

Learning How to Pray for Others

Philippians 1:9-11

All over the world today there are people meeting together in their churches to worship God and to learn his ways. Sunday morning is for most churches the high point of the entire week. This is when we gather together to celebrate what God has done and is doing in our lives and the lives of others. But that is only Sunday morning. The truth is that there's much more to the church than just what happens here every Sunday. In reality the church is a very complex organization which is mostly made up of volunteers who want to serve their lord. If you doubt the complexity of the church, all you need do is to go to the bookstore, and you'll find many books which have been written to help us to know how to operate various ministries in the church. It is so vast that people spend years of their lives going to school attempting to learn how to manage the church and its ministries. While all of that is necessary and good, the danger is that we will become so involved in learning methodologies, strategies and procedures that we neglect the simple things the bible tells us about how to do ministry. One of the most basic of all Christian principles is the practice of prayer. The truth is that we can learn how to do all the right stuff and fail miserably if we don't pray as we should.

When the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Philippians, he was writing to a congregation that he himself started and one that he loved dearly. He had confidence in the church, and he truly believed that what God had started in their lives would be continued by God's grace until Jesus Christ came back or they went to be with him through death.

But Paul also understood that God works through prayer to accomplish his will. For that reason, you find Paul praying for the Philippians in chapter one, and what he prayed for helps us to know what we should pray when we pray for one another. How do you pray for other believers? If you listen to the prayer requests made in most churches, you get the idea that someone has to be sick or without a job to be prayed for. That is very different than the kind of praying that you see people in scripture engaged in. Paul prayed for the maturity of God's people so that God would be pleased and glorified. Today we want to look at Paul's prayer so that we can use it as a model for our own praying. What does the Apostle Paul pray for the Philippian Christians? He tells us in verse nine.

Philippians 1:9, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight," When Paul prayed for Christians, he prayed that they would have more faith and more love.

When Paul prayed for the church in Thessalonica, he prayed a similar prayer.

2 Thessalonians 1:3, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."

He said to the believers in Ephesus in

Ephesians 1:15-16, "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."

In chapter five of Ephesians, he told them to "live a life of love." The issue of love is not a side street kind of thing in Christianity. It is the major interstate. The reason that it is a major thing is the fact that God is love, and there is no way that we can reflect him without being a loving people.

The power of love

There is no question about the fact that love is a very important word in our society. It would be a rare day in deed for us to not see the word or hear the word being used. Love is important in anyone's book. Frank Tebbets says "A life without love in it is like a heap of ashes upon a deserted hearth, with the fire dead, the laughter stilled and the light extinguished."

Love can do what nothing else can do. Napoleon on one occasion said, "I tried to conquer by force, and I am a failure. Jesus Christ used LOVE and He has conquered."

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, "4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8Love never fails."

I read a story that illustrates the kind of patient love those verses describe.

The classic convertible moved briskly through the afternoon traffic. The driver enjoyed the quick response of the small high powered engine. After driving her station wagon, this red corvette was exciting. Driving along with the wind in her hair, she tried to look casual and at ease, but inside she was a bit tense since she didn't often drive this car – her husband's pride and joy. She saw only a blur of color out of the corner of her eye. Before she could consciously consider her actions, she swerved to miss the small boy on the bicycle and veered into the side of a large gray pickup truck. The car stopped with a loud crash and the sound of breaking glass. They she heard, "Hey, lady. You okay?" Strong arms lifted her from the vehicle and helped her to the curb. "I'm fine," she said, "just let me sit here for a moment." All she could think was, "I'm fine now, but Jim's going to kill me when I get home." As she waited for the police

to arrive, she recalled how excited he was when he found this corvette. He wanted one ever since he was a boy. This one was a real treasure, and he had spent countless Saturdays fixing and polishing it. He knew every bolt and spot of chrome. It wasn't really his wrath she feared-he was actually a gentle and loving husband. But she dreaded the hurt and anguish she would see in his face when he heard the news. That, for her, would be worse than if he were to get angry and yell. "Thank God, I'm not hurt," she thought, "but I'm sure worried about telling Jim." The policeman arrived and asked, "May I see your driver's license and registration papers?" The officer felt sorry for her. He thought, "What a great car that was." She walked to the car, got her purse, and grabbed the registration packet from the glove compartment. She gave the officer her license and opened the plastic package that contained the papers. To her surprise, there on top of the documents was a white envelope with her name on it. She opened it and began to read, "Dear Brenda, If you are reading this, you have probably been in an accident. Don't worry. I pray that you are all right, and just remember it's you that I love. Jim

The increase of love

Paul did not say to the Philippians, "I pray that God will give you love." He prayed that the love they already had would increase. That is because all Christians have God's love abiding in them.

Romans 5:5, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

1 John 3:15, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death."

When God puts his love in someone's heart, that person finds himself loving, not only God, but also all those who belong to God. When you meet another Christian, there is an instant common bond. That is why you can meet another Christian and within 10 minutes be sharing very personal things with that other believer.

Paul says that it is not enough that we have God's love, we must have a growing love. Paul said in

Philippians 1:9, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more."

The word "abound" means to overflow. Picture a bucket standing under a water faucet with water pouring into it until it overflows. Paul is praying that the believers would not only increase in love, but that it would so fill their lives that it would overflow. What would it be like to be around someone who was overflowing in love? How would our society change if all Christians were to overflow in love? Having that kind of presence

among people would be the greatest evangelistic tool that we could possibly use. How then do we increase in love?

