

## A Word to Sheepdogs

MARTIN LUTHER ONCE ALLEGEDLY REMARKED: “I’m so busy today that I’ll have to spend an extra hour at prayer.” He, of course, wasn’t talking about setting aside an extra sixty minutes, but rather utilizing another of the historic rites prescribed for the liturgical hours. Yet let’s face it: prayer is the constant bugaboo of every conscientious pastor. We hit the ground running in the morning, race through our day, then finally collapse at night — telling ourselves: “Well, tomorrow I really should set aside some time for prayer.”

Bryan Wolfmueller isn’t that much different from the rest of us in the prayer department. The good he wants to do, he doesn’t always get to. In this paper he not only lists his aspirations, but candidly admits his failures. Yet in the “invitation” he has written — as he calls this paper — he invites us along on an excursion through the prayers of St. Paul. And we are all the richer for it.

As you review the eighteen different texts (!) containing Paul’s prayers, I’m sure you will make the same discovery I did in reading Pastor Wolfmueller’s reflections and applications: we all have a long way to go when it comes to becoming men of prayer in our own ministries. Yet there’s always hope. For not only is tomorrow another day, but it is a day in which we are free to join Paul in his ministry of prayer — to be imitators of him, just as he was an imitator of the Lord Jesus, who always lives to make intercession for us all. (Heb 7:25).

*Dr. H. L. Senkbeil*



# St. Paul and the Pastor's Work of Prayer An Invitation

*Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller*

## **Introduction: An Invitation**

**T**HIS IS LESS OF AN ESSAY AND MORE OF AN INVITATION, or, if you prefer, a challenge. I would like to invite you, my brother pastors, to meditate on St. Paul's prayers, and to follow his example of prayer. We want to see how he prayed, when he prayed, who and what he prayed for, what motivated and informed his prayers, and we want to do the same.

In his thirteen letters St. Paul has eighteen (!) texts where he speaks of his prayer for the churches. He tells us how he prays, how often he prays and for what he prays. His prayers follow a simple outline, but the petitions he offers are as varied as the congregations for which he is praying. His prayers are Trinitarian and intensely theological, and they are profoundly emotional. Paul, it seems, prays with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. He labors in prayer, and he invites us to labor with him.

In our ordination vows we made the promise before heaven and earth to "pray for God's people." While prayer is some of the most important part of our work as pastors, it is also the easiest to neglect. People notice if we don't write a sermon; they don't notice when we miss our noon prayers. And I, at least, find my prayers to hover narrowly around the fourth petition: asking the Lord for health for the sick, peace for the dying, provision for the needy, a list of earthly troubles.

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St. Paul, in contrast, is vigorous and constant in prayer, and his petitions bunch up around the first table of the Lord's Prayer, prayers for wisdom, knowledge, faith, love and hope. Paul's prayers are expansive, bold and targeted. I hope, as we follow his example of prayer, our own work of prayer would grow and bear much fruit.

This invitation is two-fold. First, we should meditate on the Scriptures in which Paul speaks of prayer. Second, and perhaps most importantly, we should take up the prayers of Paul and pray them to the Lord on behalf of our own people.

My own hope and prayer is that this invitation would uncover some previously untouched portions of the Scriptures, and that mining them together for the Lord's wisdom, we would find renewed joy and strength in our prayers for the church. To that end, please keep in touch with me as you read, meditate on and pray these passages.

### **Paul's Prayer for the Church**

First things first, the texts. I've listed them here in biblical order, and included a short summary. In the Appendix I've formatted the verses phrase by phrase as cards to be used in prayer.

St. Paul's eighteen passages on prayer:

**Romans 1:8-10**, Thanksgiving for their faith and a prayer that Paul would soon come to them.

**Romans 10:1**, Paul's desperate prayer that Israel would be saved.

**1 Corinthians 1:4-9**, Paul gives thanks to God for the spiritual gifts

given to the Corinthians to help them endure to the second coming.

**2 Corinthians 9:12-15**, Paul glorifies God for the Corinthians' confession of the gospel and ensuing generosity.

**2 Corinthians 12:7-9a**, Three times Paul prays to be delivered from the thorn in the flesh.

**2 Corinthians 13:7-9**, Paul prays for the perfection of the Corinthians.

**Ephesians 1:15-23**, In this extended prayer, Paul asks God to give to the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

**Ephesians 3:14-21**, A long prayer for the Ephesians in which Paul petitions God to dwell in their heart by faith.

**Philippians 1:3-11**, Paul prays with thankful confidence for the Philippians' partnership in the gospel and he prays for them, that their love would abound in knowledge.

**Colossians 1:3-14**, In this, the longest of Paul's prayers, he gives thanks to God for the Colossians, and prays that God would fill them with the knowledge of his will.

**1 Thessalonians 1:2-3**, Paul gives thanks to God for the faith, love and hope of the Thessalonians.

**1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**, Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians' faith, that they received the word of God.

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**, Paul gives thanks to God for the joy the Thessalonians bring to him, and prays that the Lord would increase their love and strengthen their hearts.

**2 Thessalonians 1:3ff**, Paul thanks God for the growing faith and love

and perseverance of the Thessalonians.

**2 Thessalonians 1:11–12**, Paul prays that through his power God would make the Thessalonians worthy of their calling.

**1 Timothy 1:12**, Paul thanks Jesus (!) for the ministry entrusted to him.

**2 Timothy 1:3–7**, Paul thanks God for Timothy and prays that he would see him soon.

**Philemon 4–7**, Paul thanks God for Philemon's faith and love.

That is a lot of material with which to work. A quick overview reveals a few patterns in Paul's prayer. We'll make note of them here.

### The Adjectives (or the Fervency and Frequency of Paul's Prayer)

Depending on your conscience, these adjectives and adverbs are going to inspire or convict you, perhaps do a little of both. Keep an eye out for the patterns.

"First," "for all of you," "without ceasing," "always," (Rom 1:8), "always," (1 Cor 1:4), "thrice," (2 Cor 12:8), "cease not," (Eph 1:16), "upon every remembrance," "always in every prayer," "for you all," "with joy," (Phil 1:3–4), "praying always," "do not cease to pray for you, and to desire," (Col 1:3, 9), "always," "for you all," "remembering without ceasing" (1 Thess 1:2–3), "without ceasing," (1 Thess 2:13), "night and day praying exceedingly," (1 Thess 1:10), "always" (2 Thess 1:3), "always," (2 Thess 1:11), "without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day," (2 Tim 1:4), "always," (Philm 4).

Paul prays, day and night, with thanksgiving, joy and fervency for

the churches. The word most repeated is "always," and the phrase "without ceasing." This means, at least, that St. Paul prayed a lot. The Greek *pantote* always points to regular prayer, and especially to the rhythm of prayer established in the temple with the morning and evening sacrifice. (Mistaking "always" for "every moment" is a mistake that gives room for the devil to accuse us falsely for doing anything at all but praying.)

In the Epistles, we see Paul's prayers from the perspective of the recipients. The Christians in Philippi and Ephesus hear that Paul prays for them always, day and night. But taking these reports together, Paul must have prayed for all the churches all the time. He remembers all the people he has met, all the congregations he has established or encouraged, and even more. Paul includes the congregations he had not visited. To the Christians in Rome he writes "without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you" (Rom 1:9b–10).

Paul prays alone and with others. Six of his 18 prayers are "we" prayers (Col 1:3–14, 1 Thess 1:2–4, 2:13–16, 3:9–13, 2 Thess 1:3–6, and 1:11–12). "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God," (1 Thess 3:9). Paul's missionary endeavors are not solo adventures; he has travel companions, and people coming and going from their cohort. Prayer is also not a solo-endeavor. Our own prayers are personal and public; we pray alone and we pray with people.

