

THE PRAYER THAT PLEASES GOD

Romans 1:8–15

Dr. George O. Wood

Last week in the introduction to the letter of Romans, we saw Paul’s description of himself, of the gospel, of the source of his message, and also something of these believers living in the city of Rome. Today in verses 8–15, we get a glimpse into the prayer life of the apostle and, by way of comparison, make application to our own life in “The Prayer That Pleases God.”

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“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome”

As we look at this brief prayer of the apostle today, the statement of prayer, I want us to consider three things: the spirit in which prayer is to be offered; the requests which are made of God in prayer; and the answers that God gives to prayer.

I. The spirit in which prayer is offered is identified as twofold.

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Prayer is offered with thanksgiving. And it is offered unceasingly. It is remarkable as Paul writes that he would be noting to the Romans that he, without ceasing, gives thanks to God for them.

Remarkable, I say, in that for the most part Paul had never met any of these believers in the city of Rome. From the last chapter of Romans 16, we get a list of the people to whom he sends greetings. Perhaps these are migrants to Rome that came from various centers of ministry where Paul was located at. But the bulk of the people he had never met.

One, if he is thinking in the natural state of mind here, would almost be tempted to say Paul is using a pulpit cliché. That he's wanting to get off to a good start and on a good foot with his audience by saying something like, "It is a joy and privilege to be here today," which all speakers must say when they are greeting an audience for the first time. Is he using words in a cliché-like way? Or is there an actuality to what he is saying? Paul recognizes that there may be those Christians at Rome who could conceivably treat this as a cliché. So he calls God as his witness that these words which he speaks are indeed true. And for a Jew to invoke the name of God as witness to his affairs meant that strong measure of truth was attached. There was not falsity in what is being said.

A. This, then, amazes us because here is a person so advanced in his prayer life, if you will, that he had learned the secret of giving thanks to God for people he has not even met. When we, by relief, compare that to our own life and often maybe the lack of thanksgiving for people who are even closest to us we say, "My, here is a person who has really developed!"

One of the things with relating to the apostle Paul and other giants of the faith is that sometimes they seem so far out ahead of us that we despair of ever trying to get that far. But if we will recognize that at the time Paul writes this he has been a believer for perhaps 25 years, and that surely he had not reached this advanced ability in his prayer life of giving thanks to God for

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those he'd *never* met if somewhere down the line he hadn't started by giving thanks to God for people he *had* met. But maybe what we are seeing now in the Apostle Paul is a full flowering of spiritual discipline and fruit. It's a way of responding to these Roman Christians whom he has never met by saying, "You're important to me. You mean something to me. I give thanks to God through Jesus Christ for you."

I would just suggest—and since it's still the beginning of the New Year and you have time to make New Year's resolutions yet—as you look at the close people in your life, as you even look at this body of believers in this church and look at your prayer life, are you giving thanks?

Because it is only when we are conditioning our prayers by an attitude of thanksgiving to God that God can then help us to pray aright, because we are loving people as we pray. We're not looking first of all to find out what's wrong. But we are thanking God for what is right.

B. This matter, too, of praying at all times, where Paul says he prays unceasingly—without ceasing for you in my prayers—this, by the way, is a phrase that does not mean that every moment of the day Paul was praying. For the phrase "without ceasing" was used in Greek literature to describe a hacking cough. As you know, some of you who've had it in the last few weeks, there's just no way you can control a cough when it wants to let loose. It just keeps interrupting your daily routines, sometimes at the most inopportune moments.

Paul thought of his prayer life to the Lord like this. I'm sure he had a regular time of prayer. But he had also learned in prayer to be active in his consciousness and spirit toward God throughout the moments of the day. So there would come those moments when, like a cough, prayer would interrupt his life. Or shall we say it would continue on in regularity in his life, and he would simply give thanks to God for them.

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So if we are not giving thanks to God or praying to God at all moments or having that regularity in prayer, at least the Scripture is telling us to get started somewhere. Because we never get to there unless we begin here: thanksgiving and unceasing prayer.

