

Introduction

Prayer may well be the most powerful tool available to the Christian. When we pray, an amazing thing happens. Our human concerns ascend to the throne of God, and God actually listens to them! Prayer has the potential to transform our lives, but we often neglect it. Sometimes we pray mechanically or not at all. At other times, sin in our lives prevents our prayers from ever reaching the ear of God. God may also reject our requests because we are praying for the wrong thing or with the wrong motives.

Sometimes, though, we do the most damage to our prayer lives through lack of understanding. We seek God's help in earthly matters, but we forget what God can do spiritually. We can remember by looking at the prayer life of the apostle Paul. As we study these prayers, we can learn what Paul prayed about, who he was, and what motivated his prayers. Then, through Paul's example, we can learn to imitate Christ, which should transform our lives in action as well as in prayer.

These lessons are arranged as per Paul's description of prayer in 1 Timothy 2:1: prayers, entreaties, thanksgiving, and petitions. Each lesson will examine at least a part of one of those categories through study of Paul's recorded prayers. From this, we can learn to transform both our prayers and our lives.

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Table of Contents

Prayers: An Overview	2
Entreaties: An Overview	4
Thanksgiving: An Overview	6
Thanksgiving for Salvation	8
Thanksgiving for God's Work	10
Thanksgiving for Growth	12
Petitions: An Overview	14
Petitions for Deliverance	16
Petitions for Love	18
Petitions for Understanding (1)	20
Petitions for Understanding (2)	22
Petitions for Service	24
Review	26

1

And This I Pray . . . Prayers: An Overview

Introduction

In this day and age, manners are something of a lost art. The TV shows that set our cultural norms are full of rudeness, a man who holds the door open for a woman is as likely to be rebuked as praised, and "Thank you" appears mainly on the lips of salespeople. We care about what we accomplish rather than how we accomplish it.

As we look at the passages in Paul's writing that address prayer generically, as opposed to entreaties, thanksgivings, or petitions, those passages bring us to the realization that how we pray is just as important as what we pray. However, these spiritual "manners" have to do not with outward forms of courtesy, but with a heart that is courteous toward God.

This courtesy embraces a number of different things. It includes holiness and purity of heart. It requires faith. It asks that we pray intelligently and with understanding. It urges us to pray constantly, with the assurance that God hears and blesses. Only when we pray with these spiritual manners in mind can we be sure that God is pleased.

Prayer Passages

Romans 1:9-12

1 Corinthians 14:15

Philippians 4:6-7

1 Thessalonians 5:17

1 Timothy 2:8

2 Timothy 2:22



Our Prayers

1. How often do you pray? How long do you spend on each prayer? Do you pray at predetermined times or spontaneously? Basically, what does your prayer life look like?
2. What are the things that you ordinarily pray about? Why?
3. Going into this study, would you like to change anything about the way you pray? How? Why?



Paul's Prayers

1. According to 1 Timothy 2:8, what must be the attitude of those who pray? Why is this attitude necessary? Consider James 3:8-12 and 1 John 4:20 before you reply.
2. What does 2 Timothy 2:22 say is necessary in those who call on the Lord? Why would this be true? Hebrews 12:14 proposes an answer (though note that the passage also mentions being at peace with men).

Prayers: An Overview

3. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:17, how should we pray? Why? Consider Luke 18:1-8 in your answer.

4. In what situations does Philippians 4:6-7 say we should pray? What answer should we always get? Why?

5. 1 Corinthians 14:15 implies that our minds ought to bear fruit when we pray. Let's investigate this concept:
 - a. When we ask God for something, what are we admitting? Psalm 28:1 makes a similar admission.

 - b. According to Matthew 6:7-8, God knows what we need before we ask Him. Why, then, does He wait until we pray about it to give it to us? Exodus 9:29-33 may prove enlightening.

 - c. What, then, is at least part of the fruit our minds should bear when we pray?

6. Paul's prayer in Romans 1:9-12 doesn't fit in any of the other "prayer categories" of 1 Timothy 2:1. However, it still seems like something Paul would pray for. What does he want? Why?



Getting There From Here

1. What do 1 Timothy 2:8 and 2 Timothy 2:22 tell us about our need to evaluate our spiritual condition before we pray? What are some practical ways we can make sure our heart is right?

2. What are some ways we can make our prayers more connected with our lives?

3. What are some things we can do to make sure that our minds bear fruit because of prayer?

2

And This I Pray . . . Entreaties: An Overview

Introduction

An entreaty is a prayer with oomph. It is a fervent prayer, prayed from the heart, about something which the author of the prayer ardently desires. Much of the time, the prayers offered by the basically irreligious are entreaties. These are the prayers offered by the repentant atheist in the foxhole.

