



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

**Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD**  
**P** 01277 632120 **E** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org  
**T** @EmmanuelCM12 **W** emmanuel-church.info **FB** EmmanuelChurchBillericay  
*Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry*



### HG176 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul A Model For Prayer

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Home Group Study Notes

13 January 2019 - Revd Paul A. Carr



**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



### Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

At the beginning of this new year, share your hopes, fears and ambitions for you personally and, if you have any, for Emmanuel for 2019.



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



## HG176 *Prayers Of The Apostle Paul* A Model For Prayer

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Home Group Sermon

13 January 2019 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction** I'd be amazed if any of you has not, at some point in your Christian life, found it difficult to pray. But like many things in our Christian life, praying doesn't come easy. And that's true for many Christians/Churches. We are pilgrims on a journey with many lessons to learn and struggling with such issues is part of the way we grow in faith. But we should be growing ...

I preached my first sermon here on Sunday 15 June 2008. Some of you may recall I preached on Ephesians 1:15-23 and entitled my talk *'Preparing for the Journey'*. The first point I made was the importance of prayer. I said this: *"I understand it's difficult to encourage folk to make a serious commitment to 'corporate' prayer. No-one is suggesting for one moment you are not a praying people - I'm sure you are. However, I want you to recognise how strategic the corporate prayer life of the church is, especially if you're a member of the DCC/PCC or a leader in any area of church life. It seems to me that corporate prayer has to be high on the list of all of our agendas if we want/expect God to move in a mighty way amongst us."*

And here we are, 10.5 years later and we're still no further forward in this area of church life. As I said when the DCC made the decision to suspend our monthly prayer meetings, this is an area of great concern for me and should be for us all.

If ever there is a time when we need new confidence, and renewed commitment, in our personal and corporate prayer life, it is now. Prayer, especially corporate prayer, isn't something we should avoid because we find it uncomfortable or think it has no value or because we don't have the time.

This new series on *The Prayers of the Apostle Paul* is not a comprehensive theology of prayer. Rather, we will work through several of Paul's prayers to examine the continuing relevance of prayer to our life and faith - both individually and collectively. This series will remind us how and why prayer should always be the starting point in everything we undertake as Christians.

**1: What is Prayer?** It's amazing how many Christians have such great anxiety with regards to prayer: both in what it entails and how we should engage with it. Prayer is simply talking to God in the way you would have a conversation with a family member or a friend. It is - or it should be - as spontaneous as a new baby gurgling to its father or mother. There is something quite natural about prayer for a child of God. Sometimes we talk, sometimes we listen, and sometimes we just enjoy being in that person's company. And so, it is with prayer. It's not some mystical enlightenment that only a chosen few are able to attain. Prayer should be a natural part of each Christian's discipleship and is, probably, the most important activity of our Christian lives.

**2: Why Pray?** How many times have you heard someone say: "If God knows all our needs; why should we waste time troubling him? Does prayer make any difference? Does God really hear me?" At one level, praying is just something that Christians do at another level, prayer is a natural communication between our heavenly Father and us.

4. What other New Testament teaching can you think of that encourages us to live (and pray!) with eternity's values in view?

5. In what ways do you pray for Emmanuel church? What can this prayer of Paul's teach you?

6. For what have you thanked God for recently? Spend some time thinking about for signs of grace in the lives of church members, events and activities and thank God for them.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. What features of the Thessalonian Christian's life together made Paul so thankful? Can you see any parallels to 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3?

2. What kinds of things in people's lives should cause our most profound gratitude to God? Why?

3. The Thessalonian Church knew, and today's persecuted church knows, that prayer works. Read again Brother Andrew's quote (section 4e). Does this encourage, inspire, and prompt you to discover it more for yourself by praying more?

A few years ago, when I studied for an MA, I wrote a 20,000 word dissertation on *Community, Neighbourhood and Faith*. As part of this I put together two surveys, one for church members and one for those who have no church connection. The research suggested 25% of non-church attendees in Billericay prayed every day. Amazing! A recent poll found that eighty per cent of Britons still believe that prayer can be answered. Why is that? Might it be that deep down inside all of us there is an innate/natural understanding that life works best when we communicate with God? We were created for this relationship. It's good to remind ourselves of the reasons for praying.

