



STUDY GUIDE

August 3
-
September 7



Praying with Paul

PRAYING WITH PAUL

A STUDY

on the Prayers in the Pauline Epistles:

August 3 - September 7

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Beijing, China

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Written by TJ Johnson

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Sermon Series Overview

The Reformer, Martin Luther once wrote, “As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, and the business of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray!” Luther is able to say this with such confidence because from Genesis to Revelation, we find that God’s people are praying people. The Bible opens with prayer (Gen. 4). The Bible ends (Rev. 21) with prayer. Right in the middle of the Bible is an entire book of Prayer (Psalms). To be a Christian is to be a person of prayer. And yet, in the life of a Christian today, prayer too often seems mysterious, boring, or unhelpful, and therefore it is neglected.

Therefore, over the next six weeks we will seek to deepen our prayer life by focusing on prayers modeled by the Apostle Paul. This series hopes to accomplish two things.

First, it hopes to encourage us to pray. At City Church we take prayer seriously. This is why we have a prayer team for congregational gatherings, why we take time each month to pray for the nations, why our gatherings are interspersed with prayer (not as a transition, but as a way to commune with the Living God who comes to meet with us). This is also why we have a Tuesday and Sunday night prayer meeting. So, let us pray at home, pray at work, pray on the subway, pray at church, pray when you wake up, pray when you go to sleep, pray...as Paul writes...without ceasing.

Secondly, we hope to encourage one another to pray the right TYPES of prayers. Far too often WHEN we pray, we pray with wrong motives and wrong theology. Studying the prayers of Paul will give us a framework for theologically sound, God honoring, Christ exalting, Spirit-led prayers. One of the shocking things one will discover by studying Paul’s prayer is how little time he spent praying for temporal needs and how much time he spent praying for spiritual formation. Which is most likely the exact opposite of the average Christian prayer life.

As DA Carson points out, “Judging by Paul’s praying, it should be clear that our chief concern in petition must not be that we might become successful, wealthy, popular, healthy, brilliant, triumphant, happy, or beautiful. Still less does Paul encourage us to pray that all our problems will disappear. Paul prays with eternity’s values in view. He knows we are going to have to give an account of what we have done.”

Sermon Series Overview

The vision of City Church this year is to be a church that abides in Christ through the spiritual disciplines. Prayer is one of those disciplines where we meet with Christ. Therefore, let us not just learn about how to pray, let us be a church that prays...without ceasing.

Praying with you,

Pastor TJ

Sermon Series Calendar

August 3:	Barriers to Prayer	1 John 5:14-15
August 10:	Salvation	1 Timothy 2:1-7
August 17:	Satisfaction in Christ	2 Corinthians 12:7-10
August 24:	Sanctification	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
August 31:	Love for God	Ephesians 3:14-21
September 7:	Love of Others	1 Thessalonians 3:6-13



LEADER GUIDE

August 3



BARRIERS TO PRAYER



Title: *Barriers to Prayer*

Text: *1 John 5:14-15*

Proposition: *Prayer is powerful and effective, but only if done the right way, therefore let us examine ourselves to ensure that we are praying rightly.*

This Sunday, before we get into the prayers of Paul to learn the right ways to pray, we will first look at many of the WRONG ways we pray. Come ready to take notes and seriously reflect on your current prayer life. And then be ready, with the Lord's help, to make the proper changes to your prayer life, for God's glory and the church's good.

In Him,

TJ Johnson



Sermon Outline

Title: Barriers to Prayer

Text: 1 John 5:14-15

Prop: Prayer is powerful and effective, but only if done the right way, therefore let us examine ourselves to ensure that we are praying rightly.

Sometimes our prayers are not answered because of:

1. Unconfessed Sin – 1 John 3:21-22
2. Unreconciled Relationships - 1 Peter 3:7-9
3. Unworthy Motives – James 4:3
4. Unbelief – James 1:6-7
5. Unaligned Wills – 1 John 5:14-15
6. Unpersistent Prayer – Luke 11:5-9
7. Underdeveloped Faith – 2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Sermon Notes



Discussion Questions

1. 1 John 3:21-22, Isaiah 59:2, Psalm 66:18, 1 Peter 4:7.

Why (and in what ways) does unconfessed sin hinder our prayer life and what strategies do you have for regular rhythms of confession?

When sin goes unconfessed, it disrupts fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:2). God's holiness remains unchanged, but sin erects a barrier in human hearts, effectively cutting believers and unbelievers alike off from experiencing the FULLNESS of His presence.

This disconnection can create a lack of spiritual vitality, making prayer feel distant or ineffective (cf. Psalm 66:18). Individuals may experience spiritual dryness, where God's Word no longer sparks joy or conviction, and worship feels empty. The heart becomes dull to the leading of the Holy Spirit, hindering spiritual growth and making it more challenging to recognize divine convictions.

Additionally, God does not reward disobedience so that we might turn from sin and back to God. God's refusal to answer our prayers, particularly in times of desperation, is often the very thing that exposes our sin and brings about true repentance.

