

Today we are in part 2 of a 4-part message series called Pray. What we're doing is we're looking at 4 specific prayers that the Apostle Paul prayed. We're not going to pray safe, small, general prayers as passionate followers of Jesus. We're going to pray big, God-honoring, faith-filled, and specific prayers, just like Paul prayed. What's interesting is when you study the prayers of Paul, you're going to find a very common rhythm, that he's going to pray for something specific and then you're going to see the words "so that" and he's going to show you the desired result. For example, last week, we saw him say, "I pray that you would be filled with power so that Christ may dwell in your inner beings." Every time he prays, we see the words "so that" and we see the end result. Last week, we were praying for power and I hope that you continue to pray for power.

The interesting thing is, when you look at what many of us pray for, sometimes our prayers are just benign, safe, small in general. Quite honestly, a lot of times, the things people pray for, to me, are actually kind of funny. Think about this. Many of you, your parents probably prayed this prayer with you when you were young. Some of you might pray this prayer with your youngsters. Think about how unusual this prayer is. Take your 3-year-old, put him in a dark room before you're going to leave them, and pray this with them. You can pray along if you know it. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Nighty-night, precious. See you in the morning, if you survive the night. What is that? What is that? It's crazy to pray that with little kids, if you don't die tonight.

Or what about, "Dear Lord God, Heavenly Father, I pray that You will bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies" as you step down a greasy double bacon cheeseburger with chili fries and a super-size coke. You're effectively asking God to do a miracle and make it have the same effect as grilled chicken breast, broccoli and kale.

Anyway, if we can move to more serious notes on prayer, I want to talk today about a specific prayer that the Apostle Paul prayed, that it's one of the most important things that you can pray for Christians that you love. In fact, I'm going to ask you a question: if there was a specific prayer you could pray for other Jesus followers that would help them have a full understanding of every good thing they have in Christ, how many of you would want to pray that prayer?

If you want the Christians that you love to have a full understanding of every good thing they have in Christ, then you should pray for them ***that they would continue to be active in sharing their faith***. Let me say it again. If you want to see somebody you love have a full understanding of every good thing that they have in Christ, you should pray that they would be active in sharing their faith in Jesus.

Now why would I say that? I want to give you the back story of an amazing little book in the Bible, called Philemon. This was actually a personal letter that Paul wrote to his friend Philemon and it was written and sent at the same time as his letter to the church in Colosse. Paul wrote to Philemon, who lived in Colosse and who was, quite honestly, a successful businessman, who hosted a small house church every single week. If you can picture this, you

got a business guy who has a life group meeting in his home. One of his slaves, because they owned slaves at that time, escaped. His name was Onesimus. Onesimus ran away from Philemon, ran all the way to Rome, where he met up with the Apostle Paul. We don't know exactly how it happened, but what we do know, is that the Apostle Paul led the slave into a relationship with Jesus. This guy is massively transformed, so much so that he is like, "I need to go back to Philemon. I need to make things right. Jesus has changed me and I need to go and do the right things."

Paul writes to Philemon, because he's a friend, vouching for Onesimus. Basically, Philemon, you need to understand. Jesus has changed this guy's life. He's coming back. I want you to receive him as a brother in the Lord because that's exactly what he is. Paul is writing this very heart-felt, very emotional plea, to his friend the business owner, a letter on behalf of this slave whose life has been transformed. We're going to look at just a few portions of this story. We'll start in verse 4. This is what Paul says to his buddy Philemon. He says, "I always thank God as I remember you in my prayers." Then he says, "I thank Him for 2 reasons. One is, "Because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus." Okay. The second reason is, "Because of your love for all the saints." I want you to think about this. "I thank God, Philemon, because I hear you love other Christians in such a beautiful way. I thank God because of your faith in Jesus and because you have a deep love for other Jesus followers."

