

Pray: Cross Con, Urbana, Passion /

You know what the greatest movie of all time is? I'll give you 5: Rocky, 1-5. Rocky was nothing if not focused. Rocky really lived for 2 things: Adrian and victory. Part of the appeal of the Rocky movies is that he's the underdog, and part is that Rocky seemed to care about only two things in life: his wife Adrian and beating whoever was in front of him at the time. This is appealing on both an athletic and a romantic level. His life seemed stripped of many of the complications that we experience. When he was training--doing one-armed push-ups, drinking egg yolks, running, and hitting the punching bag he had a singleness of purpose. Something too many people lack. They have no driving aim, no purpose, no meaning, no North star, no focus. Christians do.

As we kick off the new year, I want to examine one of my favorite prayers in Scripture: **Phil 1:9-11** [ ] Isn't this a helpful prayer? One of the most helpful moves you can make to improve your prayer life is to utilize Scripture in your prayer. Does your prayer life ever get in a rut? Mine does. Use Scripture to help you pray. Pray the Bible. Use Scripture to fuel your prayer life. In other words, base your prayer off of prayers like this. Before we examine this prayer, let me briefly mention 6 ways that praying Scripture can help our prayer lives, with some help from Don Whitney's excellent book, *Praying the Bible*:

1. Praying Scripture keeps us God-centered.
2. Praying Scripture keeps us Biblically-shaped. Piper says we too often use prayer like a domestic intercom rather than a wartime walkie talkie? Increased conveniences or mission?
3. Praying Scripture helps us Pray according to his will. We know for certain that it is God's will because it is God's Word. 1 John 5:14: "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."
4. Praying Scripture fosters meditation and memorization - The Word feeds meditation and meditation feeds prayer. William Bridge said, "Begin with reading or hearing. Go on with meditation; end in prayer."<sup>1</sup>
5. Praying Scripture keeps us focused. Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Scripture gives us rails to run on.
6. Praying Scripture keeps us out of rut. We will pray for new things Scripture brings up. We pray the same old things about the same old things: Fam, future, finances, work or school, church or ministry, current crisis. Gets boring after a while. If you know it will be boring before you start, we will not have much enthusiasm about praying. / He prays 6 requests for the local Philippi and therefore also for us:

**1. More Loving 9.** What is love? Now, today love is attempting to wear far too many hats. I love brisket and I love Alicia. The verb "love" had better have different definitions in those two statements. In the Bible, love is giving of self for the good of another. Love is the sacrificial commitment to the highest good of another. Love is based upon the cross of Christ. The cross is the primary display of love but also provides the clearest definition of love. 1 John 3:16: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." Love is cross-shaped. It is sacrificial. **2:1-8, 20-21 / Gal 5:6, 13-14, Eph 3:17, 5:2, Col 3:12-14, 1 Thess 3:11-13.** Love is the bond that holds all the virtues together. Love is the great commandment. God's will is that we increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

What if we don't feel like it? Feelings are good followers but terrible leaders. C.S. Lewis writes, "The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will

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<sup>1</sup> Mathis, 58.

presently come to love him.”<sup>2</sup> Love is action and when you act, your feelings often follow. We become loving by loving. We never arrive fully here. Paul prays that our love would abound yet more and more.

God wants our love, this self-giving love, to overflow. Do you think Paul means love for God or their love for one another? Yes. Because the two are connected. Remember when Jesus was asked what the great commandment was? Remember how he gave two? “The great commandment is this: love God with all you are and if you are doing that you will love your neighbor.” **1 John 4:7-12, 19-21**. This year – go all in at this local church or another. There are tons of good ones in this city. There are no lone ranger Christians. We are created for community. As Ben Witherington puts it, “The community, not the closet, is the place where salvation is worked out.” Or as Joe Hellerman says, “For the early Christians, loyalty to God was tangibly expressed in loyalty to God’s family.” In C.S. Lewis *Screwtape Letters*, the Senior Demon Screwtape wrote to his young disciple Wormwood about how to influence people toward demonic ends: “Surely you know that if a man can’t be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighborhood looking for the church that ‘suits’ him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches.” Don’t follow Wormwood. Plant roots.

**2. More knowledge and discernment 1:10.** He prays we would grow in being able to make the right move. Same idea as wisdom. How can you gain wisdom? Stay off social media, cancel Netflix, dwell deeply in the Word, attend the big 4 at SS, take walks, read books, limit the internet. Surround yourself with Godly people. Pick good friends. Sociologists say you are the average of your 5 closest friends. Have godly friends **3:17**.

Parents, know that every school has 3 teachers: teacher, curriculum, and last and certainly not least: peers. There is a fantastic book called *Thoughts for Young Men* by J.C. Ryle: “Believe me, the importance of this advice cannot be overstated. There is no telling the harm that is done by associating with godless companions and friends. The devil has few better helps in ruining a man’s soul. Grant him this help, and he cares little for all the armour with which you may be armed against him. Good education, early habits of morality, sermons, books, regular homes, letters of parents, all, he knows well, will avail you little if you cling to ungodly friends.”<sup>3</sup> / **Rom 12:1-2**

Love and knowledge go together. Paul wants an informed love. For love to last, it must be founded on knowledge, on truth, on doctrine. Paul prayed the same in Col: “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,” (Col 1:9). God’s will is that we grow in knowledge, wisdom, understanding. For love to grow, knowledge and discernment must grow. Knowledge is not an enemy of love but a necessary precondition for its existence.

**3. Purity 10b.** He prays for our purity. Jesus in the SOTM: Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. **Porn:** 5 dangers: dishonors God, robs you of joy: just leads to guilt and shame and regret, distorts your desires, objectifies women, leaves you unsatisfied – increasing craving for diminishing pleasure; the more he ate the more he wanted to eat. / God wants us to be increasingly pure people. / For the day of Christ.