Ways to Cultivate the Rhythm of Confession

- Begin and end your day with confession.
- When you sin against God, be quick to confess and repent.
- Be honest with other believers.
- As a family, establish a pattern of confession of sin.
- Know your heart well enough that you know the things needing confessed.
- Pair confession with thanksgiving and preaching the gospel to yourself.



Discussion Questions

2.1 Peter 3:7-9, Matthew 5:23-24, Isaiah 1:15-17. What are the Biblical steps to reconciliation?

Who in your life do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from and how can this group support you in prayer or practical steps this month?

- Allow the Holy Spirit to convict you of your need for reconciliation.
- Do not grieve or quench the Spirit, but meditate upon what God in Christ has forgiven you.
- Acknowledge ANY wrongdoing on your part (Matthew 5:23-24)
- Take initiative to resolve conflicts (Matthew 18:15). Don't wait for them!
- Listen actively and seek to understand the other person (Proverbs 12:16)
- Forgive (in heart and word) and seek forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15)
- Restore trust and rebuild relationships (Proverbs 17:9) through our honest actions.
- In difficult cases, seek the wisdom of one or two other godly Christians to assist.

3. James 4:3.

Give some examples of selfish motives in prayer and discuss how we can ensure we pray with right motives (the sermon discusses three possible motives, me-centered, man-centered, Christ-centered).

- Seeking Personal Gain: Praying primarily for wealth, success, or personal advantage.
- Desiring Control: Using prayer as a means to manipulate outcomes or others' actions.
- Avoiding Responsibility: Asking for help to escape consequences rather than addressing issues directly.
- Validation of Self: Praying to showcase piety or to gain social approval rather than for genuine connection.
- Praying without regard for God and His glory: Christians are not humanists, we must make sure that we do not fall into forgetting to keep God the main focus of all of our prayers.



Discussion Questions

3. Continued

Ensuring Right Motives in Prayer:

- Self-Reflection: Regularly assess your intentions before praying. Ask yourself why you are praying and what you hope to achieve.
- Practice Humility: Approach prayer with a mindset of humility, recognizing that not all requests may align with God's purpose.
- Pray Scripture: God has given us many wonderful prayers to model our prayers after (Psalms, Epistles, etc)
- Cultivate Gratitude: Begin prayers with expressions of gratitude to our Savior, shifting focus from requests to appreciation for what you have.

4. James 1:6-7, Matthew 21:22.

Give examples of praying in faith vs praying without faith then discuss how God increases our faith.

Praying in faith is a full trust in God's power and goodness. It is a person who believes that God CAN do what is being asked. It is a person who believes that God DELIGHTS to do what is being asked. Doubt often fails to believe in God's supreme power or God's supreme goodness. They don't He can or they don't think He cares enough for them to do anything. Faith also trust that God knows what is best. One great example of faith is Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego. They had full confidence that God could and would, but left room for God to not rescue them, and EVEN IF He didn't rescue them, He was still worthy of worship. Another way to pray doubting is to recite prayers out of habit, without genuine belief in their meaning or power.



Discussion Questions

4. Continued.

God grows our faith through the Word and prayer. As we read scripture we come to know God's power and love for us. We read stories of God's faithfulness, that encourage our own faith. Through prayer, we ask God for help in our weaknesses, I believe, help my unbelief. Praying the promises of God found in Scripture is another way God grows our faith. These types of prayers gives us full confidence that we are asking "In His name, according to His will."

5.1 John 5:14-15, Romans 8:26-27, Matthew 6:10, 26:39, James 4:13-15, 2 Corinthians 1:20.

What are some examples of misinterpreting and misapplying scripture that results in claiming "promises" that God never made? What are other ways people trust in false "promises" from God? How do we pray when we don't know God's will in a certain situation?

Here are a few exegetical principles to ensure we don't misinterpret or misapply scriptural promises:

- Was this promise given to me personally, or to a specific person/group in a specific context? National promises (e.g., to Israel) aren't automatically individual promises.
- Is this a divine promise, or a human/fallen character's statement? Job's friends claimed suffering always results from sin (Job 4:7–8), but God later rebuked them (Job 42:7).
- What exactly was promised—and what wasn't? "Seek first the Kingdom... and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33) promises provision, not luxury.
- Does this promise align with the rest of Scripture? Isolated verses can be twisted (2 Peter 3:16). Compare with the Bible's unified teaching to ensure you have properly understood it.



Discussion Questions

5.Continued

- Is this promise tied to an Old Covenant (e.g., Mosaic Law) or fulfilled in Christ? (aka land inheritances, Deuteronomic curses)
- Does this promise require some condition? If you repent, God will forgive. Don't claim conditional promises while ignoring the conditions.
- Is this a promise—or a description of what happened once? Not every biblical event is a template for our lives.

Examples:

Misused Verse: "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." (Isaiah 54:17)

Misapplication: "If you're truly God's child, nothing bad will ever happen to you."

Reality: This was a promise to Israel in a specific context. Christians will face persecution (John 16:33; Acts 14:22).

Misused Verse: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" (Jeremiah 29:11)

Misapplication: "This verse guarantees my dreams will come true exactly how I want them to."

