

PRAYING WITH PAUL (2)

What did Paul want prayer for?

A. Introduction

1. What should we be praying for?

There are a number of places in the Bible we can go to, to answer this question.

2. The thirteen letters that Paul wrote have much to teach us about prayer and the things that we should be praying for.

How?

They include actual prayers.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

They include prayer reports.

"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." (Philippians 1:4-5)

They include prayer wishes.

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his good grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

They include prayer requests.

"Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed." (Romans 15:31-32)

They include exhortations to pray.

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." (Colossians 4:2)

3. Much of Paul's teaching about prayer is devoted to praying for others, especially members of local churches.

He gives thanks to God for them – for their saving faith, for their active faith, and for their growing faith.

He makes requests to God for them – that they would know God better, that they would live godly lives, that God would give to them what they need to do so (knowledge, strength, hope and unity).

And by praying for God's people to be God's people, his hope is that this would lead to others becoming God's people.

4. It would be good if as a local church, we regularly prayed for one another in this way.

5. But included in Paul's teaching about prayer are requests to members of local churches to pray for him.

What did Paul want prayer for?

As well as telling us what we should want others to be praying for ourselves, Paul's requests can also help us to pray what is best for one another.

B. For opportunities to evangelise

1. Paul wanted the churches to pray for opportunities for him to preach the gospel.

“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.” (Colossians 4:3)

The open door Paul wanted prayer for, was not the door of his cell, but an open door so that the message he wanted to preach would be heard.

It is vital we pray for opportunities for ourselves or for others to speak the gospel.

We can be confident that God will answer this prayer.

If Paul didn't think that God would answer this prayer and provide opportunities to proclaim the gospel, he would not have asked them to pray this prayer.

2. Paul wanted the churches to pray for God to help him when he preached the gospel.

That he would know what to say.

The right words for that particular occasion.

“Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains.” (Ephesians 6:19-20)

That he would be clear.

Paul was concerned about preaching the gospel in a way that connected with its hearers.

“Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.” (Colossians 4:4)

“A farmer one day, after he had listened to a simple sermon which was the very opposite of what he generally heard, exclaimed, “O Lord, we bless you that the food was put into a low crib today, so that Your sheep could reach it!” Some Brothers put the food up so high that the poor sheep cannot possibly feed upon it. I have thought, as I have listened to our eloquent friends, that they imagined that our Lord had said, “Feed my giraffes.” None but giraffes could reach the food when placed in so lofty a rack! Christ says, “Feed My sheep”—place the food among them. Put it close to them.” (Charles Spurgeon, Feed My Sheep)

That he would be bold and not afraid to speak.

“Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.” (Ephesians 6:20)

As well as praying for opportunities to preach the gospel, it is vital we pray for help in preaching the gospel.

3. Paul wanted the churches to pray for fruit after he had preached the gospel.

“Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

Paul's prayer is not directly for himself, but for the progress of the gospel he preached.

Progress in terms of it going to different places.

Progress in terms of it being accepted by the people in these different places.

4. Paul wanted the churches to pray for his deliverance from those who wanted to stop him from preaching the gospel.

“And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.” (2 Thessalonians 3:2)

C. For opportunities to encourage

1. Paul wanted the churches to pray for opportunities for him to visit them.

“I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.” (Romans 15:30-32)

“And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.” (Philemon 1:22)

Why?

To encourage them by his faith, and for him to be encouraged by theirs.

“In my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” (Romans 1:10-12)

To encourage them by helping them to grow in their faith.

“Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” (1 Thessalonians 3:10)

To encourage them by loving them in practical ways.

“I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.” (Romans 15:30-32)

2. Paul wanted the churches to pray for his deliverance so that he would be able to visit them.

Deliverance from people who opposed him.

“I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.” (Romans 15:30-32)

Deliverance from imprisonment.

“Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.” (Philippians 1:18-19)

“And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.” (Philemon 1:22)

Deliverance from difficult circumstances.

“He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.” (2 Corinthians 1:10-11)

D. How should we pray for one another?

1. We should pray for ministry opportunities.

For opportunities for one another to evangelise: occasions to speak the gospel; the ability to speak clearly and boldly the right words.

For opportunities for one another to encourage: occasions to help others grow in their faith and to show love in practical ways.

2. We should pray for ministry success.

That people would be saved by trusting in Jesus as a result of their evangelism.

That people would be built up and edified in the faith as a result of their encouragement.