There is considerable overlap between the category of entreaty and the three other types of Pauline prayers. In particular, petitions are often entreaties. The mother who petitions for the safety of her son is also making an entreaty.

This entreaty/petition overlap is not limited to mankind. Romans 8:26-27 describes the communication between God and the Holy Spirit in this way. The Greek word often translated "intercedes" is defined as, "to make a petition to another on behalf of a third party." The Holy Spirit petitions here in "groanings too deep for words," in entreaty.

We need to remember, though, that the fervency with which we pray does not guarantee that we will get the answer we want. Paul's most famous entreaty met with a negative answer. However, the right we have to entreat God is a precious one, the right of children to bring their gravest concerns before their Father.

Prayer Passages

Romans 8:23-27

2 Corinthians 12:6-9



Our Prayers

1. How many of your prayers would qualify as entreaties? Does this number seem about the same as the number of Paul's prayers that were? What does this say about your prayers?
2. Do you think most of the prayers of most people (Christian or not) consist of entreaties? Why or why not?
3. What do you think the role of entreaty in the Christian's prayer life should be? Why?



Paul's Prayers

1. Let's start with second things first. In your own words, retell the prayer story of 2 Corinthians 12:6-9.
2. Do you think Paul's prayer here qualifies as an entreaty? Why or why not?

Entreaties: An Overview

3. Does God answer Paul's prayer? What's the answer? Why?
4. How does Paul take God's answer? Why? Philippians 3:7-8 may provide some insight.
5. What two things does Romans 8:23 describe Christians as doing?
6. What event causes these two very different attitudes in the Christian heart? Why? Philippians 1:21-23 may offer an explanation.
7. Considering the definition of "intercede" provided in the introduction, does "spirit" in Romans 8:26-27 appear to be referring to the spirits of Christians or to the Holy Spirit? Why?
8. Who is the One who searches the hearts in Romans 8:27? Revelation 2:18, 23 may provide some insight. Why is this important to us?



Getting There From Here

1. Most of us don't have any trouble entreating God for things we want. What do we do when we don't get them? What should we do? Why?
2. Are there things that you used to want really badly, prayed for, didn't get, but don't want anymore? Explain. What could they tell you about the things you want badly now, are praying for, and aren't getting?
3. Do we want Jesus to come back badly enough that we entreat God for it? Should we want Jesus to come back that badly? If so, how do we get there?

3

And This I Pray . . . Thanksgiving: An Overview

Introduction

Louis XIV once said, "Whenever I appoint a new official, I create ten malcontents and one ingrate." Sadly, ingratitude is not confined to 17th-century France. Since the dawn of time, human beings have tended to complain loudly when they don't get what they want and forget quickly when they do get it.

Ingratitude is particularly out-of-place in our dealings with God. God owes us nothing but provides us with everything. All of the physical blessings that we take for granted (but would mourn if they vanished) come from Him. Even beyond that, we receive every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places from His hand. We need to thank Him for everything.

Once gratitude begins to appear in our lives, however, the things we end up thanking God for provide an interesting spiritual barometer because we typically thank God for the things we care about. If, like Paul, our thanksgivings are predominantly about evidence of spiritual growth in the lives of others, that says something significant about our lives. If, on the other hand, we're most thankful for three meals a day and the new flat-screen TV, that says something else significant. Where do you stand?

Prayer Passages

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3
1 Thessalonians 5:18
2 Timothy 1:3-5
Philemon 4-5



Our Prayers

1. How often do you thank God? What commonly prompts you to thank Him?
2. Do you think you are as thankful as you should be? Why or why not? What things, if any, should you be more thankful for?
3. How important a part of your prayer life do you think thanksgiving should be? Why?



Paul's Prayers

1. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul counsels Christians to be thankful in everything. Does this mean that we have to be thankful FOR everything we experience? Explain, and consider Paul's example in Acts 16:22-25 in your response.
2. How can Christians keep an attitude of thanksgiving in the midst of personal tragedy? Consider Job's behavior in Job 1:20-21, as well as Romans 8:18, in your answer.

Thanksgiving: An Overview

3. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, how often does Paul describe himself giving thanks for the Thessalonians? In 1 Thessalonians 1:4-8, what things does Paul say prompted his thanksgiving? Why is this important?
4. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, what might be the difference between a work of faith and a labor of love? You may want to address 1 Thessalonians 1:8 and 1 Thessalonians 4:9 in your answer.
5. Philemon 5 says that Paul is thankful for Philemon's faith toward the saints. What does this mean? Look to Romans 1:11-12 for a possible explanation.
6. According to 2 Timothy 1:5, what about Timothy leads Paul to believe that he is remaining sincerely faithful? What lesson does this teach us?
7. In 2 Timothy 1:4, with what is Paul's thanksgiving for Timothy combined? Why would this be true? Philippians 1:3-6 might offer some help.
8. How important does Paul consider the prayers he offers for Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:3? How do we know? What does this tell us about the way Paul regarded prayer generally?



