

Paul, Man of Prayer
Col. 1:3-14

Today we will look at Paul, the man of prayer, and see what we can learn by the Apostle's example and teaching regarding prayer.

Let us hear the Word of the living God:

Colossians 1:3-14

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.^[b] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your^[c] behalf⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

This is the word of the Lord. May God bless it to our edification and instruction today.

Prayer for the sermon:

Gracious heavenly Father, it is with thanksgiving that we come before you today. We are thankful for the strong grace of God which has come to us and is transforming our lives. We are thankful for this great experience of prayer that you have provided for your people. We want to learn more about it today; we want to grow as men and women of prayer. Help us become more of the kind of praying people that you have redeemed us to be. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

In reading the NT letters written by the apostle Paul, I have been struck by the great preacher and defender of the faith, this great missionary, in what he says about prayer in his letters.

For example we read in Rom. 1:9-11:

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

He talks about praying “without ceasing” and he says “always in my prayers.”

Here Paul was always praying for the Christians in Rome, people whom he had never been among, hoping he could go and visit them.

As we look at Paul’s statements regarding prayer – and there are around 42 or so in the NT, we learn that:

- Prayer was a vital and constant part of his personal life.
- He spent a lot of time in prayer
- His prayers expressed a great concern and love for the churches of God.

It is astounding the devotion to prayer that Paul had. But then I think of my own prayer life and wonder if I’m engaging in this ministry of prayer as much as I should be. Maybe you wonder about your own prayer live also.

Let me see if you can relate to any of these feelings:

- a sense that I’m not praying enough
- as a preacher I think about the model of the apostles – they gave up their ministry of helping poor widows in order to devote their full attention to the “ministry of the Word and prayer.” They were doing some serious praying.

-but then all of us Christians have the responsibility and privilege of prayer – not just preachers. There was, for example, Ana in the temple who was there when Jesus’ parents brought him there as an infant – she was a widow 84 years old.

Luke 2:37 says that “She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.” This shows us that we’re never too old to pray, and to pray effectively. And that this ministry of prayer should stay with us to the end of our days.

In your own prayers, do you perhaps find yourself:

- repeating the same things over and over.
- lacking vibrancy and freshness, maybe it seems at times sort of hum-drum, boring
- lacking of words, vocabulary, thoughts to express to God
- not enjoying prayer, not delighting in it

It doesn’t have to be this way, so let’s see what Paul would teach us today.

Why don’t most of us pray more? Here’s some possible reasons:

-We don't take seriously enough the commands to pray that Jesus and the apostles gave us, nor do we follow them closely in their prayers as our models.

-We don't schedule our daily lives carefully enough to make time for prayer. We let other activities take priority over praying.

-maybe we have slacked off in prayer because God doesn't seem to answer our prayers

- prayer is hard work, it takes mental and spiritual discipline: we may be too lazy.

- we don't care enough about the kingdom of God, the churches, the expansion of the Gospel.

-our lives are focused too much on today's problems and preoccupations. We don't look at the big picture of the kingdom of God in the world. This is what ultimately matters and the only thing that will endure forever.

- we don't realize that the prayers of God's people, is one of the ways the Lord works out his will in the earth. I know one brother-pastor who used to pray every week with men in his church for the spread of the gospel into all the world. Later the Lord called him to help answer this prayer and he's been serving in the Far East for many years.

Revelation 8:4 says that

“ the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

-the prayers of God's people ascend into the presence of God

-What great privilege we have to bend the ear of God and be used to accomplish his purposes in the earth.

Sermon Goal

To look at Paul, the man of prayer, in order...

- To help us to continue to develop into men and women of prayer, who reflect the Biblical commands and models of prayer.
- To help us find more joy, satisfaction, and effectiveness in prayer.
- To help us draw near to God to experience his presence and engage in effective praying that contributes to the building of the kingdom of God.

God has saved us so we can be his children and we can know him and fellowship with him as our God.

God desires fellowship, active fellowship, communion with us, his sons and daughters, and we need to give him the quality time he deserves and expects from us.

Today I want to help us pursue more of this great adventure of prayer, the adventure of quality time in the presence of our great and loving God.