Reality: It Was Spoken to Exiles, not an Individual Promise. The good plans for Israel was 70 years of exile, hardly what many expect when they "claim this promise."

6.Luke 11:5-9, Luke 18:1-6.

Give some examples when God answered persistent prayer. How do we know when to keep praying persistently (like the widow in Luke 18) and when to stop praying (like Paul in 2 Corinthians 12)? What are some reasons why God might not immediately answer our prayers?



Discussion Questions

6.Continued

- Abraham's Intercession for Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33)
- Hannah's prayer for a Child (1 Samuel 1:9-20)
- Elijah's Prayer for Rain (1 Kings 18:41-45)
- Hezekiah's Prayer for Healing (2 Kings 20:1-6)

Feel free to share historical examples like George Mueller, or even personal stories.

It can be challenging to know when to stop praying for something, but here are a few guidelines:

- Is it REALLY a promise from scripture? Keep praying!
- Is it a prophetic word someone shared with you? Test it!
- Is It a Personal Desire? Surrender It! (pray several times and if there is not movement, surrender it to God...your will be done.)

Reasons why God might not immediately answer prayers include:

- God's timing may differ from our own.
- To strengthen faith, God may allow delays.
- Waiting can intensify the desire for what is being prayed for, leading to greater appreciation when the answer comes.
- Delays may be used to address attitudes or motives that need to be aligned with God's will.
- We may not be ready to receive the answer.
- To show His sovereignty, God may allow delays.

Remember that God loves us and desires what is best for us. Continuing to pray, waiting patiently, and trusting in His perfect timing are key aspects of a strong relationship with God.



Discussion Questions

7.2 Corinthians 12:8-9, Job 6:8-9, John 11.

Share a time when you (or someone you know) prayed for something that God did not grant only later to find that God's ways were better.

I know a person who contracted Multiple Sclerosis. He and his family prayed for years for God to heal him. It never happened. Looking back, the family now realizes that the man's faith matured because of MS. Before MS he was a nominal Christian, after MS he developed a real relationship with God.

Another individual described praying for a specific person to become their spouse, only to be heartbroken when that relationship didn't materialize. Later, they found someone who more aligned with their values and future. Looking back, they rejoice that God did not answer that prayer.

Many stories highlight the idea that God's perspective is broader than ours. His delays or redirection often serve a higher purpose, even if it's not immediately apparent. As Philippians 4:6-7 suggests, by casting anxieties on God through prayer and supplication, peace that surpasses all understanding can be found, regardless of the outcome of specific requests.

8. What else would you add to the list of barriers to answered prayer?

Various.



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



LEADER GUIDE

August 10



EVANGELISTIC PRAYER



Title: *Evangelistic Prayer*

Text: *1 Timothy 2:1-7*

Proposition: *Because God is worthy of global worship, a part of our regular prayer life should be intentional intercession for the lost.*

This Sunday, as we look at Paul's teaching on prayer found in 1 Timothy 2:1-7, we will explore the power of evangelistic prayer.

Here are a few examples of how Paul prayed (or asked for) evangelistic prayers: **Romans 10:1** - Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. **Colossians 4:3-4** - Pray for us... that God may open a door for our message... so that we may proclaim Christ clearly. **Acts 26:29** - I pray to God that not only you (King Agrippa) but all who are listening to me today may become what I am. **2 Thessalonians 3:1** - Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. **Ephesians 6:19-20** - Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel... that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

If salvation is God's work, then prayer must be the church's primary weapon in evangelism! As one person once said, effective evangelism is first talking to God about our neighbors before talking to our neighbors about God. This Sunday come ready to see how evangelistic prayer fuels global missions, transforms relationships, and empowers gospel witness.

Praying Evangelistically with You,


Pastor TJ



Sermon Outline

Title: Evangelistic Prayer

Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Prop: Because God is worthy of global worship, a part of our regular prayer life should be intentional intercession for the lost.

Three Ways to Pray Evangelistic Prayers:

1. Pray for Peoples (Nations).
2. Pray for People (Neighbors).
3. Pray for Proclaimers

Sermon Notes



Discussion Questions

1. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7. What biblical truths motivate us to pray for the lost?

- God's Heart for the Lost: 1 Timothy 2:3-4, Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9
- God's Command for Evangelism: Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Mark 16:15
- God's Worthiness of Global Worship: Revelation 7:9-10, Psalm 96:3, Habakkuk 2:14
- The Reality of Hell and Judgment: Matthew 25:41, Revelation 20:15, Hebrews 9:27

2. Read Psalm 2:8. What specific ways we can strategically pray for God's global mission (to redeem people from every tongue and tribe) to be fulfilled?

- Pray for a global mobilization of Christians: Ask God to raise up more laborers from all nations, to go, send, support, and pray for the work of missions.
- Pray for missionary preparation, logistics, fundraising, language acquisition, and initial adjustment to their new cultures and ministries.
- Pray for specific regions and people groups (use Operation World)
- Pray for unreached people groups (use Joshua Project)
- Pray for areas facing persecution (use Voice of the Martyrs)
- Pray for local churches in strategic locations (aka Indonesia and Jordan offer religious freedom and access to majority Muslim populations)



Discussion Questions

3.Read Romans 10:1. Has God given you a burden for a particular people group? If so, share a bit about them with the group. If not, as a group suggest a few nations/people groups to consider adopting.

