

## SESSION 2

# We Pray for One Another



### QUESTION 1:

*When have you really enjoyed being a part of a group?*

## THE POINT

The church is strengthened as we pray.

## THE PASSAGE

Ephesians 3:14-21

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Some things are just better when done with a group. It's one thing to grab a basketball and shoot hoops, but you can't play a game of basketball by yourself; it takes a team.

Almost 60 million people run for exercise, and almost 111 million walk for the same reason.<sup>1</sup> 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 prayer 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.

## 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.**

**KEY WORDS:** **Inner being** (v. 16)—Paul used this phrase to refer to human abilities or faculties such as conscience or the will. God considers a person’s heart, not their appearance (1 Sam. 16:7).

Culture tends to reduce prayer to only asking God 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* (Phil. 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.

This passage challenges us to broaden our prayers in at least two ways.

- 1. Pray for others, not just ourselves.** We should especially pray for fellow believers. God is the One “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” 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 was not praying for just an individual; he was praying for a group of people. Paul was demonstrating a simple truth: God saves us to be 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.

2. **Pray for spiritual needs, not just physical.** 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 (Gal. 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 (Col. 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 persevere to the end (2 Cor. 5:20).

Humanly speaking, obeying God rightly is impossible. If we are 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 are desperate apart from His power, so we pray to be strengthened with power from the Holy Spirit—and we are 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.” Through *saving* faith, Jesus already dwells in our hearts, and God has promised, “I will never leave you or abandon you” (Heb. 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. But *maturing* faith says otherwise. 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.

All of these spiritual realities grow through prayer. God uses the prayers of fellow Christians to empower our obedience, comfort our hearts, and mature our faith. And we can pray that He will do the same for them.

**ENGAGE**

Whom can you pray for, besides yourself or your spouse or children?

What are some spiritual needs you can pray for?

**QUESTION 2:**

*When have you experienced something that was obviously an answer to prayer?*

**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.**

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?

Often, 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.

## DIGGING DEEPER

### LOVE IN PAUL'S WRITING

In Paul's letters, the great Greek words for love are the verb *agapao*, the noun *agape*, and the adjective *agapetos*. Other terms appear far less commonly. By one count, the *agap-* group occurs 136 times in the Greek New Testament.

**God's Love for Men**—The love of God lay at the heart of Paul's gospel. When the apostle spoke of God's love he usually linked it to salvation. "The supreme expression of this undeserved love is Christ's death on the cross as a sacrifice for sins (Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5; 2 Thess 2:16;

cf Gal 2:20)." Love moved Christ to give Himself up for the church (Eph. 5:25-26). In Ephesians 3:18-19, Paul stressed the limitlessness of the Lord's love.

God's love draws believers into His family. "In love He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:4-5, HCSB). The love of God is crucial to a believer's assurance and security (Rom. 8:31-39). Paul thus prayed fervently that the Ephesian Christians would come to understand God's love fully (Eph. 3:14-21).

Cecil Taylor, "Love In Paul's Writings," *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 2018, 78-81.

Love is most definitely a *feeling*—and a very powerful one at that—but it is far more than a feeling. Love is actually an *action*. We see this play out in our own lives. For example, a 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.

When it comes to God's love, we must also hold the "feeling" and "doing" in proper balance. That's what Paul was ultimately praying for the Ephesian believers. And it's what you and I should be praying for each other in Christ's church. We should pray that the members of our church would have a deeper sense of God's love in their lives.

- ▶ **Pray they would constantly remember that it was God’s love that *saved* them and it is God’s love that *sustains* them.** In his prayer, Paul said we are “rooted and firmly established in love” (v. 17b). This is a statement of fact. Regardless of how we might feel, God loves us and always has loved us. He loves us today, and He’ll keep loving us tomorrow. In Christ, we are rooted and firmly established in God’s love. Pray that we remember that.
- ▶ **Pray they would grow in understanding the full measure of God’s love and character.** Paul used human terms of measurement—“length and width, height and depth”—to show our inability to comprehend the vastness of God’s love. We’ll never fully grasp everything about God and His love. But though we can’t know God fully, 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.
- ▶ **Pray they would be astounded by the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross.** Paul referred to “Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge.” In other words, His love is mind-boggling! Jesus’ suffering on the cross was the primary way God demonstrated His love for us (Rom. 5:8). Therefore, we never have to wonder if God really loves us. His love for us was settled once and for all on the cross. That has never changed—and it never will. Pray that we never stop marveling over that truth.

**QUESTION 3:**

*What facets of God’s love are the most amazing to you?*

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## 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.**

Paul challenged us with another principle of praying together in Christ's church. This principle has the possibility of radically changing our lives, affecting our worship, and altering our prayers. That principle: prayer is not about us. It's about God and His glory.

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." Those words demand our attention. Two important principles stand out:

- 1. 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. This truth should give us enormous confidence as we pray for one another. Our confidence is not based on the greatness of our prayers but on the greatness of the One to whom we pray!
- 2. In contrast to the power and greatness of God, we tend to pray smaller, more limited prayers.** God "is able to do *above and beyond* all that we ask or think" (emphasis added). This truth doesn't indict us as much as it humanizes us. 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. Through prayer, we then ask God to do it. But what we often fail to realize is that all the best possible solutions we can concoct pale in comparison to



the power and ability of God. He's able to go above and beyond what we ask or think. Paul's worship-filled words direct our gaze to God—the worthy audience of our prayers.