Getting There From Here

1. How can we become more Paul-like in our attitude of thanksgiving? Be specific. Where will this changed attitude show up in our prayers? Why?
2. Where can we see Christian virtues in the lives of others? How important is it that we notice? How can we become better at noticing them?
3. What is the one thing you most need to develop in order to become more thankful? Why?

4

And This I Pray . . . Thanksgiving for Salvation

Introduction

Salvation is the single most important event of any human life. Without salvation, we can have no eternal life with God. With it, we can receive that life as an inheritance, provided that we remain faithful to the commitment we made when we were saved.

When first we come to the Lord, our minds are afire with the thought of salvation. We constantly rejoice in the deliverance that God has worked in us. However, as time passes, the excitement of salvation fades, and, just like anything else we have for a long time, we begin to take salvation for granted.

By contrast, the writings of Paul show that He thought of salvation as the lynchpin of human existence. In Paul's mind, salvation defined who a Christian was and what he was supposed to do. Nor did Paul overlook God's investment in our salvation. He ascribed the coming of Christ as the fruition of a plan begun before the foundation of the world.

How did Paul continue to care so much about salvation? How do we care as much about it as he did? Let's consider these things as we read, so that we can restore the joy of our salvation.

Prayer Passages

1 Corinthians 15:57
Ephesians 1:3-4
1 Thessalonians 2:13
2 Thessalonians 2:13



Our Prayers

1. Explain in your own words what it means to you to be saved. No cheating and looking at Scripture. . .
2. How often do you thank God for your salvation? Is that more or less often than you would like? Why?
3. Do you ever struggle with being apathetic about being saved? Why is that?



Paul's Prayers

1. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says that the Thessalonians received the gospel as from God and not as from man. What does this mean? Deuteronomy 18:15-20 might prove enlightening.
2. If we receive the gospel as from God, what are we going to do? What are we not going to do? Consider James 1:21 and 2 Peter 3:15-18 in your response.

Thanksgiving for Salvation

3. Why do some people not receive the gospel as from God? 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 may be of some relevance.
4. What is the work of God described in 1 Thessalonians 2:13? Romans 10:17 may provide an answer.
5. What decision has God made about our salvation? Ephesians 1:4 has something to say on the subject.
6. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 uses language similar to that of Ephesians 1:4-5. What does it mean that God has chosen us from the beginning? In the immediate context of 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:14 may be of some use.
7. Is it possible to refuse the call of God? What makes you say that? Consider Matthew 22:1-14 and Hebrews 12:25 before you reply.
8. Why does 1 Corinthians 15:57 say that we have already gained the victory even though we aren't resurrected from the dead yet? 1 John 5:4-8 might prove helpful.



Getting There From Here

1. Which of the things we've studied in this lesson do you want to incorporate into your prayer life? Why? How do you plan on doing it?
2. How thankful are you for the salvation of others? Do you need to become more thankful? If so, how?
3. How should this conception of salvation change the way you behave? Be specific.

5

And This I Pray . . . Thanksgiving for God's Work

Introduction

Too often, we tend to regard the work of God as something that happened long ago to somebody else. We acknowledge God's work in creation, in sending His Son to die on the cross, and in equipping the apostles to spread the gospel, but we define the end of the era of inspiration as the end of God's work.

In this, we do both God and ourselves a disservice. Paul makes clear that the most important work of God is not in the creation or in the working of signs and wonders, but in the work that God does in and for all Christians. If we fail to recognize the presence of this work in us, we deny God His due.

The works that Paul defines are manifold. God establishes us according to the preaching of the gospel. He provides us with confirmation of the miraculous life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He comforts us in our affliction with an abundant and divine comfort. He even works within us, helping us to a measure of effectiveness in the service of God far beyond what we ever dreamed would be possible. God helps all of His people in innumerable ways, and we must take care to be thankful for His work.

Prayer Passages

Romans 16:25, 27
1 Corinthians 1:4-7
2 Corinthians 1:3-5
Ephesians 3:20-21
1 Timothy 4:4-5



Our Prayers

1. In your own life, what works of God (besides salvation) are you most thankful for?
2. Do you feel like you are as thankful as you should be? Why or why not?
3. What would you like to change about the way that you thank God for His work?



