



PRAYING WITH PAUL

A CALL TO SPIRITUAL
REFORMATION

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and BRIAN J. TABB

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

Published by LifeWay Press® • © 2014 The Gospel Coalition

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ISBN: 9781430032120

Item: 005644095

Dewey Decimal Classification: 248.3

Subject Headings: PRAYER \ PAUL, APOSTLE \ SPIRITUAL LIFE

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Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing

LifeWay Church Resources

One LifeWay Plaza

Nashville, TN 37234-0152

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ABOUT THE GOSPEL COALITION

The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences, we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence, or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King's highway, always aiming to provide gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that current and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom He shed His life's blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply His disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so we truly speak and live for Him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. As pastors, we intend to do this in our churches through the ordinary means of His grace: prayer, ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.

INTRODUCTION

As the title suggests, *Praying with Paul* is a study of the apostle Paul's prayers designed as a Bible-study companion to the book *Praying with Paul* (originally titled *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*). The chief purpose in that book is to think through some of Paul's prayers, so that we may align our prayer habits with his. We want to learn what to pray for, what arguments to use, what priorities we should adopt, what beliefs should shape our prayers, and much more. This study guide is written to encourage believers to gather together in small groups, Bible studies, and Sunday school classes to examine and apply Paul's prayers in the context of Christian community.

The Bible contains numerous prayers and teachings about prayer. Here our focus is limited to selections from the thanksgivings, petitions, and exhortations of prayer that saturated Paul's life, ministry, and writings to churches and coworkers. The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Three verses later he encourages the church to follow his example: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (v. 9).

Prayer is one of the basic and crucial ways we come to know God and demonstrate that we really do know Him. And yet many Christians are inconsistent, joyless, aimless, and powerless in prayer. We are busy and concerned with many things—even good things—but the vital biblical discipline of prayer has been sorely neglected. The rebuke of James 4:2–3 is alarmingly relevant for the Western church: "You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

This study of Paul's prayers will highlight five areas where we can grow in our understanding and practice of prayer. We will seek to examine and emulate Paul's priorities, passion, perseverance, power, and purpose in prayer. We'll look at each of these "five Ps" of prayer here and then will draw particular attention to these areas in the eight lessons that follow.

First, consider Paul's *priorities* in prayer. We typically pray most when circumstances are desperate—when we or those we love face serious illness, tragedy, financial need, relational strife, or a difficult decision. We should certainly pray for these sorts of concerns, asking God to provide, heal, protect, and lead.¹ However, Paul's common practice is to pray looks different. He consistently thanks God for signs of His grace at work in people's lives, such as growing faith, love, and

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faithfulness in times of adversity (see 2 Thess. 1:3-4). He also consistently asks God for those things that are most important and carry eternal weight, such as believers' deepening knowledge of God, growing spiritual maturity, and increasing love for one another. This emphasis is clear in Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-10, which is examined in session 4: "From the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Second, Paul's *passion* for people motivates his petitionary prayers. In 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, discussed in session 3, Paul writes, "For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?" Strikingly, he tells believers in Philippians 1:8 that he yearns for them "with the affection of Christ Jesus." That is, Paul's deep affection for other Christians flows from his own profound experience of God's love in Christ. If we are to follow the apostle's example in petitionary prayer, we must be controlled by the love of Christ and must foster our love for people in practical, self-sacrificing ways.

Third, the apostle demonstrates remarkable *perseverance* in prayer. Many of us may have the desire to pray more or better, but we don't stick with it—like those who join a fitness center January 2 but by February or March are back to old habits. Paul and his coworkers thank God always, praying unceasingly for the churches. Paul perseveres in earnest, joyful petitions for other people even when the going gets tough. He continues to pray for others when he is in prison, when his travel plans are canceled, when his circumstances appear uncertain or bleak. As we will see in session 5, Paul persists in prayer because of his unshakable confidence "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Fourth, Paul recognizes that the true *power* for effective ministry and life transformation comes from God in response to prayer. Scripture summons us to recognize our inadequacy and weakness and rely on God's "power at work within us" (Eph. 3:20), which strengthens us "for all endurance and patience" (Col. 1:11; see sessions 4 and 7). Paul prays that God by His power "may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power" (2 Thess. 1:11).