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*What emerges from the Scriptures is the clear picture that Paul's work is a work of prayer. In all circumstances, at the beginning of a work and at the end of the day, Paul can be found in prayer.*

The book of Acts helps paint the picture. When Paul returns from Damascus as a Christian, he goes into the temple to pray (see Acts 22:17). Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey begins with fasting and prayer, and after laying on hands they are sent off (Acts 13:3). When Paul and Silas are imprisoned in Philippi, they are found praying at midnight (Acts 16:25). After preaching to and encouraging the Ephesian pastors in Miletus, Paul "knelt down and prayed with them all," (Acts 20:36). On his way to Jerusalem Paul finds Christians in Tyre, and he spends seven days with them. These all accompany Paul to their ship, and again, they kneel down on the beach and pray (Acts 21:5). Paul prays for safety in a storm (Acts 27:29) and prays for the healing of the father of Publius, the governor of Miletus (Acts 28:8).

What emerges from the Scriptures is the clear picture that Paul's work is a work of prayer. In all circumstances, at the beginning of a work and at the end of the day, Paul can be found in prayer. He, like Jesus, is found watching<sup>1</sup> in prayer through the night. While Paul is busy work-

<sup>1</sup> We remember the accounts of Jesus praying through the night in the Gospels, summarized in Hebrews: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence" (Heb 5:7). The spiritual discipline of "watching" is mentioned by Martin Luther in *The Freedom of the Christian*. "Here then works begin; here he must not take his ease; here he must give heed to exercise his body by fastings, watchings, labour, and other moderate discipline, so that it may be subdued to the spirit, and obey and conform itself to the inner man and faith, and not rebel against them nor hinder them, as is its nature to do if it is not kept under." Martin Luther, *Everyone's Luther: The Freedom of the Christian* (Around the Word, 2017), 51.

ing and serving the people around him, he is also serving and blessing the churches far away through his prayers.

For us pastors, endeavoring to imitate St. Paul, there are practical and spiritual considerations.

First, the practical.

When do we pray? Paul follows the pattern handed on from the Old Testament of praying "night and day" (see 1 Thess 3:10 and 2 Tim 1:6, see Ps 1:2). We understand that, first, this means that Paul prayed all the time. But, second, we see that Paul prayed in the evening and the morning. The pattern of evening and morning prayer has any number of practical benefits. Families are usually together, especially for meals. We are on the edges of the day's work. Morning and evening naturally give shape to our petitions; in the morning we give thanks for protection through the night, and pray for the work set before us. In the evening we pray for forgiveness for the day's sins, and for protection through the night. In the morning we pray for those we serve in our vocations. In the evening we pray for ourselves and our families.

In the table of prayers in the Small Catechism Martin Luther has brought this pattern of prayer from the monastery and fit them into the rhythms of the home.<sup>2</sup> An important part of our Evangelical heritage will be found with the renewed practice of family prayer. Luther has more ad-

<sup>2</sup> Even though it's not the point, I can't help reminding the reader that the Small Catechism is an evangelical breviary, or an "Evangelical Rule" equivalent to the rule of St Augustine or Benedict, where Luther transforms each home into a chapel and sacred space.

vice for pastors, an additional hour of prayer.

Now that they are free from the useless, bothersome babbling of the Seven Hours, it would be fine if every morning, noon, and evening they would read, instead, at least a page or two from the Catechism, the Prayer Book, the New Testament, or something else from the Bible and would pray the Lord's Prayer for themselves and their parishioners. In this way they might show honor and gratitude to the Gospel, through which they have been delivered from so many burdens and troubles, and they might feel a little shame because, like pigs and dogs, they remember no more of the Gospel than this rotten, pernicious, shameful, carnal liberty. (Large Catechism, Introduction 3)

For pastors, whose work and vocation involves the spiritual labor of prayer, work time should be set aside for this work. What is the best way to develop this habit? Ask me that in ten years.

St. Paul, apparently, had a fantastic memory. He "remembers" the congregations and the Christians in his prayers. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (Phil 1:3, see also 1 Thess 1:3 and 2 Tim 1:3, 5-6). Paul would bring to mind the names and needs of the people in his prayers. Recognizing this, I've recently begun asking the Lord for a better memory<sup>3</sup>, but while I'm wait-

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<sup>3</sup> I've noticed a refrain in conversations with pastors, namely, that their bad or weak memory causes damage in the congregation. No doubt this is the case. As we understand that the advance of time is, in fact, diminishing the strength of our human faculties, we might expect that a weakened memory would come along with life in these latter days. Add to this what many have observed, that the

ing for that prayer to be answered, the practical work-around is to keep a prayer list. I've often heard the old pastors talk or write about their prayer-lists, but I've yet to find a description of how those lists were organized, kept, or used. I've been working on a little journal (that fits in the back of my Bible) that has various petitions of the Lord's Prayer for the different days of the week (Sunday, "Hallowed be Thy Name," for my godchildren, for the baptized, for the preaching of the word; Monday, "Thy Kingdom Come," for the church, missionaries, various projects, and so forth. I've included this list as an appendix.). I include in this journal an index card where I keep a list of people or circumstances that need special prayers every day. I always write the day that I add the name to the list. I think a particularly good practice (which I have tried and failed multiple times to implement) is praying through a page of our congregation's membership directory every day.

Paul kneels to pray. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Eph 3:14). Paul did not have a sanctuary or a home office. He was dragged all over the world. He was in prison cells, boats, in the wilderness, homes, beaches and everywhere else, but he would

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strength of technology (expansive memory and near instant access to information) has made memory weak. We are distracted, and our culture lives with a deficit of attention. Pastors should, then, consider how to strengthen their memory, and consider what tools they can use to avoid sins of forgetfulness. Consider, for example, the usefulness of a calendar, and how lost most of us would be if our calendars were lost. The calendar is a tool for externalizing our memory. What tools do we have to keep information that doesn't belong on a calendar? For strategy and advice on this topic I would recommend *Getting Things Done* by David Allen.

transform the place where he was into a sanctuary. His posture would mark the place and time as holy.

It is a good habit to use our posture, kneeling or standing, to set apart the time and work of prayer. If we have access to the sanctuary, we should use it.

These practical suggestions could be expanded by each pastor's practice and wisdom, but it is important to see the spiritual motivation of Paul's prayers. For this we turn to Paul's prayer to the Philippians:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, *because I have you in my heart.*

Paul has the Philippians in his heart. His thoughts, affections, care, love and desires were wrapped around the Philippians. He carried the congregation and the saints around with him wherever he went, and this, no doubt, is true for all the congregations.

Jesus reminds us, "Out of the heart the mouth speaks," (Luke 6:45), and this certainly extends to our prayers. We speak to our Heavenly Father of the things on our heart, and when the families of our congregations are engraved on our hearts, prayers for them follow, flowing from the abundance of compassion and love.

We expect, then, that the devil would attack pastors at exactly this point. Instead of holding the congregation

in their hearts and having a fatherly affection for the members of the congregation, the devil tempts us with bitterness and hurt. He alienates the people from the heart of their pastor, and the pastor from the hearts of their people. Many pastors would find it difficult to speak of their congregation the way Paul speaks to the Philippians. This constrains prayer.

What to do? First, recognize that every pastor should be able to confess regarding their congregation with St. Paul, "I hold you in my heart." Second, when we recognize that we lack this profound affection for our members (the congregation or individuals in it), we repent, both to the Lord and to our confessor. Third, we pray, asking the Holy Spirit to give us new affections<sup>4</sup>, especially that our

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<sup>4</sup> I think we would be well served by recovering the confessional language of "new affections." The Christian likes different things than the flesh likes. The devil wants to make "desire" the problem, equating it with concupiscence. Rather, we understand that desire is sinful because of the source (the flesh), the object (what God has forbidden), and the goal (death). Desire that comes from the Spirit, is fixed on the good, beautiful and true, and leads to life is a good desire. It is a particular gift of the Holy Spirit that He makes us want and desire the will of God and the good of our neighbor. Notice, in Romans 7, that the things that Paul "wants" are the things of the Ten Commandments, and the thing he "hates" are the things of sin and death (especially Rom 7:15). "Concerning this material element, he has also said that the Holy Spirit, given in Baptism, begins to mortify lust and to create new impulses in man." (Ap II:35, all quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from the Tappert edition). "Since faith brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in our hearts, it must also produce spiritual impulses in our hearts. What these impulses are, the prophet shows when he says (Jer 31:33), 'I will put my law upon their hearts.' After we have been justified and regenerated by faith, therefore, we begin to fear and love God, to pray and expect help from him, to thank and praise him, and to submit to him in our afflictions. Then

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love would fit the neighbors given to us by God through our vocation. In other words, we ask God to make us like our congregations and her members. Fourth, we remember that Jesus holds us sinful pastors in his own heart, and by his blood our sins are forgiven. His love and affection caused his incarnation, his crucifixion and even now motivate his constant intercession for us (see Heb 7:25, Rom 8:34–35).

