

RTO™ School of Prayer

Praying for Believers

by Dave Mozdin

Ephesians 1:15- 21

¹⁵“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

Philippians 1:9-11

⁹“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

In a previous School of Prayer lesson “Praying for God’s Wisdom”, we discussed the different prayer requests we make to God. To review, we pray for “our daily bread, for health, safety, protection and traveling mercies for our loved ones and ourselves, success in our work, our marriages and relationships, in finding employment, finding a marriage partner, healing for those who are sick or suffering, consolation for someone who has lost a loved one, justice for

someone in an unjust situation.” This is but a small sample of the varied and diverse prayer requests we make.

For those of us who are devoted to the growth of God’s kingdom on this earth, we pray for the salvation of the lost, especially family members, for a wayward or backslidden child or loved one to return to the Lord. We pray for our churches, pastors, elders and deacons, for the gospel to advance in world missions, jails and prisons. We pray for government officials and those in authority as God’s word instructs us in 1 Timothy 2:2.

While all of that is all well and good, there’s one important area we often forget, and *even I myself* failed to mention this in the list of requests I wrote and discussed in the wisdom lesson. And that is to pray for the spiritual growth and development of fellow believers. (In my own defense, I did write and present a lesson titled “The Prayer of Sanctification” (T-A-P into God’s Word) which pertains to one’s own growth in Christ.)

As in so many instances, for help and guidance for a perspective and manner in how to pray for believers, we need to look no further than God’s holy word, the Bible. (Those of you who know me and my manner of teaching know that sooner or later I will come to the Bible as the one true authoritative source.). As always, the Bible brilliantly, wonderfully and concisely illustrates this.

The apostle Paul provides excellent instruction by example for us here. From the New Testament books of Acts all the way through to the Letter to Philemon, we see a chronicle of all the work he did for the Lord in the early church, amidst much strife, hardships and persecution. His work included proclaiming the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the synagogues, market places, churches, prisons, courts of the rulers, planting and helping to establish churches, helping to select elders, rebuking and correcting wayward churches and believers, and providing instruction for the churches and saints where he ministered by writing letters to the various churches, letters which are included in the canon of the New Testament, ostensibly for our benefit too.

Yet while always reaching out to the lost, Paul always showed great care and concern for fellow believers. In New Testament books such as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Second Thessalonians, he wastes no time in praying for the believers in these locations (in the first chapter of each, in Philippians and Colossians right after the greeting), and provides a role model for us to always keep the spiritual health and well-being of our fellow believers at the forefront of our thoughts, words and actions.

With this in mind, we’ll spend the remainder of this lesson taking an in-depth verse by verse look at the wealth of material for prayer requests which emanate from each of these passages,

and my prayer for everyone is that you will incorporate *these passages, which can be prayed word-for-word*, into your regular prayer time, always remembering your fellow believers, as Paul did.

A.) Ephesians 1:15-21-Paul writes this letter to the church in the city of Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor, modern day Turkiye. The first three chapters focus on New Testament doctrine, the last three on practical application of this doctrine for right Christian behavior. According to the MacArthur Study Bible-NKJV, “Perhaps above all, this is a letter of encouragement and admonition, written to remind believers of their immeasurable blessings in Jesus Christ; and not only to be thankful for those blessings, but also to live in a manner worthy of them (4:1). Despite and partly even because of, a Christian’s great blessings in Jesus Christ, he is sure to be tempted by Satan to self-satisfaction and complacency.” (As the late great Pastor Voddie Baucham famously said: “If you can’t say ‘Amen’, say ‘Ouch!’).

Verse 15, “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love toward all the saints”. After the greeting (customary for a letter), Paul begins a twelve-verse description (one sentence in the Greek, vv. 3-14) of the saints’ abundant blessings through redemption in Christ in a way that incorporates the entire Trinity. Drawing upon the awesome significance of this, Paul acknowledges their grateful zealous continual response as evidenced by their love toward all the saints because of their faith in the Lord Jesus. Do you know of any believer who shows such love toward all the saints this way? This gives us a motivation to want to pray for them by thanking God for them, as this gives Him glory. (v.16), “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers”.