I am sure most of us have already begun that journey and discovered some of the joy and satisfaction of prayer. But the journey of prayer is like gazing up at the stars on a cloudless, moonless night out in the country when the vastness of the universe is stretched out before us. So it is with the experience of prayer – its possibilities stretch out before us almost limitless in its possibilities. The world offers its pleasures, but here is what God offers his people – the vast satisfaction and joy of communion with him in worshipful and intercessory prayer.

Let's see what we can learn about prayer from Paul, the man of prayer, in his prayer for the Christians at Colossae in Col 1:3-14

Let's look at three marks common to Paul's prayers:

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

I. He was always thankful to God for his fellow-believers.

In these kinds of prayers for various churches, the apostle almost always begins with thanksgiving to God. He is so grateful for God's work of grace in their lives. He has not even met these believers face to face, yet he's heard about them and received reports about them, so he knows them in an indirect but accurate way. And what he's heard gives him causes him to raise thanksgiving to God.

Think for a moment of another church that Paul wrote to - the church at Corinth. You may remember that this church had all kinds of problems: most of the people were from a pagan background. There was divisiveness and factions. Some of the church members were suing one another in court. Some were still engaged in sexual immorality, etc...

Yet, listen to how Paul prays for this church, still marked by leftovers of their former lifestyles:

1 Cor. 1:4-5 - ⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge...

You know, what we see here, is the Apostle's ability to focus on the Big Picture. Sometimes we let the details of the moment define what's important. But Paul doesn't let the current problems with remaining sin derail him from seeing and recognizing the power of God's grace actively working in their lives. Paul had been among them for a year and a half. He knew them; he knew what God was doing in them; he had beheld the miracle of regeneration come alive in them. He had seen the Spirit taking the truth of the Gospel that he preached and birthing former pagans into saints in the kingdom of God.

Paul doesn't excuse their remaining sins, but he sees the Big Picture. The grace of God was powerful in them and he was so grateful for what was happening in their lives. He knew God was "not finished with them yet.."

A. Specifics he was thankful for v. 4-5

4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Notice here that Paul mentions three fundamental realities that are imparted to believers in Christ: ***faith, love, and hope***.

These indeed are marks of true believers. True and sincere believers in Jesus Christ will have faith in him; they believe in him. They believe he is the very Son of God who came from heaven to die on Calvary's cross and be raised from the dead so his people could be saved from their sins.

They also have love. He or she who claims to be a Christian and does not love the Savior or love the brothers and sisters in Christ, who does not love the church, the people of God, must not be a true Christian.

Thirdly, true Christians have hope. They have confident hope that they shall see their Savior and be with him forever. No matter the discouragements of life, they have an undying hope in being with the Son of God when he returns.

Next, Paul speaks of the reason these people had faith, hope and love:

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

B. His thankfulness for these believers was rooted in their reception of the Gospel

The gospel was the starting point; the reception of the gospel was the foundation for the sanctifying process that began in their lives.

For a people to come into the knowledge of God, the Gospel must first be faithfully preached.

It must be believed and received. This is the launching pad of the Christian life. We have to hear the gospel; we have to believe the gospel; we have to commit to the gospel and embrace it with all our heart and soul.

The maturing process for Christian believers cannot begin until the Gospel is first planted in their hearts and minds.

Summary of above: *He was always thankful to God for his fellow-believers.*

9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you,

II. Paul's prayers for his fellow believers was unceasing.

Almost the same exact words that Paul uses here in verse 9 are found in his prayer in his letter to the Ephesians, 1:16

16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

Paul's prayers for both these churches – at Colossae and Ephesus - was faithful and continuous.

And we see that Paul not only practiced constant prayer for his fellow believers but he exhorted his readers to do the same:

(F.....keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. Eph. 6:18

In Paul we see a man who practiced what he preached. He was a faithful pray-er and remember-er to pray for his brothers and sisters, so he has the experiential background to command us to do the same. Remember, that Paul was inspired by the HS, so that his apostolic commands to the people of God are no less than God's commands.

