

## The Pauline Pattern for Prayer

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### Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, the apostle Paul called upon the Corinthian Christians to “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (NIV). One of the ways in which Paul followed the example of Christ, and, therefore, a way in which we can follow Paul’s example today, is in the way that Paul prayed. What can we learn from Paul’s life and from his letters that can help us to pray like Paul? Here are seven lessons:

### Lesson 1: Pray For Other People

While we can safely assume that Paul prayed for himself (after all, as we shall see, he asked others to pray for him), we certainly see that he prayed for others<sup>1</sup> (“I mention you always in my prayers,” Romans 1:9-10; “remembering you in my prayers,” Ephesians 1:16; “every prayer of mine for you all,” Philippians 1:4; “when we pray for you,” Colossians 1:3; “pray for you,” Colossians 1:9; “mentioning you in our prayers,” 1 Thessalonians 1:2; “we always pray for you,” 2 Thessalonians 1:11; “I remember you constantly in my prayers,” 2 Timothy 1:3; and “I remember you in my prayers,” Philemon 4). The other people for whom Paul prayed included:

- The church at Rome (Romans 1:9-13)
- Unbelievers (Romans 10:1)
- The church at Ephesus (Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-19)
- The church at Philippi (Philippians 1:4 and 9-11)
- The church at Colossae (Colossians 1:3 and 9-14)
- The church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3:9-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and 2:16-17)
- Timothy (2 Timothy 1:3)
- Philemon (Philemon 4-7)

Jesus also prayed for others (for little children in Matthew 19:13//Mark 10:16; for Peter in Luke 22:31-32; for those who crucified Him in Luke 23:34; for His disciples in Luke 24:50; and for present and future followers in John 17).

The Bible calls upon believers to pray for others: enemies (Matthew 5:44//Luke 6:28), other believers (Ephesians 6:18 and James 5:16), and all men in general (1 Timothy 2:1), including political leaders in particular (1 Timothy 2:2).

As the song by Charles Meigs says: “Lord, help me to live from day to day, In such a self-forgetful way, That even when I kneel to pray, My prayer shall be for others.”

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<sup>1</sup>... Paul’s prayers ... are outstanding for the large part intercession for others and thanksgiving for others play in them” (D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 66).

## Lesson 2: Ask Other People to Pray for You

Not only did Paul pray for others, but he also asked others to pray for him (“your prayers to God on my behalf,” Romans 15:30; “and also for me,” Ephesians 6:19; “pray also for us,” Colossians 4:3; “pray for us,” 1 Thessalonians 5:25; “pray for us,” 2 Thessalonians 3:1). See also Hebrews 13:18. Those whom Paul asked to pray for him included:

- The church at Rome (Romans 15:30-32)
- The church at Ephesus (Ephesians 6:18-20)
- The church at Colossae (Colossians 4:2-4)
- The church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:25 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)

By humbly asking other believers to pray for us we thereby encourage them to keep the command of Ephesians 6:18 and James 5:16 to pray reciprocally. If the apostle Paul needed the prayers of other people, we do, too!

## Lesson 3: Pray With Other People

We see Paul praying with others when he prays with Barnabas in the Phillipian jail in Acts 16:25, when he prays with the Ephesian elders in Miletus in Acts 20:36, and when he prays with the believers of Tyre in Acts 21:5.

Jesus also prayed with others (on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John in Luke 9:28 and in Gethsemane with the same in Matthew 26:37f//Mark 14:33f).

Other examples of believers praying with one another are found in Acts 1:12-14, 24, 4:24f, 6:6, 12:5, 12, 13:3, and 14:23. Christianity, from its very commencement, was communal.<sup>2</sup>

Every corporate prayer time in your local church (see Acts 2:42’s “the prayers”) is an excellent opportunity not only to pray **for** others in the body (and to ask others in the body to pray for you), but also **with** them.

## Lesson 4: Pray Persistently

Paul prayed unceasingly (Romans 1:9 and Colossians 1:9), constantly (2 Timothy 1:3), always (Colossians 1:3, and 2 Thessalonians 1:11), or night and day (1 Thessalonians

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<sup>2</sup>“The hallmark of Western civilization has been rugged individualism. Because of our philosophy of life, we are used to the personal pronouns I and my and me. We have not been taught to think in terms of we and ours and us. Consequently we ‘individualize’ many references to corporate experience in the New Testament, thus often emphasizing personal prayer, personal Bible study, personal evangelism, and personal Christian maturity and growth. The facts are that more is said in the Book of Acts and the Epistles about corporate prayer, corporate learning of biblical truth, corporate evangelism, and corporate Christian maturity and growth than about the personal aspects of these Christian disciplines” (Gene Getz, *Praying for One Another*, pp. 11-12).