Fifth, Paul prays and ministers with a clear sense of *purpose*. Often when we pray, particularly for urgent, pressing needs, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. However, we see that Paul consistently aligns his requests with God's grand

purposes to bring glory to His name and to save and sanctify His people. God acts for His glory and our good, and He accomplishes His glorious purposes in response to the expectant, dependent prayers of His people. Second Thessalonians 1:12 summarizes Paul's ultimate goal in his petitions for the churches: "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." As discussed in session 2, Paul prays in view of the final day, when the Lord Jesus will be glorified in us because of what we have become by His transforming grace, and we will be glorified in Him because of what He has done for us.

Our aim in *Praying with Paul* is to examine the biblical prayers of the apostle with a view to aligning our own prayer patterns with his. We study Scripture seeking lasting renewal and true spiritual reformation, and for that we are dependent on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. May our prayers be increasingly characterized by God-centered priorities, passion for people, dogged perseverance in times of busyness or trial, spiritual empowerment, and a clear sense of purpose.

1. See for example Psalm 5:8; 20:1; 50:15; Philippians 4:6,19; James 5:13-18; 1 Peter 5:7.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

PREPARATION

Group members are encouraged to prepare as much as possible each week in advance—first and foremost by a careful reading of the biblical text covered in that week’s session. The **Introduction** to each session leads into the **Scripture** text. You’ll want to have a Bible on hand as a quick reference for the primary texts and other references to passages throughout. Each of the eight sessions includes one or two sections of Scripture followed by a short commentary and personal reflection questions. The **Commentary** sections explain the text and highlight important theological and practical themes in Paul’s letters. The **Reflection Questions** reinforce key points noted in the commentary and promote honest self-examination and application of God’s Word.

GROUP MEETING

The small-group time begins with the **Group Discussion** section and a **Warm Up** question to encourage everyone in the group to think about key concepts in the biblical text. Next, watch the short **Video** featuring D. A. Carson’s exposition of Paul’s prayers. From there, move to the **Group Discussion** questions to get everyone engaging with the content and implications of Paul’s prayers. These questions focus on observing and interpreting key truths in the biblical text, with the end focus on applying these truths to our practices of prayer. The **Wrap** concludes the group time. Spend about 10 minutes reiterating the bullet points and sharing prayer requests before closing in prayer.

A **Take Home** component challenges group members to put “flesh” on the discussion and apply it during the week in some specific way. Recapping this section will be an important way to begin the Group Discussion the following week. Group members, and especially leaders, should consider consulting the works listed under **Resources for Further Study**, especially D. A. Carson’s *Praying with Paul*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study guide freely adapts and uses material from D.A. Carson's *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. I write in my own style and I point readers to the relevant chapter or chapters from D.A.'s book at the end of each session.

I would like to thank Brian Daniel from LifeWay, Collin Hansen and Ben Peays from The Gospel Coalition, and D. A. Carson for inviting me to write *Praying with Paul* and for their assistance in various ways to see the project through to completion. My teaching assistant, Zach Howard, proofread the study and made many helpful comments. I also had the opportunity to teach through many of Paul's prayers and read D. A. Carson's book with a wonderful group of college students in my Intermediate Greek Grammar class at Bethlehem College and Seminary. Finally, I am grateful to my wife Kristin for her constant encouragement and support and for reading portions of the study and offering suggestions. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

Brian Tabb

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**LESSONS FROM
THE SCHOOL OF**

PRAYER

SESSION 1

Many Christians feel dissatisfied or discouraged with their prayer habits. It's difficult to set aside adequate time to seek God in prayer and to intercede for the various needs of one's family, friends, local church, city, and the world. When we do begin to pray, we sometimes struggle to know what to say and may find ourselves praying the same things again and again, seemingly making little progress. How can we experience increasing depth, vibrancy, and growth in our prayer life?

This session introduces Paul's practices and priorities in prayer and also offers encouragement and practical strategies to carry out what might seem to be impossible biblical commands: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:16-18). We must plan to pray if we want to see increasing depth, vibrancy, and maturity in our prayer life. This study will also suggest studying the prayers of Scripture, learning from the prayers of mature believers, and employing other practical lessons from the school of prayer.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

COMMENTARY

What is your church's greatest need? More effective programs? Renewed zeal for evangelism? Greater engagement with the needs of your community or of the world? Growth in disciplined, biblical thinking? More authenticity in relationships? Doubtless all of these and more are important and necessary for our churches today.

