

What Do You Pray For?

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[0 : 00] What have you been praying about this week? I'm going to assume that just about everyone in this room, we have prayed at least once this week.

Well, what specifically have you asked God to do in your life or in the life of the people you pray for? Now, from my observation, from what I've heard as a pastor for many years, and I'm going to say a lot of you know this, being in prayer meetings, being in Sunday school, most Christians make physical health, physical needs their top priority in prayer, or at least their top priority when it comes to making a public prayer request or praying publicly.

Why is that? Why do we mostly pray about, at least publicly, physical things?

Well, sometimes it's very obvious that we need to pray about physical health and issues. COVID-19, for example, that has been a central focus of many people's prayers over the last 10 months.

And if you haven't prayed about this, I don't understand you. I cannot imagine how any Christian has not been praying that God would bring about an end of this pandemic.

[1 : 38] I know a lot of you are like me. I have prayed that my family members and this church family would be spared, that we would not come down with it.

If we did, we would not, you know, have any serious or long-lasting effects from it. It's natural for us to pray about some physical health issues, matters, physical needs at times.

I mean, who wouldn't? But at the same time, we need to understand, that is not the biblical focus of prayer. The Bible does not make physical needs the priority of prayer, either by instruction or by example.

Jesus taught us about how to pray. Matthew chapter 6, Luke chapter 11. When Jesus taught, this is how you should pray, He said, in effect, that our priority should be to focus on God, to honor Him, to seek His will, and to ask for help to live in a right relationship with Him and other people.

That's why there's such a strong emphasis on forgiveness, and especially on forgiving other people. Now, when you read the prayers of the apostles in the New Testament, and I'm thinking specifically of Paul, their top priority is for Christians to honor God and seek to grow spiritually in their prayer requests.

[3 : 29] Now, I want to reemphasize. I am not in any way saying that it's wrong, that it's unimportant to pray about physical needs.

It is not. In fact, Jesus did teach us to ask for our daily bread in that model prayer, didn't He? And when He was talking about praying for our daily bread, He wasn't talking about literally just bread, but daily necessities.

Paul sometimes asks Christians to pray for His safety or for His deliverance. So, don't take what I'm saying here at the beginning wrong.

It is not wrong. It is good. It is healthy. It is normal for you to pray for physical situations, health, needs, in your life, in the life of people that you know and love and care about.

But most of what we see in the New Testament about prayer is that spiritual needs take priority over physical needs.

[4 : 43] And we need to apply that to ourselves and how we pray and then how we pray about other people. Paul provides us with a great example of this kind of prayer in Philippians chapter 1.

I want you to turn with me if you would because I'm not going to put all of these verses on the screen at this time. We will look at them individually a little bit later on. Let's look at Philippians chapter 1 verses 9 through 11.

I only referred to this last week. We didn't get into it at all. We're talking about how to make the best of the bad situation. And one of the ways we need to, one of the things we need to do is pray.

Well, now we're going to look at how we should pray. Look at this. Philippians 1, 9. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

I want us to look at this as an example of the kinds of things that we need to be asking God for for ourselves and for the people in our lives that we really are concerned about and praying for on a regular basis.

[6 : 12] I'm talking about your family members, your friends, this church family. Let's look at it. First, pray for yourself and others to grow in love.

First prayer request, pray for yourself and others to grow in love. Look at it in verse 9, the first part. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.

We need to make it a practice to ask God to help us to grow in our love. Now I want you to know that Paul does not ask for us to develop love and there's a reason for that.

He's writing to Christians. He knows these Christians. You can read verses 3 through 8 and see that he has a good relationship with them, he loves them and they love him.

But Paul knows that people who are Christians, they've been born again by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God lives within them. And the Spirit of God when he comes to indwell us, he plants what we could consider seeds of love within our heart.

[7 : 27] If you are a Christian, there is love within you by virtue of the fact that the Holy Spirit lives within you. So we don't have to pray for love if we're Christians.

It is there. But what we do need to pray for is that it will grow more and more every day, abounding more and more, that it will mature.

Now, note that Paul does not specify the object of our love. He doesn't say, you know, pray for, that we'll love God, love people, or whatever. He just says that our love will abound more and more.

And so we can apply that, at least initially, broadly. We need to pray that we'll love God more. We need to pray that we'll love other Christians more.