In verse 6 Paul writes: *'I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.'*

Now what I want to do for a moment is I want to read into this story. I'm imagining what might have happened but I'm just guessing. Imagine this. The slave runs away, gets to Rome, meets Paul. He's maybe hurting or asking questions or afraid or spiritually lost or something. Paul hits it off with this guy. Paul tells him, "Oh, I was like you. I used to hate Christians, but then I met Jesus and it totally changed me. You need to know Him."

Onesimus then realizes that he does need Jesus and he's converted. Paul starts talking to him like, "Where'd you come from?" He's, "Well, I actually worked for a guy named Philemon." "Philemon? Small world, I know him. He's got a house church in his home. Wait a minute. You worked for him and you don't know about Jesus. Didn't Philemon ever tell you about Jesus? Oh, he didn't? Philemon, I thank God that I hear about your faith in Jesus and your love for the saints. You're like, you're really loving Christians." If you're reading into this, perhaps Paul's going, "Wait a minute. Don't forget to share your faith, especially with those who you are with every single day. I pray that you'll continue to share your faith."

I wonder if Paul was doing this because he knew that it is so easy for Christians to develop an inward-looking, self-centered version of Christianity, where instead of loving those who are far from God, we start judging those who are far from God. Instead of having an attitude of trying to reach out, we have an attitude of trying to retreat and run from them. Before long, a lot of people are like, "Stay away from the world. The world is bad. Stay away from those people. They're non-Christians."

Here's the thing: the last thing Jesus said before He ascended into Heaven was not, "Christians, go into your houses and hide." What He said is, "Go into the world and shine." He said, "Go into the world and preach the gospel. Baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Make disciples of them." He said, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. You don't run from darkness, you shine into darkness."

The problem is so often, we become inward-looking and start arguing over stupid things like that's not the way we do church. The Greek word didn't really say that. That's not the right version of the Bible and all this stuff. Paul, you can almost hear him saying, "Don't do that, Philemon. Be active, always be active in sharing your faith."

Every Christian here knows it's important but we struggle with it. If we know it's important and yet, we don't do it, the question arises why don't we do it more often? Why don't we share our faith? There are any number of reasons. I think one reason is we just get busy: life happens and we forget about the importance of it. Another of the reasons is that we don't want to be that weird person, the, "Jesus loves you person."

Or, we don't want to force our beliefs on people and that's absolutely fair. I think probably the biggest reason that most of us don't share our faith in Christ more is we just don't feel like we know enough. We feel like if we knew more, then we would do it more, but I don't feel like I know enough. Here's the tension that I want you to see. We think if I understood more, then I would share my faith. Paul is implying through this prayer that that's not what happens. He's saying when you share your faith, you understand more.

Paul is praying that we would constantly share our faith in Jesus. When we share our faith in Jesus, something very positive happens. That is that lives are impacted. Lives are changed. It may only be that you're planting a seed in somebody's life, it may be that you're watering the seed, but God is making a difference in people's lives. As you do this, Paul is showing us something else amazing happens is that as you share your faith, you actually get a full understanding of every good thing that you have in Christ. Suddenly, you're growing deeper in your relationship with Jesus. You're falling more in love with Him. You're understanding just what it means to walk by the Spirit, so you want to share your faith even more.

What happens is you get a very outward, evangelistic, loving focus toward other people. Our church strap line is 'Connecting with God, each other and the world'. When we connect with the world we should be having a positive effect and we should be finding ways to talk about Jesus. Then what happens is you want to share your faith even more and more lives are impacted. You grow deeper in your understanding and you have more of an outward focus. Then you share your faith and it's very, very positive, but here's what often happens. Unfortunately, we feel like we don't know enough, we're not ready, we're not good enough, so we don't share our faith. Lives are not really impacted because we're just doing our own little inward-looking Christian thing. We don't grow spiritually in a deeper understanding of what we have in Christ, therefore, instead of an outward focus, we become inward-looking Christians.

