Pray for Me

Romans 15:22-33

Introduction

As we come to this closing section of Paul's letter to the Romans – we find him asking for prayer from the Christians at Rome

Paul often asked churches to pray for Him

II Thessalonians 3:1, 2 – 'Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified just as it did also with you; and that we be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.'

In Romans we read

Romans 15:30-31 – 'Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints.'

It's clear that prayer was a great priority for Paul – and that he coveted the prayers of the church on his behalf – 'Pray for me'

I read a book this last week - written by a former Master's Seminary professor / and pastor / favorite speaker at the Shepherd's conference / head of the D. Min program at the seminary - - - I would've guessed him to be MacArthur's replacement for a time - - - but two years ago – in September 2024 – he was exposed as having an inappropriate / adulterous relationship with a woman - - - and disqualified himself from the ministry

His church in Dallas asked him to resign / his role as professor at Master's was taken away / his spot on the Shepherd's Conference and other conferences removed - - - pretty much every ministry he was involved in at the time – went up in smoke

He just released a book – that is a kind of confession / lessons learned

Steven Lawson: 'I have failed the Lord – terribly. The pit into which I fell was a deep and dark abyss. I hit rock bottom so hard that it shattered my heart into a thousand pieces. My entire life came to a crashing halt. I lost relationships. I forfeited ministries. I squandered trust.' [Mercy in the Wilderness, p. 1]

It's an agonizingly familiar tale of the fall of a spiritual leader

What happened?

In His book he states:

Steven Lawson: 'I became too busy for God. With good intentions, but lacking wisdom, I became a workaholic in the ministry. I know this may sound strange, but serving the Lord was killing my spiritual life. This was all my fault. I could not decline invitations to preach at conferences. I could not turn down opportunities to teach classes. I could not refuse requests to write books . . . these demands became toxic.'

This was a guy – of whom it was not unusual to see people taking books up to him to have him sign them

I never did that with MacArthur or others – seemed a bit worldly

I do have a book signed by R.C. Sproul – it says – 'To Glenn – R.C. Sproul'

Steven Lawson: 'I was flying too many miles away from my wife. Spending too many nights in a hotel, eating too many meals in a restaurant . . . giving too many lectures, recording too many podcasts, writing too many chapters, posting too many social media blurbs.'

Steven Lawson: 'My giftedness exceeded my godliness.'

My two cents:

Preaching made him somebody in this world - - - that is why he couldn't say, 'no' – when his schedule was pushing God to the side / spending too much time away from home / etc.

He writes that he neglected his relationship with God

He neglected prayer

As his ministries evaporated into thin air - - - the realization of his failure to maintain a close walk with God struck home to him

Prayer is vital to our spiritual lives

Jesus told the disciples to watch and pray [a fundamental calling of discipleship] that ye not enter into temptation

The Apostles – in Acts 6 - said

Acts 6:4 – 'But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'

Paul here encourages the Romans to strive together with him in their prayers - - - to agonize together as they pray for the ministry of the Word of God – and for the Apostle

Why pray? Because

James 5:16 – '. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.'

I. The Offering for the Poor – vv. 22-29

Here Paul begins to share his plans for the months ahead

He plans to go to Jerusalem – to drop off an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem – he also desires to go to Spain / to stop off at Rome for a time to see the Christians there

First off – we note a few things about Paul and the will of God

Paul made plans – but his plans were always subject to the Lord's intervening / re-routing / re-directing

As far as we know – Paul never made it to Spain

Paul responded to 'open doors' / 'closed doors'

On one occasion – Paul speaks of being thwarted by Satan

I Thessalonians 2:18 – 'For we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, more than once – and yet Satan thwarted us.'

Paul recognized something of Satanic opposition – and believed it best to drop those plans

The most striking instance of leading in Paul's life – other than the Damascus road is found in Acts 16

Paul and Silas and Timothy were travelling – received the Macedonian vision

Acts 16:6 – 'And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.'

God is putting limits on his ministry

John MacArthur: 'Paul did not try to do the work of several apostles but only the work to which the Lord had specifically called him.'

That's our job – to do what God calls us to do

And it was after this – that Paul received a vision

Acts 16:7-10 – 'And when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithyinia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.'

They went on to Philippi – and founded the church there

We should look for God's guidance in our lives as well

Make it a matter of prayer: 'Lord – lead me to where I can best serve you.' – [open doors / close doors] and then trust God to do that

Oswald Chambers: 'God puts His people where they can glorify Him most, and we are not capable of judging where that is.'

Right now – you are where you can glorify God / you have a sphere of influence / you have resources God has given you / you have time / you have knowledge of God's truth

Paul refers to this offering he has been collecting for the saints in Jerusalem

Romans 15:26 – 'For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.'

Contribution = κοινωνια = fellowship

After the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 – We are told that the Apostles decided not to hinder Paul's mission to the Gentiles – and that Gentiles were not placed under the Mosaic Law requiring circumcision

Then Paul and Barnabas were sent off with the blessing of the other apostles

He refers to this in Galatians 2

Galatians 2:9, 10 – 'and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. They only asked us to remember the poor – the very thing I also was eager to do.'

This appears to be the origin of this collection for the saints

Christians – generally speaking are people who are glad to help out the genuinely needy

Frances Ridley Havergal wrote the hymn – 'Take my life and let it Be'

One line says:

France Ridley Havergal: 'Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.'

