



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Anatomy of Prayer

October 25, 2020

Romans 15:30-33

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³⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, . ³³ May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

(Pastor prays)

One of the most natural things that one Christian can say to another Christian is, “How can I pray for you?” It's funny though, one of the most unnatural things for a Christian to do is to actually share a genuine need for prayer. I don't know why we hold back, why we are vulnerable with each other. Maybe it's fear or shame, maybe it's something that would be embarrassing, maybe it's pride. Maybe it's shallowness. Why would Christians not share? What keeps us from praying for one another? What keeps us from sharing with brothers and sisters in Christ? It's a paralyzing plague on the church, and it should not be because every one of us here carries some kind of burden. It's a shame because you are the bridge and you can carry the burdens of your brothers and sisters to the One who has the solutions.

That seems to be what Paul is asking for. Paul is closing down this letter, and as he does we find him asking the church to pray for him. Paul says I am going into something, and if I don't have your prayers, this mission will not be accomplished. Let's just pull apart these four verses of God's Word, this anatomy of an effective prayer life, and, as we do, let's open our mouths and pray to God because...

An Effective Prayer Life Happens on Purpose

You are not accidentally going to be a person who learns how to pray. Are you ready to put your Christianity into gear and become someone who knows how to pray? Let's take a few lessons from Paul.

Effective prayer starts with humility

In verse 30, Paul starts with something familiar. Paul just says to the church, "I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ. I appeal to you." Paul does that all the time. He wrote to the church in Ephesus, Colossae, Thessalonica, to the church in Corinth, and he says, I need you to pray for me. But this time he uses a really strong word, appeal. In Greek, *Parakaleo*. It's a strong word. It's Paul saying to the church, "I need your help. I need you to get on your knees and call out to God for me, otherwise this is not going to happen. I want you to pray in such a way that Heaven will feel the request that you are offering up." Martin Luther, the great reformer, as he was dying, said, "We are beggars, it is true." It is a good thing for Christians to remember that while we are here on Earth, we are in need. And if you are going to be a person of prayer, it's going to start with you understanding that God has saved you by grace through faith in Jesus. You have believed that. It's going to be you being humble enough to say, "I need help here." Effective prayer starts when men and women push pride aside and genuinely say, "I need you to help me."

Effective prayer starts with humility. That's one side of the coin, but flip the coin over and you will see another lesson in Verse 30.

Effective prayer is built on trust

It's easier to be humble with someone that you actually trust. Let's look at what else Paul says in Verse 30. ³⁰ *I appeal to you, brothers (sisters), by our Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul is saying there is a family connection: "Although I have never met you, I don't know you, but I believe you are a brother or sister in Christ." We are all sinners Jesus Christ died on the cross for. So we are humble, but now we flip the coin over and say, are you a trustworthy person? Are you someone that another Christian can come to and say "I need you to pray for me", and then tell you something really embarrassing or really private? Paul is saying "I am humble enough to ask for help and trust you as brothers and sisters." That's why God gave us the church, so that we don't have to walk through this life alone. God gave you a church to be connected to because we are weak and need one another. What's interesting in verse 30 is how Paul talks about the Lord

Jesus, the inclusive language. ³⁰*I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord.* Every person here, who has put their faith in Jesus is a part of the body. And if that is the case, you and I ought to be people who are trustworthy. Are you trustworthy? Effective prayer has two sides to this coin. One side is humble and the other is trustworthy.

Let me give you a third consideration as we think about effective prayer.

Effective prayer stands on rock solid theology

Let's look at the theology in verse 30. I love to have church members who want to go deep in what they know about God. Becoming theological means you are studying the things of God. So often a church is either known as a place that really is solid in theology or really is filled with the spirit. Here's what I want to do. I want to have one hand on one side and go really deep into theology and the other hand on the other side to really grasp what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I think Paul unintentionally does that in this passage. In verse 30 Paul says, ³⁰*I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ – that's one - and by the love of the Spirit, – that's two - to strive together with me in your prayers to God – that's three.* Let's back up and see the access that Paul is talking about.