Paul is thanking the Lord not only for the Roman believers, but primarily because their faith is proclaimed in all the world. It is an indication of a powerful change that has happened in the lives of these people in the city of Rome—that the faith which they profess has become known in various centers of the Mediterranean world. In a day before telegraph, telephone, or rapid transit of any kind, their faith has become known.

I would like to submit to you that their faith became known not simply because they intellectually believed a content of doctrine. Their faith became known because dramatic changes occurred in their lives. Being known of the faith is not simply checking a sheet of what we believe, although that, in its place, is right. One wants right doctrine. But the real power of the gospel is not only that it is true, but that it changes our lives. God really has in mind that the gospel get a hold of us and make our experience different than it has been before. They have caught a powerful truth. They've caught a powerful life.

So great is this faith of the Roman believers, it's still being spoken of in the world today, 20 centuries later. In fact, if we could catch a plane to Rome, we could visit the graves of the children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these persons to whom Paul writes. We would take a guide and go out to the edge of the city to the catacombs and follow lights and descend steps cut into the soil. We would soon find ourselves in one of the almost innumerable passageways, which are miles in length where the second and third generation and fourth generation of believers hid out in the persecution of the Roman church. On either side of these narrow passageways, we would see openings into which the bodies of dead believers had been

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thrust. We could still read, if we could read Greek or Latin, the inscriptions which are written about these dead believers. Inscriptions like “Alexander is not dead but lives among the stars,” or “Sweetest son, mayest thou live in the Holy Spirit,” or “Victoria, in peace and in Christ,” or “Gordian, the courier from Gaul, strangled for the faith. Rest in peace.” These people had caught a dynamic of God’s entering into their lives and into human history.

What is being talked about, therefore, in the world is their faith, not the methods they are using in their faith. What is being talked about is not their great building program, because they have none. What is being talked about is not their great music program, because they have none—or their great Sunday School program, or their great bussing ministry or whatever. What is being talked about is faith. And in a kind of glutted Christian market where we become sometimes preoccupied with the means the people of God are using to accomplish their objectives, we get to talking about the way the people of God are expressing their faith rather than the fact that faith is so real and vital that lives, one after another, are being changed, and it is the content of faith that’s being made known in the world. Paul is thankful to God, therefore, for these people and the vibrancy of their faith.

There is an aspect of Paul’s habit of giving thanks to the Lord in prayer we shouldn’t lose sight of. It’s what I call the expression of thanksgiving in a double-decker world—or a two-tiered world. On the lower deck, so to speak, are the things which give us joy, health, success, prosperity—the things that can be seen. But what happens if on that lower deck of the world things change and there no longer appears to be a great many things we can give thanks for? Whereas we once had health, we do not now. Whereas we once had financial prosperity, we do not now. Whereas once things were breaking our way, they are not now. Paul is at that transition point in his own life where he is going to go through a fire in respect of the development of his

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own life. I think the Christian immediately jumps up into the second deck where he realizes, no matter what circumstances change, there are some things which remind and abide as true. Jesus is risen from the dead. The faith of the gospel is a very real faith. The change which Christ works in the heart is a real change. The gospel is going on in its advance to the world. We can praise God.

If Paul were alive today, I think he would be beside himself with giving thanks and praise to God for the faith which is heard in all the world. Paul was never this isolationist which is only concerned with what the Lord is doing in my life or this little part of the world. He is concerned about the gospel going everywhere. The literature now that is coming out that is chronicling the advance of the gospel within the last 25 years is the most exciting that has just ever been written in the 20 centuries of the existence of the gospel. The gospel is being heard today in more languages. It's believed by more people. It's believed by more nations. It's in more cultures than it has ever been in the history of the world. The last 25 years have been the greatest advance of the gospel in all the history of Christianity. Sometimes we think it's a dying age, and maybe it's the Ephesians church where the love has grown cold. Maybe that's true in some places, but it's been a time of great advance. When we hear of others coming from various cultures, we recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ can wear the garb of every nation. It wears the color of every people. It speaks the language of every tongue. The faith is in all the world.