Last week I was encouraging you to pray for power – for the power of the Spirit in your life. You keep praying for power. Today, we're going to add something new that we pray for. What's going to happen is over time, you're going to develop a very rich arsenal of spiritual things to focus on in prayer. Today we're going to add this. We are praying for other believers that we love. We're praying for ourselves that we would continue to share our faith. Pray for the young people. Pray for your spouse. Pray for the elders. Pray for the Christians that you work with. Pray for the people in your home group. Pray for me. Pray for you that you would continue to share your faith in Christ, that you would be active in sharing your faith in Christ. When you do, you'll have a full understanding of every good thing you have in Christ. Let me warn you and let me just warn you clearly. When you start praying for this, you will find that you have opportunities this week, multiple ones, and you are expected to respond.

Since many people don't fully feel equipped, I want to give you 4 very simple ways to share your faith based loosely on some stories in the Bible. When God gives you those moments in response to your prayer, you're going to be adequately prepared to share your faith, get a deeper understanding, and suddenly, you're going to see forward-spiritual momentum in your life as God uses you to impact others. Different ways to share your faith, 4 of them very quickly.

First of all, you can be loving, but direct. You can be very loving, but there will be a time to be direct. In fact, in Acts 2, this is what Peter did when he preached to thousands of people. He was loving, but he was direct. He said to them, "You need to repent of your sins and turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." This is direct. What he didn't say was, "You know, hey guys, I'm thinking about you ought to, like, explore your spiritual options and maybe, you know, think about what would happen." He's just as direct as can be. You need to repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. It's as direct as you can be. There will be times when the Holy Spirit will lead you to be direct like that and you obey the prompting of the Spirit. You don't do it all the time. If you do it all the time, you're just going to annoy people. You do it when God leads you and you're very, very direct.

The second way you can share your faith and every one of you can do this anytime, you can share your story. Every one of you have a very powerful story if you are a follower of Jesus. In fact, in John's Gospel, the 9th chapter, is an amazing story of a guy that was born blind and Jesus comes and opens his eyes so that he can see. All of a sudden, all the Pharisees are debating this going, "Whose fault was it that he was blind? Is it his parents' fault? Jesus healed him at Sabbath. Jesus must be a sinner." Maybe he wasn't really blind, so they questioned this guy. He's like, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand the deeper meanings of all these theological debates that you're having." He said, "All I can tell you is I was blind, but now I see. You can argue all you want, but now if you want to know my story, is yesterday I couldn't see you, today I can. All I know is I was blind, but now I see."

Some of you, that's your greatest love weapon is, "All I know is I used to be an addict, but because of Jesus, I am not. All I know is I used to be hurting, but because of Jesus, I have peace. All I know is I used to be lost, but because of Jesus, now I'm found." You tell your story.

Some of you, you've got really wild stories. Tell your story. Now, "I used to smoke weed, I used to be an alcoholic, and I used to shoot heroin, but Jesus saved me." Some of you it's not that dramatic but you still have a story. You tell your version of your story and watch as God uses it to impact other people. It's amazing how often your story will interact and overlap their story. "Oh, I lost a child, too." "Oh, I lost a marriage, too." "Oh, I was rejected by church, too." "Oh, I had this happen to me, too, and let me tell you what God did." You can be loving and you can be direct. You can share your story.

A third thing is very simple. You can invite people to church. It doesn't get any easier than this. "Now just come with me. Hour and 15 minutes, come with me to church." It's that easy. In fact, this is, essentially, what this woman did in John's Gospel recorded in the fourth chapter. Jesus had an interaction with a Samaritan woman, which a Jewish man should never even have done. He's loving this woman and He says to her, He said, "Ma'am, you've had 5 husbands and the man you're shacking up with, he's not your husband." She's like, "Oh, how does He know this stuff?" Basically, He says, "You're thirsting for something more and you're just using regular water." He said, "I will give you living water and you'll never thirst again." She's so moved by this, what does she do? She runs back to her community and all she says is, "Come and see the man who told me everything I've done. Just come and see. Just, just come, just come with me and meet this guy." That's what you can do. "Just come with me. Just come to church. Just give it a try, give it a try."

