

Lesson 1

GOALS FOR THE CLASS

What is the value of a class on prayer? What should you expect from this class? What do you hope gain from this class? We rarely have the opportunity to spend as much concentrated time on the subject of prayer as we will in this class. You should set some personal goals for what you hope to accomplish through this class, but these are the goals that we will set for each one of us in this study:

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Pray more frequently and fervently
2. Use Biblical principles and language in our prayers
3. Be more aware of the needs of others for whom we should be praying
4. Be made more like Christ through the effect of our prayers

Learning to Pray

Prayer. On the surface, nothing could seem more natural or simple. Prayer is simply our way of talking to God, right? Why spend thirteen lessons to learn how to do that?

As simple as prayer may seem, it is something we must learn. Consider a passage from Luke:

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” (11:1)

Jesus then gave them what many refer to as the “Lord’s Prayer” (perhaps more accurately His *model* for prayer). The point is when Jesus was asked about how to pray He didn’t turn to His disciples and say, “I don’t have to teach you how to pray. Just do it. You’re just talking to God.” Instead, He taught them how to pray.

We learn to pray by hearing others pray. Children learn by listening to their parents. New converts learn from listening to those more experienced. This truth becomes evident when you go outside the family or church to

listen to others pray. You’ll hear distinct and peculiar phrases or idioms that may sound strange and unusual.

While the choice of specific words and phrases is largely inconsequential, the content of prayer is not. In other words, while it doesn’t matter if we pray using the Old English words and phrases (“thee” and “thy” instead of “you” and “your”), it does matter if we pray *biblically sound* prayers. *Biblically sound* prayers are prayers that reflect the values and ideals of the Bible. Sadly, many of our prayers are not sound. They reflect our values more than they do God’s.

Perhaps we need better tutors. Instead of just listening to each other to learn how to pray, we should turn to biblical prayers and use them as models. There are many to choose from. The Psalms are invaluable, as are other recorded prayers in the Old Testament. Of course, you can’t do any better than the “Lord’s Prayer” as a template. But some of the greatest treasures we have among the recorded prayers of the Bible are those Paul penned when writing his letters. Next to Jesus, Paul may be the most spiritually minded man in the Bible. His prayers reflect his values. We’ll study the prayers of Paul in this class and see how we can use them as patterns for our own prayers.

Spiritual Growth

Of course, prayer is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. God doesn’t tell us to do something with no purpose in mind. There are great benefits to prayer, and the greatest is spiritual growth.

...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... (Eph. 4:13)

... but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ... (Eph. 4:15)

PRAYER – A SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

We're never going to come even close to the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" if we don't seek to pray as Jesus did. And if the goal is to grow up "in all things" into Christ, then prayer is a part of that.

In this lesson we're going to examine what true spirituality is and how it is exercised. We're going to see how prayer is an absolutely vital discipline in helping us to recreate ourselves in the image of Christ.

Learning to Pray

- 1) In what ways could you say prayer is a natural and intuitive action?
- 2) In what ways is prayer not natural or intuitive? Why must prayer be taught?
- 3) Is it true that we learn to pray by listening to each other? Have you noticed differences among different groups in the particular phrases that are used? Is there anything wrong with having peculiar "Embry Hills" phrases? What is the danger of this kind of imitation?
- 4) Where are the best models for prayer found? Give at least one example.
- 5) Read the following prayers from Paul. Jot down a brief note or two next to each commenting on how each prayer might serve as a pattern. (Don't worry about going too deep now – we're going to pick these prayers apart for 13 lessons!)
 - a) Romans 15:30-33
 - b) Ephesians 1:15-23
 - c) Ephesians 3:14-21
 - d) Philippians 1:3-11
 - e) Colossians 1:9-14
 - f) 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
 - g) 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Spiritual Growth

- 6) How do you define true spirituality? Is there such a thing as *false* spirituality? Is spirituality so much defined by what you do or is more an attitude that affects what you do? (In other words, is a good person necessarily a spiritual person?)
- 7) Who is the standard for true spirituality (Eph. 4:13-15)?
- 8) What are some ways (other than prayer) that we can exercise true spirituality? How does prayer make us more spiritual?

Lesson 2

EARTHLY MOTIVES

Prayer leads to spiritual growth. It helps to strengthen our faith, intensify our hope, and deepen our love. In short, prayer makes us more like Jesus, which is the supreme goal of our lives (Eph. 1:3-4; 4:13, 15; Rom. 8:29).

But is this automatic? Does prayer necessarily lead to these things? If it were, everyone who prays would be growing spiritually, but we all know many who pray that are not becoming more like Christ; in fact, they are becoming less like Christ. Not all prayer leads to spiritual growth. If we pray for worldly reasons the result will be carnality, not spirituality. We will become more like the world, not Christ. So, our goal should not just be to pray more, but to pray better. Let's consider some earthly approaches to prayer:

Desire for Recognition

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. (Mt. 23:14)

This kind of prayer is hard to detect. You can't tell what a man's motives are when he prays. You don't know if he's praying for show or not. And not only is it hard for you to detect this, it's hard for the one praying.

Pride likes to disguise itself. Since pride is rooted in selfishness, it does not want to be detected. Pride is ugly, and a selfish heart is very concerned about appearances. The heart tells itself, "If they know my true motives I'll look bad... Try to sound humble."

But pride does this not only for others, but for self as well. We feel bad when we are prideful, so we also seek to disguise pride to ourselves. (Our selfishness does not want us to feel bad about ourselves).

The desire for recognition is common to all of us. We all struggle with pride and selfishness. Our prayers can become a subtle way of showing off our spirituality. If we're not careful it can go undetected because our pride feeds on the selfish high we get when we pray.