Paul, in the spirit in which he offers prayer, begins with thanksgiving and its habitual form of prayer with him.

II. There's some things which he seeks in prayer, some requests which he has.

He's not simply operating passively in his prayer life by saying, "Lord, whatever You want is fine. Amen." But there are some specific goals that are in his own heart.

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A. The first thing which we see him seeking in prayer is that he might come in the will of God to the city of Rome and to the Roman believers. If we leap over to the fifteenth chapter where we come near the end of his letter, we find that maybe there's some reasons why Paul wants at this time to come to Rome. He notes in chapter 15 that he has completed his mission in all the area that is to the east of Rome. He says that he has fully proclaimed the gospel. That doesn't mean he preached the gospel in every city. But it simply means he had got enough things through the power of the Spirit going so it could carry the ball by itself. And he was now ready to head out to a new territory where no one else had ever been.

It's his goal to go to Spain, to the west of Rome. In his first three missionary journeys, he had used the city of Antioch and Syria as the base of his missionary efforts. But now he's going to be too far away from Antioch. He's going to go all the way to Spain. So what better place to use as a base of his new missionary efforts than the city of Rome, a congregation which could join with him in prayer for the success of the gospel even to the west? So he has this natural reason for asking that he might come to Rome.

More importantly, here he stresses that he simply wants to be among them and he has some specific reasons which we'll look at. He notes that the door has previously been closed to his coming to Rome, that he has been hindered. But he has not stopped asking—a kind of beautiful way of helping us to look at our own prayer life and not to stop simply because one time we have been hindered. Paul doesn't say whether he had been hindered by Satan. He may well have been. He doesn't say whether he had been hindered by friends, or the pressures of responsibilities, or by the Holy Spirit, as he was on occasion. He had simply been hindered. But he hadn't stopped asking. And he asked to come according to the will of God.

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There's been a teaching that has gone on, I think, in the last few years which has almost made us embarrassed to use the phrase "the will of God" in our prayers because it has been sometimes taught that if you ask according to the will of God, you have a specific concrete request in hand, that when you condition it by the will of God, you're not asking in faith because you're saying, "Lord, I want this, but on the other hand I'm willing to be passive. Therefore, according to the will of God." We get just a little bit ill at ease. Should I use that phrase "in the will of God" when I'm praying?

Here is Paul, the great apostle, teaching us like the Lord—that on the one hand, the Lord could pray and Lazarus would come forth from the tomb, and in the next moment, the next few days, the Lord could turn around and say, "Release Me, but nevertheless not what I will. Thy will be done." There's that double-edge aspect to prayer that the Lord expects us to condition our praying by "in the will of God." So he wants to come.

B. Another thing that he wants as he comes to the Romans is that he might impart to them some spiritual gift to the end that they may be strengthened. He notes, "I long to see you. I desire." The word there is "passion." Paul is not going to the city of Rome or to these other believers in order that he might put in a speaking engagement or get an honorarium for his efforts. He really wants to be among these Christians. In the first seven verses of Romans 1, we have seen Paul as the apostle, but now we see him as a brother. One who really feels for his people and takes his place on the level with them and says, "It's really important to me to have fellowship with you. I long to see you so I can impart to you some spiritual gift." Paul had a confidence that he had something to give to these believers.

"Spiritual gift" is the term which we derive from *charisma*, the word from which "charismatic" stems. *Charisma* means always in the New Testament not the gift that one man has to give to

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another man, but the gift which God has to give to man. Therefore, always of necessity a superior gift than what one ordinary human being can give to another.

Paul has some *charisma* to give to this church. What is it? Since he's writing from Corinth, we may sometimes speculate that he's come to give them the gift of prophecy or the gift of tongues or the gift of wisdom or the gift of interpretation, or whatever. But it's likely, however, that any early Christian church would already possess these gifts.

