

Question: Have you ever wished somebody would teach you to pray?

Today we are going to learn from one of the best – a man known for his prayer life

We continue our look at Paul's prayer we started in v. 14

Eph 3:14–21 (ESV) For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ⁽¹⁵⁾ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ⁽¹⁶⁾ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ⁽¹⁷⁾ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ⁽¹⁸⁾ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ⁽¹⁹⁾ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ⁽²⁰⁾ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ⁽²¹⁾ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

1. One of the great values of Paul's prayers is they are so instructive

- A. Today we are going to listen in on Paul's communication with his father
 - 1). We are going to see the primary focus of prayer
 - 2). We are going to see what the Spirit uses to strengthen us in the inner man

2. Our outline

- A. The focus of Paul's prayer
- B. Take a quick look at the "Inner man"

I. THE FOCUS OF PAUL'S PRAYER

Eph 3:16 (ESV) that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

1. First thing we notice in this prayer – it is primarily about spiritual things

- A. He doesn't seem to be focused on what we concentrate on in prayer
 - 1). Our prayers are usually centered on our needs and getting relief from trouble
 - 2). We fill our time with asking for provision, healing, personal advancement
- B. But Paul is sitting in prison and there is nothing about being released – gaining freedom
 - 1). Perhaps he prayed about that at times – but his focus was on God – spiritual matters
 - 2). He is simply following the exhortation of his Lord

Mt 6:33 (ESV) But *seek first the kingdom of God* and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

- a). Jesus was teaching those worried about temporal things of life - Necessities
- b). He says your starting point is all wrong – seek God first – then your life begins to line up
 - 1a). Get the center right and everything else will align around it properly

Point: Paul's prayer reflects that kind of thinking – his main concern is the spiritual

- A. He knows when that is aligned he can then rest in God
 - 1). But when that is skewed all of life will be fragmented – disjointed
- B. I think if we learn this lesson – if our prayers were more about spiritual matters - growth
 - 1). We would need to spend less time praying about our temporal situations
 - 2). Isn't the promise: Put the spiritual first and God will begin to take care of the rest

2. Balance: Does this mean we never pray about needs – temporal matters – No

- A. But there needs to be a balance in how we pray for them
- B. In the Lord's prayer - Jesus taught us to pray about our temporal daily needs

Mt 6:11 (ESV) Give us this day our daily bread,

- 1). But that wasn't the starting point in that prayer – there was much before it
Mt 6:9–11 (ESV) Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ⁽¹¹⁾ **(THEN)** Give us this day our daily bread,
 - a). Our Father = Relationship and intimacy
 - b). Hallowed be your name = Reverence and worship
 - c). Your kingdom come, your will be done = Listening and surrender
- 2). This is putting God and his kingdom first isn't it?
 THEN we ask for our daily needs – knowing they will be provided
Why? Because of the promise: Mt 6:33 (ESV) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
 - a). That is the order of the Lord's prayer isn't it?
 - b). And it is the example of Paul's prayers recorded in Scripture

Question: But do I really have to ask if I seek his kingdom first? Yes!

Isn't seeking first meeting the condition so all that I need just flows in? No!

A. We get the balance in James

Jas 4:2 (ESV) ... You do not have, because you do not ask.

Question: But If I meet the condition why do I have to ask?

A. Because God wants to maximize the situation for your good

- 1). Answered prayer accelerates our spiritual growth – our faith increases
 - a). We are amazed at God - We are thankful – we worship and praise him
 - b). And another answered prayer goes into our memory bank that increases our confidence
- 2). We grow in our love for God

Ps 116:1 (NLT) I love the LORD because he hears and answers my prayers

C. There are two conditions in having our every need met by God

- 1). He says to “seek him and his kingdom first” = the condition of priority
- 2). Then we must ask –
 - a). God waits until we ask so we don't miss out on what answered prayer will do in our lives

Summary: The Bible teaches us we are to pray for our needs BUT that is not to be our focus

A. God is to be first in all things – his kingdom

- 1). Our prayers should be spiritual – worshipful – praying about our spiritual condition...

