

CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER: A LIFE OF PRAYER, PT. 2
ROMANS 1:8-10

Loneliness is an age-old problem, and in Japan one restaurant has come up with a novel solution. The owners of Tokyo's Moomin House Café observed many customers who came alone and sat alone. So they set about to cultivate a lonely-friendly environment by working a little “anti-loneliness magic.” The café's solution?

To save its lone customers from the awkward perils of solo dining, the café kindly seats diners with stuffed animal companions called Moomins, a family of white hippo-like characters created by Finnish illustrator and writer Tove Jansson. Moomins are brought to each table so that patrons — solo or in groups — can have a turn sitting with them...[And] weekends are packed all day long. [[“Japan's ‘anti-loneliness’ cafe goes viral.”](#) accessed 7/22/14.]

Now I may be an exception, but I think sitting with a large stuffed animal at the table will make me feel more lonely and advertize even more loudly — “He's alone!” But that's just me...

The problem of loneliness is a real one in our culture. And it is a real experience even in the church. A generation ago, A. W. Tozer was one of the most prominent and influential pastors in this country; yet after his death, his wife said: “My husband was so close to God, a man of such deep prayer, always on his knees, that he could not communicate with me or our family. No one knew what a lonely life I had, especially after the kids left home.” An even greater tragedy in that story is that shortly before his death, Tozer commented to another pastor, “I've had a lonely life.”

Unfortunately, Tozer's loneliness was rooted in some unbiblical thinking. He wrote, “Most of the world's great souls have been lonely. Loneliness seems to be one price the saint must pay for his saintliness.” And, “the loneliness of the Christian results from his walk with God in an ungodly world, a walk that must often take him away from the fellowship of good Christians as well as from that of the unregenerate world.” I want to be respectful of the man, but that's just wrong. And it led to unnecessarily poor and lonely relationships for both Tozer and his wife. How tragic.

It is especially tragic because Tozer was a leader in the very organism God has designed to minister to the relational needs of people — the church. We need each other, and the church is the place where that need is fulfilled.

At GBC, my perception is that we do a pretty good job, generally, of caring for one another. But for some time, the elders have been concerned about cultivating a greater sense of love and community in

our church body. So one of the things that we planned was to make some changes to our Sunday morning worship time in the fall (which we will be talking about more in coming weeks). But even more than those program changes, we want to deepen the culture of community and fellowship here. So I planned to do a 4-part series of sermons on community and relationships on communion Sundays during the summer; and that has now been expanded into a longer series of sermons as we make our way through Paul's introductory remarks in Romans 1 — a section in which Paul models how a church cares for one another through:

- ✓ A Life of Prayer (vv. 8-10)
- ✓ A Life of Service (vv. 11-14)
- ✓ A Life of Gospel Preaching (vv. 15-17)

We began considering how we pray for one another last Sunday. Here's what Paul says —

BELIEVERS WHO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER.

What will those prayers be like? In these three verses, Paul models six attributes of a growing prayer life. If we care for one another, we will pray for one another, and when we pray for one another, these are six attributes that will be present in our prayers.

1. **The Content of Prayer:** GRATITUDE (v. 8a)
2. **The Object of Prayer:** GOD (v. 8b)
3. **The Authentication of Prayer:** GOSPEL DESIRES (v. 9a)
4. **The Frequency of Prayer:** REGULAR (v. 9b)
5. **The Submission of Prayer:** GOD'S WILL (v. 10a)
6. **The Desire of Prayer:** SERVICE (v. 10b)

In these verses, Paul models six attributes of a growing prayer life for others.

1. The Content of Prayer: GRATITUDE (v. 8a)

- Paul thanked God for the Roman church *because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world*. Their saving faith had produced a life of obedience and transformation (16:19). And that transformation was widely known — *throughout the whole world*.
 - ✓ Perhaps that was partially because the Jews (including Jewish converts to Christ) had been persecuted and expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2); and additionally, Jews and Gentiles were living in harmony in this young church (after the Jews were allowed to return under Nero, after Claudius died).
 - ✓ Paul is thrilled to see the overall progress of the gospel and their obedience to Christ. Paul is always thrilled when people exhibit Christlikeness (e.g., Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:4).
- Be intentional to look for the progress of faith in others — that implies three things:
 - ✓ We need to pay attention to the progress of *others* — there is a tendency when praying to be me-centered and selfish. I pray for my needs, my schedule, my sin, my burdens. Paul is attentive to the needs and growing maturity of *others*.
 - ✓ At times we will need to overlook areas of weakness in others (e.g., example of God, Ps. 78:38f) and see where they *are* growing (and if they are believers and possessors of the Spirit of God, there *will* be fruit). Wherever we see evidence of Christ in others, we should be grateful.
 - ✓ We need to purposely pray with gratitude. The flesh is prone to complain and be ungrateful. Cultivate gratitude (1 Thess. 5:16-18), and you will have ample content to pray.

