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As we always do as we prepare to study the Word of God, we'll take a moment to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit so that these things will be understandable and meaningful to us and that God can use them to improve us. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you as always for the wonderful privilege we have of being alive in this age of having been saved by your grace and having all of the opportunities and potential that you have built into your plan. We pray that tonight as we study your Word that God the Holy Spirit will be with us, will lead us into all truth, and will make these things a part of the resources in our souls.

We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. We resume our study of the letter to the Romans tonight in the middle of chapter 8. And we have reached a pivotal point in this argument. We have seen highs and lows as Paul builds to a conclusion and then starts a new subject and builds to a conclusion.

We saw him take on the opposing or differing points of view that prevailed in the Christianity of his day. The great philosophy or the great thinking about Christianity that prevailed in Paul's day and in Rome in particular was that pleasing God, living as a Christian, entailed external obedience, conforming to an external standard, and that standard was the law of Moses. And it made sense.

Many of these people were Jews and had grown up with the law of Moses. That's what they had lived their lives by. They had observed the feasts, offered the sacrifices, made the pilgrimages to Jerusalem, trained up their children, strapped the phylacteries, some of them, to their hands and to their foreheads.

And when Jesus Christ came and when the good news about Jesus Christ was preached, these people responded and realized that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He represented the continuance of God's plan. And so they accepted him as their Savior.

But it was a very difficult thing to change their mindset about righteousness, to change their mindset about what was pleasing to God. And so by this time, many of them were very well known in their communities and had been leaders in the synagogue and were looked up to and respected as people who represented righteousness and whose judgment could discern righteousness. And so there was a culture of religion that prevailed even among the Gentiles.

The Gentiles that accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior were brought into the fold of Jewish religion and Jewish Christianity. We have kind of the reverse situation today where we have a largely non-Jewish church and now the minority and the people that wind up coming into the church start out perhaps in the Jewish faith and come to Christ and they have to make the cultural transition out of Judaism and into the Christianity that we understand from the New

Testament. But in Paul's day, it was just the reverse.

Everything was conditioned by the Old Testament and there was very little of the New Testament in existence and so Paul and the other apostles were going around teaching the new thinking and the new objective that God had for this age. And it was different. So Romans is one of the letters that Paul wrote explaining and arguing for this change and this new way of thinking.

We say, well, that was fine for back then, but we've had 2,000 years to figure out God's plan and surely by now that's something we can take for granted. But it really isn't because if we look around at Christianity today, we see that even though the names have changed, the essence of the problem is still the same and we still have a culture that measures righteousness by an external standard. And much of this is unconscious.

It's inherited. It surrounds us like a warm, comfortable blanket that some of us have grown up with and that we've taken for granted and everyone has accepted as the way things ought to be. And we sometimes get drawn up short when we go back to Scripture and look at it for what it is and for what it says.

And what Paul has demonstrated through the seven and a half chapters that we have studied is that righteousness is not what you do, it's what you are. It's what God does on the inside that he's looking for. When we stand at the judgment seat of Christ, he's not going to ask us, how many people did you witness to? How many ministries did you engage in? How much money did you contribute to your church or to local ministries? How many missionaries did you support? God is going to be measuring us as we have seen through every single chapter of this book based on how much we let him do inside our soul.

Where is the fruit of the Spirit? Did we let him create in us love, joy, peace, patience, forbearing with one another, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, self-control, inner characteristics that only God can create? That's what he's looking for because if we put ourselves in the position to be changed by his grace, through his word and through his Spirit, these other things that we know are important and are a part of God's plan, evangelism and ministry and the exercise of spiritual gifts and so forth in the physical world around us, the visible parts of ministry will flow out of that in a natural and God-ordained fashion. But what we have done in our Christian culture and in many of our churches today is to skip that intermediate step of inner transformation and we look in the word of God. We know that God wants people to hear the gospel and be saved.

We know that God wants the widows and orphans to be ministered to. We know that there are things that need help and need changing in this world. And so we say, well, let's cut to the chase.

Let's jump in there and this needs to be done. And so we go in without having our thinking transformed and without being in a position to be used by God in the right time and the right way. And so we are like a bull in the china shop when it comes to ministry and when it comes to overt righteousness.