I think what Paul was indicating by way of a spiritual gift is that he intends to come to them and give them some fuller and firmer grasp and possession of Jesus Christ, which will secure in their experience a deepening and a strengthening of their walk. We have the need for the ministry of someone like Paul, for we can exist on stories up to a certain level. Then we have to go beyond stories and experiences to something that deepens the timbers of our faith—to doctrine, to the understanding of the working out of our Christian life and the nature of our salvation. It's this deepening and strengthening, this spiritual gift of understanding, that the Apostle Paul has that evidently he wants to impart.

Paul is saying, "I long to impart to you some spiritual gift" (Romans 1:11). Many times I have stood up to speak, and I wonder if there have not been times when I have stood up to preach the gospel when simply I was standing up because at that moment I was on. It is quite another thing to approach it from the vantage point of, "God has given me something to communicate, and I am here with God's help and the power of the Spirit to impart it." No one of us who preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ has any business opening our mouth to preach or to teach unless we feel that God has given us something to share with others.

If this is true of a preacher, how much more true it is of our own personal life. That sense that God has placed us uniquely within a family or with people, and we're not there to simply live

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passively or to receive. God has given us something to impart—spiritually to impart. So we start inventorying our lives, looking to what we are giving to our fellows. Looking, if we are married, at what spiritual gift we are giving to our wife or to our husband. What spiritual gift we are giving to our children—our young children and our teenagers. What spiritual gift, if we are older, we are giving to our parents or even within this family of the Lord. What spiritual gift have you to impart to the body of Christ? Have you thought about it? Have you considered it? Or are you willing to be passive and to simply occupy a place? The body of Christ becomes powerful when we become alive in the Spirit to sense that God has given us something to impart. It's not all receiving; it is giving.

I was reading, in preparation this week, other sermons and what other people have thought on the text. One person I always check, but never get a lot out of, is Alexander McClaren. The reason I don't usually get anything out of it is it was preached in the last century in his pulpit in Manchester, England. There were a lot of things being said to an audience then that you don't necessarily say to an audience now. I'm sure it was relevant in his time because he preached to great crowds. But sometimes, over the course of decades, a message loses its impetus.

One of the habits of the English preachers is they did not speak a great deal autobiographically. They did not share much of themselves in the pulpit. It was mainly communication of the third person about the gospel. But McClaren, preaching on this particular text, speaking to this congregation said, "I have now pastored this church for thirty years. I have sought to impart to you some spiritual gift. Have you received the gift I have sought to bestow? There are some of you who have listened to my voice ever since you were children. Some of you, though not many, have heard it well on to thirty years. Have you taken the thing that all these years—God knows how poorly, but God knows how honestly—I have been trying to bring to you? That is, have you

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taken Christ and have you faith in Him? Do I do you any good in any way? Are you better men than when we first met together?”

What a tremendous set of questions. I look back on my years and just kind of say, “Lord, have I ministered, first of all, to impart a gift? And if I have sought to impart a gift, have you received it?” Certainly, I’ve sought to impart in these years of ministry a love for the Scripture, an understanding of the Scripture, something about coming together as the body of Christ, and about priorities and loyalty to Jesus. I pray to God that the gift which I have sought to impart is being received.

So that’s the second thing Paul is looking for: “I want to impart to you some spiritual gift—not simply that you be blessed out of your mind, but that you’ll be strengthened, that your faith will go deeper, be firmer and fuller.”