Another attribute of a growing prayer life is the object of prayer —

2. The Object of Prayer: GOD (v. 8b)

- Paul says when he prays with gratitude, *I thank my God...* Instead of thanking the Romans for their maturity, Paul thanks *God*. And by thanking God, it is an acknowledgement that God is the One who has given the gift — God is behind the progress the Roman believers are making spiritually. He is the One to be credited for their progress.

- Specifically, Paul thanks ***my God***. Paul has intimacy with God because of Christ — Paul offers thanks to God ***through Jesus Christ***. This is a unique phrase and what Paul means with it is, “Christ is the one who has created access to God so that I can offer thanks.” Cf. 1 Tim. 2:5.
- Gratitude in prayer is a way to affirm the real giver of all the gifts we receive and the progress of all men’s faith. Everything we have comes from the gracious hand of God. And then let’s also be sure to acknowledge why we have access to thank Him — because Christ has made us friends with the One who was our enemy. He has reconciled us to Him and given us access to God and His throne (which means we should also thank Christ for that!).

A third attribute of a growing prayer life is cultivating gospel desires —

3. A Stimulant for Prayer: **GOSPEL DESIRES** (v. 9a)

- As Paul prays, he does something a little unusual — he appeals to God as a witness of his prayer life — ***for God...is my witness***. How do we know that Paul is praying in with gratitude for the Romans?
 - ✓ We know Paul is praying this way because that is the way he serves Christ — ***whom I serve in my spirit*** (i.e., joyfully) ***in the preaching of the gospel of His Son***. That Paul is preaching the gospel everywhere he goes is an authentication of his prayers for the Romans.
 - ✓ Because Paul joyfully proclaims the gospel it naturally follows that he also will pray for those to whom he ministers. There is a connection between praying for others and serving others. And that connection is that we know that we are incapable of changing men’s hearts; we are dependent on God, so we must pray that He will do His work.
- God changes hearts and produces salvation; and when we believe that, we will be stimulated to pray. That’s why Paul asks the Colossians to pray for him (4:2-6).
- If you want to pray more, cultivate a desire for unbelievers to come to know Christ. You will not lack for things to pray. Many of us have unbelievers in our family and we work with unbelievers, live next to unbelievers, and do business with unbelievers. They are our loved ones and friends and if they don’t repent, they are headed to an eternity in Hell. And the only way that will change is if God changes them. So we pray. Stimulate your prayer life by deepening your understanding of Hell and God’s wrath and by loving people enough so that you don’t want them to go there.

A fourth attribute of a growing prayer life is — the frequency of prayer...

4. The Frequency of Prayer: REGULAR (v. 9b)

- How often should we pray for one another? Look at what Paul did...
 - ✓ He said about his prayers for the Romans, *how unceasingly I make mention of you* (v. 9b) and then, *always in my prayers making request* (v. 10a).
 - ✓ Now Paul does not mean, “every moment of every day he is always and only praying for the Roman church and believers.” That is neither possible nor practical. He has to sleep sometime and give his attention to other tasks besides prayer, and he also needs to pray for others besides the Romans. So what Paul means is that he is regularly, repeatedly praying for the Romans.
 - He prays repeatedly through his regular times of prayer during the day. Often Jews would pray several hours each day at regularly scheduled times (e.g., Dan. 6:13). So he undoubtedly prayed for the Romans during these prayer times.
 - When Paul says “pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17), it probably is a reference to those regular prayer times; but it also implies a readiness to pray whenever someone comes to mind — and that also was likely part of Paul’s practice. In fact that’s implied by *mention*.
 - ✓ The word *mention* at the end of v. 9 means “remembrance,” so it has the idea that Paul regularly thought about the Romans and as they came to his mind, he prayed for them. And he remembers them in prayer despite never having visited the church and without personally knowing many.