Various. Sample answers may include:

Many express a burden for countries facing poverty, conflict, and health crises, such as Sudan, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nations like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan often draw attention due to ongoing conflicts and humanitarian needs. Countries such as India and China are significant due to their large populations. Nations like Venezuela and Haiti are often highlighted for their economic struggles and social issues.

4.Read 2 Corinthians 10:13-16. Who are your 3-5 closest non-Christian relationships? How can we specifically pray for each?

Various. Try to get your group to think of specific categories where they encounter opportunity for evangelism. Family members, co-workers, classmates, ayi, drivers, other parents, etc

Pray for their needs and let them know what you are specifically praying for so that when God answers that prayer they are aware. Ask God to give you wisdom, clarity, and boldness to share the gospel with them. Ask God to use others to share the gospel with them. Ask God to give them the ability to truly understand the gospel, a true interest in the gospel, and open heart to receive the gospel. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. These prayers can be made personally or collectively, and they can be tailored to specific individuals or groups.



Discussion Questions

5. Read Matthew 9:37-38. Share with the group missionaries that you regularly pray for and the specific ways you pray for them.

Various.

Currently, City Church supports The Warren family in Australia, Alyssa in South Africa, Durbins in America, Extons and Wagners on the Westside of Beijing, Brogdens (Sophia Durbin) soon to move to Egypt

Think about the specific needs each missionary has and pray that God supplies that for them. For example: finances, education (for children), language, loneliness, persecution, discouragement, etc. The best way to do this is regularly ask the missionary how you can pray for them. Additionally, keep praying the types of prayers that are found in the Pauline epistles.

6. What practical ways can we pray for each other to be bold, wise witnesses in our daily lives?

- Pray for Divine Opportunities (Colossians 4:3-4)
- Pray for Courage Over Fear (Acts 4:29-31)
- Pray for Culturally Wise (contextual) Words (Colossians 4:5-6)
- Pray for Consistency in Love (1 Peter 3:15-16)
- Pray for Wisdom & Discernment (Matthew 10:16)
- Pray for Unity of Heart & Mission (Philippians 1:27-28)
- Pray for the Holy Spirit's Work (John 16:8)



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



LEADERS GUIDE

August 17



PRAYS IN HARD TIMES



Title: ***Prayers in Hard Times***

Text: ***2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5, 16-18***

Proposition: *When God's people face suffering, our prayers must go beyond begging for relief—we must boldly ask the Lord to calm them with His peace (2 Thess. 3:16), strengthen them with His comfort (2 Thess 2:17), and eternally hold them with His hope (2 Thess 2:16).*

This week, we continue our series on prayer by studying how the Apostle Paul prayed for Christians enduring suffering—whether from sickness, persecution, economic hardship, or other trials. What we'll discover is striking: Paul didn't merely ask God to remove their hardships. Instead, he prayed that Christ Himself would be present with them in their struggles, and that through His presence, they would find peace to guard their hearts, comfort to strengthen their faith, and hope to anchor their souls.

To prepare for our gathered assembly this Lord's Day, I encourage you to read our key texts:

- 2 Corinthians 12:1–10
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:5, 16–18

Interceding with You,


Pastor TJ



Sermon Outline

Title: Prayers in Hard Times

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5, 16-18

Prop: When God's people face suffering, our prayers must go beyond begging for relief—we must boldly ask the Lord to calm them with His peace (2 Thess. 3:16), strengthen them with His comfort (2 Thess 2:17), and eternally hold them with His hope (2 Thess 2:16).

In hard times:

1. Pray for God's Peace. 2 Thess. 3:16
2. Pray for God's Comfort. 2 Thessalonians 2:17
3. Pray for God's Hope. 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:3
4. Pray for God's People (to be present) 1 Thessalonians 3:10–11

Sermon Notes



Discussion Questions

1. **What hardships** did the recipients of the Pauline Epistles face, what hardships is our community currently experiencing, and what dangers do hardships pose to our faith?

These believers faced physical persecution (1 Thess. 2:14-16), imprisonment (Col. 4:3), poverty (2 Cor. 8:1-5), slavery (Philemon), public shame (Heb. 10:32-34), pagan oppression (1 Cor. 10:20-22), death of loved ones (1 Thess. 4:13), sickness (1 Tim. 5:23), economic exclusion/job loss (1 Cor. 10:14–22), plundering of property (Hebrews 10:34), and general suffering (2 Tim. 3:12).

Various answer for hardships in our community which could include: job loss, financial difficulty, illness, divorce, death, economic inequality,

Hardships threaten our faith with discouragement (2 Cor. 1:8), anxiety (Phil. 4:6), worry (Matt. 6:25), stress (Ps. 55:4-5), anger (Eph. 4:26), bitterness toward others and God (Heb. 12:15), broken relationships (Col. 3:13), lack of faith (Mark 4:40), apathy (Rev. 3:15-16), depression (Ps. 42:11), isolation (Prov. 18:1), worldly compromise (2 Tim. 4:10), and spiritual weariness (Gal. 6:9).