But what we need above all is to know God deeper and better. We think too little of God's attributes, His marvelous deeds, and His revealed will for His creatures. We too rarely revel in His love or tremble at His holiness. His Word doesn't saturate our conversations or shape our priorities to the degree that it ought.

One of the crucial ways that we grow in our knowledge of God—and show that we truly know Him—is consistent, heartfelt, biblical prayer. According to J. I. Packer, “Prayer is the measure of a man, spiritually, in a way that nothing else is.”¹ Thus, this study focuses on select prayers in Paul's letters, so that we may consider afresh the apostle's practices, priorities, and motivations in prayer and increasingly align our own prayer habits with his.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul gives a series of simple but important commands: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Rejoicing, petitioning, and giving thanks—in many respects this serves as a short-hand summary of the life of prayer that Paul models and prescribes. We will consider each of these three exhortations in turn.

First, Paul writes, “Rejoice always.” The apostle repeatedly calls Christians to rejoice or be glad (emphasis added):

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11 Finally, brothers, *rejoice*.

PHILIPPIANS 2:8 Likewise you also should *be glad* and *rejoice* with me.

PHILIPPIANS 3:1 Finally, my brothers, *rejoice* in the Lord.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4 *Rejoice* in the Lord always; again I will say, *rejoice*.

The Christian life is characterized by the constant, active expression of joy *in the Lord*—the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. This rejoicing isn’t mainly an emotional high or good feeling. Rather, it means finding our souls satisfied in knowing the one true God and taking pleasure in experiencing His good gifts. It’s noteworthy that Paul addresses believers in Thessalonica that have experienced significant adversity. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6 the apostle acknowledges that “you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”

How can believers rejoice always, even during times of dark suffering? Such deep, unshakable joy is possible because of our hope of eternal life, made possible by Jesus Christ who has reconciled us to our Creator and will return as the victorious King. The victory of a favorite sports team prompts individual and corporate joy and celebration. Is the church characterized by such rejoicing over the Lord Jesus’ victory over sin and death, which is an infinitely greater basis for exultation than winning the Super Bowl or World Series? Christians are called to “Rejoice in hope” (Rom. 12:12) because our “reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:12). In this way, we follow the pattern of Jesus who endured the pain and shame of the cross “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb. 12:2). Do we keep in mind this glorious future perspective in the midst of present trials? Are we continually moved to rejoice because Jesus has saved us from our sins and for unending fellowship with God in the new creation?

Second, in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul calls believers to “pray without ceasing” (ESV) or “pray continually” (NIV). That is, he summons the church to petition God constantly and persistently for what we need. Luke 18:1-8 illustrates this posture of persistent prayer in view of the faithfulness of God:

[Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Commentator Gordon Fee writes, “Continual prayer is the ongoing reminder that God’s children are always and wholly dependent on their heavenly Father for all things.”²

We have seen that Paul urges believers to “rejoice always” and “pray continually.” The apostle then exhorts the church to “give thanks in all circumstances.” As we experience the joy of God’s presence and good gifts and as we recognize God’s answers to our prayers, we’re prompted to thank Him for richly supplying all our needs and to continue to make known our requests to God. In the Psalms, writers regularly praise and thank God for answering their prayers in times of need and distress. For example, David says in Psalm 30:8–12:

To you, O LORD, I cry,
and to the Lord I plead for mercy: ...
You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
you have loosed my sackcloth
and clothed me with gladness,
that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul explains the underlying reason believers must constantly rejoice, pray, and give thanks: “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Here the will of God doesn’t refer to the secret divine purposes but to the revealed will of God. God commands and thus obligates us to rejoice, to petition Him for our needs, and to express gratitude to Him as the source of every blessing we enjoy.

The following eight lessons may help us put into practice this summons to “pray without ceasing.” First, *we must plan to pray*. No one drifts into disciplined prayer. Daniel, Jesus, Paul, and believers in the early church all clearly set aside specific times for prayer (see Dan. 6:10; Luke 5:16; Acts 2:42; Eph. 1:16). To grow in our practice in prayer, we must build into our schedules consistent and intentional times to do nothing but pray.

Second, *adopt practical ways to impede mental drift*. Vocalizing our prayers and typing out our requests to various biblical passages are two specific and simple strategies for remaining focused and avoiding mental drift.³

Third, if possible *develop prayer-partner relationships*. Meet regularly with a small group of committed prayer warriors. If you’re married to a believer, build consistent times of intentional prayer into your schedule.