C. Thirdly, Paul says that “I’m praying that we will have mutual encouragement when we gather together.” He did not see ministry as a one-way street where he, as an apostle, did all the ministering, and the people simply listened. Rather, when he came to them, he wanted them to bless his life, as he knew that they would. Paul is, to me, like a strongly-rooted tree, which had its roots deep in the ground and a very stable trunk. But above those roots and that trunk are leaves or green foliage which flutters in the slightest breeze. So while Paul, in respect to God, had a firmly planted-faith, in respect to his feelings, they often rose or fell depending upon the reaction that was accorded to him by believers. Those leaves turned in on themselves when he’s in Athens and no one is with him and he’s in despair. Or, at another place, in the city of Troas. But when believers are receiving him and responding to his message, then he is alive and responsive.

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Alexander McClaren said that if there are icebergs in the church, it is certain to bring down the temperature of the place, and it is very hard to light a fire on top of an iceberg. Paul expects that there is to be mutual encouragement from these believers.

D. The fourth thing which he asks for in prayer is that he will have a harvest. He has a sense of responsibility, obligation to the world. Once he has come to Christ, He owes every man who has not Christ a debt. He could not be comfortable being unproductive for his Lord. Therefore, regardless of race or language or culture, meaning to the Greek and to the barbarians. The barbarians were the tribes to the north who did not know Greek ways or Greek culture. Even though Paul is writing to a Roman city, a Latin city, the word Greek here is not used to describe, necessarily, the Greek people. But the fact that Greek culture and Greek language had spread through all the world, it stood for sophistication, it stood for culture. On the one hand, I want to reach the cultured person, the educated person, the wise person. But on the other hand, the unwise, the barbarian. Regardless of race or culture or language or education, a debt is owed to all men.

III. How did God set about to answer these prayers?

I think that, in looking how God answered the apostle's prayers, we learn an awful lot about how God answers our prayers.

A. He prayed first of all to come to Rome. How did the Lord answer that prayer? The Lord did not answer it immediately. For the Lord instead had Paul head east. He should have been going west, if his prayer was to be answered immediately, to Rome. But instead he goes east several thousand miles, to the city of Corinth, to Jerusalem. He's going to be imprisoned in the city of Jerusalem. He's going to be assaulted by a mob. He's going to be beaten. He's going to be put into prison. An assassination attempt is going to be placed on his life. He's going to escape that;

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spend two years in a stinking jail in Syria; have another assassination plot on his life that fails; be put as a prisoner on board a ship to Rome; shipwrecked in the Mediterranean; floated to land on a log; and when he's gathering firewood to warm himself, have a serpent bite him. All the time, he hasn't gotten to Rome.

A year goes by. He's in jail in Syria after he writes this letter. Two years go by. He's in jail in Syria. Three years goes by. He's shipwrecked on a winter island of Malta, and he still hasn't got to Rome. Well, might the Roman believers when they're looking at this letter—they've had it now one year—ask, "Where's Paul? What happened to this guy? He's praying in the will of God to come to Rome. Maybe God doesn't answer his prayers. Wonder if he's all that he's cracked up to be?" Two years go by. "Should we read the rest of the letter? This man does not seem to have an effective prayer life. He has not yet come." But finally, because he had prayed to come in the will of God, he comes at just the right moment—over three years after he'd first begun praying.

So if you're at all discouraged that a prayer you prayed a month ago hasn't yet come to pass, don't forget what you're praying for. Ask, seek, knock. One of the frequent things we face in prayer is if it doesn't come to pass right away we say, "The Lord must not want it. Let's go on to something else." The Lord may have wanted it. It just may be He had to work out some things in the meantime.

B. The second thing that Paul prayed for was to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen them.

What could possibly Paul impart to them when he did arrive? I think what he imparted to them was this: the spiritual gift that God was present with them in adversity. Prior to the writing of this letter to the Romans, Paul had never been in prison for any long period of time. He had been there maybe a few times, but just a very short duration. Now, after the writing of this letter, he'll

