



PRAYER IN PAUL'S EPISTLES

The epistles of Paul were written to first century believers who were building up the first Christian congregations. As these congregations grew, they were faced with numerous difficulties, from persecution to false doctrines, that caused divisions and conflict to arise amongst the new believers.

Paul filled his epistles with the truth about Jesus Christ and instructions for how the people were to live as His disciples. When we read through his epistles, it is clear how important prayer was to the life of Paul because he details the content of his prayers for the believers, and he encourages them to make prayer a vital part of their lives. Paul's prayers serve as a guide for our prayer life – both in content, what we should pray for, who we should pray for, and even how to pray. We can read verses written by Paul that are not actual prayers, but rather him recounting his prayers for the congregation. Still, we can learn valuable insights from his words and expressions.

What stands out in his letters and prayers is Paul's focus on those things that are eternal and not temporary. As we survey what Paul taught about prayer through his letters, we'll learn how to shift the focus of our prayers from momentary things to those things that are vital for growing strong in faith and edifying others.

BE STEADFAST IN PRAYER

Paul's letters served as instructions to the congregations on how to live a Christian life. He encouraged them to be steadfast, unwavering in prayer. He made it clear that prayer was to be a vital part of their life of faith. This connects to the accounts that we read in the book of Acts and his actions, along with the actions of the other apostles.

Consider the following passages. Romans 12:10-12 reads:

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer...

To the church in Philippi, he wrote,

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God... **Philippians 4:6***

To the church in Colossae,

*Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving... **Colossians 4:2***

And to the believers in Thessalonica, he wrote,

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything giving thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Summarizing these passages simply, **Christians should pray always**. They are to pray during the good moments of life, rejoicing and giving thanks to God for His goodness and grace. And, during life's difficult moments and challenging times, they are to remain in communication with God so that their faith can remain strong and grow, so that they can continue to recognize God's presence and help, and so that they will not give in to temptation that would pull them away from fellowship with Him. Christians are to be persistent and steadfast in their prayers to strengthen the bond they have with God, their heavenly Father. Paul not only encouraged the people to be steadfast in prayer, but demonstrated this as he gave them insight into his prayer life through his letters.

In human affairs **we accomplish everything through prayer**. What has been properly arranged we keep in order, what has gone amiss we change and improve, what cannot be changed and improved we bear, overcoming all the trouble and sustaining all the good by prayer. Against force there is no help but prayer alone.

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

In Romans 1:8-10, Paul wrote,

First, I thank God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

And then to his son in the faith, Timothy, he wrote,

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day... 2 Timothy 1:3

He connected himself with God and he interceded on behalf of his fellow believers.

Without ceasing means we can have a continual conversation with God. By continually communicating with Him in our thoughts, we can be in a constant discourse with God. Being constant in our relationship with God means not just in the highs and lows, but throughout our entire life. Like Nehemiah, when making every decision, we talk to God.

As Christians, we should not let a day go by without connecting ourselves with our heavenly Father. Every day we have something to speak to God about. We are wise to follow the direction that Paul has given, and make prayer an integral part of each day.



LEARNING FROM PAUL WHAT TO PRAY FOR

We know that God hears our prayers and that we can share our desires with Him. But in our pursuit to grow in godliness and maturity in faith, we should seek to deepen our prayers by focusing on those things that have eternal substance. The prayers of Paul provide us with an extended list of items that we can amalgamate into our own prayers as we seek to deepen our prayers and intercede for others.

Paul was mindful of his mission and the people he wished to share the message of the gospel with. Romans 10:1 reads,

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

For the people of Israel to be saved, as well as the Gentiles, all have to find salvation in Jesus Christ, and have to come to faith in Him. They have to believe the gospel, which Paul preached tirelessly wherever he went. As disciples of Jesus today, we are on the same mission: to love all people and demonstrate how joyful it is to be in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Paul was concerned so he asked the church in Rome to pray for him. We can read his request in Romans 15:

*Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. **Romans 15:30-32***

One of the beautiful blessings of being a part of the body of Christ is that we journey on this path together with fellow believers, unified in our desire to fulfill our calling. We pray for ourselves, that we have the courage to surrender our will to God's will and proclaim the gospel. And we pray for our brothers and sisters because we are well aware that we are not on this journey alone, and if we are going to fulfill the mission of God in our world today, we need one another and we need the help of God.

