



## LIFE-CHANGING PRAYERS

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To pray is to engage with the Creator of the universe—the One who has the power to speak things into existence out of nothing!

It's like plugging your expended battery into a power socket—to refuel, to refill!

However, not all power sockets are alike. The 5 Watt socket that came with my iPhone was ample, but it could not charge my iPad, even when plugged in all day and night, because the iPad required a 12 Watt socket for its larger battery.

So, HOW you pray makes a difference as to how much power is conveyed.

Today, we're going to consider together Paul's four Life-Changing Prayers. But, before we do, let's think about a few generalities.

Many of our prayers are prompted by personal needs—obvious things, like food, shelter, and healing, or emotional needs, like comfort, courage, peace, and joy. We can ask for all these things, because God cares for us and understands our needs, and He is a Provider. As Paul affirmed: *“And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from His glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:19)

However, God is not like the fabled genie in the bottle, who has come to grant our wishes. Paul was confident God would meet the Philippians' needs, just as God had met his own needs... *in the course of his service in the Gospel*. Call it, the condition of our confidence: God will meet our needs, too, so that we may do His will (not our own). Or, as Andrew Murray put it, “God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.”

These prayers of the apostle are prayers for God's people (fellow believers). While he most certainly prayed for non-believers to be saved, especially his fellow Jews, these prayers are aimed at the needs of people in the church. And this example should be instructive.

Since it takes a Christian to make a Christian—that is, it takes a believer to proclaim effectively the life-changing message of the Gospel (the Good News message about Jesus)—Paul concentrated on praying for his fellow believers. If they weren't healthy, the Gospel ministry would not be effective.

Just as the first aim of your faith in Christ should be to love your fellow believers (without which, your claim to love God would be invalid), so also, the first aim of your prayers should be the spiritual well-being of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Make the Church healthy, and the world will be blessed.

As to the format of Paul's prayers, we will see that his requests were simple and straightforward, not lengthy. What he did express at length were the outcomes for which he aimed—the answers to needs for which he hoped to have God's ear.

We must learn to pray *with the end in mind*. What changes do we hope to see? And right here is where our own understanding of the will of God has great bearing. *What outcome is God working toward?* If we are not praying for the same result, should He pay attention to us?

Here's what Apostle John wrote about that:

*"We are confident that He hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases Him."* (1 John 5:14)

*"We will receive from Him whatever we ask because we obey Him and do the things that please Him."* (1 John 3:22)

Praying from human need does not stimulate or require any faith, not does it impress God, who is aware of more human need in a day than you or I will be in a lifetime. *Faith comes by hearing from God what He wants to do*. Then, we can align our requests with His plans, and pray with confidence.

It is natural to be moved by need or pain or grief. But be careful! Recognizing common human needs is no sign of faith or spirituality. Every sinner feels such sentiments. But *"without faith, it is impossible to please God."* (Hebrews 11:6)

So, need may move you, but pray from *faith*, not your sense of need.

Now, let's see how Paul did it...

### **1. Ephesians 1:17-19**

*I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you **spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of Him**--since the eyes of your heart have been en-*

*lightened--so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what is the wealth of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the incomparable greatness of His power toward us who believe.*

I have boldfaced the request portion of Paul's prayer, so that you may recognize how succinct, and clear his requests were. Many of our prayers lose their power as our words wander all around a topic. *Before we speak our prayers*, we need God to give us spiritual wisdom and revelation concerning His will in the matter. Until we know that, we are just guessing, and there is no faith in guessing.

Paul's well-aimed request would have several outcomes, which he also laid out before the Lord. These are his "so that" expectations.

Do you know what your requests should accomplish, according to the will of God? What is your "so that"?

In this passage Paul asked for spiritual wisdom and revelation in their growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, *so that* three things might be known by them:

- The hope of His calling
- The wealth of His glorious inheritance
- The incomparable greatness of His power

The call of God to each of us is, first, to come to Him and to be with Him. That growing relationship is the bedrock of our knowledge and effective service during our lifetime. The *hope* of this calling is His presence, and the resultant assurance that we can do all things (to which He calls us) as He gives us strength, and that He will never leave us or abandon us in the course of our journey.