And in many ways, this letter is excellent for us because it pushes us back to the basics. The first building block of the Christian life after salvation, we find it over in Hebrews chapter 6. The author of Hebrews says, let's go on to maturity, to completion as a believer and not lay again the foundation of, and then he gives the foundation of the Christian life. And he says, let's not go back.

We should already have this foundation. He argues at the end of chapter 5. By this time, you should be ready to be teachers, but you have need that one teach you again the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. And many of us today, that's where we are.

We need to go back and review and entrench in our souls the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. And the very first one that he lists there in Hebrews chapter 6 is change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God. A lot of times we look at that and we say, well, that's salvation.

That's getting out of the old life and into the new. But this is the foundation of the Christian life. This is not salvation in Hebrews chapter 6. He's been talking to believers for five chapters and he has sort of rebuked them at the end of chapter 5 and said, you all ought to be further along than you are.

You ought to know better than to have some of the misunderstandings and the problems that you have. I've got to go back and feed you milk instead of solid food. He says, I don't want to have to lay again this foundation that you should have in your soul.

And the very first block is to change our mind about works, about works that don't flow out of God's transforming power in our soul. Because two people can go out and do a work. You can have man X and man Y drop money in the offering plate, or you can have man X and man Y go out and share the gospel with someone, the very same action.

And to an external viewpoint, to our eye, we say, well, that's good. That's something good has happened there. Money was contributed, the gospel was shared, whatever it might be.

But in God's perspective, one of those constitutes righteousness and the other one is filthy rags. The other one doesn't count. Why doesn't it count? It was a good work to our eye, but it doesn't flow out of God's energy, God's transforming power in the soul.

It doesn't flow out of a transformed believer. And if God just wanted financial aid for all of the churches and ministries, God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. It's no problem for him to support any organization that he wants.

If God wants everyone to have the gospel, which he does, God could do it himself, which in fact we've seen in Romans he does. God the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and righteousness

and judgment. We are sort of minor players in the evangelism process because it's God himself that confronts unbelievers.

It's God himself that does the work of evangelism. We are privileged to be involved in that in sort of a minor way, but salvation is a matter between the individual and the Lord and God the Holy Spirit comes straight in there and faces them with the issue. And if they respond to his leading and his invitation, his conviction, then God will bring believers into place that can give them the information they need to move forward and accept the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if they reject the ministry of God the Holy Spirit to the point that he comes with his conviction, they've already turned down God and everything he has to offer. And we often wonder, well, what about the heathen that have never heard and they're off in these far off lands? If any of those people have an interest in God, God will get them the information they need to accept Christ. And what often happens is that there are whole cultures that reject God and have no interest in him.

And because of that, there hasn't been a need for missionary contact. You could have sent a missionary in there. He could have lived there for 50 years and not been able to lead a single one to Christ because those people have already said no to the Holy Spirit.

And that's what Jesus talked about when he said blaspheming the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin because he's there first. He's the first witness of Jesus Christ. Christ said, I'm going away.

I'm going to send the Spirit. He will take of the things of me and communicate them. When people reject the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, we're not going to be able to change their mind if God could not.

But we're finding out in Romans that God, the Holy Spirit, has a very important role in God's plan in convicting unbelievers and also in the lives of believers. And that's one of the things that we studied last time. We went through many of the different things that God, the Holy Spirit, does according to the Word of God.

And we saw the five things that he does at salvation. And we saw the many things that he does for us as believers. In the most recent context here in Romans chapter 8, we saw that he represents us before God in his intercession ministry.

And Paul says, we do not know how to pray as we ought to. And so God, the Holy Spirit, makes intercession on our behalf. Now, this is an interesting statement for Paul to make.

We don't know how to pray right. And so God, the Holy Spirit, does it for us. And yet, all over Scripture, we're encouraged to pray.

And yet, apparently, no matter how well we study this subject, Paul the Apostle includes himself when he says, we do not know how to pray as we should. And so what exactly is involved in prayer? We certainly want to pray as well as we can and recognize that this is something that we

have as a privilege. It's something we have as an imperative, something we need to do, that we're commanded to do.

