

Let Us Pray Together
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Intro

New year on Tuesday - many of us are turning our attention to the New Year and what it holds regardless of whether or not we make resolutions - FYI one statistic I read last week shows that 80% of people who joined gym in January canceled that membership within 5 months - well-meaning gym rats - good on ya mate

Aspirations - for many of us these are in the realm of spiritual disciplines - read the Bible more, steward money wisely and give more, commit to fellowship and hospitality, share the gospel with a non-believing friend or family member

One BIGGIE I'm sure many of us feel is that we want to pray more - what Christian doesn't want to pray more? Which one of us feels that we have arrived in our prayer lives

Listen - legacy of prayer in this church - I stand on this stage because of the prayers of women who are present in this room - in fact I stand on this stage in large part - beyond your generous giving because of countless prayers over 15 years asking God to provide a facility - a home base for our ministry and mission

I begin with the assumption that most if not all of us want to pray more - or at least we know we should pray - more consistently - more fervently - more broadly

For the past several years I have preached a sermon on prayer at the outset of a new year in order to encourage you and serve you in this most vital discipline - go back and listen on the website.

My aim is to serve you this morning by directing your attention to a biblical prayer - a prayer in the bible - to help inform the way you and I and indeed all of us pray in 2019 - my aim is to provide for us corporately - guide rails for faithful prayer so that we would pray together - pray with a likeminded purpose

And if you have felt a waning zeal for prayer - a dryness in your prayer life - my aim is to direct your soul towards this biblical prayer so that God would meet you this morning by his Word and wake up a renewed passion for prayer - that he would in effect take you by the hand and lead you into a deepening life of communion with God and intercessory prayer to God

The apostle Paul was one of the most transparent men who ever lived. To read his letters is to see into his life. He willingly shares his doubts, hopes, concerns, joys, sorrows, and weaknesses. But of all the things that Paul shares about himself, perhaps the most profound is his prayer life. (Mark Howell, *Christ-Centered Exposition: 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, p. 67)

In our text this morning - the apostle Paul shares his prayer life with us in a most profound way - takes us into the content of his private prayers and presents us with a model for prayer - so that we to may pray confident that we are praying according to the will of God as he has revealed his will to us in holy Scripture

READ TEXT - prepare our minds and hearts to hear and receive the Word of God

Biblical guidelines for prayer from our text - a model for prayer - 3 points - 3 exhortations for you in considering how we pray in this new year

1. Pray for Our Fellowship 2. Pray for Our Love 3. Pray for Our Holiness

I. Pray for Our Fellowship

- A. v. 9 Paul addresses this church that he planted in Thessalonica - he expresses to this church his heart of gratitude for this church and his heart practically bursts with thanksgiving because of the joy he feels for this church that he loves dearly
 - 1. He tells them essentially - he is experiencing great joy because he is aware of the gracious activity at work in their lives
 - a) v. 6 Timothy his ministry protege has brought Paul a good report about this church - "good news Paul - this church that you planted is full of people who have steadfast faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and who express that faith in love for one another - they are standing fast in the Lord Paul"
 - (1) As a pastor who cares about this church Paul is filled with great joy at this good news - this good report - God is at work blessing and strengthening this church
 - (a) Paul is a grateful man - he is full of thanksgiving towards God because he is aware that wherever there is faith, love, steadfastness that is evidence of the kind and gracious activity of God
 - i) "What thanksgiving can we return to God for you for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God"
 - (1) THIS IS THE HEART OF YOUR PASTORS - FAITH AND LOVE IS EVIDENT
 - (a) How grateful I am to serve you - how thankful I am because of God's gracious activity in your life - what joy I feel before God as I get a front row seat for your faith and love
 - B. Paul experiences this deep joy that expresses itself not only generally in gratefulness to God but this joy provokes Paul to dedicate himself to pray for this church
 - 1. Prayers of thanksgiving but further - earnest prayer day and night for their sake
 - a) His prayer is consistent - when he prays in the morning and in the evening - they are included on the prayer list
 - b) His prayer is earnest - fervent - passionate because of his love for this church
 - C. Specifically, he prays that he may see them face to face - in the flesh - and supply what is lacking in their faith
 - 1. Not saving faith - but to strengthen their lives of "faith-fulness" through his ministry to them
 - a) Note his heart's desire is face to face, personal, physical connection - God's intent - we must note - is that ministry and mission happen primarily in a relational and personal context - this is increasingly counter-cultural with the rise of social media and even virtual reality - one can "do" church on websites and podcasts
- Illustration:** Prominent mega-church recently released a church app where folks are encouraged to download and carry church around in your pocket - live services every week - connect with people in the virtual lobby
- b) Technology can serve - it is a good gift from God - we, like Paul should prioritize real presence with others as is God's will be revealed in Scripture no matter how busy our lives may be
- D. v. 10-11 he lets us into the content of his prayers
 - 1. Prays earnestly, consistently that he would be able to be with this church in person so that he can serve them by strengthening their faith - he prays because he understands that God stands above this grace-wrought desire - times are in his hands - he cries out to God the Father and our Lord Jesus
 - 2. May God himself direct our way to you - see you face to face - so can serve you and strengthen your faith
 - a) Our Father - Our Lord Jesus - clear all obstacles to fellowship - provide opportunities for fellowship - provide me with the opportunity to minister to these Christians that I love