2. **Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16.** How does the Bible define God's peace? When you pray for God's peace, what are you asking God to give, what are you asking Him to remove or protect from? Who in our community need's God's peace right now? *Bonus: What are some ways God gives us peace?*

Biblical peace is confidence in the wisdom and sovereignty of God so that you fear nothing in life and are content (internal) with any and every circumstance. It is NOT just the absence of conflict (external). When praying for God's peace, we are asking God to empower us to trust in His sovereignty amidst life's difficulties, to protect us from anxieties, fear, and the negative influence of others.



Discussion Questions

2. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16. CONTINUED

God gives us peace through His presence (Ex. 33:14), prayer (Phil. 4:6-7), Scripture (Ps. 119:165), the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), trusting His sovereignty (Isa. 26:3), Christian community (Rom. 15:13), and Christ's victory over sin (John 16:33).

3. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. How does the Bible define God's comfort (In what ways do we often misunderstand Biblical comfort)? When you pray for God's comfort, what are you asking God to give, what are you asking Him to remove or protect from? Who in our community needs God's comfort right now?

Bonus: What are some ways God gives us comfort?

In the Bible, God's comfort is defined as God's strengthening and encouraging presence amidst adversity. The Greek word "comfort" (parakaleo) literally means "to call to one's side".

Comfort is not the absence of suffering or the removal of sorrow, but rather strength to endure your sorrow. We are asking God to remove despair, spiritual paralysis (overwhelmed by the weight of your circumstances), and isolation and give us His presence and encouragement to persevere.

We need God's comfort when we experience loss (Ps 34:18), grief (2 Cor 1:3-4), illness (Ps 41:3), physical pain (Ps 38:4-8), failure (Ps 51:12), fear (Ps 34:4), loneliness (Ps 25:16), persecution (2 Thess 1:6-7), uncertainty (Isa 41:10), spiritual warfare (2 Cor 7:5-6), broken relationships (Mt 5:4), etc.



Discussion Questions

4. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:3. How does the Bible define God's hope? When you pray for God's hope, what are you asking God to give, what are you asking Him to remove or protect from? Who in our community needs God's hope right now?

Bonus: What are some ways God gives us hope?

Biblical hope is a joyful and confident expectation of the future which is grounded in God's promises (as found in Scripture). Oftentimes Biblical hope is referred to as "eschatological hope" (Christ's final victory over evil, resurrection of the dead, new creation). The hope of eternity gives us perspective for our "light and momentary troubles".

When praying for God's hope, we are asking Him to help us keep our eyes fixed on eternity (rather than our present circumstances) and have faith that our present suffering is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).

We are asking God to remove, doubt (in God's power or goodness or presence), faithlessness, unbelief, apostasy/deconstruction.

People need God's hope when facing despair (Ps 42:11), suffering (Rom 5:3-5), uncertainty (Jer 29:11), weakness (Isa 40:31), death (1 Thess 4:13-14), persecution (Rom 12:12), failure (Ps 71:14), injustice (Isa. 30:18), addiction, and a general sense of overwhelmingness.

God gives us hope through His promises (Rom 15:4), Christ's resurrection (1 Pet 1:3), the Holy Spirit's power (Rom 15:13), Scripture's endurance (Ps 119:114), answered prayer (Ps 62:5), Christian community (1 Thess 5:11), future glory (Col 1:27), and His unchanging character (Heb 6:18-19)



Discussion Questions

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:10–11; Romans 1:9–13. Why might Christians today be quick to pray for a friend in need, but hesitant to be the answer to that prayer through personal action? Think about the people you've discussed who need God's peace, comfort, and hope right now; what are specific, practical ways your group can actively 'be the Church' to them this week?

Sometimes we are not physically present for others because of fear of saying the wrong thing, social awkwardness, inexperience, busyness of life, social stigma/pressure.

Ways we can be present will include various answers based on specific needs. For example: bring a meal, help with chores, provide transportation or housing, offer childcare, help with finances or job searches, share scripture, pray together, testify how God has been faithful to you (2 Cor. 1), remind them of the cross, invite them to church, connect them to a Biblical counselor, be physically present, send texts, emails, etc.



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



LEADERS GUIDE

August 24

A close-up photograph of a person's hands clasped in prayer, with fingers interlaced. The person's mouth is slightly open, and their chin is resting on their hands. The background is black.

PRAYING FOR
SANCTIFICATION



Title: *Prayers for Sanctification*

Text: *1 Thessalonians 5:16-28*

Proposition: *God's will for all Christians is that they would be sanctified, therefore we must regularly pray for ours and other's sanctification.*

I hope you have been faithfully praying each week for the salvation of others and for those in our community enduring hardships—that they may experience God's peace, comfort, and hope.

As we continue our series on prayer, we will incorporate a third type of prayer into our intercession: prayers for sanctification. First Thessalonians reminds us that God's will for us is our sanctification. In fact, Paul later prays for God to completely sanctify the Thessalonian community.