We need to pray that we'll love people in general more. You know, love is to be the defining characteristic of us as followers of Jesus, isn't it?

[8 : 28] It is the essential Christian quality. There's a strong emphasis in the New Testament, especially that we will love our brothers and sisters in Christ. I really believe that's what Paul is specifically thinking of as he writes this.

There were some problems in this church, a lack of unity. There was some division. And we'll see some of that as we go through this letter over the next several weeks. This is surprising.

But in chapter 4, Paul calls two women by name and basically tells them to tone it down. Now you can imagine church gathering.

There's two women there. And Paul calls them out for their lack of, for a better way to express it right now, loving one another as they should. They don't get along.

You think you've had your toes stepped on by some preacher before? Never, most likely, have you had your name called and say to stop sinning like this publicly.

[9 : 40] But Paul did. So there are some problems. But overall, this is the best church that Paul has a relationship with. It's a positive letter. There's a lot of gratitude and love expressed.

But he is emphasizing here our love for one another, brothers and sisters in Christ. It should be growing.

Our relationship should be deepening is what he's talking about. Jesus said this kind of love would be the distinguishing mark of his followers.

Look at this from John 13. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. Now think about that. Jesus told his disciples all the things that he had taught them about how they should think, how they should believe, how they should live.

The thing that should set you apart as uniquely as being my disciple is your love for one another. Your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

[10 : 46] John, the apostle, emphasizes this in his first letter. Look at it. And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Now think about that. Sometimes we might think to ourselves, well I truly do love God. It's people I have problems with. I can say that too. But we can't accept that.

John is issuing a command. Look at it. And this commandment we have from him. Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

By describing love as a commandment, he's talking about it being, about love as being more an act of the will than a, what you'd call feeling of the heart.

Christian love, when you think about what it is, it is not hallmark kind of love. It's not the, you know, the fuzzy, warm feelings that you see on the hallmark channel or in hallmark cards or anything like that.

[12 : 02] Now hopefully we have some healthy, appropriate feelings of love for people. But this is a commandment.

We're talking about how we act, how we treat people. One of the best definitions I've ever heard of Christian love is seeking to meet people's needs. Now, that's why Paul prays that the Philippians love will grow.

we need it to. It's an act of the will. It's not always how we feel. But I want you to note, it's not open-ended about our love growing more and more.

He says that our love should grow in knowledge and discernment. Look at this. Ask God to help your love to grow in knowledge and discernment. Verse 9, it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

Our love needs to be an informed love. We need to be growing in knowledge. James Boyce, the pastor and commentator, says that the word translated knowledge here always means spiritual knowledge when it is found in the New Testament.

[13 : 20] So here's what we need to pray. We need to pray for ourselves and for other people that we will grow in our knowledge of God, who He is, in our knowledge of His will, knowledge of His ways so that we might be able to obey Him, please Him, serve Him.

Now, how are we going to acquire such knowledge of God? It's not that you strain and pray, Lord, help me to know You better. We study His word.

See, God has revealed Himself as He wants us to know Him, His ways and His will in the Bible. And so if we're going to grow in our knowledge of God, of spiritual things, we've got to read and study the Bible.

We should pray that God will help us through His indwelling Spirit, help us to understand what we read. It's not enough just to read the Bible. You know, if you do your, if you're doing, it is good to read through the Bible in a year.

It is good to have a planned reading program. Don't misunderstand. But never open your Bible in the morning and just read it so you can say, I read it.

[14 : 35] Read the Bible. If you don't have time but to read a verse or two, read the Bible with a prayer. Lord, help me to understand what You are saying in this passage and how I can apply it, how I can do it, how I can obey You in it.

So let me just ask you. Pause right here for a minute. Are you praying such prayers for yourself? God, help me grow in my love for You, for people.

God, help me to grow in my knowledge of You and Your ways and Your will. Help me to know You better. Help me to know how to please You in just my everyday living.

Are you praying such prayers? Are you praying those kind of prayers for the people that, let's just say, you pray for every day or you pray for regularly?

Is that the kind of prayer you're praying for your children, for your grandchildren, for your parents, for good friends? don't just pray that they won't get sick.