E. Application

1. Paul in these verses reveals his passion for people - this passion for people - this passion to serve - well we are provided a model to emulate so that an internal reality would grow within us that expresses itself in prayer for this church - consistent and earnest prayer for each other
 - a) We ain't apostles - but Paul's the heart is transferrable - each one of us has gifts we can use to serve others - to strengthen others in this church - we should make it our aim to ask God to use us to serve one another as we pray for each other
2. Let us make it our aim this year (actually every year) to pray for our fellowship at this church - not take it for granted or assume it's automatic
 - a) We all have lacking in our faith that needs to be supplied - The preaching of the Word each week is vital - but God has ordained not just that preachers do the good work of supplying what is lacking in our faith - but WE - in fellowship with one another have the opportunity to supply what is lacking
 - (1) Community Groups - more than Bible studies - face-to-face, serving and helping one another in our faith
 - (2) Emulate Paul's gratefulness - private and publicly express - who can you serve by expressing your gratefulness for God's activity? IT'S ALL OVER THE PLACE!
3. Disconnected? Distant? Crazy Busy?
 - a) What are the obstacles in your way that you need to ask God to move so that you are directed into fellowship? Schedule, work, entertainment - Pray that God would direct your way deeper into fellowship this year
4. Pray for this church at large -
5. Growing church - aren't interested merely in numbers - Biblical unity FELLOWSHIP as we seek to make disciples - PRAY! Pray for our fellowship at this church.

II. Pray for Our Love

- A. v. 12 - next petition for this church - "may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you"
 1. Here Paul is praying down the work of the Holy Spirit into their loves for the fruit of the Spirit includes love - prays that love would grow abundantly in their hearts and lives
 - a) May the Lord cause an ever-growing, overflowing, abounding love for each other that overflows beyond us to all people in our proximity
 - (1) Don't think a trickling creek - praying down a mighty Niagara of love
- B. Lord - cause the fruit of love to grow out of the verdant soil of the gospel - love stirred for others because you have first loved us
 1. A heart posture - emotions are involved - affection, compassion, so forth
 2. An activity of life - a choice to care, bless, provide
- C. He petitions God to do this work of increasing and abounding love in this church - O Lord you MUST make it happen if it will happen at all
 1. Increasing and abounding love is not necessarily automatic - it's a lot more than just "being nice"
 - a) What Paul prays for and what we are called to pray for is nothing short of the work of the Lord "O LORD make love increase and abound in this church and beyond"
- D. Application
 1. All through the Scriptures we find the call and command to love - no command greater than that of Jesus Christ's command to love one another
 - a) That's the lifestyle we are called into - God is love and as his adopted and beloved children we bear the family likeness

4 ways that we can express love to others:

- Listen to others, including those who hold viewpoints with which you disagree.
- Demonstrate grace by looking past people's "faults" to see their strengths.
- Recognize the value and dignity of other human beings, regardless of their ethnicity, socioeconomic class, or background.
- Show God's love by selflessly serving and sacrificing for others.