We can read about some of the conflicts that the apostles and their helpers had in the first century in the book of Acts. Additional conflicts can be found throughout the epistles. Conflicts among believers can disturb the effectiveness of a person's witness. That's why Paul prayed for believers to **love one another and be unified**. Consider the following passages:

*Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Romans 15:5-6***

*Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. **1 Thessalonians 3:11-13***

*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other... **2 Thessalonians 1:3***

Praying for the love of God to grow within us so that we can be unified with our fellow believers goes hand-in-hand with Paul's requests to **be worthy of the calling** of God. Paul valued unity and the calling of God for his life, and he shared his values with the congregations through his letters. To the believers in Ephesus he wrote,

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **Ephesians 4:1-3***

Then we can read his prayer about calling in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12:

Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasures of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In your prayers, be mindful of God's calling, that each day you and all of God's children can walk worthy of it by glorifying Jesus Christ through sharing the love and goodness of God with the world. We can see how Paul's writings and prayers were all connected. He prayed for people to come and know the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that those who had been saved would be unified in fulfilling their calling to share that good news with the world. *To grow in your prayer life, it's important to deepen your understanding of God and His work, mission, and will.*

Paul knew his purpose was to **share the message of the gospel** with the Gentiles. Moving about the known world at that time and sharing the gospel wasn't a simple task. That's why Paul asked the people to pray for him, so that he could continue to speak the name of Jesus boldly.

To the Ephesians, he wrote the following when describing the armor of God:

*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all saints – and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. **Ephesians 6:17-20***

Pray for yourself and for your fellow believers to have the boldness to speak the words of life. Here is how Paul expressed his prayer for Philemon:

*I thank God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. **Philemon 4-6***

Without God's grace, salvation is not possible. Without God's grace, no one could ever be reborn, changed, or be made righteous. We owe our lives to the grace of God, and there is no way we can go about living out our calling and mission without His grace. Throughout Paul's epistles, he makes it known to the believers in all of the congregations

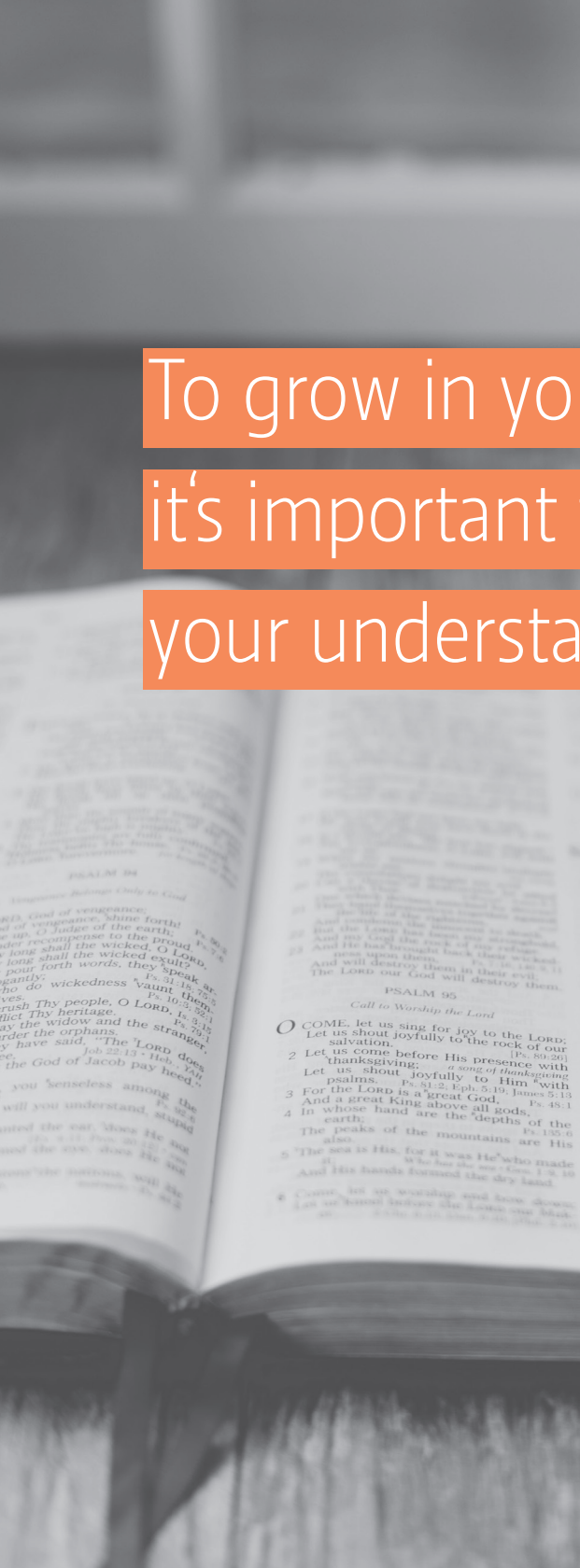
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that God's grace is vital to their lives and should be prayed for often. At the beginning of all of his letters, from Romans to Philemon, we can read that Paul greets them with God's grace. He wrote, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. In some of

the letters, he added mercy to this greeting, which highlights three key components of a Christian's life: **grace, peace, and mercy**. We find his wish for God's grace to be in and over the lives of his readers at the end of his letters as well. For example, in 1 Corinthians, he wrote, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you* (1 Corinthians 16:23). That sentiment is repeated throughout his letters.

