



+ **YOU**

Spring 2024  
Being an Authentic Church

**Sermon Title:** Lessons on Intercessory Prayer from the Life of Paul

**To be used with Session 3:** Growing in Christ

**Scripture:** Ephesians 3:14-19

**Connection with Bible Study:** To complement the Bible study “Growing in Christ,” this sermon will focus on one of the apostle Paul’s prayers. From Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3, we can glean some basic lessons on intercessory prayer. Paul set the example for his readers (then and now) concerning the importance of prayer in general and the vital link that God has ordained between intercessory prayer and the spiritual welfare and growth of God’s people.

**Introduction:** We sometimes think of Paul only as a great missionary and as God’s primary writer of Christian doctrine. Paul, however, was also deeply committed to the spiritual welfare of the churches (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28), a commitment he accomplished not only through preaching and teaching but also through his prayer life. Consequently, we find in his letters numerous references to his prayers for the churches, several requests that they pray for him, and at least three fairly detailed examples of his own intercessory prayers (Eph. 3:14-19; Phil. 1:3-11; Col. 1:9-14). This sermon focuses primarily on Paul’s introduction to his prayer recorded in Ephesians 3, where we can learn five basic lessons about intercessory prayer.

### 1. We must pray for others.

For Paul, praying for other believers was at the top of his list of spiritual disciplines. Paul mentioned prayer forty-one times, more than any other person in the Bible, even Jesus.<sup>1</sup> So, it is not just stating the obvious to say that the first lesson on intercessory prayer is that *we must do it*. Paul prayed for others, and so must we. In the last chapter of Ephesians, he commanded his readers, “Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request and . . . intercession for all the saints. Pray also for me” (Eph. 6:18-19).

### 2. We can always pray, even when we can do nothing else.

It is significant to note that Paul’s most notable prayers are found in three of his prison letters: Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Even though the Roman authorities had limited Paul in what he was allowed to do, he could always pray! Prison bars and Roman guards could not stop him from praying for the churches.

There are times when, for various reasons that are beyond our control, we find ourselves either unable or not permitted to minister to a person’s spiritual needs. But we can always pray! I shall never forget the last visit I made to my godly grandmother before she died. At first, I felt hurt that she didn’t recognize me, but when my mother reminded her that I was her grandson *Don A* (that’s what she used to call me), she said so sweetly, “Oh yes, I always pray

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<sup>1</sup>“All the Prayers of Paul,” Christ Centered, <https://christcentred.wordpress.com/2013/03/12/all-the-prayers-of-paul/> (accessed December 12, 2023).

for him.” How precious that was to me. My grandmother had reached the place in her life where she could do very little even for herself. But one thing she could do. She could pray. I have often thought that when she passed away, I had lost a significant intercessor in my life.

**3. Our prayers are equally as important as our works.**

We must qualify the previous point by saying Paul did not pray for the Ephesian church only because his imprisonment made it impossible to do anything else. We can be sure that Paul would have prayed the same prayer even if he had been free to minister to them in person. The point for us is a needed one. Prayer and ministry are essential companions. As the apostles declared in Acts 6:4, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Adrian Rogers used to say, “We can do more than pray after we’ve prayed, but we can do no more than pray until we’ve prayed.”<sup>2</sup>

**4. We must acknowledge the glory of the One to whom our petitions are made.**

When Paul said, “I kneel before the Father” (v. 15), he was emphasizing the posture of the mind and heart in prayer, not the body. In prayer we can raise hands, bow the head, bend the knees, and even prostrate the body (all these postures are exemplified in Scripture), but if our minds and hearts do not humbly acknowledge both our unworthiness and the glory of God “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,” should we expect Him to answer our petitions?

**5. We must focus on spiritual needs more than on physical/material needs.**

Paul’s intercessory prayers were decidedly spiritual in content. Nearly every one of Paul’s prayers focused on the spiritual strength and welfare of others. Even when he asked for prayer, his requests were never self-serving. Rather, he asked for spiritual strength and effectiveness in ministering the word of God (Eph. 6:19).

The mindset of our western culture tends to elevate the importance of the physical/material above the spiritual. Our prayer meetings tend to focus too much on things like sister whatsit’s ingrown toenail or brother whosit’s bad back. There is a place for these kinds of prayers in the family of God, but they should not become the priority over spiritual needs.

**Conclusion:** The apostle Paul understood the vital connection that exists between intercessory prayer and a spiritually healthy and growing church. Therefore, this type of praying must hold a preeminent place in the prayer life of the church today. The potential power of intercessory prayer is indisputable because the source it taps into (God Himself) is limitless. His answers to our petitions are “according to the riches of his glory” (v. 16).

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<sup>2</sup>Adrian Rogers, *Adrianisms: The Wit and Wisdom of Adrian Rogers* (Memphis, Tennessee: Love Worth Finding Ministries, 2011), 45.