Paul's Prayers

1. What does 1 Timothy 4:4-5 tell us? Does this mean we should receive everything in any amount with gratitude? If not, why not? Consider 1 Peter 4:3-4 in your answer.
2. According to 1 Corinthians 1:5-7, what is the purpose of the Corinthians being given the gifts of speech and knowledge? In what sense do we lack those gifts today? In what sense do we not lack them? 2 Peter 1:19-21 may be useful in your response.

Thanksgiving for God's Work

3. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 tells us that God comforts us in our affliction. What are some ways that God may accomplish this? Scriptures like Romans 12:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, and James 5:13 might help.
4. In 2 Corinthians 1:4, why does Paul say that God comforted him? Can we thus look on affliction as a sort of spiritual gift? Why or why not? Consider James 1:2-4 in your answer.
5. Do Romans 16:25, 27 and Ephesians 3:20-21 refer to something that God has already done or something that God has yet to do? If they refer to future events, why are they grouped in the thanksgiving section? Romans 4:19-22 may prove useful to your answer.
6. When Romans 16:25 says that God is able to "establish" us, to what is it referring? Look at 1 Thessalonians 3:13 before you respond.
7. Once again, in Romans 16:25, what are the things according to which we are established? What is the mystery? Colossians 2:1-3 may provide an answer.
8. According to Ephesians 3:20, to what extent is God able to work? Why is this important?



Getting There From Here

1. How can we change our attitude toward the work of God to make it more like Paul's? Be specific.
2. What things are a barrier between us and proper thankfulness for what God has done? How can we remove those things?
3. Can considering God's work motivate us to serve Him better? If so, in what specific areas do you want thankfulness to motivate your improved service?

6

And This I Pray . . . Thanksgiving for Growth

Introduction

In the religious world around us, many believe in what is called the perseverance of the saints. They maintain that once a person is saved, it is impossible for him to fall away, that from the moment of his initial salvation, he is guaranteed a place in heaven. This way of thinking inevitably minimizes the good works that God expects His people to do after they are saved.

We recognize, of course, that it is possible for the Christian to fall from grace. However, if we aren't careful, we too can overemphasize the steps leading to salvation and not enough on the steps after salvation that lead to heaven.

Once we become a part of God's kingdom, it is not enough for us to never do anything and never mature in the faith. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 shows that God expects a return on His investment. From our salvation on, Christ expects us to grow.

Paul's thanksgiving for growth in the churches he founded reveal his concern for this essential process. Paul rejoiced in the growth of every Christian. Let's consider his thanksgiving so we can learn what we need to do the same.

Prayer Passages

Romans 1:8

Philippians 1:3-5

Colossians 1:3-6

2 Thessalonians 1:3



Our Prayers

1. After reading these four passages on spiritual growth, what are your first impressions?
2. Is there anything Paul mentions in these passages that surprises you? Is there anything left out that you would expect to see? Why or why not?
3. In your own words, what is spiritual growth?



Paul's Prayers

1. According to Colossians 1:3-6, what is the source of spiritual growth? Why would this be true? 1 Peter 1:23-25 may help.
2. According to Colossians 1:3-6, what emotion did the word of truth inspire in the Colossians? Why would this be so?

Thanksgiving for Growth

3. According to 1 Timothy 4:10 and Romans 8:24, what does the presence of hope in us cause us to do? Why?
4. Returning to Colossians 1:3-6, what fruits of the Colossians' spiritual growth does Paul say he has heard about? What is the relationship between hope and these fruits?
5. According to 2 Thessalonians 1:3, should these fruits remain the same once they appear? Explain. Ephesians 4:13-15 may be useful in your answer.
6. Can either genuine faith or genuine love fail to produce good works? Why or why not? Consider James 2:14-18 and 1 John 3:16-18 in your answer.
7. What good work arising from faith does Paul attribute to the Romans in Romans 1:8?
8. What is the good work of "participation in the gospel" described in Philippians 1:3-5? Why would this good work arise from faith and love? Look at 2 Corinthians 8:4 and Philippians 4:14-16 in framing your response.



Getting There From Here

1. Describe the sequence of spiritual growth outlined in Paul's prayers. Why would he be thankful for this sequence?
2. What are some ways that our thankfulness for spiritual growth should appear in our prayer lives?
3. What else should our thankfulness for the spiritual growth of others cause us to do? Be specific.

7

And This I Pray . . .

Petitions: An Overview

Introduction

Simply defined, a petition is a prayer that we pray for someone else. In some ways, these prayers are the essence of agape in our prayer lives. They show that we care enough about someone else to remember them in our prayers, that we consider their needs at least as important as our own. The longest recorded prayer of Jesus, the high-priestly prayer of John 17, is a petition.

