

Energizing Your Prayer Requests—Romans 15:30-33—4/7/2013

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One of the best required classes in my seminary training for pastoral ministry and for all of life was the class we had on prayer.

It was not so much the content of everything that was taught.

I did learn a lot but the best part of the class was the requirement that you spend an hour a day in prayer.

A large part of both the purpose and the grade for the class was to force busy seminary students to learn and practice the priority and value of spending time alone with God in prayer.

The goal was not to micromanage minutes on God's calling plan, but to use as many as possible—at least an hour a day—because in Christ we have unlimited minutes of free access with God.

The goal was to watch God work through prayer.

Does an hour a day sound like a long time of prayer for you?

As you look back at last week and ahead to this week, does it seem hard to total up time for an hour of prayer each day?

If so, why?

I know that life can be busy & the demands of work & family can be overwhelming & you can feel like your smart-phone never stops vibrating with another kind of message.

But does any area of our lives not need God's blessing on it?

Is there any portion of a day or category of responsibility or role in relationships that God does not care about?

I don't think so—we need God in every way and He cares about how we respond and relate in every situation.

So every segment of life provides an opportunity for prayer.

And that includes praying before & during what we face & praying afterwards as we look back on how God answered.

So I want to motivate you in prayer this morning.

I want to challenge you to deepen and expand your prayer life.

I want you to allow more time for prayer, whether that's moving from 10 minutes a day to 20 or 30 minutes or it's moving from 30 minutes to an hour.

It's not that we gain merits with God by seconds ticked off a clock talking to Him, but we need undistracted and unrushed pursuit of God.

We need to prioritize and set goals to see progress as we act in faith that God hears and answers the prayers of His people.

And if you are already faithful to spend time in prayer regularly, let me encourage you to keep it up & deepen & strengthen your prayer life.

Consider today how you might pray more biblically or what you may have let slide that could refresh your prayer life.

As we finish out chapter 15 in our ongoing study of Romans today, we want to energize our prayer lives by looking at Paul's prayer requests.

From Romans 15:30-33 I'm going to outline 6 encouragements for our prayer lives that can motivate us as praying people.

Let's start into these 6 encouragements to energize your prayer requests by first reading the context where we pick up our study.

Turn to the end of Romans 15 and follow along as I read
Romans 15:22-33—Romans 15:22-33. [READ]

If you've been with us, you recall that this letter in some ways is a missionary support letter because Paul was seeking the help of the Roman church when he came through there on the way to Spain.

But his travels first needed to take him to Jerusalem to deliver this collection from Gentile churches he had planted.

And since the Jerusalem church was largely made up of Jewish believers, this gift was also an expression of unity and love between these formerly alienated people groups.

So he was concerned that this gift be received rightly by those Jewish Christians who had experienced pressure to reject the spreading of the Gospel to Gentiles.

Paul even dealt with the Apostle Peter caving to such pressure to keep separate from Gentile believers as he wrote about in Galatians.

And Paul's concern was warranted because Acts 21 records his arrival in Jerusalem after this and how he was told of his teachings being misunderstood and twisted.

Acts 21:20-22 reports that James and the elders at Jerusalem *“said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.’”*

Have you ever had that happen to you?

Though Paul certainly taught that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised and that internal circumcision of the heart was what was needed, his teaching of freedom from the Mosaic had been twisted.

He did not teach against the Law—he taught of its fulfillment in Christ and the completion of the ceremonial parts spiritually that no longer needed to be followed.

But like many of us have experienced before, what Paul taught was tweaked into something misunderstood that riled up opposition.

And that was among the believers in Jerusalem.

So it's no wonder Paul was asking in verse 31 for the Roman church to pray for his service for Jerusalem to be acceptable to the saints.

Then you can read the rest of Acts 21 later to see how the unbelieving Jews who had rejected Jesus persecuted Paul.

Anti-Christian Jews were the disobedient ones that Paul mentions here in Romans 15:31 that he wanted to be delivered from.

He had been one of those persecutors and violent aggressors and he knew he would try to kill him.

So it's no wonder Paul was asking in verse 31 for the Roman church to pray for him to be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea.

Those are the two basic requests that Paul puts forth in this section for the Romans to pray, both of them in verse 31.

Verse 31 has the 2 requests and verse 30 frames up those requests and then verse 32 gives a desire purpose or result of those requests.

And finally, verse 33 is a benediction prayer for the Romans.

Do you see that flow and organization of the passage?

Verse 30 frames up the requests; verse 31 presents the requests; verse 32 describes a purpose of the requests; and then verse 33 caps it off with a prayer from Paul for the Romans.