Self-Righteousness

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man when down to his house justified rather than the other. (Lk. 18:9-14)

Note the attitude of the Pharisee as he goes to prayer. He has no sense of dependence on God. His prayer has more of the tone of self-congratulation.

Vain Repetition

Notice also from this account in Luke, the tax collector's prayer was effective even though it was *short* and *simple*. Effective prayer is not a matter of stringing the right words together. It's not some magical incantation. Prayer is not a formulaic thing where we just put together all the right phrases to get what we want from God (see Mt 6:7-13).

Materialism

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (Jas. 4:2-3)

God is not our genie in a bottle. He is not a vending machine. If we see prayer as our way to fulfill all our selfish desires, it will not lead us to greater faith, hope, and love. It will not make us more like Christ. This type of prayer only makes us more worldly (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Desire for Recognition

- 1) What does it mean to make “long prayers” for a “pretense” (Mt. 23:14)?
- 2) What does Jesus say the hypocrites love to do (Mt. 6:5)? Why do they love this? Is it possible to have this problem if you never lead public prayer? List some ways that we can do the same thing with our private prayer life.
- 3) What does Jesus say is the solution to this problem (Mt. 6:6)? How does this solve the problem of pride? Does this mean you cannot lead a public prayer or pray where others will see you praying? List practical ways to apply this admonition to us.

Vain Repetition

- 4) Why was the tax collector’s prayer more effective than the Pharisees’ (Lk. 18:9-14)? Was it because his prayer was eloquent?
- 5) Read Mt. 6:7-13. In what way were the heathen using vain repetition when they prayed (Mt. 6:7)? Why was this unnecessary (Mt. 6:8)? How does the model prayer Jesus gave contrast with the types of prayers the heathen prayed (Mt. 6:9-13)?

Materialism

- 6) Why do some not receive from God when they ask for things from Him (Jas. 4:3)? Give some examples of this kind of prayer.
- 7) How does the model prayer Jesus gave contrast with this kind of prayer (Mt. 6:9-13)?
- 8) How can materialism creep into our prayers without our being aware of it? How do we justify materialistic prayers in our minds?

Special Assignment

Remember the goals of the class. By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Pray more frequently and fervently
2. Use Biblical principles and language in our prayers
3. Be more aware of the needs of others for whom we should be praying
4. Be made more like Christ through the effect of our prayers

Reflect on the progress you are making.

Lesson 3

BALANCED PRAYERS

We are concerned about achieving balance in many areas of our lives. We want a balanced diet, a balanced exercise routine, a balance between work and family and church and school and on and on the list goes. But what about prayer? Is balance important in our prayers? Is it possible for our prayers to be out of balance?

In Luke 17:11-19 we read about ten men who were lepers whom Jesus healed of their leprosy. And of those ten who were cleansed, do you remember how many of them returned to thank Jesus? One. Only one of those who had dramatically experienced the wonderful grace of God returned to “give glory to God” (v. 18). Many of us have the same problem. We ask a lot from God and receive much more than we ask, but we give Him very little glory for it in terms of thanks and praise in our prayers.

To help you pray more balanced prayers, here is a pattern you can follow. It’s easy. Just remember ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication).

Adoration

Jesus’ model prayer began, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be (or holy is) Your name.” It’s always good to begin prayer with an expression of praise.

Enter into His gates with
thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, and bless His
name.
For the LORD is good;
His mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endures to all
generations. (Psalm 100:4-5)

Confession

Confession of sin flows naturally from our thoughts about our Holy Father. When we think of how righteous and pure and holy God is, it almost compels us to confess how

wicked and impure and unholy we are. After seeing God in a vision seated on His throne in glory, being heralded by the seraphim as the holy, holy, holy God, Isaiah said:

Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people
of unclean lips;
For my eyes of seen the King,
The LORD of hosts. (Isaiah 6:5)

Our heartfelt expressions of praise and worship help us to see God more clearly and this produces godly sorrow in our hearts. We see how pitiful we really are and we confess our sins asking Him to forgive us.

Thanksgiving

Just as confession naturally follows praise, thanksgiving follows confession because we know our sins have been forgiven.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He
is good!
For His mercy endures forever.
(Psalm 118:1)

After we thank God for our forgiveness and all of our spiritual blessings, we also thank God for our material blessings, “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20).

Supplication

Last of all, we make our requests known to our Father.

So I say to you, ask, and it will be
given to you; seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives, and
he who seeks finds, and to him who
knocks it will be opened (Luke 11:9-
10).

We are more likely to make spiritually minded supplications to God when we save this part of our prayer for last. By the time we come to this part we are in the right frame of mind.

PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- 1) What was the problem with nine of the ten lepers whom Jesus cleansed (Lk. 17:11-19)? Do we have that problem today? Why?
- 2) Of the four parts of prayer listed in the lesson (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication), which do you believe is the most neglected? Why?
- 3) Can following the form for prayer given in the lesson help us to be more balanced in prayer? Why? What problems could develop from becoming a slave to a certain pattern for prayer?

Adoration

- 4) What are some advantages to beginning with an expression of praise in prayer?
- 5) Make a list of God's characteristics for which we should praise Him.

Confession

- 6) Why would confession of sin naturally follow praise?
- 7) Make a list of some of the most common sins we commit.
- 8) What are some advantages of making specific confession verses generic confession? (Generic confession would be "Forgive me of my many sins" and specific confession would be "Forgive me for lying to my boss.")

Thanksgiving

- 9) Why would thanksgiving naturally follow confession of sin?
- 10) Make a list of some of the things for which we should thank God.
- 11) What are the advantages of being specific in thanksgiving?

