

Paul's Prayer For Transformation
April 10, 2011
PSL: Prayer As A Second Language- Part 5

Introduction:

Video... *Ever feel like you don't know quite what to say during prayer?*

Hopefully, during this series, your getting an idea:

- How to really praise God- example Mary!
- How to really ask God for forgiveness and renewal- David
- How to really ask God for success- Nehemiah
- How to really ask God to heal our nation- Daniel...
- And, now, we turn to one of the greatest spiritual leaders of all time, Paul

Let me ask you a question before we take a look at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1.
Think about some of your prayers this week.

- Where were you?
- When did you pray?
- What did you pray for?

As I shared with you in an e-mail this week, I heard a question this week that really caused me to stop and think. *When was the last time you prayed for something for yourself or another person that didn't have something to do with health, a relational problem, or finances?*

I mean- that is true, right!? Most of the time when we pray, it is:

- God, please help... that is struggling with this health problem.
- God, please help... so and so's marriage to heal.
- God, please help ...find a job.

Does God care about these things—yes! But, is there more to prayer? Yes!

STORY ABOUT DRUNK ICE-FISHING

I have been challenged this week that many times I miss it when it comes to prayer. I'm missing the big picture. I'm down in the trees, failing to see the horizon. I'm praying about everyday stuff when God's heart is most burdened by the eternal. I'm eating an apple when God wants me to go for the orchard.

From Paul, we can learn how to pray not just for the here and now, but for the eternal. From Paul, we can learn how to pray for more than just what matters today...we can learn to pray for what will truly change my life and will truly change your life... and will truly change the lives of those we love.

Let's look at *Paul's Prayer For Transformation*.

Ephesians 1:15-20

¹⁵ Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, ¹⁶ **I have not stopped** thanking God for you. **I pray for you constantly,** ¹⁷ **asking God,** the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. ¹⁸ I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.^[g]

¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

Here are four **keys to Transformative Prayer**. This is how Paul prayed. Let's learn from the master.

1. Transformative Prayer Is Persistent.

¹⁵ Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, ¹⁶ **I have not stopped** thanking God for you. **I pray for you constantly,**

Paul says, *I have not stopped...I pray for you constantly*. What does that mean? It is consistent with what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where Paul said, "Never stop praying". But, how can anyone do that? Does he mean you are supposed to pray morning, noon, night... while working, playing, eating, sleeping, grooming... *How is that possible for anyone that works or has kids or wants to sleep...*

Certainly this was a challenge for Paul. He was a busy guy. He traveled. He was a tent-maker, meaning that he worked another job to support himself so he wouldn't be a burden to the people he served. He was imprisoned. He was beaten. He was a prolific writer. He didn't have a lot of spare time. *How do you pray constantly?* Paul said this same thing to many other churches he wrote to. How can you pray for multiple groups at the same time?

What this passage means is this: Paul is saying, *I have not stopped...I have not and will not give up on praying for you*. This is a statement of Paul's commitment to keep praying for them. It is a promise to persist in prayer. This is the opposite of "out of sight, out of mind". Even though Paul wasn't with them... he would pray and he would not give up.

The challenge here for you and me is: *How often do we promise to pray for someone and then forget about it after a day or two... or after a few minutes or two?* This implies that Paul was committed to prayer. It implies he saw one of his main ministry opportunities as prayer. Prayer was important to him- for his own relationship to God and for spiritual movement in the lives of the people he was developing for effective service for God. It implies, to me, that he must have had a system for prayer. He had to have a way to remember to pray for...and to remember

what to pray for...all the people he had promised to pray for.

*Who do you pray for? How can you persist? Keep a prayer journal? Make a phone call and pray together? Send a note to let someone know that you love them and will commit to pray? **We've got to practice this...not just give lip service to it.***

2. Transformative Prayer Directed To God

I pray for you constantly,¹⁷ asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Why is this so important? Isn't this obvious? Yes, it is obvious...but it is also obvious in all the prayers we have studied... think about this... from Mary, to David, to Nehemiah, to Daniel, to Paul... think about the ways they addressed God. Paul says *the glorious Father*. Nehemiah said (1:5): "*O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love*". Daniel said (1:4): "*O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love.*

These saints prayed to God... because they knew God. They loved Him. They sought Him. They wanted to meet with Him. They knew He was the resource for their needs: He was the source of wisdom. He was their help. He was their well for power. He was their strength. He was where they found forgiveness and mercy and grace. They took comfort from Him. They filled up on love at His bottomless ocean. Their solution was God. They looked to Him first for life...for answers...for help...for fulfillment.

Are we going to God with our needs?

- He loves you.
- He wants to meet with you.
- He's waiting for you.
- He created you... He knows every part of your heart.
- He has all you need- help, strength, creativity, answers, healing...

Will you meet with God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ this week?

Sometimes we want to...but we're not always sure what to say. Well, you can go to Mary to know how to praise. You can follow David to see how to ask for renewal. You can check out Nehemiah- and get on task with God and ask for success in your mission. You can follow Daniel and make an impact on America. But, if you are looking for transformation in your own life...or you are asking God to transform someone else... Here's how Paul prayed.

3. **Transformative Prayer Is Spiritually Focused**

¹⁷ *asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.* ¹⁸ *I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.*^[g]

¹⁹ *I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power* ²⁰ *that raised Christ from the dead*

Here is the meat of Paul's prayer. Here is what to pray for if you want to see spiritual movement in your own life or the life of another.

From Paul, we learn that transformation means:

- **Seeing Life With A Spiritual Perspective.**

to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.

