too.

I will not reveal too much but some issues pastor Chan addresses are ‘human centred theology’, a consumerist mind set, lack of unity and true brotherly love, lack of respect for authority and others. I like the chapter on “SACRED” most. I think it may be the ‘key’ as to why these problems exist in churches today.

Pastor Chan is direct and forthright in his words. Both church members and pastors-leaders will benefit much from reading this book. It is easy reading. But don’t rush to finish it. Pause and ponder on the different issues the church struggles with even if you don’t agree with him. Lest this book is ‘weaponised’ by the church’s critics, it is meant for self- reflection and self-examination by those most critical of her.

This book is riveting and worth a second, even a third read.

Other titles by Francis Chan for your reading selection:

1. Forgotten God
2. You and Me Forever
3. The Road We Must Travel

Children Titles

1. Halfway Herbert
2. Ronnie Wilson's Gift
3. The Big Red Tractor and the Little Village