

The grace of praying for others

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I want to start today by asking you a question, but there are some conditions to this question. I don't want this question to make you feel guilty. And I don't want this question to make you feel like you are less of a Christian. See today's topic of prayer is something that many Christians struggle with including myself.

My question is

When do you pray?

I don't mean what time in the day do you pray. I mean in what situation do you find yourself praying. Are you someone who prays in every situation? Are you someone who prays in situations when it's related to church stuff? Or are you someone who is the plane crash prayer? You know what I mean, you're on a plane and it hits some turbulence, and drops 100m, the air masks come out and then you pray for God's deliverance.

Now for the record I have found myself in the last two positions throughout much of my life, so this sermon is as much for myself as it is for you. Prayer is an area of my life which I'm trying with God's help to move towards the first position praying in all situations.

Now like I said I really don't want you to feel guilty or less Christian if you find yourself in the last two options because today with God's help hopefully we will see the great pleasure we have as Christians, the pleasure of coming before our loving heavenly Father in prayer.

And I think it is appropriate now that we pray and ask for God's help.

Heavenly Father, we humbly come into your presence now. Asking that your Spirit may fill us and teach us as we look into your precious Word, let this Word ruler over us and let our lives bring glory to you, and we pray all this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Our passage today starts in kinda a weird way, and for anyone who has been taught basic grammar we know not to start a sentence with and. But this is where our passage starts, and it has a good reason for starting with an "AND"

This is because our passage for today must not just be read in isolation but must be read in the context where it is found. Vs 18 is actually linked to verse 17 in the previous section. Paul in that previous section has just listed the armour we are to put on to fight for the fight we are in and he now gives us the final instruction,

GO OUT AND FIGHT AND CONQUER THE WORLD

Well that's what we expect Paul to say. But he actually says:

Pray in the Spirit. On all occasions, With all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

What, Paul has clearly lost his mind, get dressed for battle and then just pray. That seems a little strange doesn't it? But when we really think about it, prayer is the only logical thing to do.

And this is because we are supernaturalist not naturalist, our fight is not against this world but is against the evil one and the only way this battle can be won is by God.

Nick pointed out this very point last week. Have a look back with me at vs 11 and 12 of chapter 6

11 Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Paul has outlined our battle ground, he has outlined our armour we will need for the fight and his final instructions are like the oil for the armour which we have put on.

This is because putting on, taking up, and receiving God's armour all require an attitude of dependence on God.

And this is what prayer is, prayer is showing our full dependence on God not ourselves. See the divine provider of armour is the one who enabled us to stand, so it is fitting to depend on Him via prayer.

And even the way we pray shows how dependent we are on God, did you notice the very first part of Paul's instruction?

And Pray in the Spirit

The Spirit is given as our helper, and one of His tasks, is the task of prayer. Paul reminds us of this in Romans 8 where we read:

***Rom. 8:26** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

The second part of instruction that Paul gives us in verse 18 is an obvious one, but I think that it is one we often neglect.

Pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

And this goes back to my opening question. Do you pray on all occasions? I know I don't. I find myself praying when stuff goes wrong, which is a good thing because it shows that I trust and depend on God. But I don't find myself stopping and thanking God when things are going well. I often find myself using God as my personal genie. And sometimes I even find myself lying to myself saying that I'm too busy to pray.

I was reminded of this very point this week at college. Twice a year at college we have what is called a day of prayer, once before mission where we pray for all the

mission's that college are going on that year, and once near the end of the year where we pray for the exiting students.

On this day all classes are cancelled, and we spend the college day in prayer. Now before going to college if you would have asked me if I had spent a day praying, I would have laughed. I hadn't even spent an hour in prayer little own a day in prayer.

And if you would have told me that these days of prayer happen just before mission when lots of planning needs to be done, and just before exams at the end of the year I would have said that it's a really silly idea,

Surely, we can just pray at the beginning and end of preparing, prep is going to be so much more beneficial. Or surely an extra day studying would be more helpful than praying

But see I was coming at these days from a naturalist point of view, saying what can I do to make the situation work better?