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be in prison for two years and under custody for time beyond that. It is the first time that he has gone through such a lengthy, rigorous experience. He is at the height of his career. He is a man of perhaps sixty to sixty-five years of age, ready for the crowning efforts of his career and to settle back on the blessings of his ministerial benefit retirement association funds, which will secure him a good place on the island of Crete in his winter days. But all of this was removed from him in one fell swoop. When you look at the chronology, one gets a feeling here for what God is seeking to develop in the Roman church and in the church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. For by the time Paul arrives in the city of Rome, it is about 61 A.D., three years after the writing of this letter. In three more years, in 64 A.D., there is going to be a horrible persecution by the sick, psychotic Emperor Nero against the Christian church. He is going to take believers from this church at Rome and nail them to crosses and pour pitch over them and set them on fire that they might illuminate his gardens at night. He is going to put them in the skins of animals and throw them in the river. He is going to allow them to be attacked by dogs. He is going to hunt them and persecute them and exile them.

The Lord, knowing that this fierce persecution is to break on the Church, takes His finest and His best, the Apostle Paul, and works out within the experience of this one man's life what it's like to go through adversity so that the whole church could learn for the adversity that is soon to break against it. Out of this time will come, for example, the letter to the Philippians where Paul is writing to say to all believers, both in Rome and at Philippi and through all the ages, "Do not measure God by the circumstances. Do not look at the faithfulness of God by the adversity that is breaking against you now. But rather I will rejoice, and again rejoice. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This coming from a man who was in a prison cell. The Lord is teaching him, and therefore he is to teach the entire church that we cannot measure the

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faithfulness of God by simply the bad breaks or the persecution that comes our way. But God is with us even in the difficulty. To have God in the trial is better than to go through life without God. To see what God is doing in us is more important than what is happening to us. So Paul has this spiritual gift to impart, which, believe me, strengthened the Roman church. If his prayer had come to pass immediately, he'd never had that gift to impart. But it's a gift he can impart because there had been a delay.

C. Paul also prays that they will be mutually encouraged. One of the beautiful things that happens as the Book of Acts ends is Paul—after this two-year imprisonment and now this coming to Rome via shipwreck—arrives outside the city. He's walking up the way to Rome from southern Italy. Luke notes in chapter 28 of Acts, verse 15, that, “The brethren there when they heard of us came as far as the Forum of Appius to meet us. On seeing them Paul thanked God and took courage.” This was really crucial to Paul because he was down. The leaves on his tree were shaking with the winter of discontent, perhaps wondering what kind of reception he'll get in Rome. Will the believers there be frightened because, after all, he is under arrest and he's to be tried before Caesar? Will they fear to identify with him? What do they do? Instead, they walk thirty-three miles and then forty-three miles to a place called Three Taverns—at least a two- or three-day journey one way—to meet him. And when he sees them, he takes courage. Did they mutually encourage one another? They did.

D. And he prayed also that he might have some harvest among the Roman believers. How did that happen? We find as Acts ends that he stays at his own house at his own expense for two whole years, welcoming all who came to him and preaching the gospel. When he writes the letter to the Philippians from the city of Rome, he says to them in chapter one, “I want you to know brethren that what is happening to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it has

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become known throughout the whole palace guard [Caesar's secret service] and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ."

He goes on in another place to describe that he was bound in that time, and it's very easy to kind of fit this in the mind. The two soldiers would come and take their four-hour duty to watch him and be bound to him. Inevitably, because they had not met him before, they'd ask him what he was in prison for and he would say, "Glad you asked that question." And for the next four hours of their shift he would tell them about Jesus Christ. And sure enough, the story spread through all of the soldiers belonging to Caesar's palace guard. When Paul closes the letter to the Philippians, he says to them, "Those who are of Caesar's household greet you in Christ Jesus." As a result of his imprisonment, the gospel had worked itself right up into the inner establishment of Caesar's household. Had he had some harvest? He had had a harvest!