Transition: I think we are at such an important idea here – how we approach all of life and its troubles

A. It is these kind of truths that take us from the shallows of the faith into the deep - maturity

B. This prayer of Paul shows us the lens the NT writers looked at life through

3. The Spiritual approach to life's troubles

A. The NT writers didn't treat problems lightly – as if they were no big deal

- 1). That is how psychology treats problems – Not Christianity
 - a). Psychology is primarily concerned with happiness – temporal relief
 If you leave the office a bit happier – that is success
 - 1a). Even though you may not be prepared any better to face the next crisis
 - b). My experience – after bad trip on Acid – thinking I was going crazy
 Create a safe room in my mind – but I had to leave that room – mind games

B. Christianity doesn't minimize problems at all

It doesn't even promise that the situation that is causing the problems will change quickly

- 1). Joel Osteen may tell you that God's desire is to fulfill all your wildest dreams

That he wants to make everything in your life easy – abundance

- 2). But what does the Bible say?

Jn 16:33 (ESV) I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Php 1:29 (ESV) For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

2 Ti 3:12 (ESV) Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

- C. Why do these things come into our life – Because God is concerned with our character

- 1). The Spirit is determined to change me from being Bill-like to being Christ-like

Point: When Paul prays for the Spirit to strengthen us in the inner man

- A. One thing he is praying about is that the Spirit will use our trouble to change us

- 1). That is exactly what our trials do – they come as helpers to make us more like God’s Son
2). Therefore the Bible tells us how to view these friends – how to pray when we are struggling

Transition: Let’s trace this through the Bible – hopefully this will change the way we pray

4. The teaching of James

Jas 1:2–4 (ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ⁽³⁾ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁽⁴⁾ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- A. I can only have joy in my trials because if I **KNOW** something – the value of the trial

- 1). They are producing in me a quality I need today so badly = steadfastness – endurance
a). That ability to carry on doing the right thing no matter the resistance

- B. That quality is becoming more and more important as we see our society turn against God

AND that quality is essential if we are going to grow in Christlikeness

Jas 1:4 (ESV) And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- 1). As I persevere doing the right thing against resistance – Christian character is produced
2). That is what Paul said in Romans 5

Ro 5:3–5 (ESV) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁽⁴⁾ *and endurance produces character...*

- C. But James adds something that is missed so often – but so important for our study

Jas 1:5 (ESV) If any of you lacks wisdom, *let him ask God*, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

- 1). Here is Prayer in our time of trouble - Let him ask God for wisdom - wisdom about what?
a). CONTEXT - What went before this verse? The Trial
2). In other words be more spiritual in your prayers when you are in a trial
a). Don’t only concentrate on relief – getting rid of the trouble as soon as possible
b). Ask for wisdom – “What am I supposed to be learning? Are you trying to change something?”
1a). How do I react in a way that brings you glory in this?
2a). How do I put you first in this?

- 3). When you pray like that you are praying a NT prayer

- a). You are lining up with Paul in this verse

Asking that the Spirit strengthens you in the inner man through the trial

- D. This is how we maximize the trial – how we use it for our benefit – NOT ALL DO

Heb 12:11 (ESV) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness *to those who have been trained by it.*

- 1). Not all are trained by trials
 - a). Not all will care about spiritual growth – not all will want the trial to change them
 - b). Not all will pray to God for wisdom – what is he wanting to accomplish
 - c). Not all will want to bring him glory in their reactions
- 2). The trial for some is just wasted pain – but here’s the thing - *it will be a repeated pain*
 - a). God is working on something – get it over with – pray for wisdom – respond correctly
Why run that lap over again?

Transition: We’ve seen how Paul prays – it lines up with James – let’s grab an example from his life

5. The example of this in Paul’s life – turn to 2 Cor 12:7

The trial: 2 Co 12:7–10 (ESV) So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

- A. Because of Paul’s great vision of heaven – God sent a humbling trial to protect him from pride
- B. Like us – Paul didn’t see the benefit at first

The Prayer: ⁽⁸⁾ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

- A. Paul prayed for release – but the way it was answered it must have also been for wisdom

The Answer: ⁽⁹⁾ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

- A. Paul gets God’s answer and the Spirit uses that wisdom to strengthen him greatly in the inner man
 - 1). Paul this is why I sent it – this is why it is necessary