So it would be good, perhaps, at this point to pause and take a look at the subject of prayer for us as believers in this age and what role the Holy Spirit plays in our prayer life. So I've reviewed some of the Scriptures here and I've organized this into just a few points which will basically involve, first of all, what does Scripture say about the form of our prayer? What shape should it take? Are there things that should be in our prayers? Are there things that maybe should not be in our prayers? What kind of prayers does Scripture talk about us praying? What are the characteristics? What are the features that ought to be in our prayer? And what are the principles that guide our prayer life? As we look at these from Scripture, this is going to help us take advantage of the gift of God the Holy Spirit that we have. There's been so much said in our modern day about the ministry of the Spirit and how active is He? Is there healing? Are there these active spiritual gifts that are involved in different segments of Christianity? Have different views about that? What does Scripture say about the ministry of God the Holy Spirit in our lives? And so what we want to do is go in and see what the Bible has to say.

And this is one of the areas where He plays a very prominent role. So first of all, under the subject of prayer, we have some general guidance. And it's amazing that these are perhaps the most fundamental principles of our prayer and yet you hear them violated regularly by believers who probably ought to know better.

So first of all, we know that Scripture teaches, if you're taking points, this will be point one, all prayer is addressed to God the Father. Now right away we say, well now, wait a minute, Jesus Christ is my Savior. Can't I pray to the Lord Jesus? And generally speaking throughout the Bible, the vast overwhelming examples that we have all address prayer to God the Father.

And we have this, for example, in Matthew 6, 9. This is one of the places where the Lord's prayer is recorded. And Jesus said to the disciples, when you pray, this is how to do it. Our Father who art in heaven.

So right away we have the Lord's example that tells us to address prayer to the Father. We have this in many other places. For example, I'll just give you representative passages so that we don't wind up being here because the Bible is full of things on prayer.

But you might note 1 Peter 1, 17. Peter says, if you call on God the Father, and he implies there that this is the person that we normally call upon, God the Father. The prayers of Paul that are contained in the epistles, every one of these, when he says, I bow my knees to the Father, in my prayers I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, to do this and that and the other.

For example, in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 17 and following, he goes into an explanation there

in chapter 2 of Ephesians. And when he gets back to talking about prayer again in Ephesians 3, 14, he says, I bow my knees to God the Father. And so there's a very strong emphasis in Scripture on praying to God the Father.

Now, I will say that if you look real hard, you can find at least one example that I know of where someone prayed to the Lord Jesus. And it's hard to find, but it's there. It's in Acts, the stoning of Stephen.

I can't remember if that's Acts 7 or Acts 9. But Stephen, just before he disappears under the pile of rocks, says, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And of course, when he looked up in heaven, he got a standing reception from the Lord Jesus Christ, who's normally seated at the right hand of God the Father. He looked into heaven and saw the heavens open and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of the Father, which I think is a very high honor for Stephen.

And seeing Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father, he said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. So he might be forgiven for breaking protocol in that circumstance, which certainly seems to be appropriate. But generally speaking, all prayers address to God the Father.

You can put with the other Scriptures that I've mentioned, Colossians 1, 3. And those are just a few of many that could be cited. Now, we pray to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this, again, is very well documented.

Perhaps the best place is John chapter 14. For example, verses 13 and 14, Jesus says, whatever you ask in my name, that I will do in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

It's a very interesting statement because throughout the Scriptures, we have this pattern that God the Father decides the policy. He is the author of the plan. Jesus Christ executes the plan of the Father.

And God the Holy Spirit provides the operating energy for that to be accomplished. And this statement of Jesus Christ follows that pattern very carefully. We pray to God the Father.

God the Father authorizes the Son to act. And Jesus Christ says, whatever you ask in my name to God the Father, I will do it. I will perform it.

And of course, in that context, we have some conditions on that. We can't say, I could really use a new Maytag, and Jesus Christ is going to perform that. And if we look here, he talks about the one who has his words and keeps them.

He it is that loves me. We will hear his prayer. We will dwell with him and so forth.

But prayer is addressed to God the Father in the name of the Son. And thirdly, prayer is addressed to the Father in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. And this gets

back to our subject, which has been the ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

This is found, for example, in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 18. Ephesians 6, 18 is talking about the armor that the believer wears, the waist girded with truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and so forth, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Then in verse 18, he says, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

And this tells us that we need to be conscious of the fact that when we are praying, God the Holy Spirit is active in his ministry to us and active in his ministry on our behalf to God the Father. We'll see that when we get into the vocabulary of prayer this evening, what exactly is involved as God the Holy Spirit acts on our behalf when we pray. But it is in the Spirit.