Supplication

- 12) What are the advantages of saving our requests for last?

Lesson 4

THE FRAMEWORK OF PRAYER (2 Thess. 1:1-12)

Before we can understand the specific prayers of Paul, we need to examine the foundation for his prayers. Paul begins his prayer in 2 Thess. 1:11 saying, “Therefore we also pray always for you...” Why did he say, “Therefore?” One translation says, “With this in mind.” With what in mind? He must be referring to everything he has just said. He gave thanks (3-10) before he made his petition (11-12). It was what he said in his thanksgiving which motivated him to make his supplication. In other words, verses 3-10 provide for us a framework of thought Paul keeps in mind as he prays, a framework that controls what Paul prays for, and why.

Below is a brief outline of the framework for Paul’s prayer and the prayer itself.

Paul’s Framework

- A. Paul’s thanksgiving for them (3-4).
 - Growing faith (3).
 - Abounding love (3).
 - Perseverance (4).

Paul’s Framework

- A. Paul’s thanksgiving for them (3-4).
 - 1) For what three things did Paul give thanks (3-4)? Why?
 - 2) Would you describe these things for which Paul gave thanks material or spiritual blessings? What does this say about Paul’s heart? If our expressions of thanksgiving seem to center only on things of a material nature, what does that say about our heart (Mt. 6:19-21; Col. 3:1-2)?
 - 3) Application: Go over the church directory and thank God for individuals at Embury Hills. Be specific and thank God for what you’ve seen in different individuals, their faith, growth, patience, love, gifts, spirit, knowledge, unique talents, etc. Then expand the prayer to include Christians outside of the body here who have been a special blessing to you.

- B. God’s vindication and retribution (5-10).
 - Righteous judgment of God (5).
 - Vindication of believers (6-7).
 - Retribution on others (8-10).

Paul’s Prayer

- A. Paul’s petitions (11).
 - God would count them worthy of their calling (11a).
 - God might fulfill their good, faith-prompted purposes (11b).
- B. The goal Paul’s prayer (12).
 - The glory of Christ (12a).
 - Their glory (12b).
- C. The ground of Paul’s prayer (12c – Grace).

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B. God's vindication and retribution (5-10).

- 4) How did the tribulations they were enduring demonstrate God's righteous judgment? (5, see also Mt. 5:11-12; Acts 5:41; Jas. 1:4-5, 12; 1 Pet. 4:12)?
- 5) When would these suffering saints be vindicated? (6-7, see also 1 Cor. 1:7; 16:22; Rev. 22:20; 2 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 6:9-11)
- 6) What will come at the same time when the saints are vindicated? (8-10)
- 7) How do you think this knowledge of God's vindication and retribution help shape Paul's prayer? If these thoughts formed his mental framework, do you believe his supplications would be more physically based or spiritually based?

Paul's Prayer

A. Paul's petitions (11).

- 8) What was Paul's first petition for them? (11a) What is this "calling"? (Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24) Is this an appeal or is it a prayer? Is he urging them to try harder or is he praying for God's help?
- 9) The NIV translates the second petition in this way: "by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by faith." J. B. Phillips translated it this way: "by His power may fulfill all your good intentions and every effort of faith." What are these good purposes and acts of faith? What specifically might Paul have in mind?

B. The goal Paul's prayer (12).

- 10) What was the end of all of this? When Paul prayed that God would help them to walk worthy of their calling and that God would bless their works of faith, what did he hope would be achieved? (12 – two things)

C. The ground of Paul's prayer (12).

- 11) How could Paul hope for all of this being accomplished? (According to what?)

Lesson 5

PRAYING FOR OTHERS

You cannot read through the prayers of Paul very long and not be impressed by the time Paul spent in intercession for others.

For God is my witness... that **without ceasing** I make mention of you always in my prayers... Rom. 1:9

Therefore I also... **do not cease** to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers... Eph. 1:15-16

I thank my God upon **every** remembrance of you, **always in every** prayer of mine making request for you all with joy... Phil. 1:3-4

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying **always** for you... Col. 1:3

For this reason we also... **do not cease** to pray for you... Col. 1:9

We give thanks to God **always** for you all, making mention of you in our prayers... 1 Thess. 1:2

For this reason we also thank God **without ceasing**... 1 Thess. 2:13

For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, **night and day** praying **exceedingly** that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? 1 Thess. 3:9-10

We are bound to thank God **always** for you, brethren, as it is fitting... 2 Thess. 1:3

Therefore we also **pray** always for you... 2 Thess. 1:11

I thank God... as **without ceasing** I remember you in my prayers **night and day**... 2 Tim. 1:3

I thank my God, making mention of you **always** in my prayers... Philemon 4

If we are to pray like Paul, we must pray for others. Prayer must not just be about ourselves. While we gain many benefits personally from God in prayer, we must never forget the place intercession should have in our prayers.

- 1) What do you suppose are some reasons why we don't spend as much time in intercession as we should in our prayers?

- 2) We don't want this class to be merely academic. If this class doesn't change the way we pray, it has been a failure. Read through the following prayers of Paul listed on the back of this page and do three things:
 - a) Summarize what that prayer is in a single word or a very simple phrase (e.g. "salvation", "spiritual growth", "spiritual discernment", etc.)
 - b) Tie that request to someone (or more than one person) for whom you have a similar concern
 - c) Pray for that person(s)

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- Rom. 1:8-10 (key verse is 10)

- Rom. 10:1

- Rom. 15:5-6

- Rom. 15:13

- 1 Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Tim. 4:22; Tit. 3:15; Philemon 25

- 2 Cor. 13:7-9

- 1 Thess. 5:23-24

- 2 Thess. 2:16-17

- 2 Thess. 3:2-5

- 2 Thess. 3:16

- 1 Tim. 2:1-4

- 2 Tim. 1:16-18

- Philemon 4-7

Lesson 6

A PASSION FOR PEOPLE (1 Thess. 3:9-13)

If you're looking for a model for how to pray for others, look no further than the one recorded here in 1 Thessalonians 3. Paul's heartfelt, sincere emotions are laid bare for us as we examine not only his prayer for these brethren but the reasons for the prayer.

