

PAUL'S PRAYERS



GROUP NOTES

Introduction

Paul covers a lot of ground in his letters (epistles). One thing that really stands out is his dedication and reliance on prayer. We even hear some of his prayers as he tells the recipients what he's praying for them. This series of talks and studies hopes to learn from Paul's prayers on a number of subjects. They're all still relevant for us today, and we'll also consider how to respond practically - perhaps God will equip us to help answer these sorts of prayers, as well as pray them!

Each week there is a passage to read which corresponds with the Sunday sermon. There's an introduction that you can choose whether or not to use and some discussion starter questions to get into the word. Please don't feel limited by them, but hopefully they will provide some structure from which your discussions can develop.

As it's a series about prayer, I'm including some ideas that some might find helpful as different ways of focussing during prayer times, and ways of responding. They might be helpful or not for your group, and you might like to invite suggestions for ways of praying that people have found good. At the end of the day though, prayer is talking to our heavenly Father because Jesus invites us to come with confidence.

Prayer & Response Ideas

- Writing responses and prayers out
- Using worship music
- Beginning with simple prayers of praise, just a few words
- Naming people or places
- A cross or candle can be a helpful point of focus
- Having a few pre-written prayers for those less confident speaking out
- Using silence and inviting people to wait on the Lord
- ...many more!

1. Praying for Wisdom

Introduction and Opening Discussion

What's been most helpful for you, in getting to know God?

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Discussion starter questions

Before his requests, how does Paul begin his prayer? (v16)

As Paul prays for wisdom, what is his particular hope for them? (v17)

V18 - He prays for them to see the hope for God's people. Can we ever know this enough, or can we always pray for more hope?

The end of this section moves into praise - do we always remember to praise God in our prayers?

When was the last time you prayed for wisdom, did you feel your prayer was answered?

Do you pray for insight before reading the Bible, listening to sermons etc?

Application - prayer into action

When we pray for wisdom and understanding about God, what steps can we take to be ready for the answer?

Is there a practical step that might help you feel that you might get to know God better?

Prayer

It would be good to keep the Bible open as you pray.

Use Paul's prayer requests for one another, particularly for specific things about faith or in life where someone would appreciate wisdom!

2. Praying to know God's will

Introduction and Opening Discussion

Paul hadn't visited this church when he wrote to them. They were a small group surrounded by a culture of false gods, idols and mixed religion. Paul writes and includes his prayer for this group of believers who are under pressure to stop trusting in Christ alone.

Read Colossians 1:9-14

Discussion starter questions

Does Paul pray any differently for these Christians he's never met? What does it mean to 'not stop praying' - does he mean literally? Paul thanks God for what he's already doing, then prays for more. Do we pray like that? Why is knowing God's will so important in their situation? Is it any less important for us? Have you ever prayed that we and others might be 'pleasing to the Lord'? (v10) Re-read vv10-12, what are the specific ways Paul prays they will please Jesus? How might this prayer help you pray for Christians you've never met?

Application - prayer into action

Take those 4 specifics:

- bearing fruit in good works
- growing in knowledge of God
- being strengthened with his power
- joyfully giving thanks.

Is there one (or more) of those that would make a real difference to your life and faith? Ask the others to pray more of that for you.

Prayer

Perhaps spend some time praying for Christians under pressure around the world, including those you've not met. As well as praying for one another as well.

3. Praying for God's Power

Introduction and Opening Discussion

What do you think of when you hear the word power?

Is it positive, negative or something else?

Do you think of physical power like fast cars and jet planes, or powerful speeches, music and people?

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Discussion starter questions

How does Paul remind us to have confidence in prayer (v14)?

What do you think it means to be strengthened in power by the Spirit?

Do you have any examples of that happening in your life?

What is the second thing Paul prays power for? (v18)

How often do we pray for ourselves and others to be 'filled with his fullness'?

Why is it so important to pray for power and love together?

How does the mention of power in v20 show us that God can do this?

Application - prayer into action

Is there a particular situation where you would particularly like to know God's power at work?

Can you ask God to fill you with knowledge of him and his love to help with it?

Perhaps a later week you can feedback answers to these prayers?

Prayer

Paul sees a close connection between knowing the Lord better and being filled with his power. That would be a good thing to pray for one another, and for the wider church.

4. Praying for Ministry

Introduction and Opening Discussion

These verses in Romans are one of the earliest prayer letters sent out by someone in full-time ministry. We hear how Paul would love these Christians to be praying for him, and this can help our prayers for people in full-time ministry.

(Whilst remembering, that every follower of Jesus is in full-time ministry in the most important sense!)

Read Romans 15:30-33

Discussion starter questions

Is it selfish of Paul to ask for their prayers?

What does it say about his humility that he knows he needs prayer?

How can they 'join' Paul's ministry by praying for him?

V31a - what is his first request and is this still important today?

V31b - Is it comforting that even Paul needed prayer that he might bring acceptable service?

V32 - his third request, do we remember to pray for ministry and rest in the right balance?

Are these requests *only* relevant for those in church leadership?

Application - prayer into action

A practical request/discussion - would you find it helpful to receive a regular prayer update from Tom with major things that are happening to pray for each month?

If so, please let him know!

Prayer

Pray for those in full-time ministry locally, nationally and internationally. Pray for the ongoing ministry of all Christians whether in work, at home or anywhere else we go and can serve the Lord.

5. Praying for Christians

Introduction and Opening Discussion

It might be interesting to discuss what your earliest memories are of prayer, and your earliest memory of when prayer became real - that may have happened at the same time or later on!

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Discussion starter questions

We don't need to (or can't!) make ourselves worthy of God. So what is Paul praying for them in v11?

Did you notice that Paul prays for God's power to fulfil *their* good purpose - what do you think? Is that different from God's purposes?

Do you have any examples of actions prompted by your faith?

Is it a dangerous thing to ask God to prompt us to step out in faith?

What is Paul praying would result from their purposes and actions?

How does a focus on glorifying Christ help our prayers for others?

Application - prayer into action

Are there concrete steps you could take to remember to pray for Christians even when things are going fine?

It's so easy to forget when there's lots of people with challenges to pray for as well!

Prayer

It would be good to pray these things into the lives of the group. Maybe each person could share one purpose or something they need to step out in faith for, which the others could pray into?

6. Praying for Everyone

Introduction and Opening Discussion

For the final week, we hear Paul's instruction on how to pray for everyone, including those in positions of authority and responsibility. Is this something you find comes naturally in your own prayers or not?

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6

Discussion starter questions

How would you explain the difference between the four types of prayers that Paul lists in v1?

Do we remember to pray for all people, or have we become too focussed on some and miss others?

What should be the purpose of our prayers for those in authority?

How does prayer for our government help the spread of the good news of Jesus?

Do you find v4 encouraging if you've been praying for those who don't believe?

Paul provides a basis for this prayer in vv5-6, how often do we ground our prayers in what Jesus has done?

Is it reassuring to know that our prayers can please God?

Are there places or people that God has placed on your heart for prayer?

Application - prayer into action

We would love more people to share in the intercessions when we gather on Sundays. There's no formula, simply doing what Paul asks of us here.

Is there anyone in the group who may feel open to talking that through with Tom?

Prayer

It would be great to do exactly as Paul says and pray for all people, including those in authority, as well as for one another.