

# PRAYER IN COUNSELING

## Prayer

- Prayer is the cry of a heart that is desperate for God.
- "We pray best when we are fallen on our faces in painful helplessness." (*Treasury of David* by Charles Spurgeon on Psalm 107:13)
- We learn to pray when we're desperate for God.
  - "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself...But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." (II Corinthians 1:8b-9)
  - The reason for prayerlessness in our lives is that we're still depending on ourselves. We're not desperate enough for God
- The work that God does in us when we are desperate for Him will bear fruit in the lives of others.
  - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (II Corinthians 1:3)
  - "The first thing God does with us is to get us based on rugged Reality until we do not care what becomes of us individually as long as He gets His way for the purpose of His Redemption. Why shouldn't we go through heartbreaks? Through those doorways God is opening up ways of fellowship with His Son...He comes with the grip of the pierced hand of His Son, and says, "Enter into fellowship with Me; arise and shine." If through a broken heart God can bring His purposes to pass in the world, then thank Him for breaking your heart." (Oswald Chambers, Nov 1)
  - "God's purpose is not to perfect me to make me a trophy in His showcase; He is getting me to the place where He can use me. Let Him do what He wants." (Oswald Chambers, Dec 2)

## Counseling

- Definition of counseling
  - The Greek word, *parakaleo*, means to call near or to call to one's side, to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort, to help, to exhort.
  - Counseling is coming alongside, comforting, encouraging, exhorting, bringing strength and hope to those who are struggling and suffering.
- The goal of counseling is heart transformation, a work that only God can do.
  - "Our ability and power to help is always limited, and prayer recognizes the reality of our limited ability to help, and lives within it. When you pray, you live with a fundamental humility before God and others." (David Powlison "Why do we Pray?" CCEF Now, 2017)

- Principles from Paul's ministry
  - Focused on Christ – "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." (Colossians 1:28)
  - Recognized that transformation is a process - "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." (Galatians 4:18)
  - Rooted in a confidence in God's grace –
    - "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6)
    - "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again." (Philippians 1:25-26)
- Counseling weaves together three strands of grace: God's Word, prayer, and a loving relationship.
  - The Word - "For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory." (I Thessalonians 2:11)
  - Prayer - "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thessalonians 1:2-3)
  - Loving relationship - "But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." (I Thessalonians 2:7-8)

## **Practical Application for Prayer in Counseling**

- Schedule enough time for prayer.
- Begin counseling session with prayer.
- Stop and pray in the middle of counseling when you feel stuck or need insight.
- Use the Psalms for lament.
- Pray through Scripture.
- Encourage prayer.
- Pray at the end of the session.
- Ask for prayer. (Romans 15:30-31; II Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:3-4; II Thessalonians 3:1-2)

## Paul's Prayers in the Epistles

**Romans 1:8-10** First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

**Ephesians 1:15-19** For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

**Ephesians 3:14-21** For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

**Philippians 1:3-5** I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

**Philippians 1:9-11** And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

**Colossians 1:3-4** (3) We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, (4) since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

**Colossians 1:9-12** For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

**I Thessalonians 1:2-4** We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father; knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;

**I Thessalonians 3:9-13** For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

**II Thessalonians 1:11-12** To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**II Thessalonians 2:16-17** Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

**II Thessalonians 3:5** And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ.

**II Thessalonians 3:16** Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!

**II Timothy 1:3-5** I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.

**Philemon 1:4-6** I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

## Reflection

- What are the desperate places in your life? How is God using your moments of despair to teach you to depend upon Him?
- Read II Corinthians 1:3. How has God comforted you in your affliction? Who are the people that God has brought into your life to come alongside and comfort?
- As you consider the ministry of counseling, or coming alongside those who are suffering and struggling, what are your fears? How can you grow in a confidence in God's grace to work in and through you?
- The definition of the Greek word *parakaleo* is to call near or to call to one's side, to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort, to help, to exhort. What are practical ways that you can do this in counseling? What are practical ways that you can do this in other relationships in your family or with friends?
- What has encouraged you from this study?
- What do you feel you need to grow in or better understand about prayer and counseling?
- What are practical steps that you can take to grow in prayer?

## Further Study

- Read through Paul's Prayers in the Epistles.
- Using colored pencils, circle themes that you see in the prayers. (For example, circle every time Paul mentions love or knowing Christ or glory.) What themes do you see in Paul's prayers?
- What do Paul's prayers teach you about his ministry, his desires, and goals?
- What can you learn about how Paul prayed for others? How would your prayer life change if you prayed the way that Paul did?