Reasons for Paul's Prayer (2:17-3:8)

A. An intense longing to be with them.

Paul remembers how he was taken away from them (2:17). He was with them just a few short weeks and was forced to leave because of persecution from the Jews. He had almost no time to ground them firmly in the faith, and he had good reason to be very concerned about them under the difficult circumstances in which he left them.

For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. 3:5

Paul just couldn't wait any longer! He just had to know how they were doing. He was burning up inside because of his concern for these brethren. Is it any wonder he prayed for them? Are we surprised to read that he prayed "night and day" for an opportunity to see them (3:10)?

B. Joy over the report of their faith, love, and perseverance.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. 3:6-8

Some brethren only rejoice over news that is bad. If a church splits, if a preacher is caught in some scandal, if brethren become embroiled in controversy... those are the kinds of reports some brethren love to hear. They get excited when they hear such things

and thoroughly enjoy denouncing such things. But if something good happens, they aren't quite as interested. If a church is growing, if brethren make great sacrifices for the Lord's cause, if someone repents of a great wrong... that just isn't as exciting as the bad news.

What a contrast with Paul. Paul did not rejoice in iniquity but in the truth (1 Cor. 13:6). He prayed fervently for people because his passion was for people. His greatest joys were produced when he witnessed evidence of spiritual growth and maturity in others.

Paul's Prayer (3:9-13)

A. Thankfulness for them.

This was a regular practice of Paul's. He constantly gave thanks for his brethren. The examples of this in his letters are numerous: Rom. 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; 9:12-15; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 1:3-6; Col. 1:3-14; 1 Thess. 1:2-3; 2:13-16; 3:9; 2 Thess. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:3-7; Philemon 4-7.

But notice that he not only thanked God for his brethren, *he told his brethren he thanked God for them*. This was done to encourage them and give glory to God. By telling them he was thankful to God for them that served to encourage them because they were being recognized for the growth in the love and faith. But this was done in a way that the ultimate glory would go, not to them, nor to Paul, but to God alone. He was the One who was thanked for all they had done.

B. Opportunity to strengthen them.

night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith... 3:10

Three things about this verse:

First, Paul prayed night and day for them. We noticed in the last lesson similar statements from Paul: he was "always" thanking God (1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:4); he "constantly" gave God thanks (1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13). When we read such statements we should not think Paul is

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exaggerating for effect, nor should we think of him merely being in a “spirit of prayer” with very little concrete praying. He means here that he had regular times of prayer in which he specifically mentioned these brethren to the Father either in thanks or in supplication.

Second, we see Paul mixing intercession and his own service to others. When Paul asks God to bless these brethren with spiritual growth, he sees himself as the answer to that prayer. He wants God to provide him with the opportunity to do that.

And this brings us to the third point, Paul’s request is that God might open up the way. He had previously been hindered by Satan from coming to be with them (2:18). What that meant we do not know, but we do know this—Paul believed God was able to remove the barrier so that he might go and minister to their faith. He prayed that God might “direct our way to you” (3:11).

Reasons for Paul’s Prayer (2:17-3:8)

- 1) What was one of the reasons for Paul’s prayer? (2:17) How passionate was Paul about the people he taught? (2 Cor. 11:28-29)
- 2) What brought Paul great joy? (3:6-8; compare with 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3-4)

Paul’s Prayer (3:9-13)

- 3) According to the lesson, why did Paul give thanks for these brethren?
- 4) How often did Paul pray for them? (3:10) Is this exaggeration (hyperbole)? How is this to be understood?
- 5) When Paul prayed for their spiritual growth did he see himself as a part of God’s answer to that prayer? (3:10)
- 6) For what two things did Paul pray in 3:12-13?

C. Brotherly love.

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you... 3:12

D. Holiness with a view to the end.

So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. 3:13

Paul prays for them to love each other more and that they perfect holiness with a view of the Lord Jesus coming again. When is the last time you prayed something like this? Is our heart focused on the end? Are we thinking more about this life or the life to come when we pray? Is our chief aim and passion in prayer focused on a concern for the soul? What and how we pray says a lot about where our heart is directed.

Lesson 7

A CHALLENGING PRAYER (Colossians 1:9-12)

In his book, “A Call to Spiritual Reformation”, D. A. Carson argues there are two reasons to use the Bible to shape your prayers. The first is broad and theological: the study of God, Himself. Our understanding about God will shape the way we pray. If we learn more about God and His perspective, then our prayers will reflect that knowledge.

The second reason is more narrow and specific: the study of the prayers of Scripture. He writes,

Learn to argue in prayer with Moses, to sing with David, to be farsighted and expansive with Solomon at the dedication of the temple. Think through what it means to pray the prayer taught us by the Lord Jesus Himself. Learn to pray with Paul. Such study will help identify what to pray for, how to approach God, the proper grounds for our petitions. To restrict ourselves for a moment to the petitions in the prayers of Paul, we must ask ourselves how far the petitions we commonly present to God are in line with what Paul prays for. Suppose, for example, that 80 or 90 percent of our petitions ask God for good health, recovery from illness, safety on the road, a good job, success in exams, the emotional needs of our children, success in our mortgage application, and much more of the same. How much of Paul’s praying revolves around equivalent items? If the center of our praying is far removed from the center of Paul’s praying, then even our very praying may serve as a wretched testimony to the remarkable success of the process of paganization in our life and thought. (pg. 95-96)

This is why we need to study the prayers of Paul. This prayer in Colossians provides us lessons in two areas.