You might put with that also Romans 8, 26, which is our context, where he says, likewise the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And in verse 27, he continues, he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Now, that's the form of prayer in terms of to whom we speak.

And we've noted in the past that when we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, this is more than just invoking his name like a talisman or a good luck charm. We form the content of our prayer and then tack on the end, I pray this in Jesus' name. I really think praying in the name of the Lord Jesus has been abused in some cases.

The most obvious example is when you watch TV and you see all kinds of different things being prayed in Jesus' name. And you hear people just repeating Jesus' name over and over as though by repetition of his name in particular, this is going to do something that simply making a request to God the Father and mentioning his name once would not accomplish. And we've reviewed in the past the fact that this is like an ambassador.

Benjamin Franklin was the United States ambassador to France late in his life. And he would go and conduct business with the court of the King of France and he was an ambassador of the United States. So he would speak in the name of the United States.

And he didn't walk into the palace of the King of France and get up there in front of the throne and say, King, I'd really like to have a nice house on the Riviera down there and if you could arrange for me to have a coach and six horses and a butler and a maid. And I ask this in the name of the United States of America. You see the contrast there.

When you speak in the name of a country or in the name of a person, you're asking on their behalf. You're representing their interests. And this kind of puts a whole different cast on our prayers, doesn't it? Because when we go to the Father and we say, I'm asking the things that I have just brought to your throne on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm asking them in his name with his interests at heart. That really changes our mindset, especially if we remember to do that at the beginning of our prayer and say, as I go before the throne of grace, I want to bring requests before the Lord and express my thinking before God representing the interests of Jesus Christ. That implies that we have to know what Jesus' interests are.

If we're going to pray in his name, what does he want to be accomplished? Does he really want this person who's dying of cancer to be completely healed? Does he really want this job that we're praying about or this person that we're praying about and we're saying, Lord, please do X, Y, and Z in this person's life. And we put that in the name of the Lord Jesus. Have we really thought about what God's objectives, what Jesus Christ's objectives are in that situation? Sometimes we experience an illness or we see someone in our periphery experience an illness and we pray that God will heal them.

Do we really stop and think that God might be working in that circumstance to teach us something, to teach that person something, to give them an opportunity to learn things that they would not learn at the peak of their health, to let the light of the Lord Jesus Christ shine in their life under that particular kind of suffering? God has obviously allowed this circumstance to come into their life to begin with if they're a believer. What might he be up to in that circumstance? If someone is under pressure, if we find ourselves under pressure, what could God be up to? Does he really have as his objective giving us the millennial kingdom and perfect environment in this life or does he allow suffering and testing and trial for a purpose? And if we start trying to think through what could the purpose be, what are the opportunities that God might be doing, then when we pray in Jesus' name, we can do it with a whole heart because we're praying with his objective in our mind. So it's something to keep in mind.

Secondly, our second major point here is what should be included in our prayer? If you were going to outline, have a general outline to follow when we pray, it might be a healthy thing to look at what Scripture says can be included in our prayer or should be included in our prayer. Sometimes we're kind of like little children who would be like tonight. You know, we've met for a specific purpose.

We're sitting here and the children are very well behaved. They're in another room doing something. And if one of them were to come rushing in and say, Daddy, Daddy, my movie's over and I want to put another one on.

You know, that child isn't sensitive to our objective or our purpose or what we're doing and so forth. And of course, we love them and don't climb all over them for that. But hopefully as our children grow and mature and come to understand what we're doing and when we do it and so forth, they time their requests.

They are sensitive to what we're doing when they come and make requests of us. And they don't

always just ask on their own behalf. Can I have this? Can I have that? As our children mature, they start to think about other people.

And you know, my sisters need some help or my brother needs some help. And as they grow, they start thinking about other things. So it's helpful for us to think about what the content of our prayer, if we hope to operate as mature believers, might be.

One of the important elements that should be a part of our prayer, according to Scripture, is acknowledgement or confession of our personal sins, our failures. The most famous Scripture in this regard is 1 John 1, 9. If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. One of the things that's often overlooked in this regard is that if we fail to seek forgiveness from God for our sins, He's going to wait until we do.