Do you notice that title? Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul uses that title it's good for us to stop and take a look at that. It's good for us to remember that the only way we go to God is through Jesus Christ. And Paul put it to us like this as we think about the man Jesus Christ. The One who died on the cross in place of sinners. Why is that important to you? One reason is you were made in the image of God, but man fell into sin and Jesus the perfect man came and redeemed everything that our first parents lost.

So He lived perfectly, kept all the law, did everything right and in doing so He willingly goes to the cross in the place of sinners like you and me. And there at the cross the whole wrath of God is poured out so that all the sins of all the sinners who will ever be saved are paid for at the cross. And that's not the only good news. There Jesus gives us righteousness. It's good to remember in our theology that our prayers are to God through Jesus. ³⁰*I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit.*

Notice what else he says in verse 30. As trinitarians, we believe when you are a Christian, you have been filled with the Holy Spirit that empowers you to pray. When you can't articulate what you pray, the Holy Spirit is going to say it with groanings that are too deep for words.

As we keep looking to the end of the verse you find where those prayers go. ³⁰*I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God.* We are a trinitarian people. It's important that we understand that we pray to God the father, on the merits of Jesus the son, empowered by God the Spirit. I don't think Paul was intentionally teaching trinitarian theology, but he puts it there so we can learn what it means to pray. We ought to be people of deep theology that leads to even deeper prayer. Too often people grow in theology but diminish in prayer, and that should not be. The best theologians should be the most effective prayers. Here's what I want you to do. As you dig deep into doctrine, I want you to take devotion and drive its roots into that doctrine so that you might flourish. You can do that reading the Bible. You can do that reading the Puritans. When it comes to prayer, you can do that reading E.M. Bounds or get Jonathan Edwards' biography of David Brainerd. *The life and diary of David Brainerd* is heavy with prayer and theology. I want you to be a people who are not only humble and not only trustworthy, but that we understand that our prayer stands on solid-rock theology.

Let me give you another thing to consider.

Effective prayer involves hard work

When I talk about effective prayer I'm not talking about the blessing that you would say at lunch today or maybe before supper. It's a good thing to do to pause at a meal to give thanks to the Lord for His provision. But when I talk about the hard work of prayer I'm talking about the compound word that translates into *strive together with me*. ³⁰*I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me.* In Greek it is *synagonizomai*. *Syn* is "with." *Agonizomai* is "agony." It's the idea of wrestling to the point that your muscles get so tired you just can't do it anymore. It's the idea of fighting until you can't hold your hands up anymore.

This is the word Luke used to describe Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus agonizing in the garden. When Paul was trying to describe to Timothy what it was going to be like to pastor a church and you don't think you can take another step, Paul told him to fight the good *fight* of faith, this is the word he used. This is the idea of taking your need and pressing it onto God.

You know the story of Jacob at the river wrestling with God and saying "I will not let you go until you bless me. And the story of Moses leading the people of Israel praying on his face,

pleading "Please, God, don't kill them." This word gives us the picture of Hannah pleading to God for a son. This is the idea of agonizing in prayer. This is Paul in Romans chapter 9 when he was thinking about the Jews that he knew that were going to Hell. And Paul would say in Chapter 9 that if it were possible I would go in their place if that would save them. This is Elijah when he was called to pray for rain, agonizing for days.

When was the last time you were worn out from praying? This has been terribly convicting for me because I knew I was going to have to stand before you and ask these questions and I didn't have a good answer for myself. When was the last time you were worn out from praying for somebody that you know needs God to intervene? This word that Paul uses is telling us that it is hard work when it comes to effective prayer. Effective prayer takes hard work.

Let me give you something else you will find here.

Effective prayer seeks tangible results

You are praying for *something* to happen. Let's pinpoint some things that you need to be praying for. Paul wasn't afraid to do that and you will find in verse 31 that Paul has two prayer requests: ³¹ *that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints*. Let's take a look at the first prayer request that has to do with protection. Paul is asking them to pray for his protection. You have a child; you pray for their protection. It is a good and natural thing to do. Why did Paul need protection? He wants to go to Spain, through Rome but first he has to go to Jerusalem. It's a long journey. He knows it's a terrible place to go. Persecution has broken out on the church in Jerusalem and every time he shows up there, he gets the tar beaten out of him.