In reviewing this essay, Dr. John Kleinig made this particularly wonderful point about the pastor's work of prayer: "When we pray, we can only do good." Everything else we do — preaching, teaching, encouraging, visiting, meeting and so forth — can be twisted by the devil and used against us. Prayer cannot. God hears our prayers, and he answers them, and he does all things well. There is danger in every act except in our prayers. This sets us to pray with a profound confidence in God and his love for us and all his church.

### **Thanksgiving First, Petition Second: Paul's Pattern of Prayer**

Paul has a very identifiable pattern to his prayers:

1. Thanksgiving
2. Petition

He begins his letters, his prayers, and it seems, every day of his life by giving thanks to God for his blessings. Most especially, Paul recognizes the gifts that God has given to the churches.

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your

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we also begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses." (Ap III:4) If we avoid the theological conversation about affections and emotions, we give room for our emotions to run amok.

faith is being reported all over the world," (Rom 1:8). "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge — because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you," (1 Cor 1:4). "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers," (Eph 1:15). (See also 2 Cor 9:12, 15, Phil 1:3, Col 1:3, 1 Thess 1:2, 2:13, 3:19, 2 Thess 1:3, 1 Tim 1:12, 2 Tim 1:3, Philm 4.)

While giving thanks is something that is better to do than to define, we'll risk a definition: thanksgiving is the two-fold recognition in the heart and on the lips of (1) the goodness of a thing and (2) the source of that thing being God. St. Paul sees his whole life and everything in the world as a gift of God. Most especially, Paul sees spiritual gifts as God's gifts.

The "what" of Paul's thanksgiving we'll consider in the next section. Here we will simply note the primacy of thanksgiving. Paul gives thanks first. And Paul gives primacy to thanks. He bends his mind and his life to recognize the gifts of God. As we begin to imitate St. Paul, this is how we begin our prayers: we give thanks. We begin each day giving thanks to God for our congregation, for all the families the Lord has put under our spiritual charge. We note that Paul gives thanks for *all* of the members of the congregation, and we do the same, even the ones who are difficult, whose service is a thankless task. We give thanks to God for our office, for handing us over to the vocation of pastor, and giving us the office of preaching and administer-

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ing the sacraments. We give thanks to God for our life, for our family, for each new day, for the freedom that the Lord has given to his church to worship him in peace and quietness.

I think this one change in our habit of prayer will bring fantastic benefits for us and our congregations.

Consider the Corinthians. The circumstances of that congregation were dreadful. There were divisions and factions, utter confusion about marriage (with some refusing marriage, and another case of a man marrying his father's wife and boasting about it), dreadful communion practice (with some getting drunk, and others forbidding the poor from partaking), chaos in the liturgy, and a large contingent who denied the resurrection of the dead. Worry about this congregation in Corinth would certainly have been part of Paul's "deep concern for all the churches" that afflicted him (2 Cor 11:28). I imagine how I would begin a letter to this church, and it doesn't begin like this: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ..." (1 Cor 1:4).

Paul had much to rebuke, much to correct, much to lambast, much to mourn, but he begins with thanksgiving, a true Spirit-given heart-felt thankfulness for the Corinthian saints and their God-given gifts.

I've had the occasion to point out the wonder of Paul's thankfulness to disputing married couples. "Look at all the troubles the church has. Do you think Paul sees those troubles? Do you think Paul sees the faults of the church? Do you think Paul knows the urgency of the church's problems? Indeed, but he begins not with a list of the problems. He begins with

thanksgiving." I recently gave this prescription: "Every day I want you to think of one thing that you are grateful to God for about your spouse. Write it down. Thank God. Tell your spouse." I'm waiting for the results. I have no doubt that following that pattern of Paul changes the conversation, and more, changes the heart.

To imitate Paul, we pastors need a similar prescription. Begin your daily prayer for the congregation by giving thanks to God for them. We begin with giving thanks.<sup>5</sup>

### Grounded in Thanksgiving

Notice the "with thanksgiving" in Paul's instruction for prayer: "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6). Prayer, and especially thanksgiving, pushes out anxiety. Thanksgiving is what faith sounds like when it starts to talk to God. Thanks marches out of the mouth opened by God's grace, and giving thanks opens our eyes to see the grace of God.

We are tuned to see the things that are wrong. Thanksgiving tunes us to see the things that are good, and especially the good things that God has done and continues to do.

<sup>5</sup> It seems like the culture is catching up to the ancient wisdom of the Bible regarding the importance of thanksgiving. See, for example, this Wall Street Journal article "How to Raise more Grateful Children" (February 23, 2018) about gratefulness, and about a million other articles on the life-hacker websites. Alas, this gratefulness remains trapped in subjectivity, failing to recognize the Good source of every good and perfect gift (see Jas 1:17, and, for the converse, the impossibility of true thankfulness apart from faith, see Rom 1:21, "nor did they give thanks.").

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To the Colossians, Paul writes, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (4:2). Consider that, watchful in prayer with thanksgiving. When we lack thanksgiving we've fallen asleep. Alertness includes being aware of the good things God has given. Paul is looking out for the work of God, for things for which he can give thanks.

Especially when we give thanks *for people* (as God's great gifts to us), we are able to recognize the other person as a manifestation of God's kindness and fatherly goodness. This simple act of giving thanks, in fact, changes the way we treat people, the way we consider them and interact with them.

When we don't know what to pray: give thanks. When in doubt: give thanks.

The real treasure of following the example of St. Paul is not simply *that* he gives thanks, but what he gives thanks *for*. We'll explore that now.

**"I Have You in My Heart,"  
A Quick Comment on  
"Remembering" in Paul's Prayers**

Paul — over and over — notes how he *remembers* the saints in prayer (see Phil 1:3, 1 Thess 1:3, 2 Tim 1:3,4). We mentioned Paul's memory in the introductory and practical remarks, but it should be noted that remembering is also a theological act. In the Old Testament the command was to "Remember the Sabbath Day..." God promised, "Where I cause my Name to be remembered, there I will come to you and there I will bless you" (Exod 20:24). Jesus ordained that the Supper of his New Testament would be done "in remembrance of Me." Memory and

remembering are intensely theological. In fact, our salvation is found in the Lord *not* remembering our sins, but rather remembering us according to His mercy (see, for example, Pss 25:7, 79:8, 106:45).

Paul's remembering the church in his prayers is an echo of the breastplate given by God to the High Priest of the Old Testament. After giving the instructions for the breastplate, including the twelve precious stones engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel (the "stones of remembrance," see Exod 28:12), Moses gives the purpose: "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord," (Exod 28:29). This is the background to Paul's words to the Philippians, "I have you in my heart," (Phil 1:7).

When we remember others in our prayers we are carrying them into the Holy Place where the Lord sits on His throne of mercy where they can receive the Lord's blessings and grace. As pastors pray for their congregation they carry the Lord's people before the face of the Lord so that the Lord would remember them with mercy and love.

**Recognizing Spiritual Gifts: or  
Spiritual Eyes to See Spiritual  
Things**

Paul gives thanks to God for the congregations to which he is writing, but his prayers are even more specific: he gives thanks to God for the spiritual gifts that the Lord has given to the congregation. Here is where we see the intersection between Paul's theology and his practice of prayer.