Their example of love and faith can be an encouragement for us and our praying for them an encouragement for them to also respond in prayer for other saints. Gill’s Exposition notes: “Cease not to give thanks for you,.... On account of their faith and love; which were gifts of grace bestowed upon them, and not the produce of their own free will and power; and therefore thanks are given to God for them’, and, “making mention of you in my prayers; which shows the apostle to be a praying person, and that he was constant at the throne of grace, where he prayed for others as well as for himself; and it points out the time and way, when, and in which he gave thanks to God for them; and is mentioned, not only to testify his great affection for them, but also to excite them, by his example, to the practice of those duties themselves.” This is a great testimony about Paul which we can do well to imitate.

The actual intercessory request (and all the verses included in this lesson are intercessory) begins in v. 17, with the request directed to “...the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom....”. Note that the all three persons of the Trinity are addressed. It is as if Paul is calling upon the fullness of the Godhead Three-in-One to help the believers understand the riches of God for which he prays. In an earlier School of Prayer lesson,

we discussed praying to the Trinity when you pray. Since all three Person of the trinity are constantly working together, it would do us well to invoke the help of each of them when we pray, for intercession for others or for ourselves. Remember that the Trinity is united in works, but unique in function.

Asking for the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, many of the School of Prayer lessons refer to the importance of the knowledge of God to more fully grow your relationship with this great God, who longs for our fellowship with Him (Hosea 6:6, God wants us to have knowledge of Him), just as our loved ones long for fellowship with us. Barnes Notes on the Bible: “May give unto you the Spirit of wisdom - May make you wise to understand the great doctrines of the religion of the Redeemer (Christ).

And revelation - That is, revealing to you more and more of the character of the Redeemer, and of the nature and results of his work. It is probable here that by the word ‘Spirit’ the apostle refers to the Holy Spirit as the Author of all wisdom, and the Revealer of all truth. His prayer is, that God would grant to them the Holy Spirit to make them wise, and to reveal His will to them, which is all part of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

In the knowledge of him - Margin, ‘for the acknowledgment.’ That is, in order that you may more fully acknowledge him, or know him more intimately and thoroughly. They had already made high attainments Ephesians 1:15, but Paul felt that they might make still higher; and the idea here is, that however far Christians may have advanced in knowledge and in love, there is an unfathomed depth of knowledge which they may still explore, and which they should be exhorted still to attempt to fathom. How far was Paul from supposing that the Ephesians had. “The eyes of your understanding—attained to perfection!” We ought to feel the same way!

“having the eyes of your hearts enlightened”, (v. 18). Using metaphors, that is, figures of speech, Paul appeals to matters of the heart. He does not mean the physical organ of the heart in our bodies, but to our very core of belief and life, as we read in Proverbs 4:23, “...for from it (the heart), flow the springs of life”. Paul also adds the “eyes” of the heart, so the heart can clearly see, without distraction, the innumerable blessings of God he is about to describe that form the basis for this prayer for the believer. Ellicott’s Commentary: “The Eyes of your understanding (Noting that some translations say it that way) The true reading is *of your heart*, for which the words ‘of your understanding’ have been substituted, so as to yield a simpler and easier expression. The heart is similarly spoken of in relation to spiritual perception in Romans 1:21; 1Corinthians 2:9; 1Corinthians 4:5; it signifies the inner man in his entirety; and the phrase here used seems to convey the all-important truth, that for the knowledge of God all the faculties of understanding, conscience, and affection must be called into energy by the gift of the light of God.”

“that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints”. We use the word “hope” to describe something for which we wish or desire, but aren’t sure if that will come to pass. It’s a type of mental/emotional “crossing your fingers” in wanting whatever it is. That’s not what biblical hope is. According to biblehub.com, “Biblical hope is a confident expectation in the promises of God, grounded in His character and faithfulness. Unlike a wish or vague desire, it is anchored in the certainty that God fulfills what He proclaims. As it is written: ‘Faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see’ ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). This hope rises from God’s unfailing nature and is continually affirmed by Scripture.”

“what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints”. Because we are God’s adopted sons and daughters, (Galatians 3:26, 4:1, 6-7), we are also heirs of God, to inherit the riches God will give to Christ when Christ returns to establish His eternal kingdom on earth. (Luke 22:29-30). This life, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ within us, (Galatians 4:6), is an earnest, that is a type of down payment for the eternal life to come. We come to know the glory of Christ in us which will be fulfilled in us on the Day of Christ. Ellicott’s Commentary: “the riches of the glory of this mystery . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.’ The inheritance of God is the unity with Christ, in which lies the earnest and hope of glory. ‘Among the saints’ is best connected with the word ‘inheritance,’ showing that our personal inheritance of Christ gives us a place in the kingdom of heaven here and hereafter.”

