

## 24. Learning to Pray for One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to be at peace with one another. We saw that the Lord can use us and our physical and spiritual children to bring peace to others. The Lord has also given us the ministry of reconciliation to help two Christians that are in conflict with one another. We saw how to help people maintain the peace that is already present. Today, we are going to focus on another way that the Lord has given to us to minister to one another as we learn how to pray for one another. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In James 5:16, we read, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Most Christians pray for others when other Christians are experiencing times of pain and suffering due to physical health problems. That is good and important as we see in the verses that come just before James 5:16. However, many Christians seldom pray for the spiritual needs of others. James 5:14-15 show that some physical problems may actually be caused by spiritual problems or sin. Those verses say, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” Today, we will see that there is much more to praying for one another than just praying about physical needs. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn much more about their prayer ministry for others.

Christ demonstrated one of the greatest needs of all Christians as He prayed for us the night before He was crucified. John 17:20-21 says, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” In these verses, we see that the one thing that Christ prayed for us the night before He was crucified was that we might have the same unity that Christ has with the Father. Christ said that this unity will be the thing that will cause the world to believe that the Father sent Christ. In the same way, we also need to pray for unity among all true believers.

Paul also records some of the things that he prayed for as he prayed for other believers. First, we see that Paul and those who traveled with him gave thanks to God for what the Lord was doing in the lives of believers. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 says, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.” In these verses, we see that Paul, Silas and Timothy gave thanks for three things in the lives of the Christians at Thessalonica. They gave thanks for:

1. Their work of faith.
2. Their labor of love.
3. Their patience of hope.

In the letters that Paul wrote to the churches, we see that these three things commonly appear.

Sometimes only two are mentioned and the letter will include things to strengthen the third. In some letters, only one is mentioned. That letter will include things to strengthen the other two. In the book of 1 Corinthians, none of the three are mentioned. As a result, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:4, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.” Paul was still thankful that God had shown His grace to the Corinthians. In this letter, Paul wrote things to strengthen their faith, their hope and their love. He also said, in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Even though all three of these things were lacking in the church at Corinth, Paul still gave thanks for what the Lord had done in their lives.

Just as Paul continued to pray for those that he led to Christ, we also need to continue to pray for our physical and spiritual children and for those that we have led to Christ. We need to thank the Lord for their salvation and that they are growing in their faith. We need to thank the Lord that they are showing their love for Christ by their ministry to one another. We need to thank the Lord that the message of the resurrection and the return of Christ have given them a great hope for the future. As we pray for them, we also need to help them grow stronger in the areas where they are weak.

In addition to giving thanks for the people who have become Christians in the various cities where he had shared the Word of God, Paul also prayed for many other things as he prayed for these Christians. In Ephesians 3:14-19, we read, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” In this prayer, we see that Paul prayed for the following five things for the Christians in Ephesus. He prayed:

1. That they would be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
2. That Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith.
3. That they would be rooted and grounded in love.
4. That they would know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.
5. That they would be filled with all the fullness of God.

This prayer and other prayers in the New Testament give us patterns of how to pray for the spiritual life of our children and other Christians. Let’s use this prayer as an example. First, we need to pray that other Christians would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in their inner man. This is a prayer that they will grow in their dependence on the Holy Spirit for strength instead of depending on themselves. Christ told the disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Peter had learned how he failed when he depended on his own strength. In contrast, Acts 4:31 tells us what happens when we pray and ask the Lord for His strength. That verse says, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” In Ephesians 6:18-20, Paul

also asked other Christians to pray for him that he would have boldness to speak the Word of God as he ought to speak.

Second, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will experience the presence of the Lord dwelling in their hearts. Christ said in John 15:4-5, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Christians will bear much fruit as they learn to abide in Christ so this is a very important prayer as we pray for others.

Third, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will be rooted and grounded in love. There are four roots mentioned in the New Testament. Two are negative and two are positive. Hebrews 12:15 warns that a root of bitterness will trouble that person and defile many others. 1 Timothy 6:10 warns that a root of the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and will fill a person with many sorrows. Colossians 2:6-7 says that we are to be rooted and built up in Christ so that we are established in the faith. Here, in Ephesians 3:17, we see that we are to be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. This is the foundation for any effective ministry for Christ.

Fourth, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. Those who are not Christians do not even have the ability to understand the fullness of the love of Christ. However, as we as Christians grow in our understanding of the love of Christ for us, that love becomes the thing that motivates us. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” As Christians grow in their understanding of the love of Christ, they begin to live for Christ instead of living to satisfy self.

Fifth, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will be filled with all of the fullness of God. As Christians learn to be filled with the fullness of the Father (Ephesians 3:19), the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13), and the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), Ephesians 5:19-21 says that we will have a song in our hearts, we will have a thankful attitude and we will have a submissive attitude. These things combined cause our lives to have a powerful effect on everyone around us.

The Lord wants to use our lives and the lives of others to do much more than any of us could ever ask or even imagine. Ephesians 3:20-21 concludes this prayer by saying, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” May the Lord richly bless you as you pray for the spiritual growth and development of your physical and spiritual children.