- This was Paul’s pattern with other churches as well:
 - ✓ Rom. 15:30 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,
 - ✓ 2 Th. 1:11-12 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and *the* Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ Eph. 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,
 - ✓ Col. 1:9-12a For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father...

- What’s interesting about this is that evidently some of these believers were never taken off his prayer list. He regularly prayed for them all. Whenever anyone came to mind, he prayed for them, and he also appeared to have a systematic pattern for praying for all people.
 - ✓ While the reasons vary, all of us need prayer all the time — even those who are faithful and “well.”
 - ✓ One simple way you can do that is systematically pray through the church directory. You don’t have to pray for everybody every day, but pray sequentially through all the names (which will also stimulate you to ask them for their specific needs).
- We may not be able to pray all the time about everything; but we can pray on a regular basis for all the people whom the Lord has put in our lives. Suggestions for how to pray:
 - ✓ Pray immediately (with him) for anyone who asks you to pray specifically for some need.
 - ✓ Pray for some people every day (spouse, children, parents, immediate significant needs). Pray daily through your schedule for the day (anticipated meetings) and with gratitude and prayer at the end of the day for people with whom you’ve interacted.
 - ✓ Pray daily for lists of people (though perhaps not the same people each day) — missionaries, church ministries, other ministries, church directory, etc.
 - ✓ Pray weekly for less urgent requests for people you know.
 - ✓ Pray monthly (or as people come to mind) for more distant relationships, friends.
 - ✓ This helps us to pray “concentrically” outward for the people with whom the Lord has given us the most responsibility and ministry.

A fifth attribute of a growing prayer life is submission to God’s will —

5. The Submission of Prayer: GOD’S WILL (v. 10a)

- Paul wanted to go to Rome (15:24), but he had wanted to go to Rome for some time and the Lord kept preventing him from getting there (1:13; 15:22).
- So Paul kept praying and working — and at the same time, he was content and at peace when the Lord answered his prayer request with a “no.” How could Paul be content with “no?”
 - ✓ He was content because he prayed *by the will of God*. That is, Paul’s prayer was also offered in submission to God’s greater purposes. He understood that while God gave him good and godly desires, because he did not know all God’s purposes, Paul did not always know what was absolutely best in every circumstance. But God did. So if God said, “no,” Paul took that as an answer that was better than if he had said “yes.”

- ✓ And the same is true for us. We have desires when we pray; often those desires are good. Yet for some reason that may be unknown to us, God chooses to answer, “no.” Rest in the fact that if God says, “no,” the “no” is God’s best for you.
- ✓ James Boice, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia offered a clear testimony of that when he was diagnosed with cancer a number of years ago. Shortly after the diagnosis, and the last time he would speak publically in his church he said this:

If I were to reflect on what goes on theologically here, there are two things I would stress. One is the sovereignty of God. That’s not novel. We have talked about the sovereignty of God here forever. God is in charge. When things like this come into our lives, they are not accidental. It’s not as if God somehow forgot what was going on, and something bad slipped by. It’s not the answer that Harold Kushner gave in his book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. God does everything according to his will. We’ve always said that.

But what I’ve been impressed with mostly is something in addition to that. It’s possible, isn’t it, to conceive of God as sovereign and yet indifferent? God’s in charge, but he doesn’t care. But it’s not that. God is not only the one who is in charge; God is also good. Everything he does is good. And what Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, says is that we have the opportunity by the renewal of our minds—that is, how we think about these things— actually to prove what God’s will is. And then it says, “His good, pleasing, and perfect will.” Is that good, pleasing, and perfect to God? Yes, of course, but the point of it is that it’s good, pleasing, and perfect to us. If God does something in your life, would you change it? If you’d change it, you’d make it worse. It wouldn’t be as good. So that’s the way we want to accept it and move forward, and who knows what God will do?

- All believers should pray their requests according to the will of God because (three reasons):
 - ✓ That is the way the Spirit prays for us (8:26-27)
 - ✓ That is the way Christ prayed (Mt. 26:39, 42, 44)
 - ✓ And it is the way Christ has taught us to pray (Mt. 6:10)
- So Paul models a joyful acceptance of God’s will and sovereign purposes, whatever they will be. But notice some other things at the same time:
 - ✓ Paul persisted in praying, even when God was saying (for a time), “No.” It’s appropriate to keep praying for godly desires (e.g., salvation of sinners) even if God doesn’t immediately answer, “Yes.”
 - ✓ Submission to the will of God stimulates us to trust God. Our flesh is prone to trust self and not trust God (e.g., Mk. 9:24 — “I do believe; help my unbelief”).
 - ✓ Submission to the will of God also teaches us that hindrances are sometimes part of God’s plan; they teach us perseverance and they refine our desires (to make them more godly) and they teach us to rejoice in God and not in receiving our desires (e.g., **5:2-5**).