**a. Jesus prayed.** It goes without saying really, but it needs to be said, and he is our model.

**b. Prayer develops our relationship with God:** It's a well-known fact that relationships break down because of a lack of communication. But with good communication, a relationship grows and flourishes. And it's in our relationship with God that we find the very meaning and purpose of our lives and we should continually seek to develop this part of our Christian life. I believe we mature and develop as Christians through the experience of prayer. Yes, we can grow in faith through Bible Study, Fellowship and Worship but we should never underestimate the role prayer plays in developing our relationship with God. The early church met regularly to share in all of these things (Acts 2:42).

**c. Prayer allows us to be involved in God's actions in the world:** God doesn't need our prayers; he is perfectly capable of acting on his own initiative. But for some reason he chooses to involve us. The wonderful thing is that we are able to about any situation; any person; any circumstance anywhere in the world at any time.

Ronald Dunn: *"Prayer is the secret weapon of the kingdom of God. It is like a missile that can be fired toward any spot on earth, travel undetected at the speed of thought, and hit its target every time ... Satan has no defence against this weapon; he does not have an anti-prayer missile."*

**d. Prayer allows us to enjoy fellowship with God by communicating with him:** Prayer is what keeps a Christian's relationship with God fresh, healthy and real. Prayer should never be considered as a one-way phone call like a message left on an answering machine. Prayer allows us to hear God – and it's vital that we listen. But prayer is also a dialogue, and so we have the opportunity to speak with our Heavenly Father. Prayer not only changes us, it also changes situations. It's amazing what happens when we pray. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple said: *When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't.*

Philip Yancey in his book: 'Prayer: Does it make any difference' writes: *"The main purpose of prayer is not to make life easier, nor to gain magical powers, but to know God. I need God more than anything I might get from God."* And so, we do.

**3: When Should We Pray?** I recognise that prayer doesn't always come naturally; there are often times when you have to make a choice whether to pray. Sometimes, prayer can be hard work. Sometimes you have other things on your mind; sometimes you feel a million miles away from God. But the Bible teaches us when we should pray:

**Always:** Ephesians 6:18: *"Pray in the Spirit, on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests ... and always keep praying for the saints."* You don't have to be in a church to pray. You can pray as you walk down the street, you can pray on your bike, you can pray on the tube. You don't have to pray out loud - in fact, if you're praying on the tube it might be a help not to pray out loud! But you can pray in your heart.

**Alone:** *Go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father* (Matt 6:6).

**With others:** Jesus said, Matthew 18:19: *"... if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."* In other words, he says there's a special power when we pray together.

**Regularly:** I think it's helpful to have set times to pray. I always find that whatever thoughts are on my mind in the morning tend to stay with me all day. And to start with prayer is a wonderful way to start the day. Psalm 5:1.

**4: Prayers of Thankfulness** So, let's take a closer look at Paul's prayer. Paul usually begins his letters with words of thanksgiving (vs3-10 provide us with a framework that Paul keeps in mind as he prays). Paul tells us to set our hearts on things above (Col. 3:1). If what we highly cherish belongs to the realm of heaven, our hearts and minds will incline to heaven and all its values; but if what we highly cherish belongs to the realm of earth and the merely transitory, our hearts and minds will incline to the merely transitory. After all, Jesus taught us that our hearts will run to where our treasure lies (Matthew 6:19-21).

For what do we commonly give thanks? We say grace at meals, thanking God for our food; we give thanks when we receive material blessings. We may offer a prayer of sweaty thanks after a near miss on the motorway; we may utter a prayer of sincere and fervent thanks when we recover from serious illness. We may offer brief thanksgiving when we hear that someone has come to know the Lord. But generally, our thanksgiving seems to be tied to our material well-being and comfort. That is why, when we first turn to Paul's thanksgivings, they may seem alien, for they don't focus on what we might cherish. Paul gives thanks for signs of grace among the Christians whom he is addressing. He gives thanks that:

**a. Their faith was growing.** *"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more"* vs3a. Since he speaks of their growing faith, he cannot be referring to their initial conversion, but to their increasing reliance upon the Lord. Indeed, the word *faith* (Gk. *Pistis*) can also mean 'fidelity' or 'faithfulness'. The Thessalonians are growing in their faith. They are not satisfied with the past (always a danger) but looking forward to the future.