[15 : 51] Don't just pray that they won't die. Pray that they will truly grow if they're Christians in their love and in their knowledge of God and His ways so that they can live their life in such a way as to please God.

God, that's what all of us need to be doing on a regular basis when it comes to how we pray. We're also, notice here, we're to pray for ourselves and others to grow in our ability to express Christian love in our relationships with others.

I'm just throwing this in. This is not actually a part of the text. What I'm doing is applying this. I sort of got ahead of myself. God is not impressed with us just having knowledge.

It's not enough to read the Bible to be able to quote it. God wants us to be able to understand and put it into practice in our lives.

Now, we're talking about love. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, Paul describes what love looks like when it's practiced among Christians.

[17 : 04] I want you to look at this. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist in its own way.

It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Are you asking God to help you to love like that? Are you asking God to help you to be more patient with certain people in your life?

Are you asking God to help you to not be irritable and a grouch and just a negative person? Are you asking God to not gloat, to not feel good when someone that you really don't like, something bad happens to them?

Do you ask God to help you to rejoice with those who rejoice? People who get a promotion even above you. People who excel at sports.

[18 : 27] Are you asking God to help you not to be resentful, not to be jealous, but to genuinely rejoice with the good fortune of your brothers and sisters in Christ?

That's the kind of love we need to be praying that we will be growing in. If we really understand it, if we have this kind of knowledge, we need to be putting it into practice.

Are you helping your children, people you have influence over, are you helping them to develop and grow in that kind of love? Are you modeling, look at it, are you modeling it, putting forth the effort to help your children, whoever, people in your home, people in your Sunday school class, people you work with, are you helping them to see this is what Christian love looks like?

Our love needs to be growing in knowledge, practical knowledge, we put it into practice, and our love also needs to be growing in discernment. That means we need to know how to apply love in different situations.

Sometimes discerning love will require us to exercise tough love. You know, being loving is not just having a smile on your face and just thinking, don't rock the boat.

[19 : 52] Whatever goes, goes. If I came in here one Sunday morning and I said, we've been making too much of the Bible.

It's really just an old book written by a lot of old people. There's some good ideas here, but mainly it needs to be updated.

Let's just forget it. As a member of this church, you need to exercise tough love and fire me.

If a Sunday school teacher does that, they need to be fired as well. It is not loving to just let anything go as a parent.

It's not loving to allow your young child or teenager to be disobedient, disrespectful to you and your home.

[20 : 56] Christian love should compel you to take action, to not allow it.

Take control. Exercise discipline. That's part of your God-given responsibility. That's what God wants you to do.

And in the long run, that'll be what's best for your child. Sometimes, Christian love requires us to do hard things because tough love is needed.

But then on the other hand, if we're going to be discerning, sometimes our love is going to be real, give that person the benefit of the doubt, gracious.

We're not going to take, we're not going to be easily offended. We're not going to take what somebody says or does to some kind of slight, whether they meant for it to be or not.

[22 : 02] Sometimes Christian love just requires us to keep our mouth shut, to not say anything, to not do anything, just to go on, give them the benefit of the doubt.

That helps some many situations many situations among your friends at school, at work, in a church, even in the home. It's not always easy to know how love should respond.

That's why we need to pray. That's why we need to pray that our love will be growing in discernment and that we will be willing to do what needs to be done.

Sometimes the most difficult thing to do is to say something. Sometimes the most difficult thing to do is to not say something. So, this is how Christians should pray. Are you praying like this?

For yourself. For your children. For other people. Maybe you know some people. They really need to have a more discerning love.

[23 : 09] Pray for them. Ask God to help them to see the need and to be able to grow. Paul's prayer requests in these verses really build on one another.

The most important Christian quality is love. And so, Paul prays that it will always be growing. Growing in knowledge and discernment. And then the next request, build on that.

Number two, pray for yourself and others to develop Christ-like character. That's sort of the heading for everything he says now in verses 10 through the first part of verse 11.

It seems that there are Christians who think that the purpose of salvation is to keep us out of hell and get us into heaven when we die. That's not true. God saves us for much, much more than rescue from hell and getting us into heaven.

God saves us for the purpose of making us like Jesus. And we've looked at that and how many times over the years. It's in Romans chapter 8, 29. God is working in us to conform us to the likeness of his son.

