

2 | We Pray for One Other



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Almost 60 million people run for exercise, and almost 111 million walk for the same reason.¹² This discipline is commendable, yet many more decide to run or walk each year, only to quit after a few weeks—or days. What causes some people to stick it out and others to quit?

While we might suggest many reasons, a great motivator can be the presence of others. It's easy to say, "I've gone far enough," when you're by yourself, but runners are great at encouraging each other to keep going. Marathon runners are known for verbally "high-fiving" each other. They know it's hard, and they support one another. There's strength in numbers.

This truth applies to our prayer lives as well. God certainly hears the prayers of the solitary individual, but we experience something wonderful when we gather with others to pray. As a church, we need one another, and we support one another through our prayers.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: The church is strengthened as we _____.

Culture tends to reduce prayer to asking God only for tangible things in times of pressing need. Christians, on the other hand, should hold a much wider view of prayer. Don't get me wrong; God assuredly cares about our needs. In another letter, Paul said we are to pray about *everything* (Philippians 4:6)! We should keep praying for God's provision in our lives, but prayer involves much more than asking for our own concrete needs.

Ephesians 3:14-17a ¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. ¹⁶ I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, ^{17a} and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Pray for the _____ and _____ of Christ to be manifested through His church.

Humanly speaking, obeying God rightly is impossible. If we're to have any hope of regularly following what our heavenly Father has commanded us, then we must depend on His power. The reality is we're desperate apart from His power, so we pray to be strengthened with power from the Holy Spirit—and we're to pray that same prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul prayed another spiritual prayer for his flock: “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (v. 17). Through saving faith, Jesus already dwells in our hearts, and God has promised, “I will never leave you or abandon you” (Hebrews 13:5). But sometimes we don't feel like that's true. When times are tough or discouragement runs deep, we might think Jesus has gone away. As we grow in Christ, our faith matures, and maturing faith reminds us of God's promises. God Himself, through His Holy Spirit, is the One who matures our faith. The Holy Spirit not only empowers us to obey Jesus, but He also comforts us with the presence of Jesus.

Ephesians 3:17b-19 ^{17b} I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, ¹⁹ and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Pray for a deeper sense of God's _____ .

In these verses, Paul was ultimately praying for the Ephesian believers to grasp God's love fully. And it's what you and I should be praying for each other in Christ's church. Here are three things we can petition the Lord to provide for ourselves and other Christ-followers:

- ▶ **A continual recognition that it was God's love that saved us and it's God's love that sustains us.** Regardless of how we might feel, God loves us and has always loved us. He loves us today, and He'll keep loving us tomorrow. In Christ, we're rooted and firmly established in God's love. Pray that we will remember this.
- ▶ **A clearer understanding of the full measure of God's love and character.** We'll never fully grasp everything about God and His love. We can know God deeply through praying, reading His Word, walking with His people, and experiencing His care through life's circumstances. Pray that we would grow in knowing God's love more deeply each day.
- ▶ **A daily awareness of the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross.** Jesus' suffering on the cross was the primary way God demonstrated His love for us (Romans 5:8). Therefore, we never have to wonder if God really loves us. Pray we never stop marveling over that truth.

Ephesians 3:20-21 ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us— ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Pray that God would be _____ through His church.

Paul closed his prayer with more words of worship: "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (v. 21). By finishing his prayer this way, Paul presented the ultimate purpose of our praying together, living together, serving together, and everything else we do in the church and beyond. That purpose is the glory of God.

FOR HIS GLORY

In the space below, record a brief prayer list for your church and small group. Include specific needs you're aware of, as well as the things Paul mentioned in Ephesians 3:14-21.

ENGAGE

DAY 1: We're to pray for one another.

Read Ephesians 3:14-15.

This passage challenges us to broaden our prayers. One way we can do this is by praying for others, not just ourselves. It's important to note that we should especially pray for fellow believers. God is the One "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (v. 15). Christ's church includes members from every nation on earth. We should pray for believers in our church and around the world.

Throughout this passage where Paul used "you" or "your," he was using the plural form. He wasn't praying for just an individual; he was praying for a group of people. Paul was demonstrating a simple truth: God saves us to be a part of a people. The church is a family. As a family, we share responsibility for each other, and that responsibility includes praying for one another in addition to praying for ourselves.

