

Praying with Paul: A Model of Praying for One Another (part 2: Content)

I can't think of anything more practical than the fact that God answers the prayers of Christians. In John 15:7 Jesus says, **"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."** *You may say, "What do you mean that God only answers the prayers of Christians?"* Well, ONLY those who abide in Christ, and those in whom Christ's words abide, are the children of God. In John 1:12, we are told: **"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."** Only Christians have their sins forgiven. Only Christians have a relationship with God. Only Christians, by the Spirit, call God **"Abba Father"** (Rom. 8:15). With this in mind, let me ask, *"Do you pray enough? Do you want to pray more? Do you want to pray more effectively?"* If you are a Christian, your answer is "yes" to all three of these questions. With this in mind, let's continue from two weeks ago with the 2nd part of our sermon on Praying with Paul. In that sermon, we considered the motives for our prayers as we looked specifically at Eph. 1. Today, I want to move to the content of Paul's prayers. In other words, what does he pray for? And I hope this will help us pray better and more effectively. I have arranged all of Paul's prayers into 8 kinds of petitions. We will look through these (in no certain order) for a few minutes and then I will try and apply these truths at the end.

1. Pray for godliness. In 2 Cor. 13:7 Paul prays for the Corinthians that **"they will not do anything wrong, but do what is right."** In Col. 1:3-14, Paul prays for the Colossians that **"God fill them with the knowledge of his will . . ."** Why? That they may **"live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way."** In 1 Thess. 5:23-24 he prays that God would **"sanctify them through and through."** Why? So they will be **"blameless and holy when the Lord Jesus returns."** Finally, in Phil. 1:9-11 he prays they may be **"pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with righteous fruit . . ."** Praying for godliness is one of Paul's main requests when he prays for the churches. Therefore, we must do the same!

2. Pray for power. Throughout his prayers, Paul prays for the power of God and the knowledge of the power of God. In Eph. 1:19 he prays that the believers would know the **"immeasurable greatness of his power . . ."** In Rom. 15:13 he prays that they may **"overflow with hope by the POWER of the Holy Spirit."** Again, in Col. 1:11 he prays that they be **"strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might . . ."** This is the same power that rose Christ from the dead. This kind of prayer is foundational to all our prayers when we pray for one another. For which of you will make it another day without the power of God. This is **"Christ in you, the hope of glory!"** (Col. 1:27). (See also 2 Thess. 1:11-12)

3. Pray for wisdom through revelation. I get this from Eph. 1:17 where Paul prays that **"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him."** Also, in Col. 1:9 he prays that they **"be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding . . ."** This isn't to say that when we pray we are asking God for "dreams" and "visions" of revelation. Our prayers of wisdom through revelation are linked to godliness. And how do we know what it looks like to be godly? The Word of God instructs us. In this way, we find all the revelation we need to walk in godliness. And, so we pray for one another.

4. Pray for boldness. We see three prayers like this. In Eph. 6:19-20, Paul prays for himself. He says to the Ephesians, Pray for me, **“that my words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly . . .”** Why does he pray this? Notice the next words: **“to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”** He prays pretty much the same in Col. 4:2-4. Also, in Philemon 4-7 he prays that **“the sharing of your faith may become effective . . .”** The implication here is the “active” sharing of the gospel, which often takes boldness. I think we should pray this for ourselves and for others in the body every day. And if so, and our hearts are in the right place, how do you think God will answer this kind of prayer?

5. Pray for unity. We see this in Rom. 15:5-6: **“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is so important in the body of Christ, particularly local bodies. I believe our confession and our covenant and our membership process helps us do this at Grace. But, there is always the tendency for individuality. And we fight and quarrel because we don’t get what we want. Therefore, we must be unified; and so we pray.

6. Pray for love. There are two parts to this kind of prayer. First, we must know the love of God. Second, after knowing the love of God, we are able to love one another. In Eph. 3:17 Paul prays that **“being rooted and established in love”** they **“may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”** In 2 Thess. 3:2-5 he prays that **“God will directed their hearts into His love and Christ’s perseverance.”** Brothers and sisters, I am convinced that our works are directly related to this truth. This means we should do everything we can in our families, our churches, our disciple making relationships to pray for this. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

7. Pray for kings and those in authority. In 1 Tim. 2:1 Paul tells Timothy: **“First of all, then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** We aren’t giving specifics on how to pray for ungodly kings and those in authority, except to say that we pray for their salvation (v. 3). But, notice why Paul prays for them. Look back v. 2: **“that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”** This means we pray for our authorities (that may be very ungodly) so that even if God does not save them, we can flourish as Christians in godliness, peace, and a quiet life.