Fourth, *carefully choose models for prayer*. Don’t try to imitate their phrasing or mannerisms, but study the content, breadth, and passion of the prayers of some mature godly men and women.

Fifth, *develop a system for your prayer lists*. You may employ a prayer journal, a folder filled with updated prayer letters and notes, a prayer calendar on your smartphone, a church membership directory, or a prayer guide for the world such as *Operation World*.⁴ Whatever the system, use prayer lists.

Sixth, *combine praise, confession, and intercession*. We have seen that 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 calls for regular rejoicing, petitioning, and thanking God. Some believers follow the pattern of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (ACTS). Others use the simple strategy of rejoice, repent, request (the three Rs).⁵ As will be suggested throughout this book, it is wise and helpful to tie your requests and intercessions closely to Scripture.

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Seventh, *those in positions of spiritual leadership should work at their public prayers*. As with many aspects of Christian discipleship, mature, biblical praying is more easily caught than taught. This means that we should choose our models wisely. At the same time, when we have occasion to lead others in prayer (whether in corporate worship or around the dinner table), we should take that privilege and responsibility seriously and seek to be effective models for other people.

Finally, *pray until you pray*, as the Puritans often said. That is, we should seek to pray long enough and authentically enough that we move past formalism and unreality and begin to delight in God's presence and esteem His will.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is the relationship between rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks to God?

Consider your current prayer habits. Do you have a plan for regular, intentional prayer? Review the eight practical lessons of prayer noted above. What one or two of these strategies or principles do you want to put into practice this week?

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-28

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

²⁵ Brothers, pray for us.

²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

²⁷ I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

COMMENTARY

Having instructed the church to rejoice, pray, and give thanks, the apostle then prays for the church and reminds them that he and his coworkers need prayer as well. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul makes two petitions, followed by an affirmation of confidence in the faithfulness of God in verse 24.

First, Paul prays, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.” The title “the God of peace” recalls the opening greeting of 1 Thessalonians 1:1 (“Grace to you and peace.”) and the command in 5:13 (“Be at peace among yourselves.”). Commentator Greg Beale explains, “God is referred to as *the God of peace* because he is the only one who perfectly possesses peace and he is the ultimate origin of peace for others.”⁶ In Scripture, peace is more than simply the absence of strife but refers positively to the wholeness and well-being of God’s people. Through His death on the cross, Jesus has achieved costly, lasting peace, reconciling people to God and also to one another (see Eph. 2:14–17; Col. 1:20).

Paul prays that God will bring about peace or wholeness by sanctifying believers completely. Holiness, or sanctification, is an important theme in

1 Thessalonians. For example, the apostle writes, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (4:3,7, NIV). God not only commands His people to live holy lives, He also gives them His Holy Spirit (see 4:8) and is faithful to accomplish the complete holiness of His people (see 5:24). Thus Paul asks God to sanctify the church, to bring His purposes to completion. Augustine captures this interplay between God’s commanding and enabling work in his famous prayer, “Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will!”⁷

Paul’s second request complements the first: “May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23). This prayer reiterates 1 Thessalonians 3:13: “so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”⁸ As we will see throughout this study, Paul’s understanding of God’s ultimate purposes for His church on the day of Christ fundamentally guides his priorities and perspective in prayer.

Paul’s confidence doesn’t rest on the church’s valiant efforts to pursue holiness and godliness but in the faithfulness of God to finish what He starts. “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (5:24). First Corinthians 1:8–9 expresses the same conviction: “He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (NIV). The God who calls the church will certainly carry out His sanctifying work in them unto the end.

After offering instruction in prayer and praying for God to accomplish His ultimate purposes in the church, the apostle now asks the Thessalonians to intercede for him in verse 25: “Brothers, pray for us.” Paul repeatedly requests prayer in his letters:

COLOSSIANS 4:3-4 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

PHILIPPIANS 1:19 I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.

PHILEMON 22 At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

The apostle asks the churches to pray for unspecified help, for deliverance from unbelievers or from prison, and especially for open doors to boldly proclaim the gospel. Paul believes that God is faithful to accomplish His purposes in response to the prayers of His people. Even the apostle recognized his utter need for prayer and was not above asking others to pray for him in general or specific ways. Paul's example forces us to reflect on our own constant need for prayer. Are we willing to humble ourselves enough to say, "Brothers, pray for me"?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Why do you think Paul addresses his prayer in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 to "the God of peace"?

