

Praying Like Paul

Relationships are generally defined by the actions and attitudes that are communicated between the parties involved. Whether it is respect among colleagues, admiration among leaders, or animosity between rivals, their actions and attitudes communicate the status of their relationship. The Bible indicates that love is revealed to others in both our words and our actions. As a matter of fact, Paul does both as he justifies his love of the Philippians by expressing his yearning and affection for them, and then substantiating his assertion by praying on their behalf.

The distinct and powerful connection between love and prayer is clearly communicated in Paul's tender words recorded in Philippians 1:7-11:

“It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. **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.”

Paul has just defined his relationship with the Philippian church (Phil 1:7-8). In essence, he has revealed his heart and said, “I love you!” He holds them in his heart based on a mutual three-fold bond: a) they share a common Savior, b) a common partnership in Gospel-work, and c) a common care for one another as they suffer hardship. His love is not reserved for just a select few. It is indiscriminate. He loves the entire church family. Three times he addresses them as “you all”. This love or affection, as he calls it, gives rise to a passionate prayer (Phil 1:9-11). According to A.W. Pink, “The measure of our love for others can largely be determined by the frequency and earnestness of our prayers for them.”

The character of Paul's prayer is a product of his passion. He loves the Philippians so deeply that he desires God's best for them. As a matter of fact, his prayer is void of fluffy clichés. It is free of thoughtless ramblings. It is far from empty platitudes. Instead, his prayer is filled with practical relevance that is aimed at their continued growth. And this is what makes Paul's prayer a model for us to emulate. Before Paul talks to the church about these issues, He talks to God about them! The apostle loves his Philippian brothers and sisters so much that he goes to the eternal source

of all grace, the Heavenly Father, so that He might accomplish what is best for the church and for His glory. The themes of love, being pure and blameless, as well as being fruitful in righteousness reoccur later on in this letter as well as other letters written to the Corinthians, the Thessalonians, and the Colossians. The recurrence of these themes indicates that they are worth praying for in our lives and in the lives of others. Consider Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-11 and observe the similarities to his prayer recorded in Philippians 1:9-11:

“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.”

Paul's prayer is an appeal for the Philippians' growth. He knows that this transformation cannot be accomplished by human will or effort, but solely by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is *spiritual* growth after all, not behavioral modification. He prays that this dear community of Jesus followers would grow in love (1 Jn 3:16, 18) and in discernment as they appreciate and obey God's Word. Paul prays that they might grow in purity and blamelessness with an upward trajectory that aims toward a life of integrity. And he prays for the Holy Spirit's character (Gal 5:22-23) to produce good works that will bring glory and praise to God (Jn 15:8). What a rich and lifegiving way to pray for other believers! What a practical way to love your church!

Let us love one another, and so pray for one another. And let us pray for one another, so we may grow to love one another. It will amaze you to see what God can do in the lives of those you are praying for, as well as in your own life as you intercede. You can be certain that this will bring glory to the Lord and may be surprised in how much joy this will bring you.

Matthew 5:43-45 (ESV) - “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ***Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*** For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”