

“Reverse Direction”

In Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town*, Jane receives a letter addressed to her farm, town, county, state, and then, the address continues, “the United States of America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God.” In his recent book on prayer, Philip Yancey suggests that perhaps we should reverse the order. “If I started with the mind and will of God, viewing the rest of my life from that point of view, other details would fall into place – or at least a different place. My home sits in a canyon in the shadow of a large mountain along a stream named Bear Creek. During the spring snowmelt ... the stream swells... and acts more like a river than a creek.... Once I traced the origin of Bear Creek to its very source, atop the mountain. I stood on a snowfield marked by “sun cups,” the bowl-shaped indentions that form as snow melts. Underneath I could hear a soft gurgling sound.... It occurs to me, thinking about prayer, that most of the time I get the direction wrong. I start downstream with my own concerns and bring them to God. I inform God as if God did not already know. I plead with God, as if hoping to change God's mind and overcome divine reluctance.... When I shift direction, I realize that God already cares about my concerns.... Grace, like water, descends to the lowest part. Streams of mercy flow.”

As our church begins its second week in *Call to Prayer*, we now turn our attention to someone who learned how to reverse direction and start with God, our ultimate source of all we need. May his prayers stir us to pray.

Monday – Praying with Paul

“Life in this age can be tough, painful, and tiring. It is easy for us to lose sight of the central fact of our existence: that God in Christ is saving us with a love so deep that we cannot find its limits. At times we may feel parched and dry for lack of the knowledge of God's love; Paul is praying that we would be dragged into its depths and drenched in it.” Ron Julian

1. Please read Ephesians 3:14-21. What part of Paul's prayer jumps out at you? Why?
2. Paul seems to be reversing the way many of us pray, starting first with God (see intro above). What do you find meaningful about the way Paul is praying for the believers at Ephesus? Why do you think Paul finds it so essential that we fully “grasp” God's love for us (verse 18)? To what extent do you grasp God's love?

Prayer Focus: Pray for the FBC congregation. Let's ask God to help us grow in the depth of our understanding about God's love for us. Let's also ask the Lord to enable us to be conduits of his love to others who desperately need it. If you know someone in particular who needs God's love pray for them.

Tuesday – Joy-Filled Prayer

“The purest form of love is given with no expectation of return. Measured by this standard, earnest prayer for others is a magnificent act of love.” David Hubbard

1. Please read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. How would you describe the overall tone of Paul's prayers for the Thessalonian believers? What stands out to you about the way Paul prayed for them?
2. If you were to pray something similar to what Paul prays in 2 Thess. 1:11-12, who would you pray for and how would you personalize that prayer for them?

Prayer Focus: Pray for spiritual growth and renewal in the body of Christ. Spend some time praying for genuine spiritual growth amongst churches and ministries in the Yolo County Area. Pray that God will stir up Christians and cause us to seek him as never before. Pray for walls of division to be torn down and for biblical unity within the body of Christ.

Wednesday – Pray for Me

1. Paul was not hesitant to ask for prayer. Read Colossians 4:2-3; Ephesians 6:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 and Romans 15:31-32 for examples of what Paul requested prayer for. Make a list of Paul's personal prayer concerns.

2. To the Colossians, Paul exhorted them to pray with devotion, watchfulness, and gratitude. If you were to let those three principals guide your prayers, how would your praying change?

Prayer Focus: Today, please pray for those you know who are seeking to make the gospel known in their situation. Whether it's an FBC missionary, a friend, or a family member, pray that God would give them courage and open doors to share the gospel of God's love. Use Paul's requests as a guide to your prayer time.

Thursday – Abounding Love

“Paul's prayers are touching, profound, eloquent, and loving; in addition, however, they are a guide to us in our own journey of faith. Paul's heart was fixed on the essential things, things which are true and important and indispensable. Paul's prayers, then, become a mirror in which we can examine ourselves.” Ron Julian – The Prayers of Paul

1. Please read Philippians 1:3-11. What emotions accompanied Paul as he prayed for the Philippians?
2. How would you describe Paul's prayer about love in verse 9? What does love have to do with discernment, purity, and fruitfulness (see verses 10-11)?

Prayer Focus: Pray for your spiritual leaders – FBC pastors and elders, small group leaders, etc. Pray for them in ways that you think Paul might have prayed for them.

Friday – Nearer than You Think

‘In our culture we have come to think of heaven being “above us,” but it also means “beneath us and alongside us.” We are surrounded by the heavens.... We live in a multi-dimensional universe. Heaven is one of those dimensions, very close at hand.’ Darrel Johnson – Fifty-Seven Words That Change the World

1. Today we look at some of Paul's teaching on prayer found in Philippians 4:4-9. Paul is describing spiritual practices that are a part of a rich life in the Holy Spirit. Notice that prayer is not isolated from the other practices. How are they all related together?
2. It could be argued that the focal point of this section is found in the four words, “the Lord is near.” God is nearer than we think. How do those four words change the way we pray?

Prayer Focus: Pray for personal spiritual growth. Spend some time praying about your personal walk with Christ including specific challenges and struggles you face (e.g., unhealthy habits or addictions, ungodly/unhealthy relationships you're still involved in, unforgiveness/bitterness toward others, etc.)

Weekend Prayer Focus: Spend some time this weekend going back through some of Paul's prayers that we've looked at this week, praying them in your own words on behalf of those the Lord brings to mind.