However, the content of our petitions is just as important as their presence in our prayers. It doesn't take any particular spirituality to be concerned for the physical well-being of our families. Even the most worldly person imaginable will pray for the health of his gravely ill child.

There is nothing wrong with such prayers, but they don't reflect the spiritual maturity of the petitions of Paul. Life in the first century was hard, and Christians of that era had as many illnesses to petition about as we do. However, Paul's prayers are for spiritual, not physical, health. He wants his brethren to be blessed primarily in service to God. Paul petitions for the things that truly matter. We should learn to do the same.

Prayer Passages

Romans 15:13

2 Corinthians 13:7-9

1 Thessalonians 5:23

2 Thessalonians 3:16

1 Timothy 2:1-2



Our Prayers

1. For whom do you ordinarily make petition to God? What sort of things do you ask for them? Why?
2. Do others pray for you? Who are they? How often do you think they pray for you? How useful do you believe it is when they do so? Why?
3. About 45 percent of the passages that record Paul's prayers record his prayers for others. What does this tell us? How does this percentage compare to ours?



Paul's Prayers

1. In Romans 15:13, why does Paul believe that Christians filled with joy and peace will also abound in hope? Romans 5:1-4 may help you with your explanation.
2. 2 Corinthians 13:7-9 is one of the stranger prayers we'll be studying this quarter. What is it about this prayer that makes it so strange? Why would Paul pray it?

Petitions: An Overview

3. Consider 2 Corinthians 13:7-9 in light of Romans 9:1-3. Are these passages similar? If so, what makes them similar? What do we learn about Paul from these two passages?
4. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, what is the connection between the God of *peace* and sanctification? What do peace and sanctification have to do with each other? Ephesians 2:11-14 might help.
5. Why does Paul ask that the Thessalonians be sanctified *entirely*? Is there such a thing as incomplete sanctification? What is Paul saying? 1 Peter 1:13-16 could be of use.
6. Is Paul saying the same thing when he talks about the complete preservation of body and soul and spirit at the coming of Jesus? Or is he making a slightly different point? Look over 1 Corinthians 15:35-36, 42-44 before answering.
7. In 2 Thessalonians 3:16, Paul prays that the Thessalonians may have peace in every circumstance. Is that even possible? How? John 16:33 may provide insight.
8. Is there a tension between the Biblical understanding of peace and the prayer that Paul urges on all of us in 1 Timothy 2:2? If so, how do we resolve that tension?



Getting There From Here

1. Do you get the impression that Paul had a “laundry list” of petition topics, or did he pray for different things for each church? Why? What can we learn from this?
2. Do you think that the Corinthians, Thessalonians, etc., ever had sick people who needed prayers on their behalf? If so, why is Paul praying for things like peace, holiness, etc.? What can we learn from this?
3. Having gone through this lesson, what do you want to change about the way you petition? How do you propose to accomplish those changes? Be specific!

8

And This I Pray . . . Petitions for Deliverance

Introduction

Psalm 46 begins by describing God as "a very present help in trouble." This idea of God as a rescuer, a deliverer, fills the Bible from beginning to end. Throughout history, God has led His people from captivity in Egypt, saved them from innumerable foreign foes, and restored them from Babylonian bondage. The New Testament adds its own stories of deliverance: Peter and Paul from prison, Jesus from death, ourselves from sin.

It is hardly surprising, then, that believers have always turned to God when they or someone they love is ensnared in some difficulty. Mothers constantly pray for their children, perhaps especially for their sons, who have an inborn talent for disaster. Nor are our petitions for deliverance limited to the physical realm. We pray always for the souls of those we love, for the elders and church leadership, and for the church itself.

Paul's writings also contain several petitions for deliverance. Through his many trials, he was supported by the prayers of Christians everywhere, and he himself petitioned for the spiritual salvation of his Israelite brethren. Let's consider these prayers to see what they can teach us about God's deliverance.

Prayer Passages

Romans 10:1
2 Corinthians 1:9-11
Philippians 1:19



Our Prayers

1. How often do you normally pray for the deliverance of others? What circumstances cause you to do so? For whose deliverance do you pray?
2. How likely are you to ask others to pray for your deliverance? When do you do so? Why?
3. How often would you expect Paul to record prayers of this variety? Does the number that he did record surprise you? Why?



Paul's Prayers

1. What kind of deliverance does Paul pray for in Romans 10:1? For whom is Paul praying?
2. Why does Paul feel the need to pray for this group? Romans 10:2-4 explains. Are there groups in today's religious world who behave similarly? What does this tell us about their need for deliverance?