But when we remember where our battle lies the only thing I can do is to pray. To bring my prayers and requests to the creator of the universe.

This brings us to the final part of Paul's instructions. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. This is final part of the instruction links the whole letter together, our battle is not against this world but is against the evil one and one of the key messages of the letter is about bringing unity in the church under Christ

Paul has outlined what Christ has done for his people which includes both the Jews and the Gentiles, he has outlined how we as Christ's people are now to relate to each other, and finally, he has instructed us to pray for each other.

Now this seems pretty obvious doesn't it, of course we should pray for each other, But did you notice the little 3 letter word in this final part of the instruction, "all"

Well this makes it a little harder now doesn't it. We are to pray for **ALL** of the Lord's people, even the ones who we don't get on with, the ones who we disagree with, even the ones who mistreat or hurt us.

This is a hard thing to do isn't it. But the flip side of this is, it's hard to be angry or cold towards someone who you have just prayed for.

This goes back to Jesus' point from John 13

*"A new command I give you: **Love one another**. As I have **loved** you, so you must **love one another**. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you **love one another**."*

And prayer is a very practical way of showing that we love one another. And its powerful. I want to give you guys a helpful tip on how to pray for each other

Now this has been modelled to me from a number of very prayerful people. Can I suggest to you today that you pray through the church directory. You will need to work out for yourself when you will pray through it, whether its each day, each week or whatever you decide, and then pray for the people listed in the directory either in general or even better, can I suggest a day before you are going to pray for them, send the person a message or call them telling them that you are going pray for them tomorrow and ask what they would like prayer for.

Also remember to pray for your leaders, Paul reminds us in verses 19-20 that he too needs prayer as he ministers the word. So pray for Marty as he leads our church here under God that he will faithfully teach and lead us.

Pray also for our other staff and lay leaders within the church that they too may be faithful teachers and leaders within the ministries that they are involved in.

And ask your leaders what they would like prayer for. And seems I'm up here telling you to ask your leaders what they want prayer for, I'm going to tell you what Leonie and I would like prayer for.

We would love it if you could pray for us as we finish up college in the next couple of weeks and as we prepare for next year. We would love it if you guys could also pray for us as we have just accepted a position for next year in the diocese of the North West WA Can you please pray us as we move to the other side of the country leaving our family and friends behind to do ministry in a remote part of the country which can be very isolating. Can you also please pray, that we can work well alongside the saints in Dongara next year and that we would help them take out the gospel to those who need to hear it.

And we want to thank you for praying for us because we know that it is God's work and we need to bring it before him.

Well hopefully today the Lord has reminded you, as he has done for me of the pleasure that we have to come to Him in prayer. Remember prayer should not been seen as a duty, instead it should be viewed as a great pleasure of coming to our loving Heavenly Father, to bring Him all our concerns and worries.

And the great thing about prayer is that God has the power to change things. He is the creator of the universe who is all powerful. Now if you had the pleasure of speaking with the prime minister or the head of the united nations, raising your concerns with them you would take it up wouldn't you.

Well we have the pleasure of talking with someone much more powerful than the prime minister or the head of the united nations, we have the pleasure of speaking with the creator of everything, God himself!!!

And he wants to speak with us. It's kinda like this very famous picture. This is JFK one of the most powerful men at the time meeting with some of the most powerful men in the USA. And notice who is under the oval office desk, it's JFK Jr.

JFK was one the most powerful and important men, but he still had time for his son, his son also had direct access to him, all the other men in the room would have needed to make an appointment to see the president, not JFK Jr.

We too have direct access to our heavenly Father, the creator of everything and He loves us and has time for us. We don't need to make an appointment with Him we have direct access through his Spirit.

So let us now come to him out of pleasure not out of a scene of duty and pray. And I thought that it would be fitting to close by praying for you the same prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesians in chapter 1

Dear Heavenly Father

I pray that the eyes of your people hearts here at Waitara may be enlightened in order that they may know the hope to which you have called them, the riches of your glorious inheritance in your holy people, and your incomparably great power for them who believe in you.

Amen