Read verses 30-33 again with that flow in mind. [READ]

With that context and reading of this section, I trust you get the sense of what's going on and being said here.

Now we can get into the details for some applications for prayer today.

Let's see what we can learn for our own practice of prayer.

1st we can learn to inform our prayers with truth.

Application #1 is this—inform your prayers with truth.

Often when we ask for prayer or pray for others, we request prayer for traveling mercies or protection or safety or other physical concerns.

And what we learn here from Paul's example is that those kinds of requests are not wrong or unimportant.

We can and should pray for such things.

But to energize those prayer requests, we need to frame them up with remembrance of the God we are talking to when we pray.

We need to recall who God is and why He would care about our request and how His character would enable us to pray it.

Think on what Paul does here with 2 prepositional phrases in verse 30 to saturate his requests with truth to motivate the Romans to pray.

Read verse 30 again to get this. [READ]

Paul urges them to pray as brothers and sisters in God's family governed by 2 truths—1 about Christ & the other about the Spirit.

So note that Paul was praying truth in relation to the Trinity.

Te prayers are said to go to God the Father by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit as the source of love in believers.

Specifically Christ is mentioned as our Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit is mentioned as the source of love in believers.

And those truths of Christ and the Spirit were motivators for prayer.

Paul wanted them energized with the thought that they could pray because Jesus was their common Lord and Jesus was the Master over all who had the power to rule.

And Jesus was the Christ who had fulfilled the promises of the OT who cared for the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the Gospel.

King Jesus cared about this & He had given free access to God through His vicarious death & victorious resurrection.

That's some of the significance of remembering that it was "by our Lord Jesus Christ" that Paul urged them to pray.

And he also urged them to pray by the love of the Spirit.

By the love that God's Spirit had put into their hearts when He showed His love in saving them, they could care about Paul and his travel to Jerusalem and the acceptance of the gift he was bringing.

And think how Jesus' Lordship & the Spirit's love relate to restraining unbelievers & giving receptive hearts to believers.

As Lord, Jesus could rule & restrain the disobedient.

And as the source of love, the Spirit could cleanse Jewish believers from past animosity and create a new heart of love for Gentile believers.

So the way Paul framed up his call for prayer support could energize the Roman church to be eager to pray for these requests.

That's how meditating upon and applying truth to our requests can develop confidence and faith as we pray.

That's an example how to, #1, inform your prayers with truth.

Do you do that to energize your prayer requests?

If you lack zeal and faith to pray or assume prayer doesn't really matter, then you need to realize that God does answer prayer and you can stoke the fires of your prayer life by with truth.

Then 2ndly today—you can invest in prayer as a discipline.

1, inform your prayers with truth; & 2, invest in prayer as a discipline.

I get that 2nd point from the word Paul uses to call them to prayer—it's a compound of the word for together and the word from which we get the English word agonize.

Agonizing is striving in intense competition like wrestling & fighting the good fight as in 1st Timothy 6:12 & 2nd Timothy 4:7.

Similarly, in Colossians 1:29 and 4:12, Paul mentioned laboring earnestly in ministry and in prayer.

So here's the point—prayer is WORK—it can be intense to frame requests biblically and pray seriously and stay focused and not get distracted and cultivate the heart burden to pray fervently.

Then it can take greater striving to keep that up day after day & year after year without tiring out or going through the motions.

You will not pray like this if you only pray when you feel like it.

Especially in our times, we are visual people—we live by sight & it's not natural to close our eyes and pray & live by faith.

So we must view prayer rightly—it is an act of faith and it is work.

Faithful praying will not just happen and it will not be easy.

Paul's description of prayer as striving reminds us of this 2nd application to invest in prayer as a discipline.

So #1—inform your prayers with truth; 2—invest in prayer as a discipline; and then #3—involve others in prayer as fellowship.

Application #3 today—involve others in prayer as fellowship.

To energize your praying, share your requests with others and pray with others—#3, involve others in prayer as fellowship.

As I mentioned that word strive has the prefix “sun” meaning “together with” as Paul urged the Romans to join him in prayer.

In their prayers publicly and privately, they could pray for him.

It didn't matter that many in that church had not met him or that they maybe didn't know anyone in the Jerusalem church.

They could still pray, especially when they saw this request as a statement of unity among Jewish and Gentile believers.

It wasn't that Paul could not pray alone for this, but he wanted to share the load and share the encouragement of God's answers.

Paul was not too good to ask for prayer or too highly exalted as the great Apostle to the Gentiles to ask others for help.

No. He knew that God hears the prayers of His people and He uses joint prayer to unify His people.

By sharing this, Paul could have a report to share when he arrived in Rome to contribute to being refreshed with them.