*When we don't  
know what  
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thanks.*

*We are saddened  
by unbelief.  
We should be  
astonished by  
belief, surprised  
by faith,  
delighted that  
there are those  
who call upon  
the name of the  
Lord.*

Paul knows our sinful condition, that we are “by nature children of wrath,” that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God” (Eph 2:3, 1 Cor 2:14). The theological default of sinful humanity is unbelief. This is true for Paul himself, for every pastor and Christian. Our flesh hates God. Paul also knows that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Paul knows that any understanding of the gospel, any knowledge of Christ, any faith in the Lord’s promises is a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. With Christian wisdom Paul sees every believer in Christ as a miracle worked by God.<sup>6</sup>

How, then, could Paul not give thanks?

If there is a Christian church someplace, then Jesus has visited that

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<sup>6</sup>Concerning spiritual insight, it is a fruitful exercise to search Luther’s Works for “spiritual eyes.” Here are a few passages for our edification. On Genesis 28:15: “But the blindness and stupidity of our minds has been put before our eyes like a cloud, so that we do not see such great glory. It is great honor and majesty, however, when one says: ‘This is the Word of God.’ I hear a man’s voice. I see human gestures. The bread and the wine in the Supper are physical things. At ordination the hands of carnal men are imposed. In Baptism water is water. For the flesh judges in no other way concerning all these matters. But if you look at that addition with spiritual eyes, namely, at whose Word it is that is spoken and heard there, not indeed the word of a man—for if it is the word of a man, then the devil is speaking—but the Word of God, then you will understand that it is the house of God and the gate of heaven. The wooden house or the land per se does not deserve this name; but the land where the Word resounds is the land of God, not of the Creator but of the Ruler of His church, who governs His saints in such a way that they enter into the kingdom of heaven. Thus the water that is poured in Baptism is not the water of the Creator; it is the water of God the Savior.” (LW 5:248)

place with his Spirit and his word to rescue sinners.

We are saddened by unbelief. We should be astonished by belief, surprised by faith, delighted that there are those who call upon the name of the Lord.

This is another beautiful place where Paul is to be imitated. We should look out on the members of our congregation, or see them in our mind, and consider how each one of them, their baptism, their faith in Christ, their willingness to hear the Scriptures read and preached, all of this is a gift of God. Every member of our congregation is a miracle of conversion, evidence of the grace of God, and the result of his work. When we give thanks for the spiritual gifts in the congregation, we are thanking God for the work he has been pleased to do for us. We stand, like those ancient angels, and sing God’s praises as we behold, with spiritual sight, the wondrous works of God (see Job 38:7!).

Consider this prayer with which St. Paul begins his letter to the troubled Church in Corinth:

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. (1 Cor 1:4–6)

It surely would have been easy for Paul to remember in his prayers all of the troubles of that congregation, but he begins with thanksgiving, “always” giving thanks. He thanks God for the grace and gifts He has bestowed on the Corinthian Christians: their knowledge, their preaching, and their confidence in the Gospel.

To the Thessalonians Paul writes:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (2 Thess 2:13)

Paul knows, more than anything else (both through the Scriptures and through his own bitter experience), that the natural heart of man does not receive the word of God. The gospel is only spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14ff). He thus gives great thanks to God that the Thessalonians received Paul's preaching as God's word. Receptive ears and hearts are the work of God.

Consider the opening lists of the letter to the Philippians (1:1–5):

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, *for your fellowship in the gospel* from the first day until now.

The Lord has made the Philippians partakers with Paul and all the saints of the grace of the gospel, the forgiveness of all their sins. Paul does not take this for granted. Unlike Elijah who despaired in the wilderness, thinking he was the last remaining Christian (1 Kgs 19:10), Paul knows he is not alone. The Lord had not only called, gathered and enlightened Paul, but the Holy Spirit also calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

Paul knows original sin, the depth of our corruption, the utter godlessness and uselessness of our fallen nature, and this provides the founda-

tion for an abundance of thanksgiving at even the smallest glimpse of spiritual life and gifts.

Again, we consider what it would mean to imitate Paul here. The hearts of the Lord's preachers should overflow with thanksgiving, giving thanks to God that anyone would listen to our own preaching, that even one person would receive our teaching as the Lord's doctrine. We give thanks that there is a church, the Lord's Word has endured, that there is faith, and salvation, and that the Lord's kingdom still stands.

We are so often drawn to the trouble, to the unbelief, to the sin, to the false teaching and unholy living, that we miss the work the Lord has done and continues to do in our midst. We notice the devil's victories; he rubs our noses in them. Sadly, we miss the humble and quiet work of the Holy Spirit. Our spiritual eyes are dim, and the result is an anemic thankfulness, or a lack of thankfulness altogether.

If a heart is not overflowing with thankfulness then the weeds of bitterness and the thorns of resentment start to grow. "I'd love to thank God for my congregation, but there is nothing to be thankful for." This is spiritual blindness. In our practice of giving thanks the Holy Spirit begins to open our eyes to see his works in our congregation.

### **The Lord Was Here First**

The other practical outgrowth of beginning with thanksgiving comes with the humble recognition that the Lord Jesus was here first. The Holy Spirit began his work in my congregation long before I arrived. And the Holy Spirit continues to work apart from me and, often, in spite of me.

*The hearts of the Lord's preachers should overflow with thanksgiving, giving thanks to God that anyone would listen to our own preaching, that even one person would receive our teaching as the Lord's doctrine. We give thanks that there is a church, the Lord's Word has endured, that there is faith, and salvation, and that the Lord's kingdom still stands.*

Thanksgiving involves recognition.

As I give thanks, I consider the congregation and her members *not* with the question, “What do I need to do?” but rather, “What has the Lord already done?” Instead of asking, “What lacks?,” our thankful prayers consider, “What is? What exists?” Instead of looking over the congregation asking, “What next?,” thankfulness looks over the congregation and asks, “What are you up to, Jesus?” Quite simply, instead of focusing on our work, thankfulness focuses our attention on the work of God.

Consider Paul’s prayer for the congregation in Rome. Paul had never been to Rome. He didn’t know the people or the pastors, but still he prays and gives thanks for them (1:8):

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Their faith came through preaching, but not Paul’s preaching. Paul knows, and gives thanks, that the Lord had built and established that congregation completely apart from any work of his. Thanksgiving, like all prayer, occurs in the humble recognition that everything does not depend on me. In fact, very little depends on me. God is the actor, the doer, the Maker and Creator and Savior and Redeemer. If there is creation and redemption happening, then it is God who is accomplishing it.

Our thankful prayers are a recognition that God was at work in our congregations and their families long before we came around, and he will continue to love and bless them long after we are gone. The Lord is working through all sorts of different and varied arrangements to bless and

keep the members of our congregation, and we are only a small part of his work. We give thanks to God for that, and we give him thanks that he does give us a place to bless and serve his people.

Thanksgiving, insofar as it is a recognition of work accomplished, is itself not a work, but an act of rest, an act of acknowledgement and reflection. As such, our desire to work is probably one of the biggest reasons we don’t pray.

Let’s make this point practical. We are good at making “to-do” lists for ourselves. Our thanksgiving is an “already-done-by-God” list.<sup>7</sup> We want to develop the habit of making this list, of seeing these things, of noticing the works and gifts of God. It is, really, a habit of faith, of knowing that the Lord himself is the driver of our lives, the lives of our members, and the life of his church.

### **Faith, Love and Hope: Paul’s Outline for Thanks AND Petitions**

The most precious spiritual gifts are faith, love and hope. These three are the outline for Paul’s thanksgiving and petitions. Consider the following passages:

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus, and of the **love which ye have** to all the saints, for the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye

<sup>7</sup> I’m trying to avoid the Heidelberg Disputation reference, but you guys are all thinking it, so I might as well mention it. Thesis 26: “The law says, ‘do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘believe in this,’ and everything is already done,” (LW 31:41).

