

THE PRAYERS OF PAUL
Personal Prayer Life
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Paul's prayers: We'll take them home and file them in our Bible or notebook and we'll never get around to actually reading them. I've learned there maybe are times we shouldn't take things for granted. Just lay out a piece of paper and assume everybody's going to read it. I want to take a moment at the beginning of my message this evening to have us all go through these actual prayers of Paul. I went through the thirteen letters of Paul and called out the specific prayers that he prayed. Last week we looked at the teaching on prayer and how there are over 50 occasions where he gives some encouragement to pray or states something about prayer. But these are in addition to those fifty occasions. Thirteen specific times in his letters he prays.

Romans 15:5-6 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Jesus Christ. So that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 16:25-27 "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of mystery hidden from long ages past but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him, to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ, Amen."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

2 Corinthians 2:14 "But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him."

2 Corinthians 13:14 "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Ephesians 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Actually what follows for the next eleven verses, through verse 14 of Ephesians 1, may be a continuation of the prayer. I'm not sure whether it's a theological statement or a prayer. But at least the first phrase is definitely a prayer.

Ephesians 1:15-23 "For this reason ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. [Sometimes you hear the word "Eucharist." That's a word that refers to communion in liturgical churches. It literally is a word that means to give thanks. What Paul actually says here is I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.] I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the

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dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in this present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Then another lengthy prayer, Ephesians 3:14-21, “For this reason I kneel before the Father from who his whole family in heaven and on earth derives his name. I pray that out of his glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and know this love which surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever, Amen.”

Then Philippians 1:9-11 “And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.”

Philippians 4:20 “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever Amen.”

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 “Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May He strengthen your heart so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 and 2 Thessalonians 3:16-17: “May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and work.”

The sum total of Paul’s prayers.

What was Paul praying for that teaches us how to pray for one another? Then secondly, what things was Paul not praying for in his prayers? And what may that suggest about our own praying?

I’m going to talk about that, at least to kind of focus in on what this apostle is teaching us through letting us pray with him. The reason why I’m doing this series on Prayer is to look at it and get some help in our own prayer life. Maybe you say, I never know what to pray for when I pray. Just take these prayers of Paul and begin making them a guide. Instead of praying for the Ephesians, pray for somebody in your home. Use the prayer of the Philippians to pray for

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somebody in your school. Use the Thessalonians to pray for someone that you're trying to strengthen in their Christian life. Turn around and use these with other people.

Most of these prayers as you see by looking through them tonight, are brief. Except the ones in Ephesians. There are three rather lengthy prayers in Ephesians. The first in verses 3-15, I only have the first verse. One interesting thing. If you look at these prayers in Ephesians the long prayers, in the Greek language in which Paul writes, each of the long prayers is only one sentence in the Greek language. In the English we wouldn't be able to even follow Paul if we tried to put it all into one English sentence. We just can't take it all in. We have to chop it up and so we have four, five, six sentences to translate his one sentence.

But I think that what Paul's one sentence prayers which stretch on and on and on are telling us that sometimes in an outpouring of language in prayer there is a tendency by Paul to stretch language to its limits. It's like Paul says "I will pray with the mind and I will pray with the spirit." He didn't just drop into praying in the Spirit because he ran out of things to say. He tried to cram the languages that he knew with all the content that he could. It was sort of like prayer was a suitcase and he was trying to put everything in the suitcase that he could.

When you come to the first prayer of Ephesians 1:3-14 – there are in that one sentence 203 words. Nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives... Every once in a while in this torrent of words an interruption to say, To the praise of his glory, verse 6, 12, 14. Trying to diagram that sentence is as impossible as trying to count the number of grains of sand on the beach. You can no more diagram Paul's sentences at times on prayer, than you can fathom God.

What this suggests to me by way of transference in our own prayer life is perhaps there are times when we are intensely praying and we're so caught up with God that it is appropriate that our power of speech be taxed to the limits. Not to prove how smart we are. But to do in the words of the hymn says, "Lost in wonder, love and praise." Are their times in my prayer life when I become so overcome with what the Lord has done for me and for his church and all the universe that I tax speech to its limits. At least my speech. Do my prayers, as do Paul's, contain language of praise, thanks and glory. Those are great words that Paul all the time use.

My main focus however tonight is not on these aspects, although I find them very fascinating as applied to prayer. My main focus tonight centers on the requests Paul makes for other people.

We would probably be here a long time if I took the time to exponentially examine each prayer and try to lay out its context. What I did was take the theological vacuum cleaner and ran it back and forth. If you boil down into some simple statements, what Paul was praying for, what things grabbed him? I find that there are eleven things especially that stand out.

One thing he's praying for people is endurance. It comes out in Romans 15:5. That's not the only place where he's praying for endurance. If I had a favorite word from the New Testament it's that word. In the noun form in the Greek language the word meant "basement." It means literally to remain under or to stay behind. It describes the quality of a person who has a load on their back. If the Lord removed the load that we would call a miracle. If the Lord however says, I'm not removing that load and that pressure from you. Instead I'm going to give you a strength to carry it. The strength is endurance, to remain under, to stay behind.

