

Friday: Praying – for others...

Read: Ephesians 6:18-20¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Reflect:

This is just after the famous “armor of God” instructions from Paul. Having used a Roman soldier’s armor for his visual aid, Paul continues an appeal to that imagery.

If you take the most highly trained Roman soldier and put him in battle by himself he’s extremely vulnerable. However, if you place a group of Roman soldiers in battle together they form a formidable unit (even if their individual skills aren’t ‘superior’). There is strength in numbers in physical as well as spiritual combat.

This is why Paul asks for prayers on his behalf from those to whom he wrote. Paul knew he wasn’t a one man show. He knew that his service to God was assisted in ways he could not comprehend by the prayers of others.

Respond:

Do you have people who pray regularly for you? When was the last time you thanked them?

Do you keep some sort of a prayer journal so you can track God’s faithfulness?

If Paul sought the prayers of others, how much more should we?

Pray: Continue to pray for the grocery delivery this Sunday – pray we have wisdom when talking with those we will serve. Pray for those teaching our children on Sunday mornings. Ask God to help you be a more faithful pray-er on behalf of others.

Saturday: Loving Relationships

Read: Mark 3:31-35³¹ And his mother and his brothers came...³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.”³³ And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Reflect:

Jesus was quite the character. He literally heaved Judaism into an uproar...and it has never been the same since. Those of Jewish ethnicity who follow Him are no longer Jews, but Christians (or Messianic Jews). Today some branches of Judaism have given up on an actual Messiah and instead are looking for a “Messianic Age”. Yet, others are still waiting for the Messiah.

In addition to throwing Judaism into disarray, Jesus also put quite a twist on practically every aspect of humanity as we know it. People literally flocked to Jesus during His ministry. Why? Certainly His miracles had something to do with it. Yet so did the love He showed towards others.

The same holds true for a church today as well. If someone here at NLCC had the ability to perform actual miracles...people would flock here. Yet would they stay? Many likely would not. Yet if those who come to NLCC show true, real, practical love towards others...is there a limit to the number who will want to come?

Respond:

How have you been shown love by the body of NLCC?

Are you planning to stay for the Pot-luck meal tomorrow? Why, or why not?

Have you made plans to join your NLCC family and show some of Jesus’ love to others in Emporia by giving away groceries tomorrow night?

Pray: Pray that our worship tomorrow is pleasing to God – pray He’s honored and lives continue to be transformed. Continue to pray for our grocery distribution as we seek to share God’s love with others in physical need. Pray for boldness (Acts4:29) and open doors (Col4:2-6) to share God’s love.

Effective Churches are Affective Too

July 6 – 12

“Those who reap the blessings of freedom, must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.” That quote is from Thomas Paine, an integral part of the American Revolution who has been described as “The Father of the American Revolution”. It’s quite possible that you, like many in America, just observed our “Independence Day” on July 4th. Physical freedom can be a blessing.

While enjoying the freedoms we have here in America, are we able to keep in mind that Jesus isn’t the Savior of only the “red, white, and blue”? The following sentence and bullet list comes from an internet blog.

“As I reflected on the title and as we celebrate our independence, I must remind myself that Jesus is not a Savior dressed in red, white and blue.

- He is a Savior who brought freedom, a freedom purchased at a terrible price—the shedding of innocent blood.
- He is a Savior who established a Kingdom that knows no bounds—a kingdom that draws from every tribe, language, nation, and people.
- He is a Savior who welcomes people from all cultures.
- He is a Savior who expects his people to be both cross-cultural and counter-cultural.
- He is a Savior who demands that we pledge allegiance to the Lamb.
- He is a Savior whose commands supersede all others.
- He is a Savior who cannot be kidnapped by any political power or party.
- He is a Savior who reigns not from any country—the United States of America or Israel, for examples—but a Savior who reigns from heaven above.
- He is a Savior who is dressed in white and he invites his followers to be dressed the same.

Even with those words in mind, the quote from Thomas Paine still has a great deal of merit to it (unfortunately later in life he challenged much of Christianity with a work titled “The Age of Reason”). However, we know physical freedom is trivial next to spiritual freedom.

Last week we looked at how God has freed people in order for them to worship Him. This shows us that God never asks of us more than what we can do. What He asks of us are the things which He has already equipped us to do.

With that in mind, how ready are we to daily fight for our spiritual freedom? I’m not talking about standing up for our rights against “liberal judges” or contacting our senators to vote for or against specific bills. Those items are fine and have their place. Yet, how ready are we to fight for our spiritual freedom in the sense of living out our faith daily?

How apt are we to daily put on the armor which God has provided for us (Eph6:10-17)? How apt are we to daily pray for workers in God’s Kingdom (Mt9:36-38)? How apt are we to pray for boldness to share God’s Word (Acts4:29) and for It to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1) as we pray for open doors to share our faith (Col4:2-6)? How apt are we to love our neighbors (Lk10:25-37)?

Monday: Greetings

Read: Ephesians 1:1-2 ¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflect:

It's quite amazing when you stop to think about it. Those to whom Paul wrote the letter we call Ephesians he addressed as "saints". It's a descriptor many in the church quite possibly shy away from today (e.g., "What do you expect, no one's perfect." or "Well, I'm not a saint you know." etc.). Quite possibly it was the same in Paul's day as well.

