



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## **Gospel Prayer Life**

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Romans 1:8-12

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*<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the 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 mention you <sup>10</sup> always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— <sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. (Pastor prays)*

Romans is a Gospel-saturated letter written by the Apostle Paul to a group of brave Christians that he didn't really know. They lived in a city that, at the time, was the seat of world power; but because they were followers of Jesus, they did not really fit in with the rest of the world.

The pressures of being a Christian are nothing new. The pressure of raising your kid in an environment that is filled with temptation and danger is how it's always been to be a Christian. Being ostracized, misunderstood and thought odd is really unavoidable. Paul knew that. He knew that being a Christian in Rome, like being a Christian here, can be draining. And this letter— Romans—is written to be means of help and healing, a Bible book given to us to embolden and strengthen us in the Gospel so we can be better husbands and wives and bosses and leaders.

We can be stronger Christian athletes and faithful children. Politics are broken, the world is drunk on pornography, materialism and video games; and when you are breathing all that in, it's like carbon monoxide poisoning. You unknowingly have a drowsiness into death. And this book is like a blast of oxygen into our lungs so we can breathe deep and live clean. As Paul goes from the introduction into the body of the letter, he does so by showing us how to center our lives on Jesus.

And by example, he shows us how to pray. God knows we need a lesson in prayer. When we have a child that's wayward, a friend who is dying, a neighbor who is lost, a housing development that needs our witness, or you have personal pain that you are finding hard to bear, verse 8 - 12 is written as a prayer, and it's here for us to learn.

## **When You Love the Gospel, You Learn to Pray**

### **When You Love the Gospel, You Make Prayer a Priority**

Notice how he starts in verse 8. He's finished the intro; now he's into the body of the letter. Look what he says. First, I want to thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. First. Paul begins with a *first* and never gets to a *second* because he's saying that this is the most important thing I can do, take you and your situation and your life and your struggle to God in prayer.

Prayer isn't a last resort, it's the first response. It's modeled in Paul and pictured in Jesus. Charles Spurgeon once was asked how he was so successful in ministry. He answered, "my people pray for me." Unfortunately, hectic schedules, electric screens and social media have distracted us right out of praying. Anxiety, depression and worry are real things, often to the point of needing medical attention. I think part of the answer is a renewed, quiet commitment to centering yourself and entrusting the grace of God we find when we pray. If you struggle with anxiety and depression, don't stop seeking medical help but also put it to the Lord in prayer.

One of the greatest missionaries the U. S. ever produced was a man named David Brainerd. There is a book, "The Life and Diary of David Brainerd," that you should read. You should learn to pour out your soul in prayer. It's what Paul would write from a Roman jail to the Philippians. In Philippians 4: 6-7 it says, *<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* When you love the Gospel, you make praying a priority.

### **When You Love the Gospel, You Learn to be Thankful**

Go back with me to verse 8. *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you.* Notice the parts of this prayer.

*Gratitude.* It's what grace does to you. Matthew Henry said it's good to begin everything every day with thanking God and when you can personalize it by saying "my God" it makes every new mercy more sweet. If you can say "*my God,*" you are not talking *about* God, you are talking *to* God. He's not a theological abstraction, but a loving father. And because of Christ we have been given the spirit of adoption by which we can cry out, ABBA Father.

Notice also the prayer is through Jesus Christ. Ligon Duncan says this is a theological mouthful. Why? because Paul tells us in first Timothy 2:5, <sup>5</sup> *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* Our prayers are only good and only heard because of the atoning work of Christ, His death on the cross and the veil torn in two from top to bottom (in the Temple) making a way for us. When you pray to God, knowing him as "my God," and you do that through Jesus, when you have turned from sinning and by faith believed that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and has given you His righteousness, then God is *your* God.

And when you pray through Jesus, and it is through the mediatorial work of Christ, I've heard it said that your prayers visit God the father on the throne of grace as if they came from the lips of Jesus. When you love the Gospel, you learn to be thankful to the Father in Heaven who purchased you through the blood of Jesus. This gives confidence that *my* God hears me and will answer me.

### **When You Love the Gospel, You Go Quickly to Things of Consequence**

Let me show you what I mean. Look what he's praying here in verse 8: *I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is being proclaimed in all the world.* Paul is thanking God because people all over the world are hearing about their Christianity.

Remember where they are now, in Rome. Christians in Rome lived in the lion's den. Rome is where persecution of Christians would be the law of the land for another 250 years. They lived under intense pressure. In fact, less than a decade from when this was written a great fire swept across Rome and Nero blamed the Christians. He burned hundreds at the stake to light his garden. You see, when bending the knee to Jesus, their faith was being tested and their suffering to Christ became the witness that changed the world. Now people name their dogs Nero and worship the Christ he tried to stomp out. When we pray, we go right to the issue and ask for the hard and impossible things and we celebrate the faithful things.

## When You Love the Gospel, You Trust God with Reckless Abandon

I think that's what you see in verses 9-10. Let's read it and hear the intensity and passion. <sup>9</sup>*For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you* <sup>10</sup>*always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.* There is a whole lot here.

It's serious. God is my witness, that is an oath.

“Serve,” this is a type of sacred worship.

And consistency, to pray without ceasing and always.

Those are all important, but in the middle of all that is in verse 9, the Gospel is *of his son*, the atoning work of Jesus. This is a cross-driven prayer that reminds us the cross of Jesus doesn't just save us, it makes it so that we have the absolute and covenant right to go to God and draw near to the throne of grace in time of need.

But there is something else I want you to see here in verse 10. Notice the trust in God's sovereignty, but the pleading for an answer. Look at it. “I mention you always in my prayers,” asking that somehow, by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

This is an aggressive trusting. It is asking, pleading, seeking, and might even be considered begging. I don't think we know this posture very well. “Somehow by God's will.” Paul longs to be in Rome, he begs to be in Rome, but he completely submits himself to the will of God. But that doesn't stop him from making his requests to God.

People will often say, “when God shuts one door, He opens another or He opens a window.” But I don't think we spend enough time banging on shut doors. Sometimes our belief in sovereignty robs us of praying fervently. When sovereignty is really just submission, we need a willingness to pray with all our hearts and then trust the outcome of God.

And that's what Paul did. He prayed hard, asking God to let him go to Rome. And when the Lord finally let him go to Rome, he went in chains as a prisoner. And sitting in a Roman prison, he would write one of the most encouraging letters of the Bible.

This is what Paul said in the book of Philippians. Philippians 1:12-13, <sup>12</sup>*I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,* <sup>13</sup>*so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is*

*for Christ.* What a great Gospel-saturated approach. A life fully submitted to God, encouraging and strengthening the church through his own suffering. What the Gospel of God does— the life, death and resurrection of Christ— is it makes us a body, a family and a church. And today we have a chance to strengthen that bond through taking The Lord's Supper.

*(Pastor explains The Lord's Supper and prays)*