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That's what Paul starts out praying for the Roman Christians, praying for other Christians. The Christian life will require staying power. There are occasions in our life where God does not intervene supernaturally or miraculously to change and alter our circumstances. We need to hang in there.

Someone has said the difference between a coward and a hero is that a hero hangs in their five seconds longer. Endurance.

Do you know anyone who needs endurance? Maybe in your prayers for them instead of simply asking the Lord to make their load lighter, we need to also pray, "Lord, give them greater endurance."

2. A second thing that he prays is that we will have encouragement. Romans 15:5, the God who gives encouragement. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, this word "comfort" is used which is the same word in the original as "encouragement." 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 "May the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father encourage your hearts." Encourage.

I think endurance takes care of staying power. But the encouragement gives a lift to our spirit. The Greek word is the same word that's used to describe the Holy Spirit – paraclete. It comes from – to call alongside. Therefore an encourager or a comforter is one who is called alongside. Not just to stand there and do nothing but called alongside to help. This word is appropriate of the Holy Spirit who comes alongside of us in life to not only just be there but to give us the help that makes a difference.

Paul prays this for the believers in various churches. "May you be given encouragement. May someone come alongside of you and help." First the Holy Spirit and then other believers. We exist to encourage one another. How do we do that? We speak to one another with encouraging words. We help one another with encouraging actions.

3. He prays for people that they will have strength. Ephesians 4:17 and 2 Thessalonians 2:17. Obviously the words endurance, encouragement and strength are kind of trinity of values that are closely connected and it's hard to say there's much of a difference between them. They belong together. There are people we know and in our own life we need these things as well.

4. Paul prays for others that there will be unity. Romans 15:5 – "That he will give you a spirit of unity among yourselves." The enemy is always seeking to divide, to divide homes and to divide the church. Acts 6:16 tells us that when the early church is growing and its Pentecostal days immediately the enemy is there to try to sow discord in the body. Paul prays for unity.

Unity is neither union nor uniformity. Union is where you simply make people get along who don't want to get along. It's like tying two cats' tails together. They have union but they don't have unity. Paul is not simply praying that we all be in union.

Neither is he praying that we all be uniform. I don't like artificial fences. I don't feel we should ever draw the membership of the body of Christ in a smaller circle than Jesus Himself has drawn it. Whom Christ has fellowship with, let not the church reject. Paul's saying, let there be unity in the church. I know we've got to discuss issues, but can't we discuss the issues and still like one

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another? Can't we settle matters among ourselves as to what is basic and what is secondary and agree that certain matters don't have to be believed on to have true faith in Jesus Christ.

Pray that we may have a spirit of unity among ourselves. Unity says that our differences will enrich us rather than paralyze us. So we pray, Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

5. Paul is praying for the church, fellow believers, that we'll all glorify God. This is probably the thing he mentions most. It comes up again and again. Romans 15:6, 16:27, Ephesians 3:21, 4:20 and elsewhere. "That we may glorify God." Glorify to me has been one of the most difficult words to get a hold of in the New Testament. It is so abstract.

I think the Martin Luther has helped me most understand how to glorify God. In his shorter catechism he asked the question How do we glorify God? And the answer is given, When our life and doctrine are truly Christian. That is to say we glorify God when we believe and we behave in a way that God is pleased with. We glorify Him in families when we live the kind of lifestyle that represents the character and spirit of that family.

That's what Paul is saying to the churches. He prays that we will be glory to God. That people will come in from the world and taste our life or we'll go into the world and people will taste our life and they'll say, That's what it is to be a Christian. That's the difference it makes. I see God in you.

Glorify God, reflect favorably on the family name. You belong to Jesus Christ.

6. That we will be established. Romans 16:25. Established. How tenuous the work of the Lord appears in the new believer or new church! When the word of God comes to us it's in seed form. Is it going to sprout? Is it going to grow?

I know Paul had to pray that for these pioneer churches. Pray that the work of God will take root. We ought to be praying this for one another all the time. Establish them.

7. A prayer of thought than it is a prayer request is found in 2 Corinthians 2:14. It's just a phrase, "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ." It's Paul's way of saying as we pray for one another, let's envision in our mind that as we go through life we're involved in a procession of triumph. He goes on to say then that in that procession of triumph we are an aroma to some of life and an aroma to others of death. We look at that from our culture and we say, What was he talking about? What is this about being in the procession of life and what does that involve?

He borrows a military phenomenon from his day that when a Roman general attained a triumph over a foreign army he was given a procession in Rome that went from the outskirts to the capital. There was a whole parade order as to how this procession would unfold. Beginning at the front with state officials and trumpeters and floats. Then a white bull that would be used for sacrifice. Then the captives that had been taken from other places. They were on their way, many of them, to death or permanent slavery. They were chained, walking along behind the exhibits of that had been taken. Then there were the guards keeping everybody in line. Then following them were musicians. Then priests that were swinging the censurers of incense. So

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there was an aroma in the parade. Then following them was the general who was the conqueror. Then the army that had conquered. All shouting, Triumph!