Lessons from the Setting

A. Paul prays for Christians he has never met personally.

Paul had learned about these brethren from Epaphras, who had apparently founded the church in Colosse, as well as Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13). Paul writes to these brethren, “I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, *and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh...*” (Col. 2:1, emphasis added)

B. Paul prays without ceasing (1:9).

We’ve already observed how it was Paul’s custom to regularly pray for brethren.

C. Paul links his prayers of thanksgiving to prayers of petition.

“For this reason” Paul writes, “since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you” (1:9). The reason for the petition (vs. 9-14) is the thanksgiving for the evidence of grace he saw in them (vs. 3-9). Paul prayed not only for brethren who were having problems, he prayed for brethren who were growing and maturing spiritually as they should.

Lessons from the Prayer

A. Paul asks God to fill them with the knowledge of His will (1:9).

Paul’s concern in the letter is that these Christians, who have come out of a pagan background, will trust in Christ as the only source of wisdom and knowledge and reject all religions and philosophies of men (2:8-10). So he prays that they might know God’s will: which is based on the truth of His Word (Psa. 143:10; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:15-17; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:16-18)

B. Paul’s purpose in this petition is that they might be pleasing to the Lord (1:10).

Paul prayed they might “walk worthy of the Lord, *fully pleasing Him.*” Paul’s desire was that they please the Lord in every way. He wanted

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them to be fully devoted to the Lord's will in every area of their life (3:18-4:1).

Paul then spells out exactly what he desires in his prayer.

C. Paul sketches, in four characteristics, what a life pleasing to the Lord looks like (1:10b-14).

- *Christians bear fruit in every good work (10b)*. Paul has prayed that they know God's will (9), but this must not be merely academic. It must produce fruit (Mt. 7:21-23) There is no way that we can be pleasing to the Lord if we don't bear fruit (Jn. 15:1-8).

- *Christians grow in the knowledge of God (10b)*. To know God's will (9), and to do His will (10), will lead to a deeper knowledge of God. We come to know from experience His will, and thus to know Him better (Rom. 12:2). This knowledge of God only motivates us to know

Lessons from the Setting

1. Had Paul met these Christians before (2:1)? How did he know them (1:7; 4:12-13)? Why do you think he prayed for them? What does that reveal about His heart?
2. How often did Paul pray for them (1:9)?
3. According to the lesson, what was the "reason" (1:9) Paul prayed for them?

Lessons from the Prayer

4. Why did Paul want them to be filled with the knowledge of God's will (1:9)?
5. What was the purpose for his prayer (1:10)?
6. What were the four characteristics of a life that is pleasing to the Lord (as given in the lesson)? Why are each one of those characteristics necessary to please the Lord?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

His will better and even greater obedience. It is an endless cycle that spirals upward toward God. The Lord is pleased when He sees this kind of growth.

- *Christians are strengthened to display great endurance and patience (11)*. He prays that they might fully know the power of the resurrection (2:12) and thus be motivated to joyfully accept whatever trials they have in this life. This steadfastness is well pleasing to the Lord.

- *Christians joyfully give thanks to the Father (12-14)*. This thanksgiving reveals what we value. The Lord is pleased when He sees that our greatest joy is not in our health or wealth, but in our spiritual condition, having been delivered from "the power of darkness" and translated into the "kingdom of the Son of His love" (13).

Lesson 8

EXCUSES FOR NOT PRAYING

Though the focus of our class has been improving the quality of our prayers instead of the quantity, we need to spend a lesson on some of the excuses we often make for the small amount of time we spend in prayer.

Too Busy

We're all in such a rush. From the time we wake till the time we settle down in the evening our days are a flurry of activity. We rush, we accomplish, we strive, we do. At the end of our day we want to unwind and relax, and for most of us, that means television.

Where does prayer belong in our day? Most of us try to pray either in the morning (before our busy day gets started) or in the evening (once our busy day is through). The problem is exhaustion takes over. We stay up too late and can't get up early enough the next morning or we wear ourselves to a frazzle during the day and can't stay up long enough to get even half way through our prayer.

We promise the Lord (and ourselves) that once things slow down we'll devote more time to prayer, but that day never comes. We just stay too busy to slow down and pray.

Too Dry Spiritually

Sometimes we go through periods of spiritual dryness. We come to the throne of God in prayer, having set aside the time and devoted the energy to this endeavor, but we just don't feel like praying. This may be due to discouragement, to stress, to depression, to periods of weak faith, or to just a general feeling of emptiness.

We've all gone through such periods in our spiritual life, and there are numerous triggers which can cause spiritual dryness. But whatever the cause it severely limits our desire to pray.

Feel No Need

This excuse is a little trickier to detect than the first two. Few of us would truly admit to this feeling. Who among us would say that we

don't need prayer because we are so strong, so mature, or so independent? Though we, like Peter, would boldly confess, "Not I, Lord," this perspective is more prevalent in our life than we may think. Let's face facts: When are we the most prayerful? When are the most consistent in our prayer-life? When things are going well for us? When the bills are all paid? When our health is good? When family life is great? When we are having few problems with temptation? No, we often treat God like a spare tire. We pull Him out when we need Him. When things are going well again, we toss Him back in the trunk and forget He's even there!