*Our thankful prayers are a recognition that God was at work in our congregations and their families long before we came around, and he will continue to love and bless them long after we are gone.*

heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel. (Col 1:3–5)

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of **faith**, and labour of **love**, and patience of **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father. (1 Thess 1:2–3)

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your **faith** groweth exceedingly, and the **charity** of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your **patience** and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure. (2 Thess 1:3–4)

Faith and love:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your **faith** in the Lord Jesus, and **love** unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. (Eph 1:15–16)

I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy **love** and **faith**, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints. (Philm 4–5)

Paul has these three pillars in his mind: faith, love and hope, and when he goes to craft his prayers, his letters, his sermons, he builds out from these three things. He thanks the Lord for the faith, love and hope of the Christians for which he is praying.

When Paul's prayers turn from thanksgiving to petitions he uses the same outline. He asks the Lord to deepen the faith, love and perseverance of the Lord's saints. He even writes his epistles with the same

purpose in mind: the strengthening of faith, the growth of love and the endurance of hope.

This triad occurs all over the writings of Paul, most famously in 1 Corinthians 13(:13), "faith, hope, and love, these three, and the greatest of these is love." (In this place Paul breaks the normal and theologically logical order of faith, love, and hope in order to emphasize the enduring nature of love.)

This pattern gives us an opportunity to imitate Paul. And there is more here. Faith, love and hope are the three theological pillars upon which Paul's mind rests, upon which the apostles and prophets meditate. Faith, love and hope are the three grand theological categories into which our thinking, our praying, our teaching and our working fall.

These three theological pillars inform our pastoral conversation. We are listening for news of faith, love and hope. The categories of faith, love and hope inform our preaching, our Bible class teaching and catechesis. Faith, love and hope are the legs upon which rest all our pastoral care.

And, concerning our prayers, we begin with thanksgiving to God for giving the Christians the gift of faith in Christ, love for God's word and one another and hope to endure the suffering of this life. We pray for growth in faith, love and hope. These three are an outline for prayers.

Consider the petitions in 1 Thessalonians (3:9–13):

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might

*Faith, love and hope are the three theological pillars upon which Paul's mind rests, upon which the apostles and prophets meditate. Faith, love and hope are the three grand theological categories into which our thinking, our praying, our teaching and our working fall.*

*They have the Holy Spirit, and still Paul prays that God would give them the Spirit. This is one of the mysteries of the Christian life: the Holy Spirit dwells with us even as we pray that he would continue to come to us.*

see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your **faith**? Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound **in love** one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may **stablish your hearts** [patience and hope] unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

Paul prays that the faith of the Thessalonians would be perfected, that their love would increase and abound and that their hope would be firm and holy.

Thinking of faith, love and hope and love expand our prayers. I've noticed a pattern in my own prayers: they tend to focus on the fourth petition, the needs of the body. I remember to pray for people who are sick, who are dying, who are in distress. I don't often remember to pray for spiritual things, for ears open to hear the Lord's word, and hearts that believe it, for a love for the neighbor that joyfully gives, for patience to endure the hardships of this world, and receive the troubles of this life as gifts from our loving heavenly Father. When faith, love and hope become the outline for my prayers, it pulls those prayers out beyond the stuff of this body to the spiritual gifts the Lord wants to give in his church.

### **Prayer for the Spirit**

Jesus, after reviewing the Lord's Prayer with his disciples, says, "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those

who ask for Him," (Luke 11:13). I've always puzzled over this verse, especially the very specific petition that the Lord Jesus promises will be answered, the prayer for the Holy Spirit. I also wonder how this promise follows the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer, none of which mention the Holy Spirit.

It must be that the petitions of the Lord's Prayer are, in fact, petitions for the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther's explanation of the second petition ("Thy kingdom come") in the Small Catechism demonstrates this. "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit...."

This promise of Jesus, that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to all who ask, reminds us of the importance of our constant need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Lord's desire for us to have the blessings of the Holy Spirit.

We are not surprised when we find in Paul's prayers for the church requests that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit. We especially consider Paul's prayers for the Ephesians (Col 1:8-9 and 2 Tim 1:7 should also be considered).

The Ephesians, after they believed the Gospel, "were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (1:13). They were baptized and possessed the Holy Spirit, even as the Holy Spirit possessed them. Paul then prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (1:17).

They have the Holy Spirit, and still Paul prays that God would give them the Spirit. This is one of the myster-

ies of the Christian life: the Holy Spirit dwells with us even as we pray that he would continue to come to us.

Paul prays for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Knowing that the teaching and gifts of God are only spiritually discerned, Paul asks for the Holy Spirit so that they would know these mysterious things. Paul, in fact, goes on to pray that through the Spirit “the eyes of [their] hearts would be enlightened,” and through this enlightenment they would know three things:

1. The hope of their calling,
2. The riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints, and
3. The exceeding power to us who believe (the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to the Father's right hand).

Paul prays that, through the work of the Spirit, they would see what they already have, that they would know what they already possess.

Paul prays a second time for the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 3:16. The prayer is Trinitarian: that the Ephesians would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner man (3:16), that the Lord Jesus would dwell in their hearts by faith (3:17) and that they would be filled with the fullness of God (3:19). This prayer is also for faith (“that Christ may dwell in your heart by faith”) and love (“being rooted and grounded in love...” “to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge...”).

Similar to the prayer of thanksgiving in the beginning of the epistle, Paul here asks for the Holy Spirit, for the presence of Christ, and for a grounding in love so that the saints “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth,

and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (3:18–19). This is another mystery, a riddle, as Paul prays that they would know that which passes knowledge.

The love of Christ for us is beyond our comprehension, but by the Holy Spirit, opening the eyes of our heart, we begin to know the unknowable, we begin to taste and see that the Lord is good, we begin, in some small way, to realize who God is and what he has done for us. The power of God gives us the capacity to begin to know, believe and rejoice in the things that the Lord has already given us.

The prayer for the Holy Spirit is often a prayer for power. Paul is not afraid to pray for power (see Eph 1:19 [x2], 3:20, Col 1:11, 2 Thess 1:11, 2 Tim 1:7). Meditating on Paul's prayers for power would be a fruitful exercise. Perhaps it is enough here, in passing, to mention Paul's confidence that the Holy Spirit is living and working and accomplishing things in the midst of the congregations. There is a power at work in us who have been rescued from the power of darkness (Eph 1:21), even if we do not often see it.

To put a point on this, Paul sees that the problem with the Ephesians (and really, with all the churches, see Phil 1:9, Col 1:9–10, 1 Thess 1:3) is not that they do not have what they need. Their problem is not a lack. Their problem is that they do not see what they do have. They do not see or know the height and depth of the love of Jesus, the riches of the inheritance of the saints, the glory and the power that is theirs as the people of God. They are sitting on all the treasures, gifts and authority of the kingdom of God, but they don't

*The love of Christ for us is beyond our comprehension, but by the Holy Spirit, opening the eyes of our heart, we begin to know the unknowable, we begin to taste and see that the Lord is good, we begin, in some small way, to realize who God is and what he has done for us.*



*Joy is a gift from God, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Joy means that the first thing we remember, when we think of the past, is the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins, and the first thing we consider, when we think of the future, is the certain promise of our own resurrection from the dead and life eternal.*

know it. Paul, therefore prays that the Holy Spirit would enlighten them, open their eyes to the kingdom and the power and the glory that is theirs in Christ.

This beginning of enlightenment is the Holy Spirit's work, accomplished only by the Spirit through the word. The prayer for the Holy Spirit is a prayer that the Spirit would do his work of "calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying" in the midst of his church.

We imitate Paul, then, when we pray for the Holy Spirit, for ourselves and our members. We pray that the Holy Spirit would enlighten us all with spiritual insight to know the mysteries of the kingdom, the power of God, and most especially the love of Jesus.

### **Prayer and Joy**

While we are speaking of the work of prayer, the labor of prayer, and, in some ways, the anguish of prayer, it is important to remember that there is joy in prayer. Paul, again, shows us the way.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now... (Phil 1:3-5)

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God? (1 Thess 3:9)

Paul prays with joy and for joy, praying that the Colossian saints would be

strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. (Col 1:11)

Joy is a gift from God, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Joy means that the first thing we remember, when we think of the past, is the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins, and the first thing we consider, when we think of the future, is the certain promise of our own resurrection from the dead and life eternal.