**QUESTION 4:**

*When has God exceeded your expectations?*

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.” By finishing his prayer with these words, 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.

“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 (Ex. 20:3-6).
- ▶ God created us for His glory (Isa. 43:7).
- ▶ God does not share His glory (48:11).
- ▶ God saves us for His glory (Eph. 1:12).
- ▶ We are to bring God glory in everything we do (1 Cor. 10:31).

This is only a sampling of the many Scriptures referring to God's passion for His glory. 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.

**QUESTION 5:**

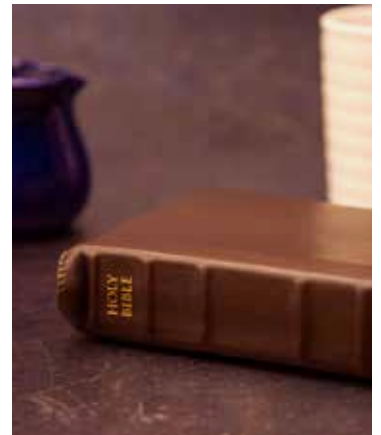
*What are some specific ways our group can pray for the church?*

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## LIVE IT OUT

How might you adjust your prayers to align more with the spiritual priorities of God? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Confess.** In order to realign your prayer life in a more God-centered, others-focused direction, confess to God the ways you've prayed in self-centered ways.
- ▶ **Pray.** If you're not in a regular discipline of prayer, begin now. Keep a journal of your prayer requests to ensure you are also praying for the spiritual and physical needs of others.
- ▶ **Pray together.** The best way to grow in praying together in Christ's church is by praying together in Christ's church! Commit to a regular time to meet and pray with one or two other believers from your Bible study group.



### END NOTES

1 Christina Gough, "Running & Jogging—Statistic and Facts," *Statista*, October 18, 2018, [www.statista.com/topics/1743/running-and-jogging](http://www.statista.com/topics/1743/running-and-jogging).



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## THE CHURCH PRAYING FERVENTLY

By Brenda Harris

Prayer is a personal and intimate time between a person and God. Entering into fellowship with God the Creator through His Son, Jesus Christ, is a high privilege. However, prayer can also be a shared experience. When believers agree together and seek the Lord corporately, this spirit of unity glorifies the Father and offers a special bond of Christian fellowship.

Throughout the pages of the New Testament, we read about the value of praying together. In Matthew 18:19, Jesus urged believers to pray together. According to Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas prayed together in a prison cell. And in Colossians 1:1-9, we find that Paul and Timothy prayed for the church at Colossae.

The church as a whole is a powerful force when prayer is a priority. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed” (Acts 2:42-43).

Peter was the focus of the church at prayer as recorded in Acts 12. This courageous disciple was thrown in jail by King Herod and closely guarded by 16 men. But we find tucked into these verses that “the church was praying fervently to God for him” (v. 5).

Peter experienced a miraculous release that night. A light shown into the prison, an angel woke him up, and his chains fell to the ground. Peter was dumbfounded, but he obeyed the instructions that were given. He walked right past the guards, through the iron gate, and out onto the streets before it dawned on him what was really happening .

Don't miss what the writer of Acts said in verse 12: “He went to the house of Mary ... where many had assembled and were praying.” Even in his confusion, Peter knew the family of God was praying for him!

When Peter arrived, Rhoda, the servant girl, got so excited that she forgot to open the door! What was she thinking? Why didn't she simply open the door and let Peter in? Obviously, Rhoda knew what had been going on inside that house. She heard their prayers; she was an eyewitness to the faith those early believers had in the power of God. Is it any wonder that when she heard Peter's voice outside the door, she was overwhelmed? I love the phrase, “because of her joy” (v. 14). Rhoda was celebrating because she witnessed an answer to prayer literally right outside her door!

Rhoda went to share the good news, but she encountered doubters. The very ones who had been praying for Peter's release were hesitant to believe what the servant girl told them. Peter was standing outside, an in-the-flesh answer to prayer, and the others couldn't (or wouldn't) believe her.

Persistent, Peter kept knocking, and someone finally let him in so he could testify of the Lord's goodness. Can you imagine the celebration that took place that night at Mary's house when they acknowledged God's answer to their prayers? Indeed, celebrating together with other believers is an amazing experience!

Praying is such a blessing, but that blessing is multiplied when we share it with other believers. Focusing on the power of God as we agree and intercede for others brings unity. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:20).

Jesus told His followers, “My house will be called a house of prayer” (Matt. 21:13). What better support system could we have than a group of committed believers coming together in unity to lift up the needs of individuals, the church, the community, and the nation? Think about the impact! Oh, that we could all be part of the church that is praying fervently!

**BRENDA HARRIS** enjoys her role as prayer coordinator for Kendrick Brothers Productions. She has the unique privilege of rallying prayer teams and prayer warriors from around the world and joining them in united prayer to the Father!