[24 : 23] I want to read something. It's from Ephesians chapter 1. It's not on the screen because I didn't think about putting it in until it was too late. Ephesians chapter 1 is in verse 4.

Remember last, two weeks ago, we looked at Philippians 1, 6. And I referred to this verse and talked about how if we're Christians, that means God has chosen us to be his children.

God chose us because he wanted to choose us. All within him, nothing about us. He chose us before the foundation of the world. But I want to read this verse.

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

God's intent when he saved you and me was to so work in us throughout our lives that we would grow and develop in Christ-like character.

[25 : 25] And as time goes on, we become more and more holy and blameless. That doesn't mean perfect. It means that we live a life above reproach.

We seek to obey God. Those kinds of things. We need to think of God as being like a father who has many children. He's happy that he's got each one but he's not just content just to have all those children.

He wants each child to grow, to mature, to be a good and productive member of society. God, our Heavenly Father, he wants each one of us to grow and mature, to grow and develop holiness, purity, and to be a fruitful member of his family, of his kingdom.

We need to pray to that end as Paul does in these verses. Look at this. Number one, ask God to help you and others discover what is excellent.

That's the first part of verse 10 so that you may approve what is excellent. There's two key words here. The word approve means to put to the test, to find out, say, from experience, to discover.

[26 : 52] The word excellent literally means things that differ, things that make a difference, make a difference, the best things. The NIV translates this phrase so that you'll be able to discern what is best.

What's your real desire for yourself as a Christian? How are you praying and asking God to work in your life? Now, you would never say this, none of us would ever say this, but do your prayers sort of sound like your goal is just to be mediocre, stay out of trouble, stay healthy, and don't go overboard with excitement about being a follower of Jesus.

The way you pray, the kind of things you pray for, could it be that's what it really boils down to? Or, do you pray that you will grow in your relationship with God?

That you will really develop Christ-like character? Do you pray that you'll have a strong Christian influence on other people? And are you praying that for your children, for your grandchildren, for your friends, for the people that you really do care about and you do pray for?

You pray that for our church, our church family. We need to pray that we will discover from experience that the best way to live in this world is to love and serve God, to love and serve other people, and not just enough to get by, but to excel at it, to seek to do our best to please God, to impact other people.

[28 : 54] The next thing Paul teaches about prayer is this, ask God to help you and others become pure and blameless. The phrase in the last part of verse 10, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

To be pure and blameless is really talking about the inward and outward parts of our lives, our character. pure is something, a word that can be translated as sincere.

It refers to what we are on the inside. Blameless refers to what we appear to be, how others perceive us, both inward and outward, is what we're talking about here.

Another way to describe being pure and blameless is to be real, be genuine, be on the inside what you are on the outside, be on the outside.

Or put it another way, Paul's teaching us to pray not to be hypocrites. You know, we pray for God to help us to have, we need to pray that God would help us to have right motives and then act on those motives.

[30 : 15] I need to pray that God will help me to prepare and get up here and preach for the right reasons. You don't know why I'm here. Brian needs to pray before he gets up here and leaves and sings like he did.

God, help me do it from the right kind of motives. You don't know, I don't know what his motives are. But God does. And we do as well.

So we need to pray that way. God, help me to be pure, sincere, genuine on the inside and on the out.

You know, another way to say this is we need to ask God to help us to hate hypocrisy and never allow ourselves to be hypocrites who don't practice what we profess.

And you know, by being here this morning, by being a member of this church, by coming to a worship service, we are making some kind of profession that we're Christians.

[31 : 22] We're God's people. We've been born again by the Spirit of God. We need to live like it. But we need God's help to live like it. So we need to pray for ourselves and for the people we care about that we will grow in our love, in our knowledge, in our discernment, and that we'll be the real deal.

We'll grow inwardly, develop in Christ-like character. And we'll display that in all of our relationships. There's one more Christ-like character, quality, we need to pray for.

Look at this. Ask God to fill you and others with the fruit of righteousness. The first part of verse 11. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, what comes through Jesus Christ.

We need to pray that God would help us to produce the kind of fruit that comes from having a right relationship with Him that is through faith in Jesus.

Now the first thing that might come to your mind, it does me, the first thing that might come to our minds when we say that word fruit, it's something like the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, those kinds of qualities.