**4. Blameless.** What is that mean? Spiritual maturity. It obvi doesn’t mean without sin – that won’t happen till the resurrection. But it means we are *all in* for Jesus. Maturity: **2:12-16, 3:12-16**. Tonight at 5 we are going to talk more about his: aim for maturity in 2026, for blamelessness. Keep making progress. Augustine: “If you

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 110 in *The Complete C.S. Lewis* (New York: HarperOne, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*, 50.

would attain to what you are not yet, you must always be displeased by what you are. For where you are pleased with yourself there you have remained. Keep adding, keep walking, keep advancing.”

Once again, Paul is forward thinking, takes the long view. Pure and blameless for the day of Christ Jesus. Lives in light of the end. Luther used to say he had two days on his calendar: this day and that day. Paul had a forward-looking framework. He mentions the day of Christ here and in chapter 1: **1:6**. The future informs the present. He has judgment day on his mind at all times. 2 Cor 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” We live in light of that day.

**5. Fruit of Righteousness 11a.** So, he is praying we’ll be more loving, more knowledgeable, more discerning, pure, blameless. How could we summarize that? Spiritual maturity. That we would grow spiritually, filled with the fruit of righteousness. The fruit that comes from righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. This is important. The order is important. It is not the case that we are to grow in holiness so that we would gain the standing of righteousness. No no no, we grow in holiness as the fruit of being declared righteous. Does he mean our R behavior or the R of Jesus? Context: **3:4-9** / “My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.”

You are working not for a position of righteousness but from a position of righteousness. / Listen to the way the New City Catechism puts it: Justification means our declared righteousness before God, made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection for us. Sanctification means our gradual, growing righteousness, made possible by the Spirit’s work in us. / Indicative imperative / Before battery powered watches, they would need to be wound every day. You had to wind the stem to wind up the main spring and throughout the day, it would gradually unwind causing the watch to keep time. Being declared R - Justification by faith is the mainspring of the Christian life. But it must be wound every day. Why? Because the default mode of the human heart is self-salvation. Must keep hitting refresh on this righteousness. / He prays that we would be filled with the fruit that comes from the gift of righteousness.

**6. All for God’s glory 11.** All to the praise and glory of God. Our lives are to increasingly bring glory to God. North star. not to us, not to us but to your name be the glory – and whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we will do it all for the glory of God. / My in-laws have pet greyhounds. Not my cup of tea – those dogs are kind of creepy, but apparently, they are fast. They have races. And the way they work is right before the race they bring out a fake rabbit, often names Lucky the Lure. The announcer says “Here’s Lucky” and the crowd roars and the dogs go crazy. The doors open and the dogs chase Lucky the fake rabbit all the way around the track till the end and it disappears into a hole. Every single race. And then they get up the next day and do the same thing. Friends, don’t waste your life by chasing Lucky. Some dogs actually catch the fake rabbit and are obvi quite disappointed and they say they never race the same. Friends let’s not waste our lives on lucky the lure. Let’s live with meaning and purpose that matters for eternity: the glory of God.

**2:8-11** Paul is actually quoting from the prophet Isaiah here, ch. 45, which is all about the exclusivity of Yahweh. Over and over again in that ch he says “And there is no other god beside me, no other god beside me, to me every knee will bow. The God who will not share his glory shared it with Jesus. What Isaiah insists belongs to Yahweh alone, the H.S. through Paul attributes to Jesus Christ. Stott: Jesus is given a God title, applied a God text, anticipates God worship. The point is as simple as it is profound: Jesus Christ is YHWH. / Given a God title, applied a God Text, anticipates God worship

Incarnation, death, resurrection, exaltation – all so people will acknowledge who Jesus really is. To the glory of God the Father. The first question of the Catechism: “What is the chief end of man? Answer. Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” / Friends, resolve in 2026 to be with Jesus and be like Jesus. Make this the year you get serious about Jesus. Spurgeon: “Be half a Christian, and you shall have enough religion to make you miserable; be wholly a Christian, and your joy shall be full.” Venture on him wholly. / I love these New Year diagnostic questions Don Whitney:<sup>4</sup>

1. What’s one thing you could do this year to increase your enjoyment of God?
2. What’s the most humanly impossible thing you will ask God to do this year?
3. What’s the single most important thing you could do to improve the quality of your family life this year?
4. In which spiritual discipline do you most want to make progress this year, and what will you do about it?
5. What is the single biggest time-waster in your life, and what will you do about it this year?
6. What is the most helpful new way you could strengthen your church?
7. For whose salvation will you pray most fervently this year?
8. What’s the most important way you will, by God’s grace, try to make this year different from last year?
9. What one thing could you do to improve your prayer life this year?
10. What single thing that you plan to do this year will matter most in ten years? In eternity?

Ryle: “Believers, if you would have an increase of happiness in Christ’s service, labour every year to grow in grace. Beware of standing still. The holiest men are always the happiest. Let your aim be every year to be more holy, to know more, to feel more, to see more of the fulness of Christ. Rest not upon old grace. Do not be content with the degree of religion whereunto you have attained. Search the Scriptures more earnestly. Pray more fervently. Hate sin more. Mortify self-will more. Become more humble the nearer you draw to your end. Seek more direct personal communion with the Lord Jesus. Strive to be more like Enoch, daily walking with God. Keep your conscience clear of little sins. Grieve not the Spirit. Avoid wranglings and disputes about the lesser matters of religion. Lay more firm hold upon those great truths, without which no man can be saved. Remember and practise these things, and you will be more happy.”

**Benediction: 2 Cor 13:14**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/ten-questions-for-a-new-year>