

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

06 – Why We Pray

Announcements:
8/11 @8:30 -
Sunday School

AUGUST 18-25
Grace Groups
Relaunched!
SEE SIGN UP
SHEETS

REVIEW: Was there anything covered or said on Sunday that you had any questions or comments about?

ICE BREAKER: When you hear the phrase “Prayer Warrior”, what do you think of?

READ: Philippians 1:18b-26

While preparing to teach this passage I told a lot of people that I was “doing the first of the passages that everybody knows” in Philippians. In particular I was talking about the “to live is Christ and die is gain” portion. And I will just say, there is certainly a reason that this is the portion that everyone knows! But the more time I spent the more I was drawn to another thought as well. Paul says that he will be delivered because of the “help of the Spirit of Christ”, but also because of “your prayers” (verse 19). It is the thought that our prayers have power that I would like to dive into today.

The first thing to note is that because Paul includes both the help of the Spirit of Christ *and* our prayers, it steers us away from traps that might lie on either side. The first trap is to think that it is up to me and my ability to pray. When I think that things are happening only because I pray I can either think too highly of myself or possibly beat myself up because “I just should have prayed harder”. In reality It is my prayers (which are, in some sense, weak) that come alongside what God is doing. And ultimately it is God who is the omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth. If there is any power in prayer (and there is!) it comes not from me, rather all from the working of God.

DISCUSS: What dangers are there in forgetting that God is the one with the power? What ways might we be acting like we have forgotten this (in other words, what might that look like)?

But there is another danger that we can avoid when we really read what Paul says here. This is the danger of what I call “fatalistic prayers”. This is when we pray a prayer that is not bold, and underestimates our ability to affect change through our prayers. Paul says directly that he is delivered **THROUGH** their prayers. Their prayers actually do something, and in fact, do something incredible! In other words, after just saying that our prayers are weak, I am telling you that our prayers are filled with power! This is the balance that is often hard to find. Some of us lean to one side (overestimating the strength of US) and some to the other (underestimating the strength of PRAYER). A proper view understands that my prayers have power, but only because God gives them that power.

DISCUSS: Why do we often fall into the trap of “fatalistic prayers”? What is the proper response?

To summarize it would be helpful to see what another Scripture Writer says about this sort of thing, James.

READ: James 5:13-16

Here the same thought permeates, that prayers have power because God is working. In particular we could look at verse 15 “the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick” (that's the power of our prayer) *because* “the Lord will raise him up” (that's the work of God). James is really clear in his exhortation here: we should pray for one another. In faith and boldness, because God will use our prayers. So to end, let's think of a phrase that we often say in passing, or without much thought: “I'll pray for you.” Both James and Paul would agree that there is power and wonder and goddess loaded into that phrase. So why do we say it with a shrug and no real intention of actually praying? If we stop and think about it, we should be saying this with conviction, because it says a whole lot!

DISCUSS: Why do we just say “I will pray for you” flippantly? What steps can we take to remember the power of prayer?