Too Bitter

Injustice is a fact of life. We all get treated unfairly. Whether it be hateful words, false judgments, or malicious gossip spread about us, it hurts, and especially so when it comes from those with whom we are close. Revenge is sweet. Malice fills our hearts. We feed on it. It makes us feel better (at least in the short term). This bitterness we store up against our enemies is almost intoxicating, but it has many serious side effects spiritually, not the least of these is prayerlessness.

How do you approach God when your heart is filled with such anger? It's hard to do (if it is done at all). Our prayers become formulaic at best. At worst, we actually justify our hatred in prayer and petition God to curse our enemies. (The very opposite of what Jesus said we should do when praying for our enemies!) But usually, we just don't pray. We know God does not approve of our thoughts, but in our state of self-pity and resentment, we just can't bring ourselves to pray for the very ones we enjoy hating so much!

Too Ashamed

After Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit they heard God walking nearby, and we're told they "hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). Shame

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makes us want to hide from the presence of God. Just like a child who hides from his parent when he knows he's been caught red-handed with his hand in the cookie jar, we like to hide from God when we sin.

Content with Mediocrity

The most dangerous reason of all is this one. Sometimes we just become content. We cling to the "truth" and feel quite proud of our superior morality. We're there in the pew

three times a week, we "tithed of all we possess", etc., etc. We're quite satisfied with ourselves spiritually. This confidence is not based on grace either. It is in our foolish assumption that we've arrived. We feel we are "rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" and do not realize that we are actually "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:18).

- 1) Rate the six excuses listed in the lesson relative to yourself. Think about which one of these is giving you the most problems right now. Can you think of a time when another one of these was your biggest hindrance?

Too Busy

- 2) Read Lk. 10:38-42. What was the difference between Mary and Martha? How does this narrative relate to prayer?
- 3) Read 1 Cor. 7:4-5. What does this passage say about the importance of prayer?

Too Dry Spiritually

- 4) Read Lk. 11:5-10 & 18:1-8. What would Jesus say to someone who used "spiritual dryness" as an excuse for prayerlessness?

Feel No Need

- 5) Read Josh. 9:14-15. What was the critical error the leaders of Israel made with reference to the Gibeonites? Is it possible they were suffering from too much self-confidence?

Too Bitter

- 6) Read Mt. 6:14-15. What is the consequence of allowing bitterness to reign in our hearts?

Too Ashamed

- 7) Read Psa. 32:3-5. What caused David so much distress? What was the solution?

Content with Mediocrity

- 8) Read Jas. 4:1-10. Were these Christians? Did they pray? What was at the core of all their problems (v. 6)? What was the solution?

Lesson 9

PRAYING FOR EXCELLENCE (Philippians 1:3-11)

Let's remember the personal goals we each are hoping to accomplish through this class.

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Pray more frequently and fervently
2. Use Biblical principles and language in our prayers
3. Be more aware of the needs of others for whom we should be praying
4. Be made more like Christ through the effect of our prayers

The prayer of Paul we will study in this class is an excellent example of praying for the spiritual needs of others. Both in what he asks for and in the language he uses, Paul demonstrates a level of spiritual maturity towards which we should strive.

Paul and the Philippians

In Lesson 7, we examined a prayer of Paul's for a church that he did not know well – the Colossians. Here Paul is praying for Christians with whom he has had a long association (cf. Acts 16:11-40). He describes his relationship at the beginning of his epistle to them (Philippians 1:3-8):

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

The prayer we will examine more carefully is contained in 1:9-11, but even in these first words, we see the prayerful attitude of Paul. He mentions the frequency of his prayers for them (remember our first goal), and notes the depth of his love for them (*I hold you in my heart*). The statement in vs. 8 of his yearning

for them (longing for them – NKJV) undoubtedly describes the fervency of his prayer on their behalf.

Notice also, the confidence he has that God will bring to completion the good works that He began in them (vs. 6). This assurance plays a prominent role in the prayer that follows.

Paul's Prayer

Paul prays thus for the Philippians:

⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so 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.

The prayer is brief, essentially in the nature of an intercession - making a request on their behalf – but the language is rich in spiritual importance. He first prays that their love would abound, recognizing this as a strength of the Philippian church. We might not be as ready to pray for something that already exists, but here Paul acknowledges how important it is that love grows. But he asked that the growth of this love would be accompanied with both knowledge and discernment.

But in vs. 10-11, we see that this request for their love to abound has a series of goals. Paul mentions four in all:

- That they would approve what is excellent
- That they would be pure and blameless
- That they would be filled with the fruit of righteousness and
- That all of this would be to the glory and praise of God.

When viewed with these goals in mind, we see the vital nature of Paul's request. To have a growing love possessed with knowledge and wisdom would result in a host of spiritual

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benefits. He prayed for this, in part, because he was already confident God would make this happen (cf. 1:6).

Lessons from the Prayer

Compare this prayer to our often feeble efforts. We frequently fail to pray for those who are already doing well in their service to God (think about our third goal), not seeing that they also are in need – the need to pursue that which is excellent. When we do pray, is our language anything like that of Paul's in this prayer? Do we pray for discernment, for the ability to recognize what is excellent, for

purity and for the fruit of righteousness? Are these the subjects on our mind for both our self and for others?

Lastly, if we are committed to what is excellent and that shows through in our prayers, it should then motivate us to consider whether we are doing our best in terms of what we read, with whom we associate, with how we use our time and money, and in terms of how we help others. The pursuit of the very best in our service to God will flow through our prayers and into the daily activities of our life – all intended to be to the glory of God.