Writing to a mixed audience (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) Paul brings out the big guns right at the beginning. The "grace and peace" his readers have is from both God and Jesus. The "grace" was a spin on the Greek word for "greetings". Grace is a gift someone is unable to attain by merit. Peace is built upon the Hebrew concept of *shalom*. It is the full and abundant life enjoyed by God's people.

Paul couldn't be more clear; "All of ya'll are God's people..." (accompanied by the expectation of their faithfulness). It's a beautiful truth, one we need to remind ourselves of on a regular basis.

Respond:

The same word is translated as "holy" (when it's singular) and "saints" (when it's plural). Holy has the connotation of being 'set apart'. How descriptive is that of you?

Read and ponder the other areas where "grace" (1:6,7; 2:5,7,8; 3:2,7,8; 4:7,29; 6:24) and "peace" (2:14,15,17; 4:3; 6:15,23) occur in Ephesians.

How can the realization that those who are "in Christ" are all a part of God's family help foster better relations between denominations?

Pray: Thank God for the time of worship we had together as a body yesterday. Pray for the grocery distribution that will be taking place this coming Sunday. Pray for Bob Griffin, Larry Hayes, and Roy Andrews – the elders of NLCC.

Tuesday: Reason for Rejoicing

Read: Ephesians 1:15-17 ¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him...

Reflect:

Paul prayed such wonderful prayers. It was customary in his day for people to set aside time each day for prayer; often several hours. This must've been the case for Paul as well, given how often he mentions praying for other congregations (e.g. Phil1:3ff; 1Thess1:2ff).

Notice the two areas about which Paul had heard news; 1) faith in Jesus and 2) love towards God's people. The Christian faith really is that "simple". Yet the simplicity of the Christian life doesn't translate into it being "easy" to live.

Paul prays for "deepness" in these Christians. There is no arrival for the Christian; there is never a date when we will know enough and then cease to grow as a result. We may cease to grow because we think we know it all, but that is a different issue...

Respond:

We all have Christian friends in different communities. What will they hear of our faith and how it is impacting Emporia and the surrounding area?

Just because we're to grow "deeper" doesn't mean we all have to love "head knowledge" or "learning new things" (although they are useful). What would a week of meditating on ways to show love for one's neighbor result in; is that not developing a spirit of wisdom?

How do we do at NLCC with the two categories about which Paul gave thanks?

Pray: Pray for "Deb Reduction Sunday," coming on July 13th. Pray for Ed Asbury, Mike Haag, and Keith Krause – the deacons of NLCC. Pray that NLCC is known for how it shows love towards others while being faithful to Jesus.

Wednesday: Focused Prayer

Read: Ephesians 3:14-17 ¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father...¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love...

Reflect:

Paul now returns to the thought he started in verse one of chapter three. He wanted to be clear that his prayer (vs14ff) for the Gentiles was based on their inclusion in God's family.

The "inner being" Paul desired to be strengthened is a bit hard to pin down. It could be a strengthening of one's reasoning capabilities – so right and wrong can be discerned. It could also be one's conscience – so that we're sensitive to the things which concern God. It could also be one's will – so that our will is strong enough to carry out that which we know to be right.

Whichever of those was his intention (likely all were in mind) the next verse shows why this prayer is so important; "so that..." These words look forward to the recipients of this letter no longer being like children (4:14). What a wonderful thing to focus our prayers upon – spiritual maturity for followers of Jesus.

Respond:

It's a powerful reminder to bow your knees in prayer. Is this a practice of yours? If being on your knees is not good for you because of physical conditions, what is another position you can assume that shows your humbleness towards God as you pray?

Read Luke 11:9-13. Ask God for the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts and actions today; tell Him of your willingness for this to happen.

Who are the people you pray for regularly to grow to be more and more like Jesus?

Pray: Pray that those we will deliver groceries to this Sunday will be receptive of our generosity. Continue to lift up the need for more workers in God's Kingdom (Mt9:36-38). Pray for Brent McCrory – the preaching minister of NLCC.

Thursday: Leave it Behind...

Read: Ephesians 4:17-20 ¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—

Reflect:

Apparently those to whom Paul wrote, while being "in Christ," were still struggling with the pattern of the world. Paul's word to them, "Stop it!!" For those of us who are blessed to be "in Christ," we all realize that we were not always in such a privileged state.

How often do we consider how our minds used to be "darkened" due to our alienation from God? Have you ever seen someone and thought, "Wow, that person is quite possibly what I'd be like if I didn't have Jesus in my life" when you see them?

To what should that realization lead you; smugness ("I'm glad I'm not like them") or a humble state of mind ("thank You God for Your grace")? Are we really that much "different" from others who don't know Jesus? What I mean by that is...if we believe and have had our lives changed, why can't others? Are we that abnormal?

Respond:

How has your thought processes changed since coming to know Jesus? How can you utilize the changes you've gone through to reach others who need to know Him?

Do you still struggle with an area of impurity that was a part of your life before knowing Jesus? How can others help you to overcome it (them)?

Don't you enjoy having a good time, spending time outside, relaxing, working hard, etc.? How can we do better at bridging the gap to show the world that we (followers of Jesus) don't need to be feared?

Pray: Continue to pray for the upcoming "Deb Reduction Sunday" and coinciding Pot-luck. Confess to God your desire to rid your life of impurities – ask for His help. CIY's summer conference, "Move," is rapidly approaching...pray for our youth.