*Pray today for the list you created on page 73 in the "For His Glory" activity.
Place this list somewhere you'll see often as a personal reminder to pray.*

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."

MARTIN LUTHER

DAY 2: We're to pray for others' spiritual growth.

Read Ephesians 3:16-17a.

In this passage, we're encouraged to pray for spiritual needs, not just physical ones. Like Paul, we can pray that God would strengthen our brothers and sisters through the Holy Spirit's power. What does that look like?

- ▶ Pray that, as children of God, they would shed sinful works of the flesh and grow in the holy fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-23).
- ▶ Pray that, as God's people, they would love one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, and serve one another (Colossians 3:12-13).
- ▶ Pray that, as God's ambassadors, they would serve the world and share God's Word. In the midst of persecution, pray that they would turn the other cheek and faithfully persevere to the end (2 Corinthians 5:20).

When you pray for a physical need for yourself or someone else, develop a habit of praying for a spiritual need as well.

DAY 3: God's love for us is real and active.

Read Ephesians 3:17b-19.

God's love may seem to be a foregone conclusion to you. We constantly say, *God loves you* and *God is love*—and we should, because it's true. But what does it mean that God loves us? Oftentimes, we may think of God's love as being no different from the love we give to spouses, siblings, parents, children, or our favorite flavor of ice cream. To us, love is a feeling we have toward people or things we like more than anyone or anything else. Consequently, we might reduce God's love toward us as simply warm, sentimental feelings. But God's love is so much more.

Love is most definitely a feeling—and a very powerful one at that—but it's far more than a feeling. Love is actually an action. We see this play out in our own lives. For example, a godly father frequently tells his child he loves him, but he demonstrates that love by feeding him, clothing him, and sacrificing his time for him. Moreover, as a parent, the father sees the bigger picture of life. Just as a father installs a fence around the backyard to allow his young child to play freely while being protected from outside danger, so too God places boundaries around His beloved children in His Word. Love is something we do—love in action.

What have you learned about God's love lately? Be ready to share what you've experienced with someone who needs to hear it today.

DAY 4: We pray with confidence because God is powerful.

Read Ephesians 3:20.

Paul finished his prayer with climactic words of worship to God. He didn't just tack on an "amen." Instead, he prayed, "Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think" (v. 20). Those words demand our attention. Two important principles stand out:

- ▶ **God is able to do more than we ask.** He created all things. He orders all things. He sustains all things. God saves His people. He empowers His people. He provides for His people. He knows all things, and He can do all things. Nothing is too difficult for Him. The same God who put the stars and planets in their celestial orbits also placed every hair on your head. He knows you by name.
- ▶ **In contrast to the power and greatness of God, we tend to pray smaller, more limited prayers.** In our humanity, we often bring to God our needs and concerns, asking Him to work in specific ways. We even craft a perceived (or preferred) solution to the matter. What we often fail to realize is that all the best possible solutions we can concoct pale in comparison to God's power and ability. He's able to go above and beyond what we ask or think.

Have you been praying for a need with a specific outcome in mind? Acknowledge God's wisdom and power. Ask Him to answer your prayer as He knows is best.



DAY 5: Our prayers declare God's glory.

Read Ephesians 3:21.

“The glory of God” is God’s fame or renown. With that definition in mind, that means we who are Christ’s church are to make God famous through our collective witness and worship. God’s glory is a consistent theme throughout the Bible.

- ▶ God protects His glory (Exodus 20:3-6).
- ▶ God created us for His glory (Isaiah 43:7).
- ▶ God doesn’t share His glory (Isaiah 48:11).
- ▶ God saves us for His glory (Ephesians 1:12).
- ▶ We’re to bring God glory through everything we do (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Throughout the Bible we see that God works in and through His people for His glory. Since God’s glory is His top priority, it should be our top priority. Our prayers should also reflect His priorities. When we pray like Paul, our prayers will be more about God and His church and less about ourselves.

Spend some time worshiping God today. Praise Him for what He has done in the past, what He is doing today, and what He will accomplish in the future.

“Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

EPHESIANS 3:20-21