Joy is the companion of thanksgiving.

We live in an age where we are tempted to equate seriousness with anger. If I'm serious about the Bible then it must be that I'm angry with people. If I'm serious about the gospel then I'm angry with false teachers. We look for the pastor to be marked with sternness. This is an illegitimate connection. Paul is serious about the doctrine. Paul is filled with joy. Christian seriousness manifests itself as joy in suffering, and this joy manifests itself most especially in prayer as we stand before the Lord offering our thanks, praise and petitions.

### **Paul Reports His Prayers**

We know about them because he tells us.

He didn't have to tell the churches that he was praying for them, or what he was praying for. It would certainly be enough for Paul to offer his petitions in private. But Paul has determined that it is helpful and edifying for the congregation to know that they are in his prayers. He wants them to know about his prayers, and I suppose, as we chase after the example of Paul, that we should consider doing the same thing.

How? How do we let our congregation know that we are praying for them?

First, we'd better be found praying for them. May God grant us his Holy Spirit so that we remember his people daily in our prayers.

Then, with humility, we want to encourage the congregation with the content of our prayers. Paul does not simply report that he gave thanks; he tells them for what he gave thanks. He doesn't simply report that he prayed for them, but tells them for what he prayed. As we offer thanksgiving and petitions for the congregation, and for the families and individuals in her, we can let them know some of the specifics of those prayers.

Regarding families and individuals, I would suggest we use the same method Paul does: letters. As we write notes to encourage the members, we include an encouragement regarding how we have been praying for them.

Regarding our prayers for the congregation, perhaps a pastoral letter, newsletter article or devotion before a congregation meeting is an appropriate time to mention your prayers.

A word of warning, extreme caution must be used so that the reports of our prayers are not used or understood to be manipulative. "I've been praying that the Holy Spirit would make you more generous." "I've been praying that the Lord Jesus would help you see your sins." We are also careful that we are not boasting or presenting ourselves as spiritual super-pastors. "I prayed for you eight hours yesterday. I skipped lunch, and with loud wailings I brought my petitions to the Lord..." Probably not a good idea.

When we anchor our prayers in the Scriptures it is easier to let people

know how we have been praying for them.

I've been trying to pray Ephesians 1 for Hope, my congregation. (Believe me, brothers, I am no expert at this. I've only just enrolled in St. Paul's school of prayer. I'm writing this essay as much for myself as I am for you.) As mentioned above, this is a prayer for the Holy Spirit, and for the spiritual insight and awareness of the grace of God, the hope of our calling, the riches of our gracious inheritance. When we take up the Scriptures to pray, it becomes easier to report what we are praying. I can say to my church council, "I've especially been praying Ephesians 1 for our congregation, that the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of our hearts so that we would know and live in the confidence of God's calling." We might note similar things for our prayers for families. "I prayed Psalm 130 for you yesterday, that the Lord would deliver you from your troubles." "I prayed the Lord's Prayer for your family yesterday, that the Lord would provide you with daily bread, and also that he would give you the confidence of his fatherly love." "I thought of you when I was praying Philippians 1, 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...'"

As we grow in the discipline of prayer, notes about our prayers become another way to encourage and bless the people we are called to serve. As we follow the example of St. Paul, we are becoming examples of prayer for our people as well.

### **Paul's Attentive Listening, Prayer as the Anti-Gossip**

We know Paul as the blessed apostle, the great preacher, teacher and writer. We know him for what he said.

*As we grow in the discipline of prayer, notes about our prayers become another way to encourage and bless the people we are called to serve.*

*We listen for the good stuff so that we can give thanks to God, and we listen for the trouble so we can ask for God's blessings.*

But Paul was also a gifted listener. We have hints that Paul excelled in listening, the chief part of wisdom<sup>8</sup>.

Paul tells us that his prayers, his thanksgiving and petitions, are occasioned by the news he gets from the congregation.

Consider Ephesians 1:15–16a, “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks...” Or Romans 1:8, remembering that Paul had not visited Rome and met the Christians there, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” Paul is paying attention to the news, especially the news of the churches. He is listening for the good and the bad, the blessings and the troubles, and he turns that news into prayer.

Colossians 1:3–4 says, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” The faith of the Colossians reached Paul, and he immediately turns that news into a prayer, giving thanks to God for his work in that place.

Paul’s prayers are informed and directed by good and careful listening. Paul knows that the Lord lets the news get to him, the good news and the bad news, not so Paul can go around gossiping, but so he knows how to pray and how to preach.<sup>9</sup> This is a discipline that is good for us to

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<sup>8</sup> We remember that Solomon, when asking the Lord for wisdom, asked for “a listening (or hearing) heart” (1 Kgs 3:9).

<sup>9</sup> There is something unique about Paul’s position, that he knows all the congregations and pastors, and the unique situations and gifts of each, so that he can use the congregations to encourage, bless and sometimes even provoke one another.

learn and teach. We listen to the news so that we can pray. We listen to each other so that we can pray. In conversations with families, individuals, people in the church and outside the church, in every conversation we are listening so that we might pray.

We listen for the good stuff so that we can give thanks to God, and we listen for the trouble so we can ask for God’s blessings. Pastor’s ears are tuned to repentance and the state of the conscience. Pastors, especially, are listening for evidence of faith, love and hope, for the condition of each, and they are trying to identify where and how the devil is attacking.

We know that the reason the Lord lets us hear bad things is for this purpose: that we would pray.

We pray as we listen, for open ears, for a hearing heart, for understanding of the real problem. We pray silently for the person we are listening to, that they would speak honestly and clearly. And as we listen we note the things that need the Lord’s help. In each conversation we are building, through careful listening, a prayer list.

Listening is difficult work. We are distracted people. But just as we are to give ourselves over to reading and to prayer, so we are to give ourselves over to the work of hearing, hearing the voice of Jesus in the Scriptures, and hearing the voice of faith fighting despair<sup>10</sup> in our congregations. Listening is an act of love, and listening in order to teach, comfort, pray and bless gives our work of listening its proper *telos*.

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<sup>10</sup> “Faith fighting despair” is Philip Melancthon’s memorable definition of worship in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 44.

It might be advisable to write down some of the things that you hear in conversation to use later in prayer. This list might also be something helpful to give to the person for whom you prayed to help remind them of these things that they should ask of the Lord.

### **Pray Also for Me, A Conclusion**

“Pray also for me,” (Eph 6:19, see also Col 4:3 and 2 Thess 3:2). Paul not only prays; he is also prayed for. He knows his own need, his own weaknesses, his own failures and the perilous position he is in. He asks the congregations to pray for him. We should do the same.

Lenore was 102. Like every 102-year-old, she wondered why she was still around. “Why doesn’t the Lord take me, pastor? Why am I still here?”

“Two reasons,” I told her, “so that Jesus can love you and forgive your sins, and so that you can pray for your family.”

“I know Jesus loves me, and I pray for my family every day.”

“Maybe Jesus has a third reason, then, so that you can pray for me.”

“Do you think that’s it? I’ll pray for you, pastor.” Lenore died a few weeks later.

It is good for pastors to ask their members to pray for them. Especially the homebound and shut-in, to give them the holy work of specific prayer for the pastor and the congregation. Paul notes that the true widows “continue in supplications and prayers night and day” (1 Tim 5:5), and these prayers are a vital part of the church’s spiritual warfare.<sup>11</sup>

Prayer is co-labor. “You also must help us by prayer,” (2 Cor 1:11). When we pray for each other we help them. Prayer is co-fighting. “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,” (Rom 15:30, remembering also Col 4:12, where Paul commended Epaphras who was always “laboring fervently for [them] in prayer”).

Just as the pastor, in his ordination vow, promised to pray for the people, so the people, when the pastor was installed, promised to pray for him and his family. Remind them of this promise. Just as our prayers for the people grow out of our confidence that God is, in fact, the One who matters, and his works are the works that are blessed and stand, so do the prayers of the people for their pastor grow out of a confidence that the Lord has blessed the preaching office and will use it to his blessed end.