In our prayers, we can thank God for His grace as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:4-8:

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Why was Paul thanking God for His grace in the lives of the believers? God's grace enriched their lives by enabling them to grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ so that they could give a credible testimony of Him. His grace is also needed today so that we can grow in our knowledge and continue to be credible witnesses of Him until His return. It is only by His grace that we are a part of the family of God. It is only by His grace that we will be welcomed into His eternal kingdom. And it is only by His grace that we can grow into the likeness of our Savior and share His love with the world so that He may be glorified. We need God's grace and He freely shares it with us. In our prayers, we can continually thank God for His grace, and ask Him to share it with us anew each day.

Along with God's grace, peace and mercy should also be mentioned in our prayers because both are needed if we are going to persevere and carry out our calling. Until the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, disciples of Jesus will be challenged by hardship, sickness, turmoil, and false doctrines. That's why the peace of God is so important to have in our lives. It's His peace that settles us and helps us to focus. As the world shakes around us, pray for God's peace to reign in your life. In 2 Thessalonians 3:16, we read the following prayer for peace from Paul:

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

He prayed this benediction over the people so that they could have peace at all times, even when being persecuted and challenged by false teachers seeking to confuse their understanding. Today, we can pray this benediction over ourselves and our fellow believers so that we can know this peace and so that we can demonstrate the security we have in God even in the middle of tumultuous times.

God's mercy is manifested in His kindness and forgiveness. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote about one of his faithful helpers, Onesiphorus, and asked God to show mercy towards him and his household. 2 Timothy 1:16-18 reads:



The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day – and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.

Growing and maturing in faith is a lifelong journey. A real danger that threatens believers is complacency. We are reborn by water and Spirit and are transformed into a new being, but we remain in development. We want to have an ever-increasing thirst for wisdom and knowledge of God so that we can walk our path with confidence according to His will. Paul, with all of his knowledge, continually sought to **increase his knowledge of God**, and he prayed for believers to do the same.

In Ephesians 1:15-21, we read:

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Later in the same letter, Paul wrote,

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. **Ephesians 3:14-21***

To the Philippians, he wrote,

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.
Philippians 1:9-11

And to the Colossians, he wrote,

*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. **Colossians 1:9-12***

As Paul wrote, growing in knowledge sustains the hope of our calling, assures us of the greatness of His power, strengthens our inner being, and increases our knowledge of the love of Christ, all of which are crucial for us in our Christian walk. The growth mindset of Jesus' disciples leads them to seek out knowledge and wisdom, as well as surrender themselves to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. To be **sanctified** means to be set apart or dedicated. We desire to grow in holiness so that we can resist temptation and do works of righteousness. Paul prayed for the sanctification of the believers in Thessalonica, which prompts us to pray for our own sanctification. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, we read,

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be persevered blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God does not leave us in the midst of our struggles but comforts us so that we do not lose hope or stop persevering. We pray for His comfort when the way gets difficult. In 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, Paul wrote,

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

We know that God will comfort us because He is the God of all comfort, as Paul teaches us in 2 Corinthians 1:3–4:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

God comforts us in our tribulation so that we can, in turn, comfort others. And when we are comforted by other believers, we should recognize through them the comfort of God. As believers, we pray for one another in addition to ourselves, and we can be confident that God will hear our prayers and comfort us so that we do not stop.

WORSHIP AND THANKFULNESS IN PRAYER

Paul taught that believers should be steadfast in prayer, and that the content of our prayers should be focused on our holiness and spiritual well-being. In addition to our requests, Paul wants believers to know that they are to include worship and thankfulness. In Ephesians 1:3, he wrote,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, he begins his letter with the following:

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.

Then, in 1 Timothy 1:12,

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.

Jesus removed the sin barrier between God and humanity through His death and resurrection, and we should not neglect the audience we have with our heavenly Father through prayer. Paul's epistles are rich in teaching about how to live a Christian life. One of the lessons he taught was to be devoted to prayer. Through his letters, Paul taught us how to focus our prayers on our calling and the purpose we have been called to by God. By focusing our prayers on our spiritual well-being, we connect ourselves to His will and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. God hears our prayers, is with us at all times, and will provide for us. We can be confident of this, and that's why our prayers are to be filled with worship, praise, and thanksgiving.