Praying fervently for a fellow believer—that God would shape their thoughts, words, and actions to be more like Christ's—is one of the most powerful gifts we can offer. In preparation for our time together this Sunday, please read through 1 Thessalonians, focusing on 5:16-28.

Praying with You,


Pastor TJ



Sermon Outline

Title: Prayers for Sanctification

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

Prop: God's will for all Christians is that they would be sanctified, therefore we must regularly pray for ours and other's sanctification.

Let us pray for:

1. Complete Sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 5:23a
2. Completion of Sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 5:23b
3. Means of Sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Sermon Notes



Discussion Questions

1. **Define** the biblical concept of sanctification (include key differences between the believer's positional, progressive, and ultimate sanctification and why each is important).

Sanctification is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ.

Positional sanctification refers to the believer's status before God, achieved through faith in Jesus Christ. This is an instantaneous act of God, where the believer is declared holy and righteous because of the atoning work of Christ. (Hebrews 10:10)

Progressive sanctification is the ongoing process by which believers grow in holiness and are gradually transformed into the likeness of Christ. This involves the work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers believers to overcome sin and cultivate the fruits of the Spirit. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Ultimate sanctification, also known as glorification, is the final stage of sanctification that occurs when believers are fully conformed to the image of Christ at His return. At this point, believers will be completely free from sin and its effects. (1 John 3:2)

2. **How** do you interpret the meaning of 'sanctify you completely' in 1 Thess. 5:23, and how can we pray for this complete sanctification in the lives of others?

Various answers depending upon theological background. Here are a few ways it might be answered:

Reformed: This view interprets "completely" as referring to the entire person (thought, word, and deed) being progressively transformed by the Holy Spirit throughout the Christian life.



Discussion Questions

2. Continued

Wesleyan: This view interprets "completely" as referring to a second work of grace often called "entire sanctification" resulting in perfection in love, meaning the heart is fully oriented toward God and the motives are pure.

Sinless Perfectionism: This is a more extreme and less common teaching, often found in certain smaller sects or independent churches. This view asserts that a believer can become literally sinless and incapable of sinning, even in thought, word, or unconscious mistake.

To pray for the complete sanctification of others focuses on specific aspects of their spiritual growth. The more we know a person, the more we know about their sin struggles and spiritual blind spots. Therefore, we try to be as specific as possible for God to grow grace in these areas. For example, gossip, lust, pride, anger, etc.

3. **Based** on 1 Thessalonians 5:23, what does it look like to pray for a fellow believer's 'whole spirit, soul, and body to be kept blameless' until Christ's return?

The reference to Christ's return is a reminder that Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead. Hebrews reminds us that, "without holiness no one will see the Lord." While we are not saved by our works, true salvation produces works. If someone has no evidence of the sanctifying work of the Spirit then on judgment day they will not pass the test. Therefore, this is a prayer that is not only concerned with a person's present sanctification, but one that is thinking long-term, that they would continue to repent and believe in Christ. They are asking God to keep His promise (Philippians 1:6) to persevere their faith and keep them from falling away, due to trials, cares, or love of money.



Discussion Questions

4. **Share** some examples of people who started following Christ and later fell away. What role does prayer have in ensuring others are found “blameless” at the final judgment?

In the Bible: The Rich young ruler, Judas Iscariot, Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17-18), group referenced by John in 1 John 2:19, Exodus generation (Hebrews 3:7-19).

Outside of the Bible: Emperor Julian the Apostate, Charles Templeton (1915–2001), Bart D. Ehrman, Joshua Harris, Rob Bell, perhaps someone they know personally.

Prayer can play a role in desiring and seeking God's will for others to be found blameless at the final judgment. While prayer doesn't change God's eternal decree, it is seen as a means by which God brings about his will. In other words, God ordains both the desired outcomes and the prayers offered as a means to achieve those outcomes. Often Paul would speak with great confidence in God's ability to keep true believers in the faith (Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, Romans 8:30, 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, 2 Timothy 1:12, 2 Timothy 4:18, Romans 8:38-39, Ephesians 1:13-14, John 10:28-29, Jude 1:24-25).

5. **According** to the Bible what are the means by which God sanctifies a person?

God sanctifies individuals primarily through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:2, Romans 15:16), His Word (John 17:17, Ephesians 5:26), Christ's death (Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 13:12) and prayer (John 17:17-19, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).



Discussion Questions

6. **Share** an example of how you have seen God's sanctifying work in your own life. What areas are you desiring greater sanctification in?

Various. Areas to discuss include, a special event that fueled sanctification (revival), ordinary means of grace that over time sanctified a person (prayer, word, worship, communion of saints). They may share a personal story of some sin they were struggling with that they have seen real victory in, etc.

Going Deeper:

1. **Does** Paul's phrasing of 'spirit, soul, and body' suggest a trichotomist view of human nature, or can it be understood within a dichotomist framework?

Three Parts (Trichotomy): Some Christians see "spirit" as our God-connection, "soul" as our mind/will/emotions, and "body" as our physical self.

Two Parts (Dichotomy): Others see "spirit" and "soul" as terms for the same inner, non-physical self (like saying "heart and soul"), distinct from the "body." They would say this verse is using a rhetorical and poetic device to emphasize the complete and entire nature of a person that God sanctifies.