3:10 and 2 Timothy 1:3).<sup>3</sup> One example of his persistence in prayer is found in 2 Corinthians 12:8.

Jesus was also persistent in prayer (see Matthew 26:44, as well as Luke 6:12).

We, too, are to persist in prayer (see 1 Kings 18:43, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 7:7-8//Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 26:44, Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-5, Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, 12:5, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

#### Lesson 5: Make Your Praying Public

Paul let others know that he was praying for them, including the church in Rome (in Romans 1:8), the church in Corinth (in 1 Corinthians 1:4), the church in Ephesus (in Ephesians 1:16 and 3:14 and 16), the church in Philippi (in Philippians 1:4), the church in Colossae (in Colossians 1:3 and 9), the church in Thessalonica (in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3 and 11), Timothy (in 2 Timothy 1:3), and Philemon (in Philemon 4). He also let others know what it was that he was praying for them (Romans 1:10-13, Ephesians 1:17f, 3:16f, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9f, 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and Philemon 6).

Jesus did the same (Luke 22:32).

The point is not seeking to pray in public to be seen of men (as Jesus prohibited in Matthew 6:5-6), nor to “toot your own horn” (contrary to Proverbs 27:2) so that everyone knows how spiritual you are (such self-promotion is evidence that you are not spiritual), but to let those for whom you are praying know that you are praying for them, which serves as an encouragement and as an example.

#### Lesson 6: Pray for the Spiritual Progress of God’s People

While Paul certainly prayed for the salvation of sinners (Romans 10:1), as should every believer, for we are to pray according to God’s will, and God desires the salvation of sinners (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9; cf. Ezekiel 18:23, 32, and 33:11), most of the praying that Paul did for others, as found in Scripture, was for those who were already saved, particularly for their spiritual progress (see, for example, Ephesians 3:16, 19b, Philippians 1:9a, 11a, Colossians 1:10a, 11a, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 5:23, and 2 Thessalonians 2:17).

When we pray for the sanctification/spiritual strengthening of saints, the purity/perseverance of our fellow parishioners, we are also praying according to God’s will (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Jesus prayed this way (Luke 22:32, John 17:11, 15, and 17).

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<sup>3</sup>“Paul must have had an extensive prayer list and presumably spent some time each day naming before God all his churches, colleagues, and supporters” (James Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 316).

While the spiritual progress of God's people is assured (see Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:24, and Jude 24), it is not automatic. God uses the prayers of his people as a means to this end (see Philippians 1:10b, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and Jude 20-21). And, as seen by Paul's prayers in Romans 1:11 and 1 Thessalonians 3:10, God wants to use us to be the answer to our prayers for the spiritual progress of our fellow parishioners.

#### Lesson 7: Make a Practice of Praising God for God's People

We see Paul thanking God for the Romans (in Romans 1:8), the Corinthians (in 1 Corinthians 1:4), the Ephesians (in Ephesians 1:16), the Philippians (in Philippians 1:3), the Colossians (in Colossians 1:3), the Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3:9, and 2 Thessalonians 1:3), Timothy (in 2 Timothy 1:3), and Philemon (in Philemon 4). In most of these instances, Paul is praising God for His sanctifying grace in the lives of His people, evidenced by their faith in God (Romans 1:8, Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:5, and Philemon 5) and love for God's people (Colossians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, and Philemon 5). Giving God the glory for such things is only fitting, since God is the One who ultimately brings them about (Philippians 1:6, 2:13, and Hebrews 13:21).

Paul's practice is a reminder to be on the lookout for the good God is doing in the lives of other believers<sup>4</sup>, rather than always bellyaching about the bad. It also brings to this writer's mind what D.A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 29) has said: "All of us would be wiser if we would resolve never to put people down, except on our prayer lists." And, when we put them down on our prayer lists, to praise God for them. And to let them know that we do<sup>5</sup>, as Paul did, one of the ways we can "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

#### Conclusion

One of the first things said about Paul in Scripture after he was saved is: "behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11). May the same be said about us. Like Paul, let us pray. And let us pray like Paul, praying for others, asking others to pray for us, praying with others, praying persistently, letting others know that we are praying for them (and what we are praying for them), praying for the spiritual progress of others, and praising God for others (and letting them know that we do).

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<sup>4</sup>"If in our prayers we are to develop a mental framework analogous to Paul's, we must look for signs of grace in the lives of Christians, and give God thanks for them" (D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 44).

<sup>5</sup>"How much would our churches be transformed if each of us made it a practice to thank God for others and then to tell these others what it is about them that we thank God for" (D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 87)?