When we open the Book of Romans, we come to a place, for example, like Romans 8:28, and we sometimes fail to recognize that verse was written before Paul had completely tested out the premise involved. He writes it from the city of Corinth. The verse literally reads something like this, "God works good in all things." Literally, when that verse is translated correctly, it does not mean that everything that happens to us is good. There are some things that happen to us that are very bad. Or so they seem. Death is not good. Illness is not good. The Scripture is not saying that everything that happens to you is good. The Scripture is saying that God works good in all things. That's the principle of the Resurrection: that after crucifixion comes rising. That God, if we will yield ourselves to His hands and watch Him at work, will eventually turn our losses into triumphs, and we will see some good emerge. When Paul stated that principle, he had not fully lived out its implications. There may have been some times in that jail in Syria where he wondered about Romans 8:28, whether he should have edited that. Is this good? No, it's not

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good. But is God going to bring good from it? Yes. God is going to bring good from it. And God does.

How does the Lord answer prayer? Sometimes the Lord answers prayer with an immediate yes.

Sometimes He answers prayer with a no because it is clearly not in His will. But many times we

find the Lord answers prayer by saying to us, “Wait. Wait.” He answers prayer by means of

process—that in order for our prayer to truly come to pass, there are some things through which

we must pass first in order that there might be a more complete fulfillment at the end of the day.

When, therefore, we begin our prayer with thanksgiving and condition it by praying in the will of

God, we can accept any answer which is provided by the Lord. Paul, having given an

introduction of himself to the Roman believers and having stated his prayers for these believers,

is now ready to begin to explain the gospel which he proclaims. We’ll begin looking at that in

the next week together.

Closing Prayer

As we have examined this Scripture, our Lord, this morning we want to give You thanks again

for Your Word, for its ring of authenticity, for the way it speaks to our own lives. We compare,

contrast, our experience of prayer with that of the apostles. We lay before You both our

successes in prayer and our failures. We think, Lord, of the times often when we fail to articulate

our desires as clearly as Paul so as even to reduce them to writing as he did that later we might

measure the way You answered with our requests which were given. Lord, there have been times

when we have not come back to give You thanks in our prayers, even though You answered

them, simply because we forgot what we prayed. Lord Jesus, we know that as we rely upon You

and put our confidence in You, You’re going to help us. You’re going to help us in our prayer

life really praise and glorify You this year. There have been many things, Lord, You have said to

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us through this Scripture today. You've been speaking to us about the need for thanksgiving in our lives and for constancy in our prayer. Lord, in this moment while we're addressing You, we think consciously of the person or persons that are closest to us. Maybe even the relationship of us with them is not a good or healthy relationship at this moment. There has been a resistance in our hearts to give thanks or to believe the good. But Lord Jesus, melt the resistance of our hearts to look at those who are closest to us and whom You have appointed us to love and cause us, Lord, to focus in through our prayers upon those qualities which are of You which we can give thanks for—knowing that it is only as we love others, only as we pray for others, that change can truly occur. We think, Lord, too, of Your Word to us which so positively shares with us that we have a gift to impart. For there is no one here in Your body whom You have not given a ministry. Maybe it is that we have not yet found it or sought it in prayer. But I pray, Lord Jesus, as a result of hearing the apostle speak to us today, we would seek those things which are Yours, which are meant for us to possess. And that Your Body would be enriched and blessed through the sharing of gifts, the imparting of gifts among Your people. We praise You, Lord, for Your mercies. We praise You, Lord, even at this moment, for the prayers which we are praying which we have not yet seen a completion to or an answer that we have sought. We simply rely upon You at this moment, trusting in Your grace, realizing that indeed in all of our affairs in life You work for the good. So Lord, we know that in this moment of suspension, when what we have prayed has not yet come to pass, that You have not abandoned us. You are with us. And You're working out a more perfect end. You're working out a more complete goal, one that we would have never dreamed of or thought of ourselves. But in Your great grace and mercy, You're bringing to pass some wonder, some glory, some benefit. Lord, we would just end this time with our hearts to exercise faith and trust in You to believe You in the midst of difficulty, knowing

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that in Your good hands we are held and blessed. We ask these things, Lord, through You. In Jesus' name. Amen.