

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Paul's Prayer-life illustrated

Introduction

Firstly going to look at more lessons from Paul's prayer-life, and then see it illustrated, along with other Biblical principles about prayer, in one of greatest modern prayer warriors. Already seen something of the intensity of Paul's prayer life. **Night and day we pray most earnestly** (1 Thessalonians 3:10), **We continually remember before our God...** (1:3). Chapter three closes with more references to prayer. Paul prays about his physical movements (3:11), the believers relationship to one another and to all men (3:12), and their spiritual condition (3:13).

Prayer regarding his physical movements

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you (1 Thessalonians 3:11). Father and Son are brought together in this petition. Two people, but the verb *κατευθυνει* is singular, i.e. may "he" clear the way. The Father and Son. Eternal persons. Equality. **I and the Father are one** (John 10:30). We are commanded to baptise in the name (not the names) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). One God, revealed in three co-equal co-eternal persons.

Paul wanted to visit the Thessalonians, but Satan had hindered him. Now he prays that the Father and Son will guide, make straight, clear the obstacles on his way to them. That prayer was answered five years later when Paul visited Thessalonica on his third missionary journey. They had to wait five years.

Prayer about their relationships to each other

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Overflowing with love – the picture here is of an ocean of love swelling and "going over the top". Firstly in love for each other, and then for everyone else. We need to pray like that. It does not come naturally to love all our fellow Christians.

*"To sing above with saint we love,
That will be glory.
To live below with saints we know,
That's a different story!"*

Prayer for their inner character

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy (i.e. set apart for God, and showing evidence in their lives) **in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes** (i.e. the second coming) **with all his holy ones** (i.e. angels and departed believers) (1 Thessalonians 3:13). In order that we may be

blameless and holy at the Lord's return we need to be inwardly strengthened now. Sanctification is a continuing process now. Perfection awaits at the second coming.

So Paul's prayer is continuous and earnest. It is about physical movements, relationships of Christians to one another and the world, and also their spiritual growth. Here together with other prayers in the Bible are words and ideas we can use in our prayers – to save us from overworked words like “help”, and “bless”. This will lead to variety and richness.

An illustration from the life of George Muller

Now by way of extended illustration, going to look at the prayer life of a great believer in the modern era, to challenge, comfort and encourage us. We will see these principles at work together with other Bible principles.

George Muller (1805 – 1898). A member of the open Brethren. Without asking for a penny, Muller raised one and a half million pounds (worth much more in those days) for Christian work. The £1,381,170 was given solely as a result of prayers. Never ran into debt. That was to feed, clothe, house and educate 2000 orphans daily in Bristol. He also gave money to 15,000 missionaries, and bought innumerable Bibles, books and tracts for distribution.

We are not all called to be George Muller's. There is a special gift of faith, one of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9). Not just saving faith, but special gift for definite ministry to which we are called by God.

Although Muller never made an appeal or published his accounts in order to get support, this was not because he thought it was wrong to appeal. But he took this line to show to Christians that God was the same faithful God, and to encourage them to use prayer more than they did at present. Accounts of God's dealing with him led to innumerable conversions.

Many of the gifts were direct, often with a note along these lines, “From a servant of the Lord Jesus, who constrained by the love of Christ seeks to lay up treasure in heaven”. One gift came from a Dublin man who had escaped drowning. Many gifts were from orphans themselves. Often the gifts were from entire strangers. One lady sent some expensive jewellery, which she had worshipped in her unconverted days, but had lost interest in it since she became converted because she had found something more precious. A man who had given up cigars sent Muller the money he saved. Some sold property and donated the proceeds.

Conditions of prayer. Need to be converted. God will not answer prayers till He has reconciled them and they are His child by grace. Need to pray in Christ's name if prayer to be answered. Cannot do that if an unbeliever. Then even if a Christian, not answer prayer if walking at a distance from God, out of His will, living for self. **If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened** (Psalm 66:18). The will must be yielded up to God. No will of one's own in any matter, and willing for His will to be done.

Motive for prayer. Is it that God be honoured and glorified? How often we might pray for conversion of someone for a lesser reason – e.g. to be united more to husband or wife, that the home might be a happier place, to make the church grow in this place or that place, and bring in more money. Do not be discouraged if answers do not come immediately. May have to wait. The answer has to be in God's time. Some answers come very quickly, others have to wait years even though the same prayer is prayed daily.

Muller's prayers were answered because he was sure they would be, and because he continued patiently and believingly to wait on Him. On one matter he prayed daily – and had to wait 19 years and 6 months for the answer. Another request was made every day for twenty-nine years. There was a man Muller prayed for for 63 years, and at the time of Muller's death, he was still unconverted – but by the time of Muller's burial, he was converted. Muller prayed whether he was at home or abroad, in sickness as well as in health.

For what shall prayer be raised? Everything, temporal and spiritual, small matters and big matters. Learn to cast all your cares and burdens on the Lord, and enjoy His peace in the midst of difficulties. Great peace and happiness result.

On one occasion Muller prayed about a leaky boiler in one of the orphanages, in the middle of winter. He prayed two things – that the cold wind from the North would cease and the milder wind from the South would blow. Also that the workman would do his job quickly so the orphans would not be affected by the cold. On the day of the repairs – the South wind replaced the North wind, and the workman worked late into the night, returned early next morning, and completed the job in record time.

On other occasions Muller prayed for milk and food for the orphans. Sometimes the answers to these prayers did not arrive till the mealtime they were needed. He prayed with child-like simplicity about everything. Prayed over plans for the buildings, the price of the buildings, the workers for the orphanages. He trusted God for everything.

We can pray expecting an answer if it is His work and we are in His will. He is even more concerned with His work than we are. If the answer is delayed, keep busy in His service. Never rush ahead. Wait for His time. Trust Him with all your heart. He will answer in His way and in His time – whether it is about family, business, or Christian work. Put Him to the test. Try Him. Let Him prove Himself to you. Place your confidence in God and in Him alone. There is such joy in this kind of life because independent of circumstances, events, difficulties, sufferings, death – if we lean on God we have all we can possibly need.

Conclusion

The challenge of this testimony. Behind the prayers was faith, the faithfulness of the man himself, where he was spiritually and his relationship to God. The quantity and quality of his prayer life was a reflection of his spiritual life. He had only one life to spend, and he would spend it for God. He was God's man entirely. His heart was surrendered fully. He was not the owner, but the steward. He was submissive to God's will. He was nothing and Christ was everything. He died to George Muller and the opinion of others, and his only concern was to live approved unto God.