He's looking for acknowledgement. He doesn't let us just run amok and disregard our lifestyle or our failures and so forth and just say, well, you know, the blood of Christ covers that. And, you know, we have this pattern even in the Old Testament where there was a necessity to acknowledge because that's a part of our growth.

If we never told our children what they did wrong, if we went into training and nobody ever told us the wrong things we did, we'd never get good at anything. So it's not just a matter of wearing a hair shirt or afflicting ourselves and groveling before the Lord. It's a constructive sort of self-critique that helps us grow.

And it also reminds us of the necessity to forgive each other. We reviewed last time the picture of Jesus in the upper room washing the disciples' feet as a picture of forgiveness, not salvation forgiveness. Jesus told Peter, I don't need to give you another bath.

I don't need to wash you all over. I just need to wash your feet. And this is a picture of the ongoing road dust that we pick up as we fail and go through life.

And Jesus said, as I have done for you, you should do for others. And we need to forgive each other. And for example, in Matthew chapter 6, verses 12 through 15, Jesus talks about this very thing in another context.

He says, when he's talking about the Lord's Prayer, and he includes that famous phrase, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Or forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. We kind of blow right through that part of the Lord's Prayer.

But what does that say? Forgive me to the extent that I have forgiven others. That's the pattern of prayer. Forgive me as I have forgiven others.

If I haven't forgiven others, I am not forgiven. And that sounds like kind of a strong statement. But what does Jesus say in verse 14 here of Matthew 6? If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Now, he's talking here to believers, isn't he? He's talking to people who are going to the Father and acknowledging this is not salvation. He's not saying, you know, this is not a salvation context.

This is the forbearance and the love and the endurance and the longsuffering that we express toward each other. And this should draw us up short a little bit. Is there someone in our periphery that has wronged us or that has stabbed us in the back? Or that every time we think about them, it's a painful, unhappy, dark cloud type of thought and we haven't really gotten over it.

And when we see that person or when we're in that environment, we just really have a hard time. That is an indication that we haven't really forgiven them in our heart. We haven't said, you know, it's a fallen world.

We're fallen people. And Jesus said in this world, we're going to have tribulation. And I got some of it from this person.

But that's life in this world. And to not hold that grudge and not have that dark cloud and be unable to treat that person the way Christ would treat them. You know, one of the hardest commands we have in the Bible is love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who have spitefully used you. We can't do that from the heart if we haven't forgiven them.

And if we haven't forgiven them, there's going to be an issue between us and our Heavenly Father. We're not going to be forgiven either. So confession of sin, acknowledgement, looking at ourselves with that laser beam perception that we like to turn on each other.

We need to turn on ourselves and acknowledge these things before the Father. You can put with this Hebrews 10.22. Read that right quick. Hebrews 10.22 says, Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

This is talking about drawing near to God the Father. He's used the illustration of the temple curtain that was torn in twain. And we now have access to the holiest place.

So let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. And this is a reference back to Leviticus, to the cleansing rituals that were physical and external pictures of what's supposed to be happening on the inside. We have to make a conscious effort to sanctify ourselves as we draw near to God.

And that's probably where we should start. That would certainly be a good thing to begin with, so that we're then on firm footing as we come before the Father with the other parts of our prayer. So after confession, thanksgiving.

It's amazing how many times the Bible encourages us to be thankful. I'll just give a few representative passages here, such as Ephesians 5, verse 20. And in that passage, Paul encourages us, right after he says, do not be drunk with wine in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns, spiritual songs, singing, making melody in your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a great picture of the pattern of our prayer, isn't it? Giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. But notice that little phrase there, giving thanks always for all things. So my radiator hose that broke this week on Wednesday on my foreign car, and then my radiator hose that broke Thursday on my domestic car, that's part of all things.

And it's something to be thankful for. It may be difficult to figure out why, but there's not much way of getting out of all things and all ways. So giving thanks is an important part of our approach to God.

And a lot of that depends on the way we view life. Are we living in the external, or are we living in our soul where the Lord dwells? First Thessalonians 5.18 is another passage in this regard. And I'll just give you these that you can look up so that we'll finish our study tonight.

