**When and What to Pray for your Friends**

Prayer – 3 weeks @ start of year.

* Fact is, I’ve yet to meet someone who thinks they have nailed this one.
* All learning – hear me pray and wish you could pray like that – I know there are others who are way further along than me.
* One way to learn is just to be with others who can pray – spend some time with Apostle Paul this morning. Listen to him praying for his friends – learn.

Read Phil 1:3-11

When? What?

**When to pray for your friends?**

1st/last thing? Lunchtime? Sunday mornings? Prayer meeting? When something goes wrong? Never?

Paul did a lot of praying[[1]](#endnote-1):

**Rom 1:9-10** “…constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times”

**2Thes 1:11** “…we constantly pray for you…”

**2Tim 1:3** “…night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers”

Feeling a bit intimidated? Thinking: alright for him, but I can’t do that! I think he found prayer hard too because we all do. One of his strategies:

**Philippians 1:3** I thank my God every time I remember you.

Letter to church in Philippi – I pray for you every time I think of you. Every time you come to mind –stop – pray. Not restricted to a particular slot during the week.

* They’re on his mind a lot – they’re his friends. **v4** In *all* my prayers for *all* of you, I *always* pray with joy
* Every time – prays for them.

Nice model – those who find it hard to concentrate – all different – lots of short bursts of prayer throughout the day.

* Make a phone call – pray; answer the door; write an email; walk into a building; shops; start of shift; start of lunch break; get in the car; get out of car. See someone you know in the street.
* Ever made a phone call – they’ve forgot to hang up? Hear what’s going on. Can be like that with prayer – don’t ever hang up. If one long call a day doesn’t work for you, just keep the line open. “Constantly remembering…”
* Caveat: can’t base your whole prayer life on this. Quick prayers: Answer door – “Lord, help me to be truthful & honest”, Not, “Thank you glorious Father for your bounteous provision of a home to live in...” Quick prayers – not much depth, but a lot of breadth – constant reminder that we need the Lord’s help – dependent not independent.
* When to pray for your friends? Every time you think of them!

**What to pray for your friends?**

V9 – “this is my prayer” – this is what he actually says to God – things he’s asking for his friends.

**1st thing: Their love for God will run deep**

**Philippians 1:9** And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight…

Prayer: ‘You love God. Let that love deepen – may it have depth to it. May it be based on knowledge. When you say you love God, may that have some depth to it – some understanding behind it.’

Eg. Imagine you ask me what I think about Wendy…

I love Wendy.

 *Why?*

I love her.

 *But what do you love about her?*

She’s lovely.

 *But precisely what is it about her that you love?*

I love her.

...What do you think? Kinda shallow!

Try again: imagine you ask me what I think about Wendy…

I love her because of her heart. She’s hardworking, always giving her time, energy, money to other people; She cares about people – their welfare, future, joy; Shares same priorities in life as me – God, me, family, people, her; She’s not too fussed about money or material things – she’d be content with less or more than we have now; She’s in life for the long-haul – doesn’t give up on people easily, makes long-term plans – patient and doesn’t mind waiting; respect her understanding of the Bible – she sets me straight sometimes – puts God 1st most of the time and feels bad when she doesn’t – says sorry when she’s wrong. Wonderful mother - and she’s gorgeous – and mine!

What do you think now – not shallow – knows this person! His love is abounding in knowledge and depth of insight! And with a woman, there’s always more to learn!

Same with the Lord. When you first come to know him – saved from your sins – wow – feels great. Love him because he first loved me! Nice, but we’ve not then “arrived” – that’s the very, very start of knowing God – infinitely more to know.

1 quick example – lots of Christians think a bit like this:

* God the Father is scary and angry and wants to blast us because he’s holy and we’re not.
* God the Son (Jesus) is nice and friendly. Jesus loves us and shields us from the Father who is kind of distant and unknowable. Jesus pleads with the Father to be nice to us.
* God the Spirit is mysterious and gives us goose-bumps when the music team play our favourite worship song.