We stand because the Lord lets us stand. We preach because the Lord has authorized us to preach. We live because the Lord gives us breath and guards and protects us from all evil. It is his will. It is his gracious answer to the prayers of our people.

*Prayer is co-labor.*

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nal? The church needs to pay particular attention to the lie that the devil tells the elderly, that they are “useless” and “good for nothing.” The elderly are finally ready for the real work of spiritual warfare. They have been trained in the Scriptures and the school of suffering. They have learned what things are truly important in life. They have the spiritual authority over their families, the strength of their sinful flesh has diminished, they are not afraid to die, and they have one of the greatest of all spiritual gifts: free time. Pastors should remind the elderly of all of these gifts, and encourage them to watch less Wheel-of-Fortune, and rather enlist them to fighting on the front lines of spiritual warfare.

<sup>11</sup> How about an essay titled “The Elderly and Spiritual Warfare” for next year’s jour-

*We stand  
because the Lord  
lets us stand. We  
preach because  
the Lord has  
authorized us to  
preach. We live  
because the Lord  
gives us breath  
and guards and  
protects us from  
all evil. It is his  
will. It is his  
gracious answer  
to the prayers of  
our people.*

“This we must know, that all our safety and protection consist in prayer alone.” (Martin Luther, Large Catechism, 30. If any lack zeal or need encouragement to pray, they will find what they need in Luther’s introduction to the Lord’s Prayer in the Large Catechism.) So we, with Paul, ask the church to pray for us, and we trust that the Lord Jesus hears and answers those prayers. He guards. He keeps. He blesses. He protects. He blesses the word. And he brings us through this life to the joys of life eternal.

Dear Brother, Jesus himself prays for you (Rom 8:34). It is why He lives (Heb 7:25)! When we follow after St. Paul’s example of prayer, we are really imitating our Lord Jesus. “Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Jesus (imagine it!) is, at this very moment, praying for you. The Father delights to hear and answer our prayers. He will keep you to the end. The Holy Spirit takes your prayers for your family and your congregation, mixes them with the prayers of Jesus, and brings them before the Father who has promised to hear and answer them.

May God grant to his pastors “the Spirit of grace and supplication” (Zech 12:10), that following after Paul, and after Jesus, we would approach the throne of grace with boldness (Heb 4:16), and pray with confidence and joy for the congregations entrusted to us, knowing that Jesus loves our people, even as He loves us and forgives us for all our sins. Amen. ☩

*Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath,  
The Christian’s native air,  
His watchword at the gates of death--  
He enters heaven with prayer.*

*The saints in prayer appear as one  
In word and deed and mind,  
While with the Father and the Son  
Sweet fellowship they find.*

*Nor prayer is made by man alone--  
The Holy Spirit pleads,  
And Jesus on th’ eternal throne  
For sinners intercedes.*

*O Thou by whom we come to God,  
The Life, the Truth, the Way,  
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod--  
Lord, teach us how to pray.*

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## APPENDIX A: PAUL'S PRAYERS

### Authorized Version

#### Romans 1:8-10

<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God  
through Jesus Christ for you all,  
that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.  
<sup>9</sup> For God is my witness,  
whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,  
that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;  
<sup>10</sup> Making request,  
if by any means now at length  
I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you

#### Romans 10:1

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer  
to God  
for Israel  
is, that they might be saved.

#### 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

<sup>4</sup> I thank my God always  
on your behalf,  
for the grace of God  
which is given you  
by Jesus Christ;  
<sup>5</sup> That in every thing ye are enriched by him,  
in all utterance,  
and *in* all knowledge;  
<sup>6</sup> Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:  
<sup>7</sup> So that ye come behind in no gift;  
waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:  
<sup>8</sup> Who shall also confirm you unto the end,  
*that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
<sup>9</sup> God *is* faithful,  
by whom ye were called  
unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### 2 Corinthians 9:12-15

<sup>11</sup> Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness,  
which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.  
<sup>12</sup> For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints,  
but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;  
<sup>13</sup> Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the  
gospel of Christ,

and for *your* liberal distribution unto them,  
and unto all *men*;  
<sup>14</sup> And by their prayer for you,  
which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.  
<sup>15</sup> Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable gift.

**2 Corinthians 12:7–9a**

<sup>7</sup> And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of  
the revelations,  
there was given to me a thorn in the flesh,  
the messenger of Satan to buffet me,  
lest I should be exalted above measure.  
<sup>8</sup> For this thing I besought the Lord thrice,  
that it might depart from me.  
<sup>9</sup> And he said unto me,  
My grace is sufficient for thee:  
for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

**2 Corinthians 13:7–9**

<sup>7</sup> Now I pray to God that ye do no evil;  
not that we should appear approved,  
but that ye should do that which is honest,  
though we be as reprobates.  
<sup>8</sup> For we can do nothing against the truth,  
but for the truth.  
<sup>9</sup> For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong:  
and this also we wish,  
*even* your perfection.

**Ephesians 1:15–23**

<sup>15</sup> Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all  
the saints,  
<sup>16</sup> Cease not to give thanks for you,  
making mention of you in my prayers;  
<sup>17</sup> That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Father of glory,  
may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:  
<sup>18</sup> The eyes of your understanding being enlightened;  
that ye may know what is the hope of his calling,  
and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,  
<sup>19</sup> And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe,  
according to the working of his mighty power,  
<sup>20</sup> Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the  
dead,  
and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,  
<sup>21</sup> Far above all principality, and power, and might,  
and dominion, and every name that is named,

not only in this world, but also in that which is to  
come:

<sup>22</sup> And hath put all *things* under his feet,  
and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the  
church,

<sup>23</sup> Which is his body, the fulness of him that  
filleth all in all.

### **Ephesians 3:14–21**

<sup>14</sup> For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>15</sup> Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

<sup>16</sup> That he would grant you,

according to the riches of his glory,

to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

<sup>17</sup> That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;

that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

<sup>18</sup> May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and  
length, and depth, and height;

<sup>19</sup> And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,

that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,  
according to the power that worketh in us,

<sup>21</sup> Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world  
without end. Amen.

### **Philippians 1:3–11**

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

<sup>4</sup> Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,

<sup>5</sup> For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;

<sup>6</sup> Being confident of this very thing,

that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus

Christ:

<sup>7</sup> Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all,

because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds,

and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel,

ye all are partakers of my grace.

<sup>8</sup> For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

<sup>9</sup> And this I pray,

that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;

<sup>10</sup> That ye may approve things that are excellent;

that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

<sup>11</sup> Being filled with the fruits of righteousness,

which are by Jesus Christ,

unto the glory and praise of God.



**Colossians 1:3–14**

<sup>3</sup> We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
praying always for you,

<sup>4</sup> Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,  
and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints,

<sup>5</sup> For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven,  
whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

<sup>6</sup> Which is come unto you,  
as *it is* in all the world;

and bringeth forth fruit,  
as *it doth* also in you, since the day ye heard of *it*,  
and knew the grace of God in truth:

<sup>7</sup> As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant,  
who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

<sup>8</sup> Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> For this cause we also,  
since the day we heard *it*,

do not cease to pray for you,  
and to desire

that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will  
in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

<sup>10</sup> That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,  
being fruitful in every good work,  
and increasing in the knowledge of God;

<sup>11</sup> Strengthened with all might,  
according to his glorious power,  
unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

<sup>12</sup> Giving thanks unto the Father,  
which hath made us meet to be partakers of the  
inheritance of the saints in light:

<sup>13</sup> Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness,  
and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

<sup>14</sup> In whom we have redemption through his blood,  
*even* the forgiveness of sins:

**1 Thessalonians 1:2–4**

<sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for you all,  
making mention of you in our prayers;

<sup>3</sup> Remembering without ceasing  
your work of faith,  
and labour of love,  
and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,  
in the sight of God and our Father;

<sup>4</sup> Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

**1 Thessalonians 2:13–16**

<sup>13</sup> For this cause also thank we God without ceasing,  
because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us,  
ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth,  
the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.  
<sup>14</sup> For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in  
Christ Jesus:  
for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen,  
even as they *have* of the Jews:  
<sup>15</sup> Who both killed the Lord Jesus,  
and their own prophets,  
and have persecuted us;  
and they please not God,  
and are contrary to all men:  
<sup>16</sup> Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved,  
to fill up their sins alway:  
for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

**1 Thessalonians 3:9–13**

<sup>9</sup> For what thanks can we render to God again for you,  
for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;  
<sup>10</sup> Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face,  
and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?  
<sup>11</sup> Now God himself and our Father,  
and our Lord Jesus Christ,  
direct our way unto you.  
<sup>12</sup> And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another,  
and toward all *men*,  
even as we *do* toward you:  
<sup>13</sup> To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God,  
even our Father,  
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

**2 Thessalonians 1:3–6**

<sup>3</sup> We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren,  
as it is meet,  
because that your faith groweth exceedingly,  
and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;  
<sup>4</sup> So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God  
for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:  
<sup>5</sup> *Which is* a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God,  
that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God,  
for which ye also suffer:  
<sup>6</sup> Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that  
trouble you.

