

# Pray it Again, Saul

The Recorded Prayers of the Apostle Paul

Text

Philippians 1:3-6

## Introduction

One of the regular bits on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* is him writing out Thank You Notes.

*Thank you, emergency row on a plane, for making me lie every time the flight attendant asks me if I can function in case of an emergency.*

*Thank you the word "moist" for being the worst word ever.*

*Thank you, slow walking family ahead of me on the sidewalk. No, please, take your time, and definitely spread out, too, so you form a barricade.*

The apostle Paul inserted "Thank You Notes" in his letters. With the exception of Galatians and Second Corinthians, all of his letters begin with a mention of his thanksgiving. Paul was thankful for what God had already done for the believers, and for what God had promised to accomplish in them.

Rom 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

1Co 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

1Co 1:5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,

Eph 1:15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

Eph 1:16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

Col 1:3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

Col 1:4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;

Col 1:5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

1Th 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,

1Th 1:3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

2Th 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

2Th 1:4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

Our text tonight is from his letter to the Philippians, where Paul states his thankfulness for their "fellowship in the Gospel."

We're taking a look at some of the recorded prayers of Paul. It's hard to have a definite list, because sometimes he is praying, whereas other times he's talking about how he prays.

Believing we are being Spirit-led in the texts we choose, we're looking at his prayers in chronological order; and that takes us from the Thessalonians letters we've already looked at to Philippians.

On his second missionary journey Paul visited Philippi. Through his ministry there several people trusted Christ as their Savior. Some of these were Lydia and her family and the Philippian jailer and his family.

Soon after Paul's visit a local church was established in Philippi. The church often helped the apostle in different ways so this epistle was written to acknowledge their help, as well as to help them.

Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter - probably in Rome. The believers naturally were concerned. Nothing wrong with their concern, but they ought to have remembered that when Paul was in prison in their own city, he and Silas prayed and praised and, at midnight, an earthquake shook the city, opening up the prison's cells.

They stopped the jailer from committing suicide, and convinced the prisoners not to escape. The jailer and his family were saved. Paul and Silas returned to their cells.

In the morning, when the city officials thought their prisoners had learned their lesson, Paul dropped that he was a Roman citizen. The city officials had broken several laws in detaining them; their careers, if not lives, were on the line.

Paul was a prisoner, for sure, but not of Rome. Never of Rome. He was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He had resolved in his heart that whatever he encountered in his life, it was for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Prison gave Paul opportunity to write some of his letters - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were prison epistles. And it gave him extended prayer times.

Let's see what he was praying for regarding the Philippians.

Php 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,  
Php 1:4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,  
Php 1:5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,  
Php 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

Hard to say exactly what he was praying for. It doesn't read like a prayer-list.

What we can glean is something we haven't yet mentioned in this series, and that is what we might call the *tone* of his praying.

From one quick reading of these verses we can see Paul was thankful, joyful, and confident in his praying for them.

Let's keep that in mind as we dig in a little deeper.

Php 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

You're too young to remember Bob Hope; but I'll ask anyway. What was his signature song? Right - *Thanks for the Memory*.

Paul thanked God for the memories he had of the Philippians. They loved him; they put that love in action, caring for him, and sending him support.

Paul didn't merely receive a one-time gift from the Philippian believers; he received gifts from them on a number of occasions. Even when he was in another city, the Philippians continued to send material support.

It wasn't the money that made the good memories, but the thought behind it.

Here's something to ponder: Are you remembered by others with thankfulness on account of your being a help to them?

Paul referred to God as "my God." It's a term of endearment, and of intimacy. Of course God was the God of the Philippians believers just as much as He was Paul's God. But they - and we - should all have an intimate relationship with Him.

This is one reason why I get frustrated, then angry, when folks erect barriers to our worship of God, then act as though they feel closer to Him. Currently there is a movement to return to the liturgies of ancient church groups. Robes and rituals. To me, they are a new veil, separating you from immediate contact with Jesus.

The tone of Paul's prayers was thankfulness. Wherever God is at work in people, we have cause for thanksgiving. It's no easy thing for a hard heart to be penetrated by grace and for a person's freed will to choose the Lord.

Php 1:4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,

The words for "prayer" and "request" mean the same thing. They are translated from the same word. Paul was making specific requests for them.

He undoubtedly prayed for them as a church, but he also prayed for "all" of their requests, as individuals.

In the age of smartphones, folks are split over just how rude it is to be noodling on your device while talking to someone. Jerry Seinfeld has a routine based on this.

I actually don't mind, because we are totally capable of multi-tasking.

If you're a believer, you can do something like that, but without it being observable. You can silently, secretly, be praying for someone while they're talking to you.

I do it anytime I'm in a counseling situation - since I want to say what God wants them to hear.

*Just don't move your lips!*

Paul tells us he made his requests for them "with joy." To have "joy" when making a request, you must believe that God will do what is best for the person, regardless your personal wishes. Whatever His answer - "yes," "no," or "wait" - you believe all things work together for the good for those who love the Lord.

Php 1:5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,

"Fellowship" isn't just friendship on a deeper level because we are all believers. Don't get me wrong: friendships are great, and friendships with believers ought to be profound.

But our fellowship is "in the Gospel." It is based on the common salvation we share, and in our participating in THE fellowship of the gathered saints, and in our desire to work together to see that the Gospel is shared.

I need to remind myself that I don't need to be on a missions trip in order to be on a mission trip. My whole life is a mission trip, to fulfill the Great Commission.

Let's make sure our fellowship is around the Lord and, if we do, we won't be able to keep from sharing Him.

Php 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

"The Day of Jesus Christ" in this context is the day you die, or you are raptured. In those moments, you'll be completed; finished; fit for eternity.

Paul was "confident" because God was the One Who is responsible, ultimately, for transforming each of us into the image of His Son. We therefore pray with confidence knowing that everything else God said He'd accomplish will happen.

Our prayers, obviously, ought to take into consideration that God is working in the believer to transform him or her. Thus it isn't always appropriate for the trial to end, because God can use it.

I pray for folks to be healed, believing God can do it. But I am excited to see Him at work if He withholds healing.

I don't know how much suffering we might need to endure prior to the Rapture, but I know that my future is secure, and the future of the earth is already written out.

If I'm confident Jesus will return during Armageddon to save the world from destruction, I ought to be confident He is with me in my battles; because He is.

I am confident that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation. I am confident that I can announce to a sinner that God forgives their sin, and saves them, by virtue of the Cross, and in light of the resurrection.

I am confident that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of the Lord when He comes to rule and reign.

I'm confident mankind will not obliterate itself because I know the Lord will stop that from happening.

We are a supremely confident people. We ought to pray with confidence, tempered by the Lord's will.

And we ought to have a general, overruling confidence, that God is at work - always, in every circumstance.

Thankful... Joyful... Confident.

Am I? Are you? Listen to your prayers, to their tone, and you'll know.