Paul and the Philippians

1. What two attitudes characterized Paul's prayer for the Philippians (1:3-4)?
2. How did Paul characterize his relationship with the Philippians (1:5)?
3. What was Paul confident would happen for the Philippians (1:6)?
4. How does he describe his emotional attachment to the Philippians (1:7-8)?

Paul's Prayer

5. In his prayer, what does Paul ask would be true of their love (1:9)?
6. What was the purpose for his prayer (1:10)?
7. What four things did Paul ask would be the result of their love (1:10-11)?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Lesson 10

PRAYING FOR OPPORTUNITIES (Romans 15:30-33)

Why do we pray? After all, if God is sovereign and all that happens is directed by His will, what difference does it make whether we ask for something or not? If it is God's will, it will happen. If it's not God's will, it won't happen.

On the surface of it, that sounds correct. It almost sounds biblical. But it makes prayer irrelevant and flies in the face of numerous passages that present God as a personal God. God is not only sovereign (in control of all things), He is also personal (He listens and responds to our prayers).

What did Paul think of God? Did he see God as sovereign, as able to accomplish things and affect circumstances? Did he also see God as personal, listening and receptive to his petitions for help?

Before we examine Paul's prayer in Romans 15, let's first consider how some people view God and prayer.

Reasons Some Give for Prayer

A. "Prayer does not change God; it changes the one who prays."

The thinking here is that prayer is a mind game and nothing more. Some would say that the only thing Paul accomplished in his prayers for opportunities is he made himself more aware of the opportunities God had already determined to give him. The opportunity would have been there whether Paul prayed for it or not. His prayer made no difference in that sense. At best, his prayer just focused his mind in the direction God wanted.

B. "Prayer insures the glory goes to God."

Again, prayer is not affecting any kind of change, all it is doing is making us aware of God's hand in making things happen. What happens is going to happen whether we pray for it or not, prayer just makes us more aware of the fact that God is making good things to occur.

Weak Incentives for Prayer

But what incentive is this to pray? When prayer is reduced to a mind game it has no power. Why would you pray? It would only be out of sense of duty.

God wants us to see Him as a personal God, a loving Father who mercifully and lovingly responds to our prayers.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Matthew 5:7-11

The apostle Paul prayed to God because He believed God was listening to Him and that He would respond to his petitions.

Paul's Prayer

A. He pleaded for prayers on his behalf (15:30 "Now I beg you, brethren...").

We find Paul making request for prayers in many places (1 Thess 5:23-25; Eph 6:18-20; Col 4:2-4; 2 Thess 3:1).

Prayer was more than just a mind game to Paul. He not only prayed himself, he urged others to do so for him as well. Paul saw the intercession of others as a powerful thing (Phil 1:19-20; Philem 22).

B. He views prayer as a part of our struggle (15:30 "strive together with me in prayers...").

The phrase here represents one verb in the Greek, used only here in the New Testament. Other forms of the same word-group appear in the New Testament, sometimes in connection with prayer (Col 4:12; 2:1).

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The word-group is often associated with the strenuous discipline of the athlete who struggles to prevail. It was used of wrestlers in the Greek games. It has the idea of agony in it. The same root word is used of Jesus in the garden: “**being in agony**, He prayed more earnestly” (Lk 22:44).

Something that does not appear in our English translations is that this word-group is repeated twice by Paul: *sunagonizomai, sunagonizomai*.

This picture of prayer is consistent with the picture of spiritual conflict we see in Ephesians 6 where Paul describes the “Christian armor” and the place prayer plays in our struggle against “principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (v 12, 18-20).

C. His prayer focused on specific outcomes (15:31 “*that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe...*”).

This would seem strange if Paul didn’t believe God would respond to his specific requests.

D. His prayer for opportunities envisions further ministry (15:32 “*that I may come to you with joy by the will of God...*”).

Paul has prayed that might come to Rome to work among them and then go on past them into Spain to places the gospel has not yet been (Rom 1:9-13; 15:20, 24, 28).

When Paul asks for prayer in connection with his trip to Jerusalem, he cannot think of that trip without thinking of the ministry that stretches beyond there.

This is a large, visionary view of prayer. It keeps in mind the details of immediate concern, but also the broader picture, looking forward to long-term goals. Paul dreamed great dreams, and all of those dreams were in line with God’s purpose for his life. And all of those dreams depended on God’s grace and help. That’s why he prayed.

Reasons Some Give for Prayer

1. What were two reasons given in the lesson for prayer?

Weak Incentives for Prayer

2. Why are these incentives for prayer weak?
3. How did Jesus want us to view God (Mt 7:7-11)?

Paul’s Prayer

4. If Paul pleaded for his brethren to pray for him (Rom 15:30), what does that reveal about his attitude toward God and prayer?
5. What is the significance of Paul asking them to “strive together” with him in prayer?
6. What was the specific outcome Paul prayed for (Rom 15:31)? What does that reveal about his attitude toward God and prayer?
7. Does the petition end with his service in Jerusalem (Rom 15:32)?

Lesson 11

PRAYING TO THE SOVEREIGN GOD (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians by presenting all of the glorious blessings they had received in Christ Jesus (1:3-14). All of these blessings were the result of God's sovereign grace. He begins by praising the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us..." (v. 3). He praises God for having chosen them (v. 4), predestinating them to adoption according to His good pleasure (v. 5). And all of this was done, not because they deserved it, but it was to the "praise of the glory of His grace" (v. 6). He comes back to the sovereign grace of God in verse 11: "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." And why was this done? "that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (v. 12). Their salvation was planned before creation (v. 4), accomplished by Jesus on the cross (vs. 7-10), and revealed by the Spirit (v. 13-14). And all of this was done "according to the riches of His grace" (v. 7).