You know the story of Paul. In Acts Chapter 9 he gets converted on the road to Damascus and right after that people are trying to kill him. In Acts Chapter 13 he gets to Antioch and there even the women are trying to kill him. In Acts 14 he gets hit in the head so many times with a rock that they think he's dead and drag him out of town. Everywhere he goes. In Iconium, he visits his friend Jason and when people find out he is there, they almost tear Jason's house down. There were riots in Berea. He hated going to Ephesus and called them a bunch of animals. In Acts 21 he made it to Jerusalem and was almost killed in the temple.

Paul knows he needs protection so he is asking the church for something very tangible. We pray for tangible, observable, measurable, real things. He has another request there in verse 31 that

has to do with the congregation. ³¹ *that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.* Let's think about why he is praying that. Jerusalem was the original church where the Gospel was preached to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. The Jerusalem church had a little bit of pride and dignity about them. In Acts 11 the Christians were persecuted and run out of there. The Gospel started to spread, and the Greek churches were growing. And those Greek churches had money, but the church in Jerusalem had pride but no money and they needed help. Along with pride sometimes comes resentment. That church in Jerusalem had been wounded and that sometimes creates dissension, so Paul was going to have to walk a fine line in order not to create disunity.

So he asks the church in Rome to pray for that congregation. He wanted them to pray that the Christians in Jerusalem be reasonable and unified around the Gospel and not divided by things that don't really matter.

When you pray for a congregation, you pray that the Gospel is clear, unity is real and that people are humble. Paul says, we pray and we look for something to happen. Effective prayer seeks tangible results.

Let me give you just a couple of more things.

Effective prayer submits to God's will

Let's look at verse 32. You hear Paul talking about wanting to be with his friends and looking forward to a good reunion in Rome. But if you know the story of Paul, what he envisioned going to Rome never happened. He got arrested and was taken to Rome in shackles. Now he may have seen some Christians there and had a good reunion, but that doesn't seem to be what he's asking here. Paul says, ³² *so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.*

Now Paul is clear about his desires. He says he wants to go to Rome so that then he can go to Spain. He has things that he wants to see happen. But on the front end of verse 32 there is a filter for our prayers. It sounds a lot like how Jesus would teach us to pray: "Thy will be done." It's a joyful resignation to the goodness of God to work in your life. Do you have that or do you resent what has gone on? You need to leave your past and trust that a good God is working out those things for your own good.

I'll give you one last point.

Effective prayer we rejoice when others flourish

This is a prayer wish in verse 33. Notice how Paul closes in verse 33. ³³ *May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.* The God of peace. Paul says that more than 17 times in the book of Romans. The God who has made peace for us through Jesus, May that God, the God of peace, be with you all. Amen. Paul is praying that they would flourish even as his life will unravel. Are you willing to take that prayer wish in verse 33 and pray it for the person who hates you the most?

Are you willing to say that you want to become that man or woman who is effective in prayer? Well that happens not by accident, it happens on purpose. It happens when you humble yourself before the Lord at the cross of Jesus. It happens when you are someone who is trustworthy. It happens as you grow deep in your theology and thoughts of the sovereignty of God in all things. It happens when you are willing to work hard, agonize in prayer. It happens when you aren't afraid to ask specifically for God to do something that is measurable and tangible and seeable. It happens when you are able to say that you are glad for God's will to be done. You become effective in prayer when you can look over and see others flourish even though you might not be winning in life.

As we close I want you to reflect on what you've heard this morning about being an effective pray-er. I want you to think through what does this mean for you today. If you claim to be a Christian, what is it that needs to change today? What thing is keeping you from sharing today? Or maybe you haven't been trustworthy. We are a people that center around the Gospel of Jesus and His cross. And from that cross emanates power. And from that power we move forward. We move forward when we humble ourselves, when we are trustworthy, when we become men and women of effective prayer.

(Pastor prays)