All the above is complete rubbish.

* Jesus does not try to convince the Father to love us. Father – loves. Primary characteristic – love. 1 word. “God is love”.
* Because the Father loves us, he sends the Son into the world to die for us. Son does that because he loves the Father. Because the Father loves, he sends the Son. The Son obeys because he loves the Father.
* And the Spirit enables us to know that love for ourselves. He is the one who opens our eyes to see, our minds to understand. The Spirit pours the love of the Father into us by making us understand what the Son has done for us.

This is what Paul wants for people – this is his big prayer – that we’ll know God – deeply. Understand the character and personality of God – how the Trinity interacts – how and why he does the things he does.

**2nd thing: Because they love deeply, their hearts will change**

Flowing out from knowing God deeply is heart-change:

**Philippians 1:9** And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness

If you know God deeply you will be changed. Can’t stay the same – once you know this God your heart will be affected by him. You’ll either turn and run *to* him, or you’ll run *from* him.

* If you don’t believe – if you’re still in the darkness, the more you know, the less you’ll like[[2]](#endnote-2). Why?
	+ By nature we like darkness (sin) instead of light.
	+ Change picture: Because he demands to be #1 – and you will do everything you can to keep that place for yourself.
* But if he’s saved you – opened your heart – if the Holy Spirit has come in and made you see – you will change as you come to know him better.

So let’s say you know God better – this is Paul’s prayer – what then?

Purpose – not just head-knowledge - “so that” (v10)

* “you may be able to discern what is best”
* “may be pure and blameless”
* “filled with the fruit of righteousness”

No time to look at this in detail – maybe in LG. Basically all the same thing.

Life throws us into all kinds of situations – what should I do? What to discern what is best in any given situation? Want to know the right thing to do? It’s to be pure and blameless – always do the right thing. The fruit of righteousness – fruit of the Holy Spirit - is being pure and blameless, which is doing the right thing.

Nutshell: It’s Christian maturity – spiritual growth. And you get it from understanding what God says about himself in the Bible. And copying it. Theology -> behaviour. That’s why we don’t shy away from theology here. Changes people! Deep theology -> deep change.

So let’s say your friends come to know God better – Bible – lives slowly change (and it is slow – fruit doesn’t appear overnight, have to patiently wait for it!) This is what Paul is praying for. What then? Is that the goal – lives changed? Is there anything more – is there a greater purpose to it? Deeper reason to pray?

**3rd thing: Love deeply -> hearts change -> God is glorified**

Yes: (end of v11) “to the glory and praise of God”

Know God -> changed lives -> God gets all the glory. Makes him bigger & more wonderful in the eyes of people. That’s what Paul wants – glory and praise of God – for God to be elevated – lifted up – for people to praise him.

Jesus said it too, This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”

Hallowed – lit. Sanctified – set apart – made special – different from us – elevated above us. God – make your name great! God – be worshipped! God – be praised in our midst!

When we pray for our friends like Paul did, this is what we do: Pray they might know God better – lives are changed – God is glorified. That’s what prayer is all about. That’s why we pray – in the end it’s for the glory of God. *“Transforming lives for the glory of God”* that’s what we’re about as a church – and that’s why we pray.

So practically speaking, what do we do with this?

We’ve seen what Paul prayed for his friends. Prays for “spiritual” things – knowing God better, discernment, purity, Spirit of God to be working – spiritual growth. General pattern in NT – prayer for spiritual growth. At least twice as much as prayer for anything else[[3]](#endnote-3). All sorts of other things too – proportion.

Challenge. What sorts of things do we pray for people? Is it just bodies and practical things? Nothing wrong with that – but Paul’s prayers are mostly not that sort[[4]](#endnote-4).