“and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might” (v. 19). Another previous School of Prayer lesson was “Prayer to a Superhero-Understanding the Power of God”, where we acknowledged along with the psalmist that “power belongs to God” (Psalm 62:11). God alone is all powerful, and no one or anything on earth or in the universe has more power than our Almighty God. Yes, that is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe. Barnes Notes: “The ‘power’ referred to here as exercised toward believers does not refer to one thing merely. It is the whole series of the acts of power toward Christians which results from the work of the Redeemer. There was power exerted in their conversion. There would be power exerted in keeping them. There would be power in raising them up from the dead, and exalting them with Christ to heaven..... In all the forms and stages of it the power of God was manifested toward them, and would be until they reached their final inheritance.”

“that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated at His right hand in the heavenly places” (v. 20). In that School of Prayer Lesson about the power of God, we acknowledged that there is no greater display of God’s power than resurrection power, the power to give life to a living being who has died, as God did for Christ and WILL do for us. He has already granted us a spiritual resurrection through our salvation in and through Christ

(Ephesians 2:1-8), and will bring that to consummation with a physical resurrection when Christ returns. (John 5:25-29). Barnes Notes: "Which he wrought in Christ - Which he exerted in relation to the Lord Jesus when he was dead. The 'power' which was then exerted was as great as that of creation. (The power of creation is the only thing which comes close to the power of resurrection). It was imparting life to a cold and 'mangled' frame. It was to open again the arteries and veins, and teach the heart to beat and the lungs to heave. It was to diffuse vital warmth through the rigid muscles, and to communicate to the body the active functions of life. It is impossible to conceive of a more direct exertion of 'power' than in raising up the dead; and there is no more striking illustration of the nature of conversion than in such a resurrection.

And set him at his own right hand - The idea is, that great power was displayed by this, and that a similar exhibition is made when man is renewed and exalted to the high honor of being made an heir of God." Yes, when we are raised and ascend to heaven, we too will share in that which is part of our inheritance! "In the heavenly places.... The phrase here evidently means in heaven itself."

"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." (v.21). Paul concludes by putting multiple exclamation points on this description of the glory and power of Christ ruling and reigning. He signifies that Christ is all powerful, all glorious, all holy, far beyond anyone or anything else, now and forever! This is the passion for the glory of Christ that Paul had and he prayed that fellow believers would know this, believe and have that same passion for the Lord Jesus Christ as he had, because they too, just like Paul will share in that inheritance! It is my prayer for each of you who hears or reads this that you too will have that same passion (I myself have a piece of it and pray to grow it more within me) to know these spiritual riches and inheritance we have in Christ, now (as the down payment) and in the fullness of eternity, where it all comes together *perfectly* within us, and that passion would fuel your prayers for other believers as you pray this prayer for them. Amen.

B.) Philippians 1:9-11-This letter, written by Paul while he was imprisoned, to the saints of the church at Philippi, is known for its theme and tone of joy despite his hardships. It is a practical, not theological or doctrinal letter, with only one exception to this. As John MacArthur writes, "The magnificent passage describing Christ's humiliation and exaltation (2:5-11), contains some of the most profound and crucial teaching on the Lord Jesus Christ in the Bible."

In the first chapter, Paul begins with his usual customary greeting, and this one specifically addresses the saints in the church of Philippi and from his description, these are saints who he holds near and dear to himself. We read that he thanks God for their fellowship "in the gospel from the first day until now" (v. 5), meaning that they had been ministering with Paul from the

beginning of this church. He expresses his great love for them in vv. 6-8, which naturally flows into a prayer for them (vv. 9-11), as he had noted in v. 4.

We have said that joy is one of the major themes of this letter, being mentioned at least once in each chapter. In v. 4 we read, “always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy”. John MacArthur has defined joy as “An emotion springing from a deep-down confidence of the Christian that God is in perfect control over everything to work it for our good in time and His good in eternity.” The Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary: “Love and joy are the two first-fruits of the Spirit. Joy gives especial animation to prayers. It marked his high opinion of them, that there was almost everything in them to give him joy, and almost nothing to give him pain.”