Those lines were autobiographical.

At the time she wrote those words - - - she had sent to a church missionary society all her gold and jewelry – including a jewel chest she described as being fit for a countess. She wrote to a close friend: 'I don't need to tell you that I never packed a box with such pleasure.'

Generosity is something Christians find joy in – as we are prompted by the Spirit

Lisa Whelchel – who played Blaire on the Facts of Life - - - was a Christian - - - and wrote a memoir referring back to those years

On one occasion – she wanted to make a donation to some ministry – but her parents / and the adults in her life discouraged her

So she invested in some high-rise buildings in Pittsburgh - - - she says – not too long after – there was a real estate collapse and she lost all that money – and 'The Facts of Life was canceled' - - - by 28 - - - she was broke - -- -she regretted the missed opportunity

Lisa Whelchel: 'God was trying to get me to invest my money in heaven, where it would be safe, but I thought it was too risky to take Him at His word.' [Money, Possessions and Eternity, pp. 287, 288]

When we see Christians sharing their resources with those in need – there is a kind of fellowship that takes place – we see God's grace on display

Galatians 6:10 – '. . . while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.'

God has blessed us – let us bless others

Jesus: 'Freely you have received; freely give'

I have never watched 'The Simpson's' tv show – but this scene made it onto some Christian blogs

In this episode – the family is all seated around the table - and Bart was told to say grace:

He said: 'Dear God – we paid for all this stuff ourselves – so thanks for nothing.'

Not too many people would be that blunt in their prayers – but many people live that way

Little gratitude / no recognition that even health and opportunity are gifts from God's hands

But – if God has blessed us / given to us - - - we want to be sharers / givers

Romans 15:27 – 'For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.'

One view is that this refers to the idea that all of the original apostles were Jews – who took the gospel to these Gentile peoples

More likely – this refers to the idea that Gentiles enter into the covenant blessings God made with Abraham / Israel – we have been grafted into the Olive Tree of God's blessings

Jesus told the woman at the well – 'salvation is from the Jews'

Arnold Fruchtenbaum: 'The church has become a partaker of Jewish spiritual blessings, not a 'taker-over' of the Jewish covenants

We are the wild branches grafted into the Olive Tree of God's covenantal blessings

Think of the language of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:8-9 – "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant . . .'

Old covenant was the Mosaic Law / circumcision / etc.

Jesus established the New Covenant at Calvary – 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'

Gentiles enter into New Covenant blessings thru Jesus Christ

We enjoy spiritual blessings originally promised to the Jews!

II. Dangers, Toils, and Snares – vv. 30-33

Paul says: Pray with me!

'Strive together with me'

Paul uses the Greek term — αγονιζωμαι to refer to our prayers – a term referring to extreme exertion as in an athletic contest / agonize together with me in prayer

Caitlin Clark – in game 2 of the playoff series with the Las Vegas Aces - - - the Fever was fighting to stay alive in the series – in the first quarter - - - Clark snatched the ball away from Aja Wilson – and the look of intensity on her face said it all – it said - - - this ball is mine and I'm keeping it! - - and the play must have been blown dead because she walked away with the ball and yelled to the crowd - - - getting the Fever crowd all fired up

Paul says, 'take that intensity into prayer' – 'Father – deliver me from evil! - - - Satan – is not going to beat me with this sin – He is not going to wreck this fellowship with his poison / He is not going to steal my joy

Acts 12 – Peter rescued thru the prayers of the church

Prayer is hard work!

Colossians 4:12 – 'Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.'

In prayer – while we may not understand it completely – much more is going on than we often realize – spiritual warfare

MLJ: 'Prayer is one of the most difficult things to do because it is the greatest thing.' We are drawing near to God and Satan does not like that – so we can expect struggle and conflict in this area'

Where two or three are gathered in my name – there is Jesus

Prayer is a weapon of spiritual warfare

Ephesians 6:12 - 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places.'

We wrestle in prayer to be faithful to God

We are to persevere in prayer – we aren't to just pray once a week!

Luke 18:1-4 – 'Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. "And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' "And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,

Luke 18:5-8 – 'yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

Prayer is a display of faith

God is able to help / able to come meet our need / to bless us in some way

Hebrews 11:6 – 'But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' [kjv]

What does Paul want them to pray for?

Protection from those who are disobedient

Paul knows there is a price on his head and a bullseye on his back
He had enemies – amongst the Jews

When Paul did make it to Jerusalem - - - and was arrested – some 40 Jews took a vow that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul

Paul was delivered from their death threats – and the book of Acts ends with him under house arrest in Rome

John MacArthur: 'Any theology that belittles the power of prayer or intensity in prayer is heresy.'

The best way to learn to pray is to pray / to pray with someone else - - - to seek the Lord and His blessings / pray for others and God's work in their lives

I still remember the prayers of Earl Vande Krol – the sense of God's presence permeated his prayers

E.M. Bounds: 'Men are never nearer heaven, nearer God, never more Godlike, never in deeper sympathy and truer partnership with Jesus Christ, than when praying.'

Conclusion
Steven Lawson: 'I became too busy for God.'

That is a deadly place to be

Let us never be too busy to pray

Let us be like Jacob – 'I won't let go until you bless me!'

God honors faith like that!