Thinking – how can I do that? Can’t do those words, flowery prayers like Paul. Doesn’t just happen overnight – wake up one morning – Pow! – I can pray like a Puritan. No – learned:

* Know God better – develop in prayer – understand who he is – want to pray – natural instinct. Instead of just saying, “Lord, I love you” – can say why. “Father my heart loves you because you first loved me and sent your Son to die in my place. Thank you for your Spirit who opened my eyes to see and understand your love”.
	+ Know him by digging deep into the Word. Do everything you can to understand this better. New series.
* Just do it. Whether you pray for 10sec or 10 hours – just do it.
	+ Personal, constant, keeping the line open – daily minute-by-minute dependence on God.
	+ Deeper prayer for spiritual growth – yourself & friends. Most of us find it happens easier with other people.

Finally, don’t miss out. There’s joy in praying for other people.

“I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel.” (v4)

Seeing other people change and grow and mature – brings joy to your own heart. Most amazing thing – God asks us to pray for each other – he ordains that change happens when we pray for each other. Makes a difference – he changes things in response to our prayers - “praying causes things to happen that wouldn’t happen if you didn’t pray”[[5]](#endnote-5). He chooses to order the universe in response to our prayers. One day, we’ll find out just how much difference our prayers have made. Think we’ll be surprised.

**John 16:24** Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

As a church, we want to experience joy don’t we? Want all that God offers – all he has for us. Praying for each other is one way of getting joy.

* On your own – lifestyle of prayer
* Small groups – LG, 2s, 3s, prayer meetings – lots of ways.
* Don’t let’s neglect it and miss out on the joy that God offers.

General resources:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/pray-like-this-hallowed-be-your-name>

Discussion questions:

1. Most of us find prayer hard. What reasons are there for that? (Don’t see the importance? Easily distracted? Don’t have the right words? Cold hearts? Not organised enough?)
2. What do you think of the “keeping the line open” idea? Do you do that already? Is it likely to be a helpful idea to you? Or do you prefer a special time set apart each day?
3. What are the benefits to praying with other people? (Learn from each other, encourage each other, fewer distractions?)
4. Look at the things Paul prayed for (footnote 3). What things do we pray for most? Are our priorities in prayer the same as Paul’s?
5. Have you ever experienced real joy in prayer? What happened?
1. Also Eph 1:16, Col 1:9, 1Thes 1:3, 2Tim 1:3, Phm 1:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John 3:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Brief survey of the subjects Paul mentions in prayer. It’s very rough and ready, but makes the point:

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| Visits | Rom 1:10, 1Thes 3:10, Phm 1:22 | 3 |
| Don’t know what to ask | Rom 8:26 | 1 |
| Israel | Rom 10:1 | 1 |
| Safety | Acts 27:29, Rom 15:31, 2Cor 1:11, 2Thes 3:2 | 4 |
| Thanks | 2Cor 9:14, 1Thes 1:2, Phm 1:4 | 3 |
| Spiritual growth | Rom 15:31, 2Cor 13:7, 2Cor 13:9, Eph 1:16, Eph 1:18, Eph 3:16, Eph 3:17, Eph 6:18, Eph 6:20, Phil 1:9, Col 1:9, Col 4:4, 2Thes 1:11-12, Phm 1:6 | 14 |
| Practical/general | Eph 6:18, Phil 1:19, Phil 4:6, 1Thes 5:25, 1Tim 5:5 | 5 |
| Evangelism | Acts 26:29, Eph 6:20, Col 4:3, 2Thes 3:1 | 4 |
| Rulers/leaders | 1Tim 2:1 | 1 |

 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Some might argue, “he’s an apostle - a leader - and he prays as a leader for the people who look to him for leadership. Those sort of “spiritual” prayers are for leaders to pray for others, not for ordinary Christians.” Well, Paul asks for many of these things for himself, so he has the expectation that the ordinary people that he’s writing to will pray these kinds of prayers too. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/pray-like-this-hallowed-be-your-name> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)