In addition to First Thessalonians 5.18, you can put Colossians 3.17 and Colossians 4.2. All of these passages talk about thanksgiving. If you get a concordance and look up thanksgiving and just look at the New Testament passages, it's a convicting list. There's a lot of passages that tell us to be thankful.

And in Colossians 3.17, you'll also notice that it once again talks about addressing prayer to God the Father. So we've got two of our elements of prayer here, confession of sin and thanksgiving, being thankful. And we're pretty much concentrating on New Testament passages here, but there are many Old Testament passages.

Remember in Psalm 100, where it says, be thankful unto him and bless his name for the Lord is good. And it says, come before the Lord with joy and with singing and so forth. There are just too many passages to mention there.

Now, a third element is intercession. Now, I'm going to use these words in sort of a technical sense, and I'm going to distinguish between intercession and petition. And you could mix these words, but we're going to use intercession for prayer on behalf of others.

And we'll use petition for prayer for ourselves. So these would be our third and fourth categories or elements, broad areas of our prayer. And I put intercession first because we're encouraged to consider others before ourselves.

And it's a good measure of self-discipline if we can remember to pray for others before we break

out our list of personal requests and personal petitions. So that gives us four elements, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and petition. Now under intercession, there are, again, a plethora of passages, but I wanted to work that word in for Paul, a plethora.

Ephesians 1, verse 15 is an example of Paul interceding. He says, whenever I think of you all, I ask the God of our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory, that he may give to you a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation and the full knowledge of him. And the whole last half of chapter one of Ephesians is a record of Paul's prayer on behalf of other believers.

And that's a great thing to look at. If you could have an apostle right here in the room and say, what is the Christian life all about? What should my goal be since I'm a believer? What should I be shooting for on a day-to-day basis? We have a record of what Paul prayed for believers in the last half of Ephesians 1. He says, this is what I pray for you. I pray that God will reveal to you the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints and the great section there where you've got all five Greek words for power, *energeo* and *iskuo* and *dunamis* and so forth.

They're all, it's all bound up in that. That's probably my favorite passage in the whole New Testament is the last half of Ephesians 1. In fact, I did both my short and my long Greek exegeticals on that passage because it sums up the entire Christian life. That's what our goal is.

And that's contained in Paul's prayer. And that's an intercession. He says, this is what I pray on your behalf.

And several of Paul's epistles contain these things. You can look in Colossians 1, verse 3 and following. And he says, on every remembrance of you, this is what I pray on your behalf.

And we've studied through Colossians 1 in the recent past. And he mentions this again in Colossians 4, verse 3 and 12. Let's just turn, we'll just look at this one tonight.

Colossians sums up many of these other passages. Paul says in chapter 1, verse 3 of Colossians, and once again, he starts out his prayer. He says, we give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.

Ever since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints, because of the hope that is laid up for you in heaven. And there's that great triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. All in one passage there, one sentence.

And he says in verse 9, for this reason, since we heard of your faith and hope and love, we do not cease to pray for you and to ask. Here's what he asks. And this is what we can ask for each other.

Ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Where does that knowledge come from? It comes from this book we're looking at tonight. It comes from the word of God.

Under the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, who enables us as carnal individuals to understand spiritual truth. So he asks that we may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. So that.

This is the reason. It's not an end in itself. We have, in some cases, an academic Christianity where we sit, soak, and sour.

We say, I've learned this great truth. It's stimulating. It's fascinating to me.

I now understand a passage I didn't understand before. And that's wonderful. But Paul says here in verse 10 that there's a purpose for this.

We learn and get all of this great wisdom so that we may walk worthy of the Lord. And there's a cause and effect. Where does the worthy walk come from? It comes from being filled with wisdom and knowledge.

Being filled with wisdom and knowledge is not the goal of the Christian life. And it's a very sad thing. If we stop there, we can wind up being like the Pharisees who knew an awful lot and all it did was puff them up because there was no exhale.

There was no application of it. It didn't work itself out in divine good. But the purpose of getting that wisdom and understanding is so that we may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him and being fruitful in every good work.

We don't just jump straight in and start trying to bear fruit. We have to start with that knowledge and wisdom and spiritual understanding. And that enables us to be fruitful in every good work.