Whom do you regularly ask to pray for you? What sort of prayer requests do you share?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Mature, biblical praying is more easily caught than taught. Perhaps you've observed this principle at the dinner table. Many families customarily pray before meals. When they're old enough, children will often volunteer to pray. In these precious moments, we see where children copy how their parents pray. Sometimes, to be sure, they develop their own approach (like thanking God for all the animals they can think of or for every part of the meal). But in general, they pray for the things they hear their parents pray for. The example we set during simple prayers before meals or at bedtime with our children may have the most lasting impact because they will learn to pray the way they've been taught.

WARM UP (10:00)

Who in your life has served as a model or mentor in prayer? What is something specific that you learned from that person?

SHOW SESSION 1 VIDEO: LESSONS FROM THE SCHOOL OF PRAYER (11:00)

In this video, D.A. Carson discusses 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28. He unpacks the idea that prayer isn't something we accidentally fall into. Prayer is a discipline that should be developed over time. But it's in the context of thankfulness that makes it easier to have a constant willingness and desire to pray. This video also asks the question, "What do you pray for?" Are you simply asking for blessings, or are you asking God to shape your heart and the hearts of those around you to become more like Christ?

GROUP DISCUSSION (20:00)

Spend the next several minutes engaging the discussion questions below. Try to avoid simple, pat answers and challenge yourself and the group to dig deeper into the truths that Paul presents to us.

What does it look like practically to “rejoice always”?

What motivates Christians to rejoice even in difficult trials?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Romans 15:30-32; Colossians 4:3-4; and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2. What prayer requests does the apostle Paul make in these verses?

What is one way that you are encouraged or challenged by Paul’s example of asking the churches for prayer?

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Do you have a current plan to regularly and intentionally pray? Do you have a particular system for praying for the specific needs of other people that you have found to be helpful?

How does Paul's statement, "This is the will of God, your sanctification," relate to his prayer for the God of peace to sanctify the church completely?

What is one way you are hoping to grow in prayer as a result of this study?

WRAP (10:00)

- Our lives should be marked by constant rejoicing because of Jesus' victory over sin and death, continual prayer because we are utterly dependent on God for every good thing, and thanksgiving in every circumstance because of God's blessings.
- To experience increasing depth, vibrancy, and growth in our prayer lives, we must plan to pray and study the prayers of Scripture and of mature believers and employ other practical lessons from the school of prayer.
- Paul prays for other believers and asks for prayer because he is confident that God is faithful to carry out His purposes to completion.

Close in prayer. Use the “three Rs” (rejoice, repent, request) and Paul’s prayer in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 to guide your focus.

TAKE HOME

It’s challenging to pray consistently and specifically for a large number of people and concerns without a system for keeping track of prayer needs. If you don’t have a system in place, consider starting one this week. If you already have a system in place, reflect on ways you could strengthen it. Who or what should be included in your prayer list? You may begin with those people you regularly see and interact with—family, close friends, coworkers, your pastor, key ministry leaders. Include the names of several unbelievers for whom you will regularly pray, as well as several missionaries in another part of the world whom you or your church supports. Ask these people for specific requests and write them down, along with one or two Scriptures next to each name to guide your focus in prayer for these people. For ideas on which Scriptures to pray through, it would be helpful to read chapter 4 of the book *Praying with Paul*, where you’ll find lists of all of Paul’s prayers. Once you have a basic system in place for keeping track of prayer concerns, plan to set aside daily time to pray. In the space below, record what your prayer plan is for the next two months.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

D.A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. Chapters 1, 4.

Andrew David Naselli, “12 Reasons You Should Pray Scripture.” *Themelios* 38:3, November 2013, pages 417–25. Available from the Internet: <http://legacy.thegospelcoalition.org>.

1. J.I. Packer, in *My Path of Prayer*, David Hanes, ed. (Worthing, West Sussex: Henry E. Walter, 1981), 56.
2. Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 215.
3. See further Andrew D. Naselli, “12 Reasons You Should Pray Scripture,” *Themelios* 38:3 (November 2013), 417–25. Available from the Internet: <http://legacy.thegospelcoalition.org>.
4. Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 7th edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010).
5. See Kevin DeYoung, “How to Pray Using Scripture.” 4 January 2013. <http://thegospelcoalition.org>.
6. G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 175.
7. Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin, 1961), 233.
8. Lesson 3 will focus on 1 Thessalonians 3:6–13.