This is why Paul prayed for them. He begins his prayer by saying, "Therefore I also... do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (v. 15-16) In the NIV it reads, "For this reason." For what reason? In part, their faith in Jesus and love for the saints (v. 15b), but it's more than just that. The thoughts of God's great plan for

them, which were executed to perfection by God's sovereign power and grace, are what motivated Paul to pray what he prayed for them. The prayer itself is filled with further expressions of confidence and trust in God's continued work in their spiritual lives. He prayed because He believed that God, "who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Paul did this because he had a proper view of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Instead of being a discouragement for prayer, his view of these truths about God and man encouraged intense intercession for them. God's sovereignty did not serve as a disincentive to prayer: "God is going to save whomever who He's going to save, it matters not whether we pray for them or not." Neither did man's free will prevent Paul from praying for them: "It's all up to them. God can't do anything. They're going to have to sink or swim on their own." Though he may not have understood how God's sovereignty and man's free will did not cancel each other out, he believed in both, and both served to give his prayer the proper perspective.

Paul's prayer serves as a model for us of how to pray to the sovereign God, especially with regard to redemption.

Paul Offers Thanksgiving for God's Sovereign Grace in Their Lives (1:15-16)

- 1) What were the two things that Paul heard about these brethren for which he gave thanks?
- 2) How does this prayer serve both as a complement to them and, ultimately, as praise to the sovereign God who had redeemed them?
- 3) How do we follow this model in our own prayers? What is the proper way of encouraging someone who has been converted or those who have shown spiritual progress in their lives, while not cheating God of the glory which is due His name?

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Paul Offers Intercession That God's Sovereign Purposes For Them Might Be Accomplished (1:17-19a)

- 4) How is God described in verse 17?

- 5) What is the specific prayer in verse 17?

- 6) Paul's prayer is that "the eyes of [their] understanding be enlightened" (v. 18). What are the three specific things he has in mind in verses 18-19a? Explain what you think each of these requests mean?
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

- 7) In specific ways, how does the sovereign God "enlighten" the eyes of our understanding?

Paul Offers a Review of the Dramatic Displays of God's Sovereign Power and Might (1:19b-23)

- 8) When we think of the sovereign God, what are the things we think of?

- 9) What were the things Paul thought of when he thought of the sovereign God? (We found three things; you might find more in the text.) How do each of these realities serve to give us spiritual confidence?
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

Lesson 12

PRAYING FOR POWER (Ephesians 3:14-21)

The theme of power runs throughout the Ephesian letter. Power is presented in the opening lines of the letter as Paul describes what God's sovereign power and grace had accomplished in their salvation (1:3-14). He then prays that they might know the "exceeding greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe" (1:19). This power was demonstrated in raising up Christ from the dead and seating Him in the heavenly places and then in raising us up from our dead spiritual condition and seating us together with Christ (1:20; 2:1, 5-6). Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was a gift of God's grace to him "by the effective working of His power" (3:7). He concludes the letter exhorting them to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" as they must daily confront the enemy in spiritual warfare (6:10). It is not surprising then, that here in our text Paul should pray for them to have God's power in them.

Paul's Petitions

- A. Power (16-17a).
- Source of power: Riches of God's glory (16a) & Christ's Spirit (16b).

Paul's Petitions

- A. Power (16-17a).
- 1) From where does this power come? (16 – two sources)
 - 2) Paul prays that God's power might strengthen our "inner man"? (16b) What is this inner man? (2 Cor. 4:16-18)
 - 3) What is the ultimate purpose behind Paul's petition? (17a) Why would he pray this? Weren't these people already Christians? Was this not already a present reality for them? (see 2:6, 19-22)

- Object of power: Inner man (16b).
 - Purpose of power: Christ might dwell in heart (17a).
- B. Comprehension of Christ's love (17b-19).
- Already know Christ's love (17b).
 - Measuring the immeasurable (18-19a).
 - Purpose: Spiritual maturity (19b).

Grounds for Petitions

- A. Paul's petitions are in line with God's purposes (14a).
- B. Paul's petitions are addressed to the heavenly Father (14b).

Final Word of Praise

- A. God is able to do more than we can ask or imagine (20).
- B. The glory of God is Paul's ultimate purpose in his prayer (21).

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- B. Comprehension of Christ's love (17b-19).
- 4) The second petition is that they might comprehend Christ's love. Did they not already know the love of Christ? (17b)

 - 5) In what ways do we come to know Christ's love? Is it by revelation alone or is experience involved as well? (see Psa. 73:25-26; Rom. 14:17; 15:13; 1 Pet. 1:8-9; 2:3)

 - 6) The purpose behind this second petition is that we might be "filled with all the fullness of God" (19b). What does that mean? (see 4:11-13)

Grounds for Petitions

- A. Paul's petitions are in line with God's purposes (14a).
- 7) Paul begins in verse 14, "For this reason I bow my knees..." We must explore what Paul has just written to find clues as to why this prayer was offered. Read 3:8-13 and list some possible motivations for this prayer.

 - 8) Paul said in verse 14, "For this reason I bow my knees to the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*." How does the thought of God being our Father serve as an incentive for this prayer? (Lk. 11:9-13)

Final Word of Praise

- A. God is able to do more than we can ask or imagine (20).
- 9) Why do you think it was important for Paul to add at the end of this prayer that God is able to do beyond what we can ask or think? What is it about *this* prayer that made that necessary?
- B. The glory of God is Paul's ultimate purpose in his prayer (21).
- 10) Why was it necessary to end this prayer with this stated purpose: God's glory?