And then we cycle. We get into a loop here. We go back and increase in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might according to His power for patience and long-suffering with joy.

And if we see ourselves, or if we look around and see other believers who are laboring in the vineyard, so to speak, and out there ministering and witnessing and striving mightily to get a lot of these things done, if we don't see joy and if we don't see patience and if we don't see the ability to endure under pressure over weeks and months and even years, something has happened to this cycle. We've lost the wisdom and knowledge because that's where the power of God comes into the life of the believer. It doesn't come by prayer alone.

It comes by being self-disciplined and exposing ourselves to the truth of the Word of God, actively seeking the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit to activate that, remind us of it, change us with it, use it like a sharp sword and divide to the center of our being with it. And that is what creates in us patience and long-suffering that's supernatural. It's not something we generate.

It's not something we grit our teeth and produce. God puts it in us because He's transformed us.

So this is something we can pray for each other.

Paul is praying this on their behalf. So that's a part of intercession. And there are many, many examples.

There's a great passage in Acts. Remember when Peter was in prison and it says that the whole church was praying for him earnestly? In the Greek, it says they were stretching themselves out in prayer on his behalf. And that night, an angel came, kicked him in the side, woke him up and let him out.

And this church had been praying for him in a stretched-out fashion all day long. And that was intercession. So it's a great thing.

It's a great opportunity we have to... It's one of the great overlooked ministries that has a great effect. And those of us that have been the objects and the recipients of that kind of support from other believers know what a powerful thing that is. And it's an often overlooked opportunity that we have.

But if you're writing these scriptures down, you can put with this Matthew 5, 44. You can put 1 Timothy 2, 1 through 8. Remember when Paul says, Timothy, I urge men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer. Pray for those that have the rule over you.

Pray for governments. Pray for this, that, and the other. Pray that the gospel will go forth.

1 Timothy 2, the first part of that chapter, is a great discussion on what our prayer should involve. And you can also put Hebrews 13, 18, where the author of Hebrews says, Pray for us that we will be able to teach the truth and preach the truth in boldness. And then our fourth category here is petition.

Now we're down to our favorite part, where we get to bring our requests before the Lord. Hebrews 4, 16 is a great passage in this regard. And probably the most famous one is Philippians 4, 6. Paul says in Philippians 4, 6, and a lot of us have memorized this, Be careful for nothing, it says in the Old King James.

The New King James says, Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the God of peace, or the peace of God, actually, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Notice it doesn't say guard your bodies.

It doesn't say guard your ministry. It doesn't say guard your activities. Because it's the hearts and minds that God wants to win.

It's the hearts and minds that God wants to change. And all of these other things flow out of that. And with that peace of God in the center there, these other things are going to be natural.

They're going to be guided and orchestrated by God, and will glorify God in their execution. So in everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. So we do have the privilege of going and representing ourself before God, and letting him know what's on our hearts.

We're going to see some very interesting things in our second session tonight, in the vocabulary that is used in the New Testament, these Greek words that have different shades of meaning with regard to prayer, in terms of how we represent ourself before God, and what the nature of these things is. But that's sort of the areas in which we can group the parts of our prayer and it's a good exercise to just think, well, let me just kind of sequence my prayer and get my foot washing out of the way, acknowledge my sin before the Lord, and take advantage of his promise to forgive and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. And then think about the things to be thankful for.

And it's funny, because after we get through the thanksgiving phase, sometimes that changes the petition phase, because we realize the way that God is working, and we don't necessarily ask for him to take away some burden, because we can see things in it to be thankful for. And then intercession on the behalf of fellow believers and those who may still need to come to Christ and so forth, and then finally petition. I'm going to quickly give some principles and then we'll pause for our break.

In fact, we may not get through the principles. Let me just give you a thought here. And this is probably, there are so many different things you could say about prayer, but I think this is probably the single most important thing to think about when we pray.

And that is the effectiveness of our prayer is directly related to, in fact, it's an expression of our faith. Faith is a word that has been used a lot and used to the point where we don't often really think about what it means, what it involves. Trust is a little bit fresher in our mind.

And if we think about faith or we think about trusting God, faith is not sort of an abstract hope that everything will turn out all right, because unbelievers can do that. An unbeliever can get through a disaster, a fire or a flood.