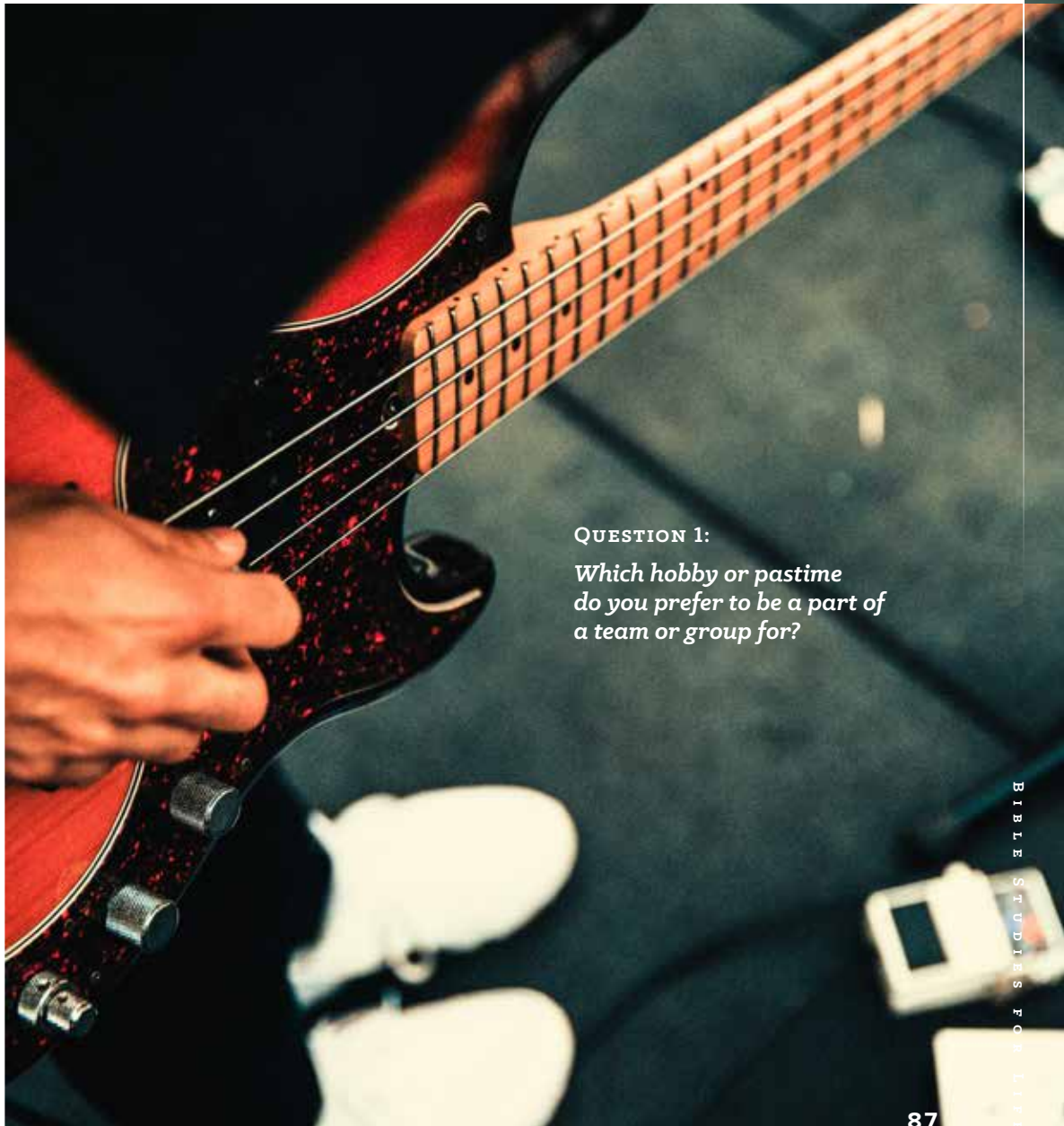


Session 2: We Pray for One Another



QUESTION 1:

Which hobby or pastime do you prefer to be a part of a team or group for?

THE POINT

The church is strengthened
as we pray.



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 more than 110 million walk for the same reason.¹ 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. 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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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.

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 (see 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.

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 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.

QUESTION 2:

How do you typically approach the discipline of praying for others?

- 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.

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" (Hebrews 13:5). But sometimes we don't feel like that's true. The Holy Spirit will make His presence known to us as we mature in Christ.

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 others.

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?

QUESTION 3:

What have you found to be true about God's love?

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. Just as a father installs a fence around the backyard to allow his young child to play freely while being protected from danger, so too God places boundaries around His beloved children in His Word. Love is something we do—love is action.

When it comes to God's love, we must also hold the "feeling" and "doing" in proper balance. That's what Paul was praying for the Ephesians. 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." This is a statement of fact. 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.

▶ **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 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 (see Romans 5:8). God's 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.



*“Everywhere we turn,
prayer should be there to meet us.”*

STEPHEN KENDRICK AND ALEX KENDRICK

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 yet 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 is this: prayer (and everything in life for that matter) 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 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." 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. 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 our powerful God.

QUESTION 4:

When has God gone "above and beyond" what you asked Him for?

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 and everything else we do. That purpose is the glory of God.

QUESTION 5:

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

PRAY

Make a commitment to pray for others.

*Reflect on the following acrostic to help guide your prayer time,
then write down the names of people for whom you will pray this week.*

- P R A I S E :** Worship God for who He is (Psalm 150:1-6).
- R E P E N T :** Confess any known sin in your life (Psalm 51:1-2).
- A S K :** Make your requests known to God. Trust that God will meet the needs of others and your needs (Philippians 4:6-7).
- Y I E L D :** Yield your life to God. Recommit to serving Him alone as you begin your day (Proverbs 3:5).

This week's prayer list:

1.

2.

3.

4.