2. **Compare** and contrast the Wesleyan, Keswick, Reformed, and Chaferian (Dispensational) views of sanctification. Which perspective do you find most biblically compelling

Wesleyan (Methodist): Teaches entire sanctification or Christian perfection as a second definite work of grace after conversion, where the root of sin is cleansed, enabling believers to live in perfect love (though not sinless perfection).

Keswick (Higher Life): Does not teach eradication of sin, but emphasizes a crisis of surrender ("let go and let God"). Believers still have sinful tendencies but can live in victory by yielding moment by moment to the Spirit.



Discussion Questions

Going Deeper:

2. Continued

Chaferian (Dispensational): Teaches a difference between salvation and the moment a person makes Christ “Lord of their life.” Sanctification progresses quickly/instantaneously after one makes Christ Lord, but rejects the Wesleyan idea of eradication of sin in this life

3. In the process of our sanctification, what is God's role and what is our responsibility? How do these two work together without compromising God's sovereignty or human responsibility? (see Phil 2:12-13)

Various. Sample answer. Sanctification is both a gracious gift of God and it requires our active cooperation. God is the source and power of sanctification. By His Spirit, Word, and grace, God works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose (Phil. 2:13). We are called to actively obey—“work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12)—through faith, discipline, and intentional pursuit of holiness. God’s sovereignty and our responsibility are not in competition. God’s work enables and guarantees our growth, while our effort is the means He uses. We strive because He works; our responsibility rests securely in His power.



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



LEADERS GUIDE

August 31



PRAYING FOR LOVE FOR GOD



Title: Love for God

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Proposition: *Because love is at the very core of our faith, one of the most important things that we can pray for is an increase of the love for God in our hearts by growing in our knowledge of His love for us and our desire to abide in Him.*

As we continue our series on prayer, this week we will look at another of the most important things we can pray for: an increase in our love for God.

Love is at the very center of our faith. 1 John 4:8 tells us that “anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Jesus told us in Matthew 22 that the first and greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

This week we will look at Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and discuss why it is important to love God, what it means to love God, and how to grow in our capacity to love God.

Here’s a hint: it all centers around God’s amazing love for us, made manifest through Christ.

Praying with you,

Pastor Ben



Sermon Outline

Title: Love for God

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Proposition: Because love is at the very core of our faith, one of the most important things that we can pray for is an increase of the love for God in our hearts by growing in our knowledge of His love for us and our desire to abide in Him.

A.) Why should we love God?

- 1. Love is at the core of our faith.
- 2. The first and greatest command is to love the Lord.

B.) What does it mean to love God?

- 1. If we love Him we will obey Him.
- 2. We also cultivate our affections for Him.

C.) Pray to know the love of God.

- 1. We love Him because He loved us first.
- 2. His love has been demonstrated on the cross.
- 3. We need the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to know and believe God's love
- 4. God's love is limitless - we can never stop growing in our knowledge of His love.

D.) Pray for an increased capacity to love God.

- 1. Pray against other lovers (idols).
- 2. Pray for an awareness of how much we've been forgiven.
- 3. Pray for an increased desire to spend focused time with the Lord.
- 4. Pray that we would love God with our heart (will), soul (core of our life), mind (intellect) and strength (actions).



Discussion Questions

1. **How** does our culture use the word “love” in different ways than the Bible uses love?

As a weakened form of love: I love pizza, I love that new dress. When the Bible speaks of love, particularly our love for God, it speaks of an “agape” love. It is not an emotional response or a love based on the worthiness of the recipient. Instead, it is a deliberate, intentional love characterized by unconditional commitment and sacrificial action.

As a disordered form of love: Sometimes our culture uses the word love when it really means lust. To love things that are bad for us or goes beyond the boundaries God has set for us. Biblical love is always pure and holy love that seeks to obey God fully.

2. **Why** is God worthy of our love?

God is worthy of our love because He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, holy and perfect in all His ways. Even though we were sinners, He loved us first by sending His Son to redeem us (1 John 4:19). Our love for Him is the proper response of worship and gratitude to His sovereign grace and steadfast covenant love.

3. **What** are some right and wrong expressions of love toward God?

Right expressions of love include obedience to His commands (John 14:15), worship from the heart, prayer, service to others, and treasuring His Word. Wrong expressions are empty ritual without faith, obedience done to earn favor rather than from grace, using God for personal gain rather than delighting in Him, or right motivation (sincere desire to honor God) but wrong method (think of Uzzah’s attempt to steady the ark).



Discussion Questions

4. **How** does the Bible describe God's love for us, and how does grasping this truth grow our love for Him?

The Bible describes God's love as steadfast, undeserved, and sacrificial. It is covenantal and unchanging, rooted in His character rather than our performance. When we truly grasp that God loved us while we were His enemies, it humbles us and stirs our hearts with gratitude, producing a deeper desire to love Him in return. Read Jeremiah 31:3, Romans 5:8, 8:38-39; Ephesians 3:17-19, 1 John 3:1, etc.

5. **What** specific practice, habit, or experience has God used to grow your love for Him?