The fourth thing is this. You can live a life that other people will want. You can live a life that other people will want. In fact, Paul and Silas, they did this. It's a crazy story you can read about in Acts 16. They get arrested and they're in prison and what do these crazy guys do, these Jesus followers? They're in the middle of jail, prison, and they just hold a worship service. They're just worshipping God. The jailer's looking on them, "Most people don't worship God when they're in jail." Suddenly, an earthquake comes. The jail doors fly open and they're free. The jailer's like, "Well, if they escape they're gonna kill me, so I might as well kill myself." Then Paul is like, "Don't kill yourself. No, no, no, it's ok. We're still here." They're showing love to this guy. He looks them and basically says, "I want what you have," and asked a question. "What must I do to be saved?" In other words, "I've seen that you all have something that I do not have. I want what you have."

There are those of you that when you live with God in such a way that if you find out you have cancer you're not rocked by it. You have this peace through it. "How do you do that," people will ask and you tell them, "I've got the grace of Jesus carrying me." You can live in such a way that others are hungry for what you have. That's one of the reasons we're going to pray, God, every day, give us opportunities to share our faith. May we be active. God, we pray for those we love, that they would be active in sharing their faith. God, we pray that every day You would give us eyes to see divine opportunities so we could share our faith. Why? So that we'll have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. With an outward focus, we share our faith even more and we'll have positive spiritual momentum. This week, every day, I want you to pray, God, give me opportunity to share my faith.

He will. When you do, let me show you 3 things that will happen.

The first thing is this. You get to play a part in a divine story. You get to play a part in someone else's spiritual story. You may simply be planting a seed. You may be the one that waters the seed. You may just play a very small part. You may be there at the harvest, but you get to make a difference in someone else's life. When you do it brings spiritual momentum and faith into your heart.

The second thing is when you share your faith, your faith grows. Your faith grows and grows and grows. You're having a conversation with someone and you don't know what to say next and you're like, "Oh, what do I say?" Then boom, this Bible verse just pops into your brain, like, "Whew, where did that come from? Must be God." Then you're praying for that person and you're praying for more people and all of a sudden, your faith is growing and faith starts to expand.

The final thing is this. When you share your faith, you are reminded of what you have in Christ. There are some of you there was a time in your life when you were really passionate about Jesus and now you're not. I can guarantee you from the time you were passionate until this moment right now, you stopped sharing your faith. I can guarantee you because when you're sharing your faith, something happens on the inside. You're telling people the story of the gospel and you're talking about forgiveness of sins to people that have never realized that God could forgive their sins. It's like you're hearing it for the first time when you tell it again. Then you talk about the promises of God and you tell them, "Yeah, God's not going to give you the perfect life so you're never going to have problems again." Instead you're like, "No, in the middle of those problems, God gives you a supernatural peace that goes beyond your human ability to understand."

The very Spirit of God moves into the life of the Jesus follower. That spirit convicts you and loves you and equips you and comforts you and empowers you and suddenly, you start walking by faith and not by sight. You don't just serve this God who's out to get you, but you have a loving relationship with a God that you can know, a God who speaks to you, and a God who cares about you. All of a sudden, we're on the front lines talking about the goodness of God. You cannot be lukewarm. You are filled with the fullness of all that God has. Suddenly, you're having a deeper understanding and a deeper understanding of every good thing you have in Christ. When you share, lives are changed. You have a deeper understanding, you have an outward focus, and you want to share even more.

That's why I'm praying every day for you for power because you need spiritual power. I'm praying for our church community that you would be active in sharing your faith in Christ because when you do, you will see lives changed. When you are active in sharing your faith in Christ, you will have a full understanding of every good thing you have in Christ. Amen