Dear Friends,

The start of a new year often brings with it a resolve to make changes. It may be to exercise more. To have less screen time and to paint, sew, or read instead. To reconnect with old friends. To go to bed earlier. To spend more time with the kids. To plan a regular date with your spouse.

I have resolved to keep practising praying. I have no aspirations to become a master prayer. It's a silly and an unrealistic goal. God's word says that I am a disciple and a child of God. That means I am always a learner. That is especially the case when it comes to prayer.

I have prayed most of my life. I can remember as a small child, every night I prayed a prayer that mum taught me:

> *Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.*
> *If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

There are few days in my life when I have not prayed. I don't say this to brag. I tell you this because I need to keep working at my prayer life. I must pray because I need God. I also want to pray because prayer is the means by which I talk to God. If I am to have a closer relationship with God so that I trust, love, obey and enjoy him more, it's crucial that I pray.

To help me, I have been reading Prayerfulness by Peter Adam. I can thank Mel Wang, RPC's mission partner for putting me on to this book. His book has challenged me to improve my prayer life in two main areas: planning and thoughtfulness.

By planning, I don't mean plan to simply pray. That is fundamental. I mean, plan what to pray so that I talk with God about the things that he wants me to bring to him rather than what just comes to mind. I find that especially applicable when praying for church, for local mission, for RPC's mission partners, for fellow churches, for Bible Colleges, and for wider kingdom work.

For example, take church. I want to regularly pray for our elders, staff, managers, and ministry leaders. I want to pray for each of our ministries, for God to provide our finances, for the care of our buildings. To ensure I do that, I made a card on which I listed the ministries, peoples and matters to pray for from Sunday to Saturday. There is a list of items for each day of the week.

What do I mean by thoughtfulness? When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he gave them a prayer. It is called the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-13):

> *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For the kingdom, power and glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.*

To put more thought into our prayers, Peter Adam suggests using written prayers, like the Lord's Prayer, which have either been composed by others or self-prepared. Adam says the benefit of pre-written prayers is that they help you to stay focused and to ensure that you pray for what you need, and for what God wants you to pray. On his advice, I have composed a daily prayer for myself, using Ephesians as a guide, for those things I need to pray for each day.

I share this with you because you may find it helpful for your prayer life. So, plan to pray. Writing down a list of items you will pray for each day on a weekly basis may help to you to be regular in prayer about those things. Also, be thoughtful about what you pray for yourself each day. Consider composing your own prayer. You might even use the Lord's Prayer as a guide so that you praise God, thank him, confess your sin, trust him and ask him to provide for your material and spiritual needs.

God Bless,
Mark Adams