Petitions for Deliverance

3. Compare the prayer described in Romans 10:1 with the prayers described in 2 Corinthians 1:9-11. How are these prayers alike? How are they different? What does this tell us?
4. Which of these petitions was prayed by Paul? Which one was prayed for Paul? Why is this important?
5. What does 2 Corinthians 1:9 tell us about the reason why Paul needed to be delivered in the first place? How should this fit in with our understanding of prayers for deliverance?
6. Even though 2 Corinthians 1:9-11 is about prayers for physical deliverance, why does Paul say that God answered those prayers? Why is this significant?
7. Why was Paul confident in Philippians 1:19 that he would be delivered from prison? Consider Philippians 1:23-25 in your answer. Once again, why were these prayers for Paul's physical deliverance answered affirmatively? Why is this important?
8. Does a "yes" answer for a prayer for physical deliverance necessarily have to be physical deliverance? 2 Timothy 4:6, 18 may help you answer.



Getting There From Here

1. 2 Corinthians 1:9-11 tells us that God grants petitions for deliverance so that His people will recognize and praise His power. How, then, should we react today when God listens to our petitions for deliverance?
2. What effect does our expectation have on the result of our petitions for deliverance? Consider Matthew 21:20-22 before you respond. How should this change the way we pray?
3. How much time do we spend praying for the deliverance of preachers in dangerous places today (like China), compared to the time that the first-century church spent praying for the deliverance of Paul? If there is a difference, why does it exist? What do we need to do?

9

And This I Pray . . . Petitions for Love

Introduction

Love is a word that has taken a lot of abuse over the centuries. It has meant so many different things that today, it is almost meaningless. The sixteen-year-old boy who takes his date to the pizza parlor might talk enthusiastically about how he loves pizza, and later that night, he may tell her about how much he loves her as part of his efforts at seduction. In today's world, love can mean anything.

Biblical love is very different. Agape, the word the Bible uses to describe the love of Christians, is very concretely defined. Scripturally speaking, love is the devotion of the intellect, the emotions, and the will to the service of God and our neighbor. It is the determination to live our lives as Christ lived His. It is the gentle chain by which we are enslaved to God.

Because of love's central importance to the way of Christ, Paul devoted several of his prayers to the topic of love, and these prayers help us to understand what God wants of us. Love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling; it is a way of life that drives us to action. Paul's prayers begin with love, but they also describe the practices that result from love in the life of the Christian. Paul's prayers for love don't just tell us how to pray; they tell us how to live.

Prayer Passages

Philippians 1:9-11
1 Thessalonians 3:12-13
2 Thessalonians 3:5



Our Prayers

1. How does the world define love? Where do you see this definition in operation? Why does the world prefer this definition?
2. How do you define love? From where do you get your definition? Why?
3. How much do you petition God that He increase love in the hearts of others? Why?



Paul's Prayers

1. 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and 2 Thessalonians 3:5 both describe love as set in motion by God. How is this true? Look at 1 John 4:7-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 before you answer.
2. In 1 Thessalonians 3:12, who is described as the objects of increasing love? Must love always have an outward sign? Why? Consider 1 John 5:2-3 in your answer.

Petitions for Love

3. In Philippians 1:9-11, what two things does Paul pray that the love of the Philippians may abound in? Why would love abound in such things?
4. Once a Christian has real knowledge and all discernment, what sort of things does Philippians 1:10 tell us that he will begin to approve? What thoughts and actions fall into this category? Why? Philippians 4:8-9 and 2 Timothy 2:22 may help.
5. According to Philippians 1:11, when a Christian approves the things that are excellent, with what is he then filled? Why does this cause him to be sincere and blameless? Ephesians 5:6-9 may shed light on the subject.
6. What is "the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ" in Philippians 1:11? Philippians 3:7-11 might prove relevant.
7. What's the connection between acting out of love and receiving this fruit? Is this fruit something we can create on our own? 1 John 4:15-17 may clarify the link.
8. In Philippians 1:11, what is the end result of being filled with the fruit of righteousness? Why are the answers given in Philippians 1:11 and 1 Thessalonians 3:13 really the same thing? Consider Ephesians 1:11, 12, 14 before you respond.



Getting There From Here

1. What is Paul's attitude toward other Christians growing in love, coldly analytical or passionately committed? What makes you say that? What produced this attitude in Paul's prayer life?
2. Do we want this attitude in our prayer lives? If so, how do we get it there?
3. Once this attitude increases in our prayers, how will it show itself in other places? Why?

10

And This I Pray . . .