1. Love grows as knowledge increases

Philippians 1: 9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, "

You may have heard someone say at one time or another something like this: "our church does not emphasize doctrine. We just love one another." That may sound good to some people, but it is flawed. In reality, your love is based upon your knowledge. Ask me if I love the city of Cleveland Ohio. My answer will be, "no. I don't love Cleveland, Ohio because I don't know anything about it."

Ask me if I love driving a Mazda Miata, and I will give you the same answer. I don't love driving a Miata because I never have driven one. I don't love something if I don't know anything about it. The same is true about loving a person. My love for someone grows as I get to know him or her. That being true, I will never love God as I should until I learn about God and his ways. So when you pray for someone to have more love, you need also to pray that they will grow in the knowledge of God. If your love for God is not increasing as it should, ask yourself the question, "am I learning more about God? Do I know more about God today that I did three months ago?"

But there's more to it than that because the word used for knowledge here speaks of an experiential knowledge. In other words, we are talking about more than just learning facts about God and his ways. The kind of knowledge spoken of in this verse is speaking of something that you learn and then experience. Lets say that you have never driven a car. For some reason, driving a car has never interested you, but one day you pick up a book in the library that tells about cars and begin to read it. The more you read, the more you like the thought of driving a car. You even get to the place where you have favorite cars. You may even put pictures of those cars on your wall. At that point, you have grown in your love for cars, but that is only part of the picture. One day you decide to get your driver's license and having obtained your driver's license, you go out and buy your favorite car and begin to drive it. At that point, your love for that car abounds, and the more you drive it, the more you love it. Your love relationship with that car begins with knowledge and then turns into experience. So it is with your love for God. You learn about God and then you learn to experience a relationship with God as you share your life with Him.

2. Discernment grows as knowledge increases

Philippians 1:9, " And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, "1:10," so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,"

The word discernment has the idea of being able to see through something. In other words, you are able to see through the outward surface and to see the real root of what is going on. Without discernment, someone may make some serious mistakes in the name of love. For example, have you ever heard a parent say, "I just love my child too much to discipline him." That parent may perceive what he is doing to be love, but the scripture tells us that he is not acting in love. Love means that I am willing to suffer emotionally myself in order to teach my child the difference between right and wrong.

Is it love to give a person living out on the street money? That's where discernment comes in. If that person tells you that he wants to be out there because he does not want to work, then it is not a godly love that prompts you to give him money. And what about someone who comes to your door or is standing on the street corner in the name of Christ asking you for money to support his false religion? Is it a loving thing to give money to something that is going to lead other people astray? God's love is a discerning love.

Think of the story of the prodigal son. When that prodigal was in the far country wasting his money, I think his father in some way knew where that boy was and what he was doing, but he never offered to help him. To help his son at that point would have only enabled him to keep on living in sin. The father could not help the boy until he saw the error of his ways and repented, and when he did, the father was there with open arms to help.

The kind of love that God wants us to develop is not some kind of sentimental, emotional feeling. It is a love that is based on truth. Any kind of "love" that does not have the Biblical boundaries of discernment will do harm rather than good.

Results of Growing in Love

1. Growing in Love Leads to an Accurate Evaluation of Life

On his 80th birthday someone asked Herbert Welch the secret of his serene spirit. He replied, "As I grow older, life become simpler because I see the essentials more clearly in the evening light." God's love lead you to evaluate life from his perspective so that you can see what is essential and what is not.

In the 19th century there was a department store owner in Philadelphia named John Wanamaker. Within a few years his business became one of the most successful businesses in the country. He was also named Postmaster General of the United States. He also served as the Sunday School superintendent of the Bethany Presbyterian Church, which at that time was the largest Sunday School in the world. When he was asked how he could hold all the positions at once. He replied, "Early in life I read, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' The Sunday School is my business. All the rest are things." God's love teaches us to say yes, not to the good but to the best. It is only then that we can set the priorities that will bring the greatest blessings to our lives.

2. Growing in Love Leads to the Real Deal

Philippians 1:10," so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,"

The word used here for "pure" comes from a root word which is Latin for "without wax." In the ancient world clay pots were the vessels of choice, but their quality varied. Cheap pottery was thick and solid and did not require much skill to make. Fine pottery was thin. It had a clear color, and brought a high price, largely because it was very fragile. Often this pottery would crack in the oven. Cracked pottery should have been thrown away. But dishonest dealers were in the habit of filling in the cracks with a hard pearly wax that would blend in with the color of the pottery. This made the crack practically undetectable in the shops, especially when painted or glazed. But the wax was immediately detectable if the pottery was held up to light, especially to the sun. In that case the cracks would show up darker. Honest dealers marked their finer product by the caption *sine cera* - without wax

There are throughout the world, many people who name the name of Christ and claim to be Christians. Many are not true Christians. When you see someone living a life of Christ like love, you know that person is pure. He is without "wax." He is the real deal, and that is what the outside world needs to see. Are you the real deal, or are you a "cracked pot?"

3. Growing in Love leads to God's Glory

Philippians 1:11, "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."

When you live a life that is filled with love, who gets the Glory? God gets the Glory because he has taken a human being who is by nature self centered and transformed his life so that he is a loving person who reaches out to others. And the more he grows in love, the more apparent that he is that God is at work.

How does your prayer life for other people measure up? When you pray for people, what do you pray? How often do you pray that someone will increase in love, that they will gain knowledge and discernment?