**c. Their love is increasing.** What Paul has in mind in this context is not their love toward God (though we'd expect this to be increasing too) but the practical *"love every one of you has for each other"* vs3b. If their love for one another is growing, it can only be because they are Jesus' disciples – remember how Jesus said that such love would be the distinguishing mark of his followers (John 13:34-35)? A close-knit society with shared ideals and goals finds it relatively easy to foster love, tolerance and acceptance. Whether that is the local Scrabble Club, Women's Institute or BTFC, a certain amount of common ground helps a group to co-exist harmoniously. Of course, such groups may run into terrible division over power politics or a disruptive member or nepotism, but some measure of transparent love is not unusual in such groups.

Ideally the church is different. It is made up of people who are as varied as can be. To quote Don Carson: *"Rich and poor, learned and unlearned, practical and impractical, sophisticated and unsophisticated, aristocratic and plebeian, disciplined and flighty, intense and carefree, extrovert and introvert and everything in between"* (See Galatians 3:28). The only thing that holds such people together is their shared allegiance to Jesus, their devotion to him, stemming from his indescribable love for them. That is why it's always such a disappointment when a local church becomes a cauldron of resentments and bitterness. This may erupt simply because there is very little at the social, economic, temperamental, educational, or other levels to hold people together. When social or racial or economic uniformity seems more important than basking in the love of Jesus, when Christians lose sight of their first and primary allegiance, they will squabble and fall apart.

As Paul hears reports of the Thessalonians, he recognises this is not the case, as it was in some of the other churches he planted, and he is struck by their growing love. Such love must be the work of God, and so it is to God that Paul directs his thanks. This love is a demonstration of God's grace which has touched them all. *"Every one"* of the Thessalonian believers has been caught up in it, not a small group of the spiritual elite. Everyone. This is the stuff of revival, and Paul is grateful.

**d. They are persevering under trial.** Paul talks about how they, and the church, will face constant trial until the Lord returns but when He does, He will pass judgment on those who persecute believers and on those who rejected the Gospel. He will be glorified among his people (If you want to look at this subject in some depth, please refer to *HG5: The Hope of Christ's Coming* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)). Paul highlights that as a result of the increase in the faith and love of the Thessalonians they were spiritually strong enough to persevere under the persecutions and trials they were enduring. Paul reminded the church that God is a gracious God who has equipped them with the faith they needed to be victorious. God was doing great things in their lives through the troubles they experienced. Nothing builds deeper love and respect than suffering and praying together and our deepest relationships are often made when we suffer alongside others who are struggling in life, whether that be illness, bereavement, unemployment etc.

Their steady perseverance was so outstanding that Paul said: *"We boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring"* vs4. This does not mean that Paul is saying: "See what a great church I've planted!" That would be boasting about himself, not about them. Rather, he is saying something like this: *"Have you noticed how powerfully the grace of God is operating in the lives of the Thessalonian believers? The way they withstand the pressures of persecution and of assorted trials is truly remarkable, a compelling testimony to the grace of God. Fortified by their growing faith and love, they just press on and on. What an example! What an encouragement for the rest of us!"* Paul's boasting is nothing other than more praise and thanksgiving to God, spoken about to other churches.

**e. Their example is encouraging others.** George Pitcher: *"The Church at these times becomes both a touchstone of hope and a pillar of strength for those otherwise rendered helpless by despair. It's both what it's for and what it's best at, offering the defiance of an unquenchable and universal love and peace in the face of human darkness and evil."*

How often are we encouraged when we hear of what God is doing in the lives of churches and organisations. One of the wonderful aspects of our regular Mission Focus Sundays is that we can be encouraged to hear of how, and where, God is working through his people in our world. God was doing great things in their lives through the troubles they experienced. They were an example to other Christians who could see that Christianity worked! They saw that God does not desert his children when times are tough, rather he uses it as a time for their faith and trust in Him to grow. People looking on see the authenticity of its members commitment, belief and their support of one another in the face of persecution and they discover that Jesus is real.

Brother Andrew says: *"If we want to leave an indelible mark on the world, there is no more powerful way to do it than by joining in God's purposes through prayer. Our Prayers can go where we cannot. While many things may seem impossible from a human standpoint, in the realm of prayer there are no impossibilities."*

**Conclusion** It is not simply that Paul gives thanks for whatever measure of grace the Thessalonian Christians have achieved, it is the specific elements in his thanksgiving which he brings to his intercessions that is worth noting. If in our prayers we are to develop a model framework for prayer, we must look for signs of grace in the lives of Christians and give God thanks for them.

## Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7