8. Pray for the salvation of those around us. This follows what we’ve just seen in 1 Tim. 2. But, in Romans 10:1 Paul prays for his Jewish people. He says, **“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.”** I think as Christians here at Grace, we get this. We pray for the lost of China Grove, etc. We pray for the lost in Central and Southern Asia. We pray for the lost in our families and in our places of employment. And, God is always answering our prayers as he saves people.

6 Applications:

1. Pray constantly. In 1 Thess. 1:2 Paul says we “**constantly pray for you.**” In 1 Thess. 3:10 he prays “**day and night.**” In 2 Thess. 1:11 he says, “**we always pray for you.**” So what does this look like for us? This means we are always thinking about one another, which is shown in our prayers, as we have a great desire for our brothers and sisters to be blessed, to continue in the faith, to persevere in this life, knowing that only God can work. In this same letter, Paul tells the Thessalonians, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Have you every thought about this? Do you pray without ceasing? This doesn’t mean that we are always voicing prayers. This is impossible since we are working, carrying out day to day tasks, going to school, etc. I think to pray without ceasing is more of an attitude of the heart that is always coming out, such that even during our days activities, we are praying for others. And of course this continues in our prayer closets. So, how are we doing? Hopefully, learning about Paul’s habits of prayer and speaking in this way will help us grow in this area. And, at the end of the day, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. So, we must focus on the heart!

2. Most of your prayer time should be spent praying for other Christians. All but a couple of Paul’s prayers are for the churches he planted. Now, we know Paul prays for the lost and for other things. But, the vast majority of his prayers are for God’s people. And, by the way, if God answers our prayers one for another, how much more godly, how much more bold in our witness, will we be?

3. The bulk of our prayers are not for safety and health concerns. Only 3 times did Paul pray for such things – safety in travel, delivered from evil men, and for himself for healing. This doesn’t mean we don’t pray for things like safety and healing. We should. However, the content of Paul’s prayers is a model to us, teaching us that the bulk of what we pray for must change to resemble more of what we see in the Scriptures.

4. Praying these kinds of prayers takes more time and effort. I know for me, over the years as I have prayed these kinds of prayers, there is more thought, more time, more looking to the examples in the Scriptures as I pray. Practically, I hope these laminated charts will help us do this more effectively in the future. I must confess that I am often lazy in my prayers. I am also so distracted. But, we must learn to pray more like Paul; and this takes time and effort. But, the results will be amazing!

5. Scriptural prayers show us the will of God for our lives. In these prayers there is a connection between the “*knowledge of God’s will*” and “*wisdom*” and “*godliness.*” When we pray for the will of God, that He might “*reveal*” himself in knowledge and wisdom, we are praying for someone to be godly. This is the will of God, our godliness. To be godly is to fear God. To be godly is to be wise. To be godly is know the will of God. Honestly, it is hard to pray these prayers if we ourselves are living in sin. This means prayer is a means to godliness.

6. Since God answers his prayers according to his will, and these are the ways we should pray, what should our church look like if God answers these prayers? This means our church should

look like what we pray for. Look back through these prayers with me. We should see “*salvation*” (Rom. 10:1), “*unity*” (Rom. 15:5-6), “*joy and peace*” (Rom. 15:30-33), “*wisdom and revelation*” (Eph. 1:15-23), a greater “*knowledge of God*” (same). We will see the great working of God’s “*power*” in our lives and in this church (Eph. 1:15-23). We will have a greater and growing sense of the “*love of Christ*” (Eph. 3:14-21). We will have more *boldness* as God gives us words to speak the gospel (Eph. 6:19-20). Our “*love for one another*” will grow as we pray. We will be much “*fruit*” of godliness in our lives (Col. 1:3-14). On and on we can go, and this is only with Paul’s example.

Do we pray this way? If not, it is time to start.

Let’s end with motive (which is where we started two weeks ago). If there is no motive to prayer, there is a much greater problem. And this is the case with some of you. But, I think for most of us, we’ve just never learned to pray like this. And, if in general, we are not praying more like what we see in the example of Paul, then we are not seeing the results of what Paul prays for in our congregation. And if this is the case, in all honesty (speaking for myself), we aren’t very mature in our prayers and in our thinking. And if so, we must change this environment. We must! If we aren’t very mature in our prayers and in our thinking about prayer, we aren’t creating an environment where making disciples is normal. We aren’t “teaching them to obey” all the commands of Christ. Oh, how we fall short. But, we give thanks that God is not finished with us. And we have his Word, and we have the preaching of the Word. Brothers and sisters, may we pray more and more effectively in the coming days!