- ✓ Submission to the will of God teaches us to be content with the way God answers, “Yes.” Paul eventually did make it to Rome — in fact, he got there twice. The first time he arrived as a prisoner who had been imprisoned under false charges, and he was in Rome under house arrest for two years. And then he was released (and perhaps then went to Spain), only to be arrested again, brought back to Rome and this time placed in a dungeon and ultimately martyred. Yet even though his request wasn’t answered the way he wanted, he was still content with God’s plan (e.g., 2 Tim. 4:17-18).
- So when you pray for others, pray with confidence as those prayers are shaped by God’s Word; be persistent to pray if the requests aren’t answered immediately, and be content when God says, “No” that He has something even better for you than what you are praying.

A sixth and final attribute of a growing prayer life is service —

6. The Desire of Prayer: SERVICE (v. 10b)

- I’ve said from the beginning of this series that one of the chief reasons for this letter is for Paul to authenticate the truthfulness of his gospel teaching so that the Romans would support him and be the base of his operation in his ministry to Spain (15:20, 23ff). That’s true.
- Yet Paul also wanted to see the Romans to minister the Scriptures to them (15:29; 1:11-12). What Paul really wanted for the Romans was to see them, be with them, and serve them in ministry.
 - ✓ His desires were not selfish, but service — “Lord, let me get to Rome so I can help them.”
 - ✓ So as Paul prayed, he prayed not only that the Lord would make it possible for him to go to Rome (v. 10b), but that he also would have a fruitful ministry when he arrived in Rome.
- This is a reminder to pray for our ministries:
 - ✓ Pray for your personal ministry and service (“Lord make me effective when I use my gifts...”)
 - ✓ Pray for the ministry and service of others in the body and other ministries of the church (pray for the various ministries [use the bulletin for starters] and the various people who are involved in those ministries).
 - Pray for the individuals who will be sharing the gospel on July 4
 - Pray for SS teachers (your own and your children’s and others) — both Saturday & Sunday
 - Pray for AWANA leaders on Wednesdays and small group leaders on the days they meet
 - Pray for men’s and women’s ministries and leaders
 - Pray for counselors and counseling ministry (& BCDC)
 - Pray for missionaries

- Pray for nursery workers and leaders
 - Pray for the musicians who facilitate part of our worship each week
 - Pray for the protection of marriages in our church body (so that leaders will be fit servants)
 - Pray for the provision of jobs where people will have needed resources and gospel opp's
 - Pray for elders and deacons
- ✓ What should you pray? Use Paul's prayers as a model (Eph. 1:18-23; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-14).
- Paul's desire in his prayer was that he could visit Rome and serve the people in Rome. That's an appropriate desire for our prayers as well.

CONCLUSION: God has designed people for relationship. Yet many are lonely, as a recent study has demonstrated:

No change in the American household has been more pronounced over the last 40 years than the rise of people living alone. In 1970, only 17 percent of U.S. households contained such singletons, solo men and (more often) women getting by without kids, spouses, parents or unrelated roommates. Today, more than a quarter of all households (27 percent total) meet this definition....

As we've written before, American households have been getting smaller as our houses, conversely, have actually been getting bigger.... And housing data released earlier this summer by the Census Bureau... suggests that the U.S. is now a country where many people live alone in a land of 3-bedroom houses. [["A Brief History of How living Alone Came to Seem Totally Normal."](#) accessed, 8/29/13.]

Part of God's provision for lonely people is the opportunity for ministry in and ministry from the community of believers in the church body. As these lonely people receive ministry from others and as they exercise their gifts in serving one another, their loneliness will be lessened.

And the first part of that ministry is to pray for one another. It is not uncommon that an individual's needs and problems cannot be removed, but he can be served and helped as you pray *with* him and *for* him. If you love one another, pray for one another. Since you desire to care for one another, pray for one another.

BENEDICTION: Romans 8:38-39