Christ, the Son of the Living God, has an *inheritance* coming His way—and that inheritance is *us!* The glorified Church, the Bride of Christ, a Kingdom of priests, the ones He calls His saints—that's us, as we shall be when His work in us is completed—a living testament to the transforming power of God's grace.

That grace is related to the incomparably great power which God demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead (humanly speaking, an unimaginable feat), AND taking Him into the highest Heaven to receive His eternal Kingdom. No wonder Paul exclaimed, "*If God is for us, who can be against us!*"

## **2. Ephesians 3:16-19**

*I pray that according to the wealth of his glory [the Father] may grant you to **be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner person**, that Christ may dwell in your hearts*

*through faith, so that, because you have been rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and thus to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*

Here again, Paul's actual request is brief and concise: God strengthen you with inner power through His Spirit.

Then, he explained three outcomes that he hoped for:

- So that, by faith, Christ may dwell in your hearts.
- So that, rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend the love of Christ—its breadth, length, height, and depth.
- So that you may be filled up

We need the strengthening power of the Spirit so that His anointing may abide within us, and we do not drift away.

We must become “*rooted and grounded*” in Christ's love—unshakably assured of His faithfulness—if we hope to know, experience, and express the fullness of His love.

It is His love that will “*fill us up*” to all the fullness of God, constantly enlarging our capacity for and engagement with the Holy Spirit.

### **3. Philippians 1:3-5,9-11**

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. And I pray this, **that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.***

Paul joyfully thanked God for his fellow believers. Perhaps our lives are too sheltered to grasp his gratitude. In the culture of the pagan Roman world, to find another sincere believer was a treasure.

His grateful expression included a prayer request: may your love abound in knowledge and insight. God, of course, has already promised to “*pour His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.*” (Romans 5:5) But the abundance waits on our gaining knowledge and insight, so give it serious thought.

And what could the outcome of this be? So that you may make good decisions in your everyday life, and as a result, be sincere and blameless before the Lord, be filled with the fruit of right living, and all to the glory and praise of God.

#### **4. Colossians 1:9b-12**

*[I ask] God to fill you with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please Him in all respects--bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might for the display of all patience and steadfastness, joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light.*

Praying is not well-wishing; it involves asking God for what only He can provide. Paul prayed that his readers be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. That's a great prayer! Who doesn't need to discern the will of God for their lives and for those around them? How can we pray "according to His will" if we don't know what it is?

And, if we know what He wants (here's the "so that"), then we can live in a manner worthy of bearing the name of the Lord—a manner that pleases Him (and not just ourselves).

What does such a pleasing and worthy lifestyle look like? Paul described it as "bearing fruit in good deeds." Is that the fruit you're offering to the Lord. Sure, the fruit of the Spirit is in character qualities, but it is also in good deeds, for "faith without good deeds is dead (fruitless)." (James 2:26)

Such a lifestyle also continues to grow in the knowledge of God—it's a never-ending pursuit.

This leads to being strengthened with all power by the Spirit, and that produces the display of all patience and steadfastness. If your walk with Christ lacks steadfastness and patience, there's a deficit of power in you. Working backwards through this very prayer, that lack of power is a result of not really following the Lord, not getting to know Him more and more.

On the other hand, when we do these things, they culminate in joyfully giving thanks to the Father—an attitude of gratitude, a lifestyle of thanksgiving.

#### **Do you want to pray life-changing prayers?**

Then, follow Paul's example:

1. Be sensitive to needs, but **pray from FAITH**. Get to know the will of God from His Word.
2. **Pray with the end in mind**—the outcome God wants, no matter distant it may seem, nor how long it may take. Be clear about the objectives.

3. Then **be succinct and ask boldly.**

4. **Always thank and praise God** for His faithful mercies.

Is there a brother or sister in Christ for whom you could pray right now?

Take 10 seconds to choose one person, and whisper their name to God.

Now, take 10 more seconds to identify one thing that God wants for them, with which you will agree in faith. You might select from the four prayers of Paul:

1. Spiritual wisdom and revelation of the Lord.
2. Inner strength and power through the Holy Spirit.
3. Abound with insightful love.
4. Be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

Take 10 seconds more to identify WHY they need that particular grace from God—your “SO THAT.”

Now, whisper to God your prayer for them and the outcomes He wants that you will trust Him for today.

Let's all say “Amen” and give God thanks for hearing us...