**2 Thessalonians 1:11–12**

<sup>11</sup> Wherefore also we pray always for you,  
that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling,  
and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness,  
and the work of faith with power:  
<sup>12</sup> That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you,  
and ye in him,  
according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**1 Timothy 1:12**

<sup>12</sup> And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord,  
who hath enabled me,  
for that he counted me faithful,  
putting me into the ministry;

**2 Timothy 1:3–7**

<sup>3</sup> I thank God,  
whom I serve from *my* forefathers with pure conscience,  
that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;  
<sup>4</sup> Greatly desiring to see thee,  
being mindful of thy tears,  
that I may be filled with joy;  
<sup>5</sup> When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee,  
which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois,  
and thy mother Eunice;  
and I am persuaded that in thee also.  
<sup>6</sup> Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God,  
which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.  
<sup>7</sup> For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;  
but of power,  
and of love,  
and of a sound mind.

**Philemon 4–7**

<sup>4</sup> I thank my God,  
making mention of thee always in my prayers,  
<sup>5</sup> hearing of thy love and faith,  
which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus,  
and toward all saints;  
<sup>6</sup> that the communication of thy faith may become effectual  
by the acknowledging of every good *thing*  
which is in you in Christ Jesus.  
<sup>7</sup> For we have great joy and consolation in thy love,  
because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

**APPENDIX B:  
PAUL'S INSTRUCTION TO  
THE CHURCH REGARDING  
PRAYER (AND REQUESTS FOR  
INTERCESSION)**

**World English Bible.**

Romans 12:12

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 15:30–33

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Ephesians 6:19–20

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Phil. 4:6–7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 4:2–4

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

2 Thessalonians 3:2–5

And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

1 Timothy 2:1ff.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time....

**APPENDIX C:  
DOXOLOGIES\  
THANKSGIVING**  
**World English Bible**

2 Corinthians 1:3–7

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

2 Corinthians 2:14–16

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?

Ephesians 1:3ff.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he

chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding....

**APPENDIX D:  
BLESSINGS OF PAUL**

**World English Bible**

Romans 15:5-6

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 16:23

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

Galatians 6:18

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers.

Philippians 4:23

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:28

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

2 Timothy 1:16-18

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

2 Timothy 4:22

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Titus 3:15b

Grace be with you all.

Philemon 25

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

**APPENDIX E: A WEEKLY  
RHYTHM OF PRAYER  
(DRAWN FROM THE  
LORD'S PRAYER)**

Here's a pattern of prayer I've been working on, breaking up the petitions of the Lord's Prayer and praying them each day of the week.

SUNDAY, Hallowed by Thy name.

- ◇ For the gift of baptism
- ◇ For godchildren

MONDAY, Thy Kingdom come

- ◇ Congregation
- ◇ Council
- ◇ Elders
- ◇ Seminarians
- ◇ Missionaries
- ◇ LCMS (leadership)
- ◇ Circuit pastors

TUESDAY, Thy will be done

- ◇ Miscellaneous projects
- ◇ Congregational projects
- ◇ Wounded pastors

WEDNESDAY, Give us this day our daily bread

- ◇ Three estates, godly vocations, order in the world
- ◇ Expecting women
- ◇ Government (elected officials by name)
- ◇ (President, Vice president, Governor, Mayor, U.S. Senators, U.S. House Representatives, State Senate, State House, City Council)

THURSDAY, Forgive us our trespasses

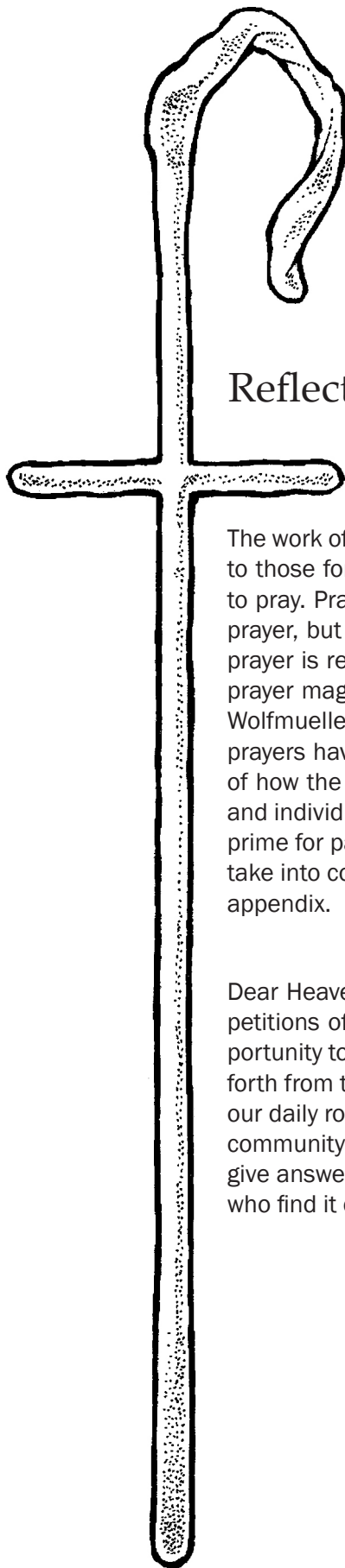
- ◇ Forgiveness (self-examination)
- ◇ A clean conscience
- ◇ For enemies (Am I angry? Are others angry with me?)
- ◇ For neighbors

FRIDAY, Lead us not into temptation

- ◇ Those in spiritual distress

SATURDAY, Deliver us from evil

- ◇ Chronically sick and dying
- ◇ For those mourning
- ◇ For the second coming



## Reflection

The work of prayer. Yes, that's what it is. We are taught to listen to both God's Word and to those for whom we pray. There is so much to listen to. There is so much for which to pray. Prayer is hard work indeed. Yet, St. Paul does not boast over his own work of prayer, but rather turns the emphasis toward the Lord's work. In this way the work of prayer is really our rest in prayer. Pastor Wolfmueller fleshes out the work and rest of prayer magnificently in this practical piece that he appropriately calls, "An Invitation." Wolfmueller not only unpacks the words of Paul's prayers but also shows how these prayers have shaped his individual prayer life and can likewise shape ours. Examples of how the author's prayer life has been shaped by the way Paul prayed for churches and individuals are interspersed throughout this opus. These practical suggestions are prime for pastors to utilize in order to bolster their own life of prayer. Give it a read and take into consideration the practical resources found throughout this paper and in the appendix.

✠

Dear Heavenly Father, you have gifted your precious children the opportunity to raise petitions of thanksgiving and need in prayer. We give you thanks for the blessed opportunity to call upon your Holy Name, knowing that you hear every petition that comes forth from the lips of your children. Help your servants to make prayer a regular part of our daily routine. Give us strength and confidence to pray for our world, our nation, our community, our congregations, our families and for ourselves. Direct our prayers and give answer, oh Lord. Comfort those who need our prayers and give strength to others who find it difficult to pray. It is in your Son's Holy Name we pray these things. Amen.

*Pastor Tyler C. Arnold*