(Charles Swindoll, *Contagious Christianity*, p. 40)

- b) We of all people would be known for our abounding love - sadly at times the church has been more known for anger about cultural issues and politics than for a deep, sacrificial, abiding love not only within the church but to "all" - listen there are many important political and cultural issues to press into for the sake of loving our neighbors - let all things be done in love

Illustration: Let's talk about discernment blogs - standing on truth - noisy gongs

- (1) Our awareness of how often our love is lacking and our desire to grow in love should provoke us to pray for the Lord to make us increase in love - personally and corporately
 - (a) Isn't it good to know that when our love feels cold, we can ask God to ignite it afresh?
2. God knows that in a culture that is increasingly hostile we need more than ever to be a place of love and care and blessing - thin, moralistic, Christian lite, spiritual boost churchianity - POOF when persecution comes and we face serious costs to being a Christian
 - a) CHINA PERSECUTED CHURCH - Believer in Nepal - YOU THINK THOSE BELIEVERS LOVE EACH OTHER - HOW CAN THEY STAND?
 - (1) PRAY FOR THEM - that their love would abound in trial
 - b) Oh, won't you join me in praying this way for this church? WE NEED YOU O Lord to make us increase and abound in love
3. Not only to us but to all - Spilled over to evangelism - John 13 - apologetic - all people will know we are disciples by our love for one another - OPEN ARMS
 - a) In a harsh, often bitter, polarized, tribal world - let us be known for our love - and so let us pray

If we are to improve our praying, we must strengthen our loving. As we grow in disciplined, self-sacrificing love, so we will grow in intercessory prayer. (D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 85)

- b) Strengthen our loving so that we would improve our praying and grow in intercessory prayer - 1. Pray for our Fellowship 2. Pray for our Love

III. Pray for Our Holiness

- A. V. 13 one more thing he prays for - "that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints"
 1. He prays in v. 12 that the Lord would make their love increase and abound - in v. 13 so that HE MAY ESTABLISH your hearts blameless in holiness
 - a) The heart that increases and abounds in love is inclined toward holiness - where love abounds - godliness is delighted in
- B. Prays for God to do another work - "a work of establishing hearts blameless in holiness before God" - this is what only God can do.
- C. Holy on two Fronts
 1. Good news that In Christ - through the gospel - substitutionary, sin-bearing, wrath-absorbing death and the imputation of his righteousness through faith - we are declared forgiven, righteous, and holy - justified though sinners still - GRACE
 2. There is a practical life of the pursuit of holiness that is lived out of the gracious declaration of holiness in Christ - our hearts need to be strengthened - our hearts need to be established in holiness

- a) So that we might persevere to the end - that we might persevere in the narrow way by faith - that our lives would, imperfectly but sincerely reflect the holiness of our loving Father
 - (1) Directs our attention to the end-game - v. 13b at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints - when he returns at the consummation to establish a new heavens and new earth - bringing us into a world of love - purged of sin and death glorified and truly made holy in his sight
 - (2) With all his saints - 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 - may disabuse one of the popular widespread notion of rapture - Jesus comes and grabs people and goes back up again and comes back down again
 - (a) We are those who look forward to his coming to establish his kingdom - bringing his saints - his holy ones with him - we will join them in an eternity of joy
 - i) Until that day - Paul prays that God would establish their hearts blameless in holiness

D. Application

- 1. Paul prays this way and directs our attention to the coming of Christ so that they and we would live this day in light of that day THE DAY
 - a) Pray - intercede for one another - **God is the one who establishes our hearts blameless in holiness - God is the one who strengthens us to persevere to the end - HE MUST DO THIS WORK!**
 - b) Oh, that God would work in us an ever-present zeal for holiness of life
 - (1) Join me in praying for fresh zeal in 2019
 - (a) If you are flagging - oh pray - God establish my heart - establish the heart of my house - my kids
 - (b) Titus - teach them to learn to do good works - learning process - there are fresh opportunities for doing good - fresh opportunities to grow in holiness
 - (c) Pray for holiness - with faith and hope

[23] Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

Close

Let us pray together in 2019 1. Pray for our fellowship 2. Pray for our love 3. Pray for our holiness

Here's what I'm looking forward to this year as we pray this way - REPORTS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS! Gather at the end of 2019 - GOD HAS BEEN FAITHFUL - FELLOWSHIP, LOVE ABUNDING, HOLINESS GROWING

CONTINUE TO GROW OUR GOSPEL CULTURE - FOR OUR JOY

BUT make no mistake this is not just for our sake but for a watching world - a church united in fellowship, abounding in love, established in holiness - this is the platform for mission

I believe we are on the cusp of church planting - pray - Multiply this church into Gospel outposts of prayer, fellowship, love, godliness

What can God do in a church that is united in love and holiness? Let's pray and watch God work

Pray because he is faithful - promises are many - he will show himself to be true - let's press into him together. Let us pray together this year for our fellowship, love, and holiness all to the glory of his grace.

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By Benjamin Kreps

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