Many believers grow in love for God through consistent time in Scripture and prayer, where God reveals His character and promises. Others point to seasons of trial where God's faithfulness was especially clear. God often uses the ordinary means of grace — His Word, prayer, and fellowship with His people — to deepen our love for Him.

6. **What** are some things that compete for your love for God and how do you fight against this type of idolatry?

Things that compete for our love include money, success, comfort, relationships, and self. Idolatry happens when these good things become ultimate things. We fight by confessing sin, remembering the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:8), and deliberately reordering our hearts through prayer, Scripture, and accountability in the body of Christ.



Discussion Questions

7. **How** might one use Matthew 22:37-38 as a template for intercessory prayer?

The sermon uses the following:

- Heart - That their affections would be for Christ alone.
- Soul - That the core of their life (purpose) would find joy, rest, and satisfaction in Christ alone.
- Mind - That their thoughts and understanding would be shaped by Scripture and protected from lies and confusion.
- Strength - That their actions would be in full obedience to Christ.



Prayer & Praise

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Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



LEADERS GUIDE

Sept 7



PRAYING FOR LOVE FOR OTHERS



Title: Love for Others

Text: 1 Thessalonians 3:6-4:11

Prop: A Christian is known by their love, therefore we must pray that our love for others would increase.

This week we end our series on prayer by modeling Paul's prayer found in 1 Thessalonians 3:12, May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. In a world filled with hate, let the church be a bastion of love. In a world filled with distorted ideas of love, let the church hold fast to Biblical love, even when unpopular. May your prayers be a powerful tool to help others "increase and abound in love"—for God's glory and the good of the world.

Praying with you,

Pastor TJ



Sermon Outline

Title: Love for Others

Text: 1 Thessalonians 3:6-4:11

Prop: A Christian is known by their love, therefore we must pray that our love for others would increase.

1. Increasing Love. 1 Thess. 3:12a

2. Comprehensive Love. 1 Thess. 3:12b

3. Conflict-Destroying Love. 1 Thess. 3:13, 4:6

4. Christ-Honoring Love. 1 Thess. 4:1



Discussion Questions

1. **Share** a time when your love for someone “increased and abounded”. Is there anyone in your life that you need God’s grace to increase your love for? Explain.

Answers may vary. Encourage people to think about a family member, co-worker, boyfriend/girlfriend, classmate, neighbor, etc. It may be someone they didn’t like at first but God gave capacity to grow in love. It may be someone they liked from a distance, but as they knew the other person more intimately their capacity of love grew. If applicable, ask what enabled their love to grow.

The second question is very personal. As a leader, you can encourage vulnerability by opening up about a difficult relationship you have in which you are struggling to show love. Take time to pray for one another.

2. **What** is Ordo Amoris and how might one use it to structure their prayers for others?

Ordo Amoris (Latin for order of love) is a framework seeking to describe the duty of love toward others. While Christian love is extended to all, there is an undeniable and unavoidable ordering of obligation that expresses itself in responsibility and support (see Gal. 6:10, 1 Tim. 5:8, etc). The order includes: God, family, church, Christians, non-Christians. For example, to love your spouse above God is idolatry. To provide for your neighbor’s education at the expense of your own child’s education is neglect. Warning: This principle must not be used as an excuse to neglect to do good to those on the outside edges of ordered love.

For our purposes, this list can be an easy way of ensuring love is being extended to all types of people. Starting with the person’s family, you can pray for their love for spouse, children, parents, etc to increase. Moving to the local church you can pray for their love of small group members, ministry team members, etc. to increase. You can then ask for their love toward co-workers, neighbors, etc to increase.



Discussion Questions

3. **What** types of conflicts are easiest to arise in our community and how does prayer help us love in the midst of conflict?

The very things that make our church beautiful and unique—its diversity, its location, and its inter-denominational nature—are also the sources of our greatest potential challenges. Here are some potential areas of conflict: cultural preferences & communication styles, theological & denominational differences, political and national differences, leadership and decision-making, language barriers, etc. Being aware of potential conflict helps us be proactive to pray against division, but instead ask God to get glory through our diversity (see Romans 15:5-6)

4. **Where** is the line between showing Christ-like love and compromising biblical truth? Can you think of a situation where choosing to love biblically might actually be called "unloving" by the world's standards?

Biblical love is always a combination of grace and truth. Grace without truth is liberalism (United Church of Christ). Truth without grace is legalism (Westboro Baptist). Jesus models perfectly this balance (John 1:14). To the woman at the well, He gives grace (living water) and truth (the one you're living with now is not your husband). To Peter, He gives truth (get behind me Satan) and grace (feed my sheep). Etc. As Christians, we must ensure that our love and compassion for others never supersedes our love and devotion to Christ.

Here are a few examples of Biblical love the world would call hate: church discipline, refusing to affirm sin (homosexuality, abortion, etc), evangelism to other religions (too exclusive or narrow-minded), parental discipline (vs positive parenting), submission to authority (where authority is often seen as negative), the affirmation of Biblical gender roles, etc. As Christians, we must never allow the world to define for us what love is and is not (see 1 John 2:15-17)



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