Petitions for Understanding (1)

Introduction

Spiritual understanding is not something that the world thinks is important. The quasi-religious bulk of the population of the U.S. is essentially content to believe that there is a God, there is a heaven, and just about everybody is going there. Even most regular churchgoers are more interested in ritual and religious experience than they are in truly figuring out what God is saying, what God is doing, and what they must do.

This attitude stands in stark contrast to the attitude of Paul. If his recorded prayers are any guide, there is absolutely nothing that Paul thought was more important to the Christian than spiritual understanding. He devoted three times as much space to his petitions for understanding than he did even to his petitions for love. To Paul, the deadliest foe of the Christian was spiritual ignorance, just as it is today.

As disciples of Jesus, we need to take our cue from God's lament in Hosea 4:6. As a people, we too can be destroyed by lack of knowledge. It is a goal that Satan works toward daily. If we wish to defeat him, we must remember how vital spiritual understanding is. We must pray for it in others and in ourselves, and we must devote our lives to embracing it.

Prayer Passages

Romans 15:5-6
Ephesians 1:15-19



Our Prayers

1. What emphasis does the world place upon spiritual understanding? Where do you see evidence of this emphasis?
2. How much emphasis does the church put on spiritual understanding? Is this the correct amount? Why or why not?
3. How much emphasis do you place on spiritual understanding? Why?



Paul's Prayers

1. In Ephesians 1:17, Paul prays that the Ephesians may receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. Does this mean that Paul is praying for a wise little spirit being to enter the head of every Ephesian? Why not? 1 Corinthians 4:21 and Galatians 6:1 may help.
2. If Paul isn't praying for that, then what's he praying for? Look at the way wisdom is presented in James 1:5, and also 1 Corinthians 2:6-8, 13 before you answer.

Petitions for Understanding (1)

3. What is Paul talking about in Ephesians 1:18 when he prays “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened?” Why is this important?

4. In Ephesians 1:18,
 - a. What is the hope of His calling? (Titus 3:7?

 - b. What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints? (1 Peter 1:3-4)

 - c. What is the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe? (1 Corinthians 6:14)

 - d. Why do we need to know these things?

5. What does it mean in Romans 15:5 to be of the same mind? Look at Philippians 2:2-4 for a possible answer. Why, then, does this Scripture belong in this lesson?

6. Why, without like-mindedness, are Christians unable to glorify God with one voice? Refer to James 3:13-17.



Getting There From Here

1. How powerful is the Biblical concept of understanding? How can we give understanding a larger place in our lives? Be specific.

2. Where do your problems with understanding show up most frequently? How can you correct that?

3. How can we use spiritual understanding to ensure spiritual unity?

11

And This I Pray . . . Petitions for Understanding (2)

Introduction

As we consider spiritual understanding, though, we must recognize that it does not and cannot exist in a vacuum. At times, this is a trap that all of us fall into. We become so engrossed in study of the word that we forget that the word is actually supposed to do something in our lives. We spend our time pondering and arguing about abstractions and details that have no effect on the way we live, and we neglect the things of God.

By contrast, Paul's ideal of spiritual understanding is not captured by the armchair intellectual, but by the dynamic servant of God. The Bible is a practical book, and those who understand it ensure that it is practiced. It is not a call to endless contemplation, but to faith and love and discipline.

Indeed, this spiritual understanding that leads to practice is the only way to truly understand. Christianity cannot be separated from experience, and our search to understand Christ must inevitably lead us to walk as He walked. The Bible is filled with concepts that must be lived to be known: peace beyond understanding, love beyond knowledge, joy beyond expressing, and so on. Only as we taste these things for ourselves can we truly come to understand God.

Prayer Passages

Ephesians 3:14-19
Colossians 1:9-12
Philemon 6



Our Prayers

1. Glance through the prayer passages from this lesson and last week's lesson. How much did Paul petition for spiritual understanding in others?
2. Compared to the prayers of Paul, how much do you pray for spiritual understanding in others? Why?
3. What would you like to change about your prayers for spiritual understanding?



Paul's Prayers

1. In Ephesians 3:16, what does Paul describe as the source of spiritual understanding in Christians? How does this happen? 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 may prove useful in your answer.
2. In Ephesians 3:17, Paul describes "being rooted and grounded in love" as a prerequisite for spiritual understanding. Why would this be true? 1 Corinthians 8:1 may provide insight.