Paul out of this whole procession picks the priests who were swinging the censor. There were two groups of people in proximity of where the priests were swinging the censor. The people ahead of them were the captives. Every swing of the censor brought them the whole idea of death, doom, they were going to their death. Behind was the general. The incense was a sweet smell to Him.

Paul says that's the life of a Christian. He's got a sweet smell to him. For those on their way to death, they don't like the smell. To those on their way to life, they loved the smell. So he says in our triumphant procession of life let's be a sweet aroma. He's praying this. I think he's praying, Lord, help these believers to know they're not in a defeated walk in life. They're not the captives on the way to the slaughter. They are in the triumph of life.

Priests unto God.

8. This is hard to capsule. I called it that he prayed we would have central attributes of God's nature in our lives. 2 Corinthians 13:14. At the very center of God is his grace and love and fellowship. In a Trinitarian prayer Paul prays that we may have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, his undeserved favor, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. He's praying that we will not only have this from God but that then being God's people we will turn around and exercise these qualities with one another in life.

9. Paul is praying for is spiritual perception. Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:18-19. "So that you may know him better." Paul fears the church or Christian who will know too little of Christ. Therefore he wants full knowledge. A greater participation by us in what is known. If we know more then it will more powerfully influence us. He's praying especially that we will know these things about Christ in our spiritual perception. We will know the hope to which He has called us, that he's called us to infinite possibilities. That we will know the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints. That is, that God has an investment in us. He prays that we will know the immeasurable greatness of his power, that we won't look at life with an attitude of defeat. But we'll look at life and know, God is for me! God is working through me. The great power that raised Jesus from the dead is operative in my life. Spiritual perception.

Ephesians 3:18-19 goes on and prays that in spiritual perception we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of God in Christ. Here the breadth represents the extent of God's love. The length, the duration of God's love. How long is it going to last. The height, the exhilaration that comes through God's love. The depth, the extremity of God's love.

A knowledge such as this fills us with the measure of all the fullness of God. That's the personality of God. He wants to pour that personality into our life that you may filled with all the measure, the fullness of the measure of God. Picture the content of God's character and love, the breadth and depth of His love and His grace. Picture it in terms of something that's a vast container. We come to extract from it, have that poured out on us. Picture our heart as a container. If it's only a thimble then all we get out of that great reservoir of God is a thimble full. If we ask God, Make our life a cup then out of that we'll get a cup.

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What Paul is praying for is, Give us more and more of a capacity to receive you in our life and to know you. Spiritual perception.

10. That we'll have an increase in love. Philippians 1:9 and 1 Thessalonians 3:12 pick up on that. The New Testament measure of love is not that we love others as we love ourselves – that's the Old Testament measure of love. The New Testament measure of love is that we love one another as Christ has loved us. How did Christ love us? He loved us immediately. He never had to make up his mind as to whether or not he was going to love someone. Jesus looks at us and has the immediate response: I love you!

His love is not only immediate but His love is thorough through and through and it continues and endures. Even when we've failed. He loves us.

Paul is saying, When you're praying for one another, pray that there will be an increase in love.

I say again, sent from Paul are body requests. Most of our prayer requests when we are together are body requests. We need to pray for one another's bodies. Don't want to undervalue that. But Paul's requests are continually, "God do something in us. Change the quality of our relationships. Change our walk with the Lord. Give us deeper spiritual life. Make us more powerful. Help us to go extensively into God's nature and love so that we can be more powerful in our everyday living. An increase in love.

11. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 is another major theme that he prays for. That is sanctification. That you'll be set apart and kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sanctify you through and through. Sanctification means all kinds of things to all kinds of people. For some it means a dress code. For others it means legalistic rules. For others it doesn't mean anything.

I came across a meaning of sanctification this week that I think sums up accurately what the biblical understanding of sanctification is and what it means to be sanctified.

I've had some problems recently with my printer on my computer. I've had it in the repair shop three times in the last two weeks. There's a guy in there with a machine that he wants fixed. He's complaining about the fact that when it's plugged in at the office he's getting interference and he wants to know how to cut down the interference showing up on the screen. It's evidently coming out of some electrical charge somewhere in the Rio. The repairman said Probably you don't have a dedicated line and that's why you have static.

I thought, That's an interesting phrase. A dedicated line. He said, Evidently you've got other things plugged in to the electrical outlet out of which you're drawing the power for this machine. This is a sensitive machine and it will operate best if you have a dedicated line. Use it exclusively for that purpose. That's the best definition of sanctification I've ever heard in my life. God wants us plugged into a dedicated line and if we've got plugs here and there there's going to be confusion in our life and the screen of our life is going to have ripples and snow and all this kind of thing.

Paul's praying for the Thessalonians: give them a dedicated line. Holy consecrated to the Lord. Not a half-hearted commitment. But a wholehearted commitment of their life to the Lord.

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If you don't know what to pray for take these eleven prayer requests of Paul and pray them for everybody you know. We all know people and we all have reasons in our life where one or more of these are needed at any particular time. Let's use them and pray as we see the apostle pray.