**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 8-13-2023
The Priority of Prayer**

Growing up playing sports, I learned pretty quickly the value of good communication. Just ask any pitcher and catcher when they get their signals crossed. The catcher is looking for a fastball and in comes a curveball. This leads to problems.

Even as an adult, as I watched my daughter Mya’s recent soccer camp, this emphasis on good communication was one of the big things that was being taught. Be specific with your teammates. Let them know you are open. Call out your teammates by name. “Mya, I am open.” “Sydney, look over here.” All these things help teams to be successful.

And this isn’t just true for sports, of course. It is true with everything. Making good communication a priority is very important for how we relate to others. Being a good listener. Speaking with clarity and thoroughness. All so important.

But if communication is so critically important between people, it is all the more critically important between people and God.

Communication with God is what we as Christians call prayer. A life of intentional prayer is critically important to someone’s spiritual health. But sadly, for many people, prayer is often experienced not as a first priority, but rather more as a last resort. When all else fails, pray. When things begin to be falling apart - then pray – ask for God’s help.

Even in football, what do they call a desperate throw when the quarterback just launches the ball as far as possible and hopes for the best? A hail Mary.

Even for many Christians, prayer is often practiced only specific times, such as before a meal or when things are difficult.

But God intends prayer to be a far bigger aspect of the lives of His people. In fact, prayer or communication with God, must be our number one priority in life.

We have to change the way that we think about prayer. It is not meant to be a last resort, but a first response.

With these things in mind, let us now turn again to this powerful epistle of Paul called Philippians, which we began looking at last week.

I invite you to turn with me to Phil. 1:3-11

**3I thank my God every time I remember you. 4In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray** **with joy 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

**7It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. 8God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

**9And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.**

It is interesting, as Paul begins the body of his letter, what subject does he chose to highlight right away? Prayer. And he does this in a variety of ways.

In verse three, he states, “**3I thank my God every time I remember you.”** This is so profound. Paul had a lot on his mind. The Philippians were not the only Christian community that Paul helped to establish. But whenever he remembered these other followers of Jesus, his first response was to pray. It would be to lift them up to God.

What Paul was modeling is meant to be equally true for us today as well. When we think about people, what should our first response be? Prayer.

For example, a couple days ago, I woke up and realized that I was dreaming about someone I went to church with years ago. I haven’t spoken with him in years. But I took this as a call to pray for him and his wife. Perhaps you can think of people that seem to come to your mind out of the blue. I would view these as invitations from God to pray for them.

Now, certainly prayer can take numerous forms depending on what is going on in the life of the person on your mind. But prayer is always the appropriate first response.

In Paul’s case, it was with joy that he was praying. For verses 4-5 state:

**4In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now**

Paul prayed with joy because the Philippians understood that the good news of Jesus was meant to impact them and lead them to a life of blessing others. The Christians in Philippi were generous financial supporters of Paul’s ministry.

Paul refers to them as partners in the gospel here. The Christians of Philippi were seeking to use their resources to bless others. These Christians were clearly growing in their relationship with God and so Paul was joyful for them and they brought Paul joy in thinking of them. .

Certainly, when you and I think of other Christians that are growing in their walk with Christ and so being a blessing to others, our response should be like Paul’s. To be joyful and thankful for what God is doing in them and through them.

Of course, not every person that we think of will lead us to overflow with joy. Sometimes we may think of them with frustration (like the people that just illegally passed us on the road) or maybe the person on our minds evokes a feeling of sadness --- maybe they are just really struggling in life or they are not walking with Jesus.

There is nothing wrong with feeling all different emotions when we think of different people and different things. But prayer is to be the proper response every time.

Who has been on your mind recently? View these thoughts as invitations to pray for them.

This is one of the themes from the book of the Psalms. There are all different emotions, but it always leads to prayer!!

And it is hard to stay angry with someone when you are praying for them. I’m just saying.

Paul goes on to write in verse 6 - “6**being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**

Paul had confidence that God’s work in the Christians in Philippi was going to continue until Christ returns. In other words, God was at work among his people to help them grow and mature as followers of Jesus. God wasn’t finished with them.

Friends, this is good news. When we or someone says a sincere yes to Jesus, we also are inviting the Holy Spirit to take control of our lives.

God had begun a good work within every Christian in Philippi and God would continue to mold and shape each believer to become more Christlike every day until Christ returns.

And this is good news for each of us. If we have come to follow Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we can trust that God is at work in our life helping us to mature in our relationship with Jesus.

He who began a good work in you will continue until we see Jesus.

And one huge way that God does mature us in our relationship with Him is through our learning to make our communication with God through prayer our biggest priority in life.

In finishing the remaining verses from our passage, Paul states:

**7It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. 8God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.** 9**And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.**

Truly, Paul loved these brothers and sisters in Christ. He carried them around in his heart wherever he was at. Remember, Paul was writing this letter while being in chains, under house arrest, for proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Incarceration was not holding Paul back from praying for his sisters and brothers in the faith.

Up until this point, we know that Paul was praying for these Christians in Philippi. And here he explains the nature of his prayer.

Paul prays that their love would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. In other words, God didn’t want just the hearts of these believers, but also their minds. Paul wanted them to grow in their love and their understanding of God and His ways.

These things go together. Growing in love and growing in our insight and understanding of God.

I find in my own life, the more that I learn of God – His character, His faithfulness, His mercy, His kindness, and so forth --- the more that I love God.

Conversely, it is difficult to grow in our life for God when we are not growing in our understanding of God.

**In other words, the more that we discover the character of God and qualities of God, the humility of God, the compassion of God, the patience of God, the mercy of God ---- and many other aspects of God – the more we can grow in our love for God.**

Many of the Philippians did not have a knowledge of the Old Testament, and the New Testament was still in the early process of being written. So what were they to do to grow?

Prayer was the biggest way. Prayer would posture the hearts and minds of the Philippians to like sponges, eager to receive, eager to learn. They would have been expected to read and re-read Paul’s letter to them until it becomes something that they would carry with them.

And as they prayerfully did this, God would help them better discern His will for their lives as well help them to think more like Jesus.

As we consider this passage and its importance for our lives today, what is the biggest thing to remember? I believe it is that prayer is not to be our last resort, but our first response.

Friends, we are to be a prayerful people. James, the leader of the Jerusalem Church and half-brother of our Lord Jesus, became known as camel knees, because of his life of steady, faithful prayer.

There are, of course, great benefits to a life of prayer. One big one is to better know God’s will for your life, which is so important.

Prayers do not need to be long. Jesus called out the people that made a show of their lengthy prayers. And prayers do not need to be in King James English either.

But choose to make prayer the #1 priority for you every day. Whether it is written-out prayers or off-the-cuff prayers – whether it is verbal or non-verbal prayers --- it just matters that you are praying to God and Jesus. And that you are praying not only for yourself, but for everyone else that comes to your mind.

**So what will happen as we make prayer our first priority instead of the last resort?**

1. **Our walk with God will be strengthened.** Prayer changes us. God uses it to shape us to become more like Jesus. Prayer will help us to think more and act more like Jesus.
2. **Others will be blessed**. God chooses to move in power through the prayers of His people. Know that when we make prayer our first priority, God will use our prayers powerfully to more fully release His will on the earth.

Friends, God is not finished with us! He who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Christ Jesus. So may prayer be our first priority, rather than a last resort.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+1%3A3-11&version=NIV>

Thinking For a Change – by John Maxwell

Dr. Timothy Valentino’s course, Preaching in the Church – Spiring 2016