Though we can be self-focused if all we talk only about ourselves, we can also be proud if we never open up and share.

It is an important part of sharing in the Christian life together to be praying for one another.

And I thank God for how I hear or read of many of you living out this principle and how we are mutually encouraged as we see God answer.

That's what we want because it builds relationships and spreads the experience of God's work for His glory.

So that's point #3—involve others in prayer as fellowship.

Next, #4—Include specifics in your requests for prayer.

Application #4—Include specifics in your requests for prayer.

The 1st 3 points came from verse 30 and now we move into verse 31, which we've already covered in explaining the requests and the context in which they were made.

But let's read verse 31 again now anyway. [READ]

As we said, the 1st request is for deliverance or preservation and protection from the unbelieving, disobedient Jews in Judea.

And the 2nd request is that Paul's deacon-like service of delivery this gift would be well-received by the saints in Jerusalem.

We read earlier from Acts 21 why this was a reasonable request with the misunderstandings about Paul's ministry.

And we should note that these requests were not merely about Paul's comfort or safety as the main goal or about him being popular or liked.

The main goal was unity in the church and God's glory in the Gentile mission being proven as Gospel fruit by the Spirit.

But what I've noted for our application here in point #4 is that Paul was specific in what he requested them to pray for.

He did not vaguely say, "Pray for God to bless the trip".

That would have been ok as we'll see in verse 33.

But where possible, we should be specific about what requests we believe God would be honored by answering.

What temptations might we face and what opposition or concerns might we encounter or what details do we want to accomplish?

Whether we answer those details about delivering a gift or treating a medical problem or sharing the Gospel or counseling a fellow believer or parenting a child, we can think of specifics.

And those specifics can help us discern how God worked like they do even now in tracing down how God answered Paul's requests here.

Amazingly, what God included in Luke's writing of the NT book of Acts has shed a lot of light on our studies of Paul's collection and delivery of this gift to the Jerusalem church.

Before what I read earlier about James and the elders of the Jerusalem church responding to Paul's arrival, we find his prayer was answered because Acts 21:17 says the brethren received him gladly.

Then Acts 21:19-20 says this—*"And after he [Paul] had greeted them [meaning James and the elders of the church], he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God."*

So though they did warn Paul about wrong ideas of his teachings, they still did receive him gladly and tried to protect him and direct him in ways that he would be received well without misunderstandings.

Enough is said to lead us to believe the gift was well received.

And enough is also said in Acts 21-28 to reveal that God did preserve Paul from the disobedient in Judea as he requested here.

You can read details of how God protected Paul from a riot when he went to the Temple & when Jews tried to kill him.

Even though Paul was arrested and imprisoned, he was protected from the disobedient in Judea who were trying to persecute him.

They did not succeed in killing him.

In a later plot to kill him, Paul's own nephew heard about it and had the courage to tell him and then go tell the authorities.

So God answered and even after Paul appealed to Caesar and endured a shipwreck on his passage to Rome, God finally brought Paul to fellowship with the Roman church.

And when he did, they came to meet him and Acts 28:15 says when he "saw them, he thanked God and took courage."

Think of that—Paul thanked God and took courage because God answered what he asked the Romans to pray.

I'm sure it had not all happened like Paul had wanted, but God had answered and he could go recall his specific requests and see that.

So #4—include specifics in your requests for prayer.

Then application #5 leads us into the heart attitude we have as we submit the purposes we want to the ultimate purposes God wants.

Read verse 32 of Romans 15. [READ]

Application #5—entrust your purposes to God's greater purposes.

As we seek to energize our prayer lives with Paul's words in verses 30-33 today, we've seen to (1) inform your prayers with truth; (2) invest in prayer as a discipline; (3) involve others in prayer as fellowship; & (4) include specifics in your requests.

Now #5—entrust your purposes to God's greater purposes.

And if you are not a good speller, this is the only point where I did not find a word starting with I-N, so this starts with E-N.

Entrust—E-N-trust—your purposes to God's greater purposes.

Having just heard how God answered these prayers, let's be clear that Paul knew he would face persecution in Jerusalem.

That's clear as you read through Paul's history in Acts also.

But it was not clear how much he would go through before the joy and refreshing rest of the company of the Roman church.

And that's where that little phrase in the middle of verse 32 is so crucial—he submitted his desired purpose to the will of God.

It's like he said, "Lord willing", or as James 4:15 puts it, "if the Lord wills, we will" come here or there and do this or that.

That phrase reflects a submission to God's sovereign plan over Paul's life and his faith in God's purposes as governing his purposes.

Would it be good for Paul to be rejoicing in the report of God's answer to his prayers for this gift to be well-received?

Yes, of course it would and we could say that kind of joy and answering prayer are both agreeable to God's commanded will.