[32 : 42] This prayer is not really that we will develop such fruit, but that we will demonstrate, put it on display in our lives.

We, you and me, we need to ask God to help us to put love and joy and peace and these things that are mentioned into practice. in the way that we relate to the people in our homes, at church, at work, at school, every place in our lives.

We need to specifically ask that God will help us where we fail the most. Just think about it. You know, sitting here right now or sitting at your home reading the Bible yourself, you think about the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and when you sort of mellowed out, chilled out, just sort of sitting back and reading and thinking good thoughts, it's not hard to be patient in my room by myself.

It's not hard to have, you know, some kind thoughts, be self-controlled. People mess it up, don't they? people just bring out the worst in us.

No. People, stressful situations just help us to see what's really on the inside, how mature we are. If you have a problem with patience, ask God, Lord, Lord, help me.

[34 : 28] Help me to desire this more, to work on this more. If you have a problem with self-control, pray about that. Ask God to help you.

Now, the people in your life that you love, that you know well, you know where they struggle. don't beat them up, but pray where they are weak, where they struggle.

Ask God to help them. Do what you can do to help them. We need to ask God to help us display the fruits of righteousness.

And we need to be praying this for other people in our lives as well. The final part of Paul's request is really the end result of everything else. Look at this. Pray for yourself and others to glorify God.

For the glory and praise of God this outends. This is the ultimate purpose of our lives, isn't it? We know that. It's the goal of everything that we do to bring glory and honor and praise to God.

[35 : 44] That means this should be the ultimate request of every prayer we pray for ourselves and for other Christians. Doesn't mean it's always easy, but it's what we should pray for.

Are you praying like this? When you face a major decision in life, do you pray among other things, Lord, bottom line, I want you to do what will enable me to most glorify you?

As you think about serving the Lord here in this church or somewhere, do you pray, Lord, it's not about me. What people say or think about me, help me to do what I do in a way that will honor you, bring glory to you.

and when you pray for people who are close to you, do you pray that God will use them for his glory?

Whatever that may mean and that may mean that your child's looking for a job and if you pray, Lord, will you not just let them have the job but let them have the job if that's what will most enable them to serve your purpose.

[36 : 59] If that's what will bring glory to you the most. See, it's not always easy to pray such a prayer but it's how we're called to live and pray.

Now, in light of what we see in Paul's prayer, do you need to make any changes in the way that you pray? Let me say it one more time.

Don't misunderstand. We all need to pray all kinds of prayers. We need to be praying about things related to the coronavirus for people to get well, for the pandemic to end.

We need to pray for our country especially this week that there will be a smooth, peaceful transition of power on Wednesday when President-elect Biden takes the oath of office and becomes actual President Biden.

We need to pray for widespread repentance in this country. Reconciliation. We need it. prayer for our prayer.

[37 : 58] But both the teaching and the examples in the Bible clearly show us that when we pray, spiritual needs need to take priority over the physical needs.

We need to work on that privately in our private prayers, but also publicly as we pray in groups here at church. church. There's no doubt that praying such prayers will make a difference in our lives and it will make a difference in the lives of the people we care about.

And when we pray the way Jesus taught us, the way Paul models here, it will make a difference in the number of prayers that we see answered.

Let's pray together. Dear God, help us to see right now what changes need to be made in our prayer lives.

Father, for some people, convict them of their prayerlessness, of their failure to pray regularly, of their failure to really believe that prayer matters, that it makes a difference.

[39 : 25] Father, for people in this room who just about exclusively pray for physical things, help them to see, Father, that their priority is wrong.

Help them to see, dear God, that while they may need to continue to pray about everybody and everything they're praying about right now, they need to, first of all, focus on you, your way and will.

They need to focus on true Christian love, growing in it, becoming more knowledgeable and discerning. Lord, help us all to see that we need to be praying about the development of Christian character and that all things, in all that we do, we seek your glory.

So, Father, just show us, help us to leave here today better equipped to pray in a way that will truly please you and make a difference in our lives and in the lives of people we pray for.

let's just now, all of us, in attitude of prayer, let the Lord speak, listen, obey Him and respond to Him. whatever you who you or not.

[41 : 01] I think you willfox verses but in the ■■■ of Israel high until man vive ganz.