Paul's faithfulness was like that of the prophet Samuel's as we see in his farewell address to the people of Israel:

1 Sam. 12:23 -,23 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing (D)to pray for you...

Paul was highly educated in the OT scriptures. It could well be that this text was one thing that exhorted him to be a faithful pray-er for the people of God.

Summary of above: *Paul prayed with thanksgiving for the people of God*

Paul prayed continuously for the people of God.

What was the content of Paul's faithful, constant prayers for the churches of Christ? He says it next in Col. 1:9

...asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

- III. Paul always prayed for the most essential needs of believers** – that is, their growth in the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

What do our own prayers for ourselves and others consist of? Someone has estimated that 80-90% of our prayers consist of prayers for our economic well-being, our health, our job, our children, our marriages, the state of the country, protection for our upcoming vacation trip, help in training the dog not to bark so much at the postman, etc. These are all legitimate needs, but should not be the focus of the major portion of our prayer time.

DA CARSON: "Our prayers may be an index of how small and self-centered our world is."

Look again at what Paul prays:

that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Paul hits on the essentials, not the peripherals. He desires, first of all, that Christian believers "be filled with the knowledge of God's will."

Jesus told his disciples: "My meat and drink is to do the will of God."

Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

To know the will of God we must have, as it says in verse 9, "spiritual wisdom and understanding."

This is wisdom given through the ministry of the Holy Spirit as he instructs us in understanding God's Word and applying it properly in our lives and in various situations.

Then Paul tells us what the results will be in our lives from gaining this spiritual wisdom and understanding. Look at verse 10:

10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;¹¹ being strengthened with all power,

He says, first of all in verse 10: **so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.**

If our Christian walk is marked by going astray into sin, or half-hearted service, or neglect of our Christian responsibilities, or getting wrapped up in our own selfishness, our lives are not reflecting the worthiness of our Lord. The Lord Jesus' service to God was unflinchingly consistent and faithful. He resisted every temptation. He bore our sins, despising the shame of the cross as he looked ahead at the reward of his suffering – which was his Father's approval and his rescue of the people of God from their enslavement in sin.

His service, his suffering, his sacrifice – were all perfect – worthy of the impeccable, perfect Son of God. This alone could qualify him as the Redeemer of God's elect. He fulfilled his calling to the last jot and tittle. He conquered and rose from the dead – a worthy offering for our sin. An offering that was accepted and which paid in full for our sins.

How worthy is Christ! And how worthy should our service be in turn to him. We must not just give him the left-overs of our lives, our left-over time, our left-over efforts, our left-over money – we must give him service worthy of his own worthiness. Jesus said: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Matthew 5:48

“Make me as holy as is possible for a pardoned sinner this side of the consummation” – teaching at St Johns Church Dukinfield – April 21, 2020

Verse 10 goes on:

...and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God

How do we please God in every way? Paul tells us here: by “bearing fruit in every good work” and by “growing in the knowledge of God.”

God saves us so that we can bear fruit in every good work. Of course, our good works cannot save us, only Jesus saves us, but when Jesus saves us he works powerfully in our lives by his Spirit so we begin doing more and more good works. We do things to help people, to promote the kingdom of God, to serve the church and serve our neighbors.

Ephesians 2:10 says: ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

When we find ourselves doing a good work for other people that we never would have done before we became a Christian, then we can take heart that God really is working in our lives to make us genuine servants of Christ.

Next, Paul says a believer is a person who is "**growing in the knowledge of God...**" When you pray for yourself, or pray for a fellow believer, do you pray for them to grow in the knowledge of God? What can be more important than that? Yes, they may need money to pay their rent, or they may need a job, or have a thousand other needs, but what they need more than those things, what I need and you need, is to grow in the knowledge of God.

This world and its problems and pleasures is soon passing away, only what is founded in God will last. Why waste our time in devoting ourselves to temporary things, things that will perish? Yes, we need things to survive and even enjoy in life, but we need to do more than just survive or have a good time, we need to prosper spiritually. We need to learn more about this gracious God who has saved us to be his very own children. We can never exhaust the storehouse of the knowledge of the infinite God. In this life we only begin the journey of growing in the knowledge of our God.