The Response. The Growth: Therefore (**Now that I have prayed and received wisdom**) I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ⁽¹⁰⁾ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- A. Look at how the Spirit strengthened him because he prayed
 - 1). All those things I wanted to get rid of – I now joyfully embrace
 - 2). Because I see what they are doing – they are driving me to Christ and to grace
 - a). Instead of depending upon my own power – I now depend upon his
 - b). THAT is being strengthened in the inner man
 - 3). It came about through prayer in the trial *and listening*
 - a). It wasn’t just a – get this away from me – see you God
 - b). Paul had a spiritual mindset – he prayed and listened and learned
 - 1a). The Spirit used the wisdom he received to strengthen him
- B. This is how the NT writers viewed all of life – their prayers reflected their focus focus on the spiritual
 - 1). God was always primary – his kingdom always first
 - 1). They prayed about their spiritual condition – they desired to be more like Christ

Transition: Again there is nothing wrong with praying for temporal matters – just keep priorities right

6. The example of Jesus in the garden (always our greatest example)

- A. We find Jesus praying for the temporal – but watch what his priority is
 - 1). It is the night before the cross – his greatest trial

Mt 26:39 (ESV) And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; *nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*”

- a). He prays about the temporal without losing the proper balance
“Father if it be possible could you remove this trial?”

Now the proper priority: “But Nevertheless thy will be done not mine”

- B. That is the example of how we are to face life – how we are to pray

“Lord I’d like this sickness, financial crisis, problem to be removed *but thy will be done*. If you have chosen this for me, then show me how to use it for your glory. Use it for my growth. Use it to draw me closer to you. Help me to handle it in such a way the world sees the reality of you in my life.”

- 1). Give me the wisdom I need to maximize the benefits of this trial in my life

Transition: That brings us to the thought of the necessity of prayer to keep praying like this

7. The necessity of prayer to persevere in seeking the kingdom first

A. There will be times when it is hard – you will feel like giving up

- 1). You will be tempted to get bitter at God – to stop pressing on to bring him glory
- 2). You will be tempted to go back to the world – try something easier for a time

B. This was godly Asaph – Psalm 73 - he was experiencing great trials in his life

- 1). He looked at the unbeliever who seemed to have it so easy – no problems at all
- 2). He said I was thinking like a brute beast – my feet had almost slipped
 - a). I was ready to pack it in and give their life a try for awhile
- 3). But he says that all changed when he got into God’s presence = Prayer
 - a). He saw the foolishness of choosing sin – the wisdom of living for God
 - b). He was strengthened and encouraged by the Spirit of God

He finishes: Psa 73:24-26 (NIV) You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. (25) Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (26) My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

- 1a). In his trouble he prayed and he listened – and he was strengthened
- 2a). It moves him for wanting to quit to worship and joy
- 3a). He prayed AND he listened – God help me – give me wisdom

C. How important this is when troubles is upon us – to seek him like this – to NOT stop praying

- 1). This is a vital element in the Spirit strengthening you in the inner man
- 2). Jesus said this is necessary to persevere in this life that has so much trouble in it

Lk 18:1 (ESV) And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

- a). If you want to avoid being conquered – giving up = You must be a person of prayer
- b). Jesus says there are two options – Pray and stand – stop praying and lose heart
 - 1a). Won’t be strengthened in inner man – you’ll be devoured by discouragement...

3). We see both these options lived out in the Garden of Gethsemane

- a). The night before the cross Jesus is with the Apostles
- b). He goes off to pray to the Father – leaving them – expecting them to pray – but they don’t

Mat 26:40-41 (NIV) Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. (41) **THE WARNING:** "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

- 1a). Luke 18 – Pray so you’ll be strengthened in the inner man or lose heart
- 2a). Matt 26 – Pray so you’ll be strengthened or fall into temptation
- c). They didn’t pray and they fell – Jesus is arrested and they scatter – abandon him
 - 1a). No prayer and your flesh will conquer you
- 4). Jesus on the other hand – praying as a man – depending upon the strength of the Spirit
 - a). He prays – gets up and is strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit
He walks resolutely to the soldiers to be arrested
 - 1a). Many believe he won that battle on his knees – strengthened by the Spirit

- b). He didn't pray like we do – we would have stopped at “Take this cup away”
 - 1a). He continued “But nevertheless thy will be done NOT my will”
 - 2a). He was strengthened by the Spirit to be able to go to the cross

Thought: Scripture after scripture telling us how important prayer is

- A. And giving us the example of what a Biblical prayer looks like
 - 1). Prayer should always have God, his glory and his kingdom at the forefront
 - 2). There is nothing wrong in praying for the temporal just keep the priority straight

Transition: We are running out of time – probably should look at what the inner man is a bit

III. THE INNER MAN

Eph 3:16 (ESV) that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

1. The inner man (being) defined in 2 Cor 4:16

2 Co 4:16 (ESV) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our *inner self* (inner man) is being renewed day by day.