With all this in view, Paul begins to pray in v. 9, “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more”. Paul prays that the great love and resultant fruit that they already show would continually increase, to the point of overflowing. “in knowledge and all discernment” (judgment in some translations), Benson Commentary: “Arising from, and attended with, a more perfect knowledge of God, of Christ, and of spiritual things in general”. Pulpit Commentary: “‘Discernment’, It is, Bishop Wordsworth says, ‘that delicate tact and instinct, which almost intuitively perceives what is right, and almost unconsciously shrinks from what is wrong.’ It cannot exist without love. ‘Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.’ (1 John 4:7). With love there comes a spiritual sense, spiritual sight, spiritual hearing, a sense of the beauty of holiness, a fine perception of Christian propriety”. In other words, the true love of God is shown in a knowledgeable way, with feeling and emotion in proper perspective coming from that knowledge.

Verse 10, “so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ”. MacArthur; “Believers need the ability to distinguish those things that are truly important so they can establish right priorities.” “And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ”, this is the goal, to take this discernment of right priorities of thought, word, and deed to be complete and perfect in God through Christ at the end. This is the objective of what theologians call progressive sanctification, well defined by Romans 8:29, “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son”, and 2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” When he was moved by the Spirit to write this Scripture verse, Paul was referring to Exodus 35:29-35, after Moses’ 40-day direct encounter with the Lord God on the mountain. Moses face shone brightly as a result of this, and he had to veil his face because the people were afraid because of the brightness. For us today, because God “has shone in our hearts to

give the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6), we do not have to veil our faces as Moses did.

The reference to the day of Christ here means the consummation, the fullness of our sanctification, our perfection which will occur at Christ’s Second coming, at the resurrection of our bodies, a glorified body which God will give us, a perfected body (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-49) to go with our perfected souls. Oh, bring it on! Great motivation for us to work with God towards this perfection is given in 1 John 3:2-3, 2”Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. 3And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.”

Verse 11, “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Barnes Notes: “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness - That which righteousness in the heart produces. The fruits, or results, will be seen in the life; and those fruits are - honesty, truth, charity, kindness, meekness, goodness. The wish of the apostle is, that they might show abundantly by their lives that they were truly righteous.” To the glory and praise of God shows the fruit of our zeal and love for Him, for all He’s done for us through Jesus Christ echoed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31, and Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14. Christ Himself exhorts us in this in Matthew 5:17, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” As one pastor simply put it, giving glory to God is saying and doing those things that make God look good!

Bringing this together, as saved believers, with Paul affirming our assurance that we will one day be perfected in Christ, both body and soul, he writes in verse 6, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” This is a sure thing because it is from our great God! And, knowing and living out our blessed resounding joy that is a result, would we not want to pray this for other believing brothers and sisters whom we so dearly love, especially if they are struggling?

Summary

These prayers illustrate Paul’s heart for fellow believers, and as one more reminder here, he is a good role model. And let’s not forget one more excellent role model who prayed for believers, that is, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is clearly illustrated in John 17 (School of Prayer lesson “The Real Lord’s Prayer”) where Jesus not only intercedes for believers, His disciples, but also for us too! In verse 20, Jesus says, “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word....” Though He prayed this over 2000 years ago He knew about you and I and all who believe. Alleluia!

So let me ask, are you one who believes, one for whom Christ prayed for so long ago? Do you know Christ as your Lord and Savior? Do you believe that shortly after He prayed that prayer, He willingly lovingly, humbly went to the cross to be crucified, to die for the forgiveness of your sins, to spare you from his justifiable wrath in hell forever and to include you among those who will dwell with Him in perfect joyful sinless fellowship in heaven forever? You will not possess this glorious inheritance in Him unless you commit to repent, to change your ways, to embrace Jesus Christ by faith for the forgiveness of your sins. If you have not yet done this, please do so now, tomorrow may be too late. As we've said in so many of these lessons, "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." Hebrews 9:27.

So when it comes to care and prayer for fellow believers, follow the examples of love and care that Christ and Paul showed by praying for them. Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1. Don't leave fellow believers off your intercessory prayer request list, pray these Scriptures for their complete growth in Christ and ultimate victory over sin. Ask them to pray the same for you and put you on their intercessory prayer list. James 5:16, "...pray for one another, that you may be healed."

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