Petitions for Understanding (2)

3. In Colossians 1:9, Paul prays that Christians may be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” How does this happen? Colossians 2:1-3 may prove useful.
4. What does Paul mean in Ephesians 3:18-19 when he prays that Christians “may be able to comprehend. . . what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge?” Philippians 3:8-11 may offer insight.
5. Is knowing the love of Christ merely a mental occurrence, then? Or is Paul’s prayer for knowledge of love in Ephesians 3:18-19 really the same prayer as knowledge leading to walking worthily in Colossians 1:10? If so, why are these two concepts linked?
6. How much do these sound like the fellowship of faith becoming effective, as in Philemon 6? With whom does Philemon have this fellowship?
7. One of the ways of walking worthily listed in Colossians 1:10 is to increase in the knowledge of God. Does this mean that knowledge in the Christian causes him to seek out more knowledge? Why?
8. In Ephesians 3:19, Paul says that the result of knowing the love of Christ is that one is filled up to the fullness of God. When? Why? 1 John 4:16-18 may give an answer.



Getting There From Here

1. What attitude did Paul have that caused him to pray so much about understanding in others? Should we develop that attitude? If so, how?
2. Where do you have people in your life who need prayers for spiritual understanding? How can you pray for them?
3. In what areas of your life would you like others to pray for your increased understanding? Why?

12

And This I Pray . . . Petitions for Service

Introduction

Too much of the time, in our Christian lives, we consider only the tasks that God has set before us and forget the help that God promises us as we struggle to fulfill His desires for our lives. Christianity is not an easy proposition; indeed, God expects all of us to work devotedly for Him until we pass from this life. However, God will always support us in this work as long as we remember to ask.

Interestingly enough, it only in this area—petitions for God’s help in service—that we see the apostle Paul asking for the prayers of others. Paul was perfectly willing to face all kinds of hardship and sacrifice with just his own relationship with God to sustain him, but when it came to the work that he did for Jesus, he wanted all the help he could get!

We would do well to imitate Paul’s attitude in this. Often, we feel inadequate to do the Lord’s work, as indeed we should. However, the strength He gives to Christians whenever they ask is something we should seek both in our own labor and in the labor of others. Only in this way can the kingdom of God come to its greatest success.

Prayer Passages

Ephesians 6:18-20

Colossians 4:2-4

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2



Our Prayers

1. How often do you make petition that others may be useful in the work of the Lord? For whom do you pray in this regard? Why?
2. How would you rate yourself as a personal worker? Why?
3. Glance through the prayer passages for this week. How do these prayers match up with your previous ideas of petitions for service? Is there anything here you weren’t expecting? Anything left out?



Paul’s Prayers

1. According to 2 Thessalonians 1:11, where does all service begin? How does this compare with other passages, such as 2 Corinthians 9:6-7? What point does this make about our service to God?
2. In 2 Thessalonians 1:11, Paul refers both to goodness and the work of faith. What do you think these things are? How do they differ? How are they the same? 1 Corinthians 9:1 and Matthew 5:16 may prove enlightening.

Petitions for Service

3. 2 Thessalonians 11:1 says that in order for God to fulfill our desire for work, He must count us worthy of our calling. What sort of Christian would God NOT count worthy? What are things we can do to ensure our own worthiness? 2 Timothy 2:20-23 may help.
4. In Colossians 4:3, what does Paul say must happen before he has a chance to preach? How can some of these doors appear? Look at Luke 11:9-10 and Acts 16:27-31 for some examples.
5. According to Ephesians 6:20, how should one speak who is proclaiming the will of the Lord? Why? Philippians 3:8 and Romans 8:35-39 may explain.
6. 2 Thessalonians 2:17 records Paul's prayer that God comfort and strengthen the Thessalonians. What is a way that God comforts and strengthens His people? Consider 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 and 1 Thessalonians 3:2 in your reply.
7. According to 2 Thessalonians 3:1, what is the desired result of this sort of work?
8. 2 Thessalonians 1:12 asks that both Jesus and the Thessalonians be glorified because of their work. What are two ways in which this happens? Galatians 1:23-24 and Romans 8:16-18 may prove useful.



Getting There From Here

1. What are some ways that we need to change our attitudes so that we include workers for Christ more in our prayers?
2. What are some things we can pray for for other workers?
3. Once we've prayed, what are some ways we can answer our own prayers with action? Be specific.

13

And This I Pray . . . Review

For each of the topics of Paul's prayers listed below, list one way that those prayers should change the way you pray, along with one way that they should change the way you live. Explain why.

1. Prayers

a.

b.

2. Entreaties

a.

b.

3. Thanksgivings

a.

b.

4. Thanksgiving for Salvation

a.

b.

5. Thanksgiving for God's Work

a.

b.

6. Thanksgiving for Growth

a.

b.

Petitions for Service

7. Petitions

a.

b.

8. Petitions for Deliverance

a.

b.

9. Petitions for Love

a.

b.

10. Petitions for Understanding (1)

a.

b.

11. Petitions for Understanding (2)

a.

b.

12. Petitions for Service

a.

b.