But verse 32 is not talking about God's commanded will.

Remember—Scripture talks about two wills of God—one is His commanded will, what He says should happen, like not murdering.

But then Scripture also describes God’s planned will, what He actually does plan and allow that includes the presence of sin and things against His commanded will.

It’s that planned will—what we call God’s providence—that Paul was referring to in verse 32 when he submitted his request to God’s will.

And that’s the right way to pray.

We can boldly make specific requests to God and get others to do the same & conclude with a heart submitted to God’s sovereign goodness.

We ultimately bow the knee to God’s rule and yield our minds to trust that His plan is better than ours.

As verse 32 gives Paul’s purpose in his requests, we find an example what it looks like to entrust your purposes to God’s greater purposes.

That’s outline point #5 to make application of what we see in verses 30-33 to energize our prayer requests today.

Then lastly, #6 sums it up—invoke God’s blessings generally.

#6—invoke God’s blessings generally.

And invoke just means summon or call for or ask for.

Read Romans 15:33 to see Paul do that. [READ]

This is a benediction type prayer with no literal verb.

It’s a general call for God to be with all the Roman Christians.

That sounds basic and broad and at times it may sound like a prayer request that isn’t specific enough to say anything meaningful.

But it is here as a Scriptural example of a blessing sought generally for all these fellow Christians.

And it is made more specific by calling God the God of peace because of what that term peace means at this point in Romans.

Peace is first an objective reality that God provides for those who trust Christ like we read of in Romans 5:1.

Romans 5:1 says, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are born at war against God & God against us because we inherit Adam’s sin & we sin in our attitudes, words & actions.

But God sent His Son Jesus to die to pay the penalty for sin so that those who trust Jesus can be forgiven.

By faith in Jesus Christ, we can have God’s wrath on us satisfied in Christ’s death so that we are welcomed as His friends and we are no longer His enemies.

That’s the Gospel—the Good News that the whole Bible is about.

So the Creator God and Sovereign Ruler of the universe is the God of peace.

He is at peace within Himself in the perfect relationships of the Trinity as the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And He has made the way we can have peace with Him.

He invented and initiated peace for us with Him.

And He plants the resulting feelings of peace into our hearts when we trust Christ and He spreads that peace through us in loving relationships with each other.

So He is the God of objective peace and subjective peace, the God who accomplishes relational peace and gives emotional peace.

And more broadly in biblical times from the Hebrew word “shalom” for peace is the sense of peace as God’s broad, all-encompassing blessings over life.

That is probably also part of Paul’s wish for all these believers for the God of peace to be with them.

So verse 33 gives us an example to follow with our 6th application point to energize our prayers.

Point #6—invoke God’s blessings generally.

God wants to bless His children because He is the perfectly loving heavenly Father of those who are in Christ.

And He tells us that He gives those blessings in answer to prayer.

So pray—pray passionately, regularly, and eagerly.

Paul’s experience & all of Scripture teach that God answers prayer.

God answers the prayers of His people by restraining the sin of unbelievers & motivating love in believers and much more.

So pray—be a man or woman or boy or girl who trusts God & prays.

1, inform your prayers with truth; 2, invest in prayer as a discipline; 3, involve others in prayer as fellowship; 4, include specifics in your requests; 5, entrust your purposes to God’s greater purposes; & 6, invoke God’s blessings generally.

And remember that all of this about prayer is founded upon and grounded in this God of peace revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

So the place to start for energizing prayer is with the Gospel.

Our ability even to pray is rooted in a right relationship of peace with God through Jesus Christ.

So if you don’t have that, I urge you to start there—ask God to forgive you for your sins as you turn away from those sins to follow Jesus instead and to trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Then with that forgiveness, you can have peace with God that leads us into prayer that is heard and answered by God’s grace.

If you have that relationship, why would you ever neglect time alone with this gracious God in prayer?

Give yourself to a renewal and deepening of your prayer life.

You can start today by confessing your lack of prayer and coming to the cross to be freshly motivated by Christ’s work.

And that’s what we close with as we celebrate communion together taking the elements of the Lord’s Table as Jesus did at His last supper.

Jesus said to remember His body and blood given for us in His death for us until He comes again and that’s what we do now.

So bow your head and take a minute to prepare to remember Him rightly with confession and thanksgiving and committing to changes His Spirit has challenged to make from His Word.

And if you don’t know Christ today, we’d love to talk with you further and we urge you to seek Him now.

But He would warn you not to take of the bread and the cup unless you are His follower by faith though He welcomes you to watch this ceremony and pray for it to become real in you.

Now let’s all pray alone quietly and then I’ll lead us in prayer.