But we must not stagnate in our growth of the knowledge of our God – there is so much to learn about him. This is what we need to pray about for ourselves and for other Christian believers.

"Lord, help John to know you better. Give him the desire to learn of you, to study your Word, to seek your face, to please you in every way. Provide him with the resources, the books, the teachings that will help him...."

And Paul goes on to pray in verse 11, ¹¹ **being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.**

We should not overlook this word "power" here. Paul also wrote in Romans 1:16:

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...

When God works in our lives he works by the supernatural power of the HS. We need the power of God to transform our lives, to root out sin, to strengthen us in temptation, to give us boldness in proclaiming the Gospel, to give us strength in confronting evil, and in many other ways.

Notice the particular reason, however, that Paul gives for our need for this power of God. It is not power to increase our bank account, or power to overwhelm our opponent on the playing field, but it is power so that we might have endurance and patience with joy. Often we need endurance in our lives in hard situations. And we need patience when things are not happening like we want. And we need the power of joy, especially in the midst of trials and suffering and deprivation.

This are the kind of things we need to pray for our fellow believes in Christ. Think of those around the world who are in prison for Christ. They especially need endurance and patience and joy. And for our friends here in America that need jobs, need income, need healing from bodily illnesses, and have many other needs that affect their lives. They not only need answers to their prayers but they need endurance and patience when their prayers are not answered as they would like.

And lastly Paul prays for these believers they would be ¹² **giving thanks to the Father, who qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.**

My friends, if God our Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance reserved for the saints of God, we should be joyful, full of joy overflowing. After all, we could not qualify ourselves. We were bankrupt spiritually and needed rescue by an outside power that was greater and more powerful than our weak, sinful selves – we needed the very power of God himself. And he's given us that in the gospel of his Son, the crucified and resurrected Son of God who has poured out his Spirit upon his church.

DA Carson summarizes verses 9-12,:

He says that they “ can simply be understood as the outworking of the gospel – that the gospel that the Colossians have already believed would continue to penetrate their hearts and minds so that they will know how to obey God in every way, growing in effectiveness and the knowledge of him. Again he prays that God will supply his promised power, enabling them to live steadily, joyfully, and thankfully for Christ. ..Paul is just praying home God's commitments in the gospel.”

DA Carson goes on to say:

“When Paul prays for the churches, he has planted...his unremitting concern is the work of the gospel in their lives. As he prays, he simply asks God to do what he has already committed to do in the gospel, as he works out the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection in the lives of his people.”

[Carson, D. A.. Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation (pp. 77-78). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]

AP – Let's summarize Paul's teaching today:

1. He was always thankful to God for his fellow-believers.

When you pray for Christians that you know who are imperfect and struggling with remaining sin, do you first of all, thank God for them and for his grace in their lives? This is the way to begin to pray for them.

2. Paul's prayers for his fellow believers was unceasing.

Are you consistent and regular and faithful in praying for the various needs of the saints of God? Or are you sporadic and inconsistent and nonchalant?

Think about the needs of those believers that you know about. Be alert in prayer. Have the attitude that Samuel had , *"23 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing (to pray for you).*

So, this is a serious matter. When we fail to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ we are sinning against the Lord. May he enable us to be more faithful in this ministry of prayer.

3. Paul always prayed for the most essential needs of believers.

When you pray for fellow believers, do you pray for God to enable them to see and understand and grow in the Big Picture of God's mighty saving work in their lives, not just their immediate needs? We have a tendency to focus on the needs of the moment in our friends' lives. But we need to pray for their spiritual understanding to grow, for their knowledge of God to grow, for them to have endurance and patience in afflictions and trial. We need to major on the majors, and keep the minor needs in their place.

Are you ready to launch out to a new level of satisfaction and effectiveness in prayer? The Lord awaits you, the kingdom of God awaits you, a needy world awaits you, your brothers and sister in Christ await you.

By the help of our God, let's step out in a greater way into this ministry.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, it is a high calling of prayer that you are calling us to. It is not an easy calling. It is a calling of sacrifice. But Lord, it is your will. Help us by your grace, to enter more and more into this ministry. We ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who always prays for us. Amen.

-by Pastor Jeff Gregory

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