Paul longed for God to give his readers spiritual wisdom and insight. What Paul means by spiritual wisdom is that he wanted his readers to know God's ways and God's plan. He wanted his readers to have a full understanding of God's righteousness and the principles found in God's word. Wisdom is thinking like God.

But, Paul didn't want his readers just to know about God and His ways. He wanted his readers to be able to apply God's way of thinking to the circumstance they would find themselves in in everyday life. That's insight. Insight is the same as understanding. It is the practical outworking of wisdom in the situations of everyday life.

When I have God's wisdom and insight- I can look at life as God does. I can see what God sees. I can act as God would want me to act. *I have a spiritual perspective.*

For example:

- Culture says: *Buy whatever you can, whether you have cash to pay it or not. Amass wealth...store up stuff...go after security at all costs.* But, real wisdom...a Godly perspective says: *God owns it all. He's given me a portion to steward for His purposes.* Real insight then...understanding...means that before I spend a dime of my paycheck I prayerfully seek out God's priorities for His money.
- Say I have an argument with someone at work. What comes natural might be to gossip about the person with others. I might feel like avoiding them and harboring bitterness in my heart. But, Godly wisdom says *I have been forgiven... I must forgive.* Insight then leads us to pursue peace at all costs.
- My neighbor is partying at all hours of the night. My tendency is to become annoyed, call the police to report the disturbance, and be irritable with him next time I see him. But, Godly wisdom says *apart from Christ, this man is*

destined for eternity in Hell. What He needs is Jesus. And, I am the one God has appointed to share Jesus with him. Insight then leads me to build a relationship over time with a plan to share the truth of Jesus when the time is right.

Paul wants his readers to know God enough that they know God's mind as they walk through life. Then he wants his readers to love God enough to do exactly as God would want them to do. ***That will bring about transformation.***

- **REVELING In The Past, Present, and Future of God's plan.**

¹⁸ *I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.^{1g}*

This is really amazing. Paul is praying that the God, through the Holy Spirit, who resides in the heart of the believer, would take a spiritual flashlight and illumine God's plan in the mind of the Christ-follower. See, God knows we will get enamored with life on earth. He knows the cares and concerns of this world will begin to consume us. He knows we'll get distracted from loving Him and doing His work by work and houses and cars and debt and health problems and...

So, Paul prays that God would remind us of what is most important. **God has called us!** God loved you enough to call out to you and me, in our sin...while we were yet sinners...and save us. He forgave us, cleansed us, made us know, and has given us significant work to do in His Kingdom. You are a child of the King! You are so special! Remember!

God has given us hope! Today isn't just about today. There is a tomorrow... a tomorrow filled with new blessings from God. New possibilities. New workings of God that we have not yet seen. What you are experiencing now is not forever... There will come a day when you will be healed from that ailment. When that temptation will no longer have a hold on you. When that ache in your heart will be fulfilled. There is hope in Jesus- for today and forever!

God has a special future planned for you! We are His rich and glorious inheritance! We can anticipate heaven... where the cares and concerns of this life will be replaced with perfect bodies, worship of Jesus, no more tears...

We have to learn to take more of a long range view of life. We have to learn to see life with hope. See life through how God views us. Anticipate Heaven... *This is what Paul wanted for his readers... to revel in God's plan.*

WE CAN DO THIS AT COMMUNION. PLEASE JOIN US! ☺

- **Harnessing God's POWER.**

¹⁹ *I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead*

Illustration:

Seth and Silas. Silas is bigger...but get's beat up. He isn't harnessing his advantage. He isn't accessing his potential.

We're like that. There is so much power at our disposal...but we miss it. Sometimes we give into temptation. We feel like we can't beat that compulsion. We can't get up early enough to spend time with God. We can't face our boss and say "No." We're scared to really live a radically committed life for Jesus in front of our neighbors or friends.

Why? The power is there. The same power we will celebrate on Easter in two weeks. Paul was concerned about his readers missing it too. So, he prayed they would get it. He prayed they would see it and recognize their power source and harness it and live a victorious life for Jesus.

Imagine...a person that sees life as God does...they have a spiritual perspective—God's wisdom and insight. Not only that, but they revel, everyday in the fact that God called them and has a special, eternal plan for them. They exude hope! And, they are vibrant, strong, consistent examples of Godliness...you can see God's power at work in them. That's transformation and that's what Paul prayed for his readers.

4. It's Goal Is Knowledge Of God

¹⁷ *asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.*

All of this... what Paul wanted most from his prayer...what he wanted to see most in his own life and in the life of his readers was growth in the knowledge of God.

Paul was radically committed to this personally. To the Philippians (3:8-9), he said:
⁸ *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ⁹ and become one with him.*

How much of your life is invested in knowing God? What do you do to really seek after God? How important is this amongst your other priorities? What would your calendar say is more important... God...or work? Kids... or God? Chores...or God? TV...Hobbies...Recreation... Or God?

What if we started praying this prayer for ourselves? What if we prayed it for others. Knowledge of God would result...and for Paul...there was nothing else in life that compared to that.

This Week's ClearView Challenge:

- Pick a friend.
- Pray for them in a transformative way (using Ephesians 1:15-20 as a guide).
- Pray for them persistently (at least every day this week and hopefully beyond).

“Dear God,

I pray for _____ . Would you grant my friend spiritual wisdom and understanding. Please help them see life through your eyes, with your perspective. Also, Father, please help them understand you value them enough to have saved them and heaven awaits...help my friend be encouraged by this. My God, may you give my friend knowledge of your power, and may he/she experience your strength today. Might my friend know you more deeply as a result of this prayer.”