

How to Pray for Other Believers

By Daryl Wingerd



I assume that as a Christian, you pray regularly. We are taught to “Continue steadfastly in prayer” (Col. 4:2), to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). These exhortations include all types of prayer: for ourselves (Matt. 6:11-13; Mark 14:38), for missionaries (Eph. 6:19-20; Col. 4:3-4; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1), for the advance of God’s kingdom and the accomplishment of his will (Matt.6:10), and for other believers (James 5:16).

My question for you concerns your prayers for other believers. While I assume *that* you pray for them, I ask you to evaluate *how* you are praying for them. What is the focus of your prayers for other believers? Where is your emphasis? What are you most earnestly asking God to do for them?

If you’re like me, you know that it’s all-too-easy to settle for the mundane and earthly in your prayers for other believers—in other words, to settle for praying for things that pertain to this life only. You pray for them to recover when they’re sick, or for them to remain physically healthy. You pray for them to land the great job they’ve applied for, or the promotion they’ve been seeking. You pray that the Lord would keep them safe while they are traveling. You pray that . . . well, I think you get my point.

Our prayers for these earthly things are not wrong or misguided. They reveal our faith in the God who is able to work in all of these ways on behalf of fellow believers—people who we love dearly and who we want to see healthy, happy, prosperous, and safe. But while we should not neglect these kinds of prayers for our fellow believers, they should not typically be the primary focus of our prayer time, not should they represent the preponderance of our heart’s desire to see God at work in their lives.

Pray Like Paul

So then, you will ask, “How *should* we be praying for other believers?” To that question I would reply, “We should be praying like Paul prayed for the churches.” “How’s that?” you ask. Well, in addition to (not to the exclusion of) the earthly concerns we so commonly pray about, we should be asking God to provide for their spiritual growth, increasing understanding, abiding joy in Christ, perseverance in the faith, and Christ-worthy conduct. Our ultimate and primary concern should be to see them pleasing and glorifying God in this life through their Christlike testimony.

Now you may ask, “Where do you find this prayer priority in the Bible?”

For starters, consider Colossians 1:9-12 where Paul writes,

And so, from the day we heard [of your faith in Christ], we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

To the Philippians Paul wrote,

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:9-11).

The Thessalonians received this word from Paul concerning his consistent prayer for them:

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:11-12).

I would also quote Ephesians 1:15-23, yet another example of the emphasis of Paul’s regular prayers, but it would not fit in my remaining space. I would encourage you to read it and imitate it, just as I hope you will imitate what I did have room to quote here with reference to Paul’s prayers for believers.

I’m quite certain that Paul prayed for other believers when they were sick. After all, he even prayed for himself when he was suffering from a “thorn” in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-9, although in this case the Lord chose to not heal him). I have no doubt that he prayed for physical safety and protection, for himself and for others. But I’m also quite certain that the consistent bulk of Paul’s prayer for other believers was spent requesting the kinds of things that bear fruit for eternal life and the glory of God in Christ—the things he specifically told them he “always” asked on their behalf.

I could do better here. Could you?