- A. Scripture tells us we have two principals at war within us

Rom 7:21-23 (NIV) So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. (22) For in my *inner being* I delight in God's law; (23) *but I see another law at work in the members of my body, (the flesh)* waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

- 1). The outward man – only concerned with fulfilling the desires of the flesh
- 2). The inner man – delights in obeying God – pleasing him
 - a). This is that new us in Christ – that new creation – that has no desire for sin at all

Thought: This is why holiness is not easy at times – why we still feel a tug towards sin

- A. That new us longs for God and his way – that flesh loves sin and resists holiness

Ro 7:21 (ESV) So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

- B. It is so important that you understand this – to help you in your walk – your disciplines

- 1). This tells us why it is so hard to read our Bible – go to church – pray - witness
There is this enemy in you that resists all that

Ga 5:17 (ESV) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

- 2). This means you must come to a place where you do what you KNOW you must do

No matter if you feel like it or not

- a). Bible – prayer – church – fellowship – are things the Spirit uses to strengthen you in the inner man
- b). But to be disciplined at these you must not let your feelings control you
 - 1a). Because MANY TIMES you will NOT feel like doing this

Transition: So the inner man and the outer man are in conflict

- A. I wanted to point this out so you'll understand why you have that struggle

- 1). And accept the fact that you will do what you need to do much of the time against resistance

- B. Let's end on a high note – the blessings of the inner man

2. The blessings of the inner man

- A. Because of this inner man the believer can find joy and peace in this life

Listen to what Paul says: 2 Co 4:16 (ESV) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our *inner self* is being renewed day by day.

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- 1). He had been beaten so many times – imprisoned – body failing – eye problems
He was a very sick man – his outer self was wasting away before my very eyes
 - B. Was he defeated by that? Did he cling to the physical so much he lost all his joy
 - 1). No! He is honest about his physical condition – I’m wasting away
 - 2). But he has this inner man – the new him that is concentrating on the spiritual
 - a). Watch what it does - I’m getting weaker physically *but* I’m getting stronger spiritually
Things of the world are starting to slip away – *but* my experience of God is getting better
 - b). I have this new part of me that delights in God, his kingdom, spiritual growth
 - 1a). All that I really care about is getting better – this brings me great joy
 - 3). This is a man who has been strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit
 - a). All the trials he prayed about and grew in are paying big dividends here at the end
 - b). All his time in the word – prayer – fellowship have left a man who is content
 - Thought:** If the spiritual is your priority rather than the material – you can have this great joy
 - A. But if you are dependent upon circumstances for your joy – good luck with that
 - 1). Circumstances are as unstable as water – they change constantly – taking you up and DOWN
 - B. But if your priority is Spiritual – if you are putting God and his kingdom first – you can rest!
 - 1). You KNOW all that you need will be provided – that is God’s promise to you
 - 2). If Christ is your treasure – the world has nothing that can rob the joy that brings
 - C. If that is your priority it changes how you view everything
 - 1). Trials are seen as servants that draw you further from the world and closer to God
 - a). They are the tools the Spirit uses to strengthen your inner man
 - 2). If you are trained by them – an interesting warning in Hebrews
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CONCLUSION

1. So what did we see today

- A. We saw how prayer is to be focused on the spiritual more than the material
 - 1). I think many of us have reversed that
The problem is we don’t grow from our trials – we aren’t trained
- B. Let’s measure our prayer life up against the NT writers and see how they compare
 - 1). If we will shift it a bit more – we will begin to grow
The Spirit will begin to use those things that come into our life to strengthen us
 - a). It will all become valuable
- C. I think we took a big step – if we respond – towards Christian maturity this morning