



Route 66 - ahead and behind us near Kingman, Arizona.

Prayer



*P*rayer is one of the most important elements of spiritual growth. However, many new believers don't know where to begin when it comes to praying. That should not be surprising, since even the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Just before we pulled away from the Grand Motel in Williams, Arizona, Bob, our host, asked us to pray for him and his family. Though he was unaware of it, his request set the tone for today's journey. Ann and I pray together, as we drive. We pray for Bob and his family, for our family, for our church, and for you who will be reading this book on your own journey.

At our next stop, in the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul gives his readers the reason to pray, examples of effective prayers, and pointers on how to pray.

Reasons to pray



Mile Marker 51A – Colossians 4:2

²Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Right here in God's Word, followers of Jesus Christ are commanded to pray. That is one really good reason! Other reasons for praying include:

1. Prayer is our communication link to the One who is our Forgiver, Leader, and Life.
2. Prayer is the way that we invite God to use His power in areas of need.
3. Prayer makes a difference. God cares about our concerns because He cares about us.

An example of someone who knows how to pray

The Bible gives numerous examples of believers praying. Paul mentions one of my favorites toward the end of Colossians:



Mile Marker 51B – Colossians 4:12

¹²Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Now that was one prayin' dude! Epaphras not only prayed, he wrestled in prayer! Epaphras was the world champion in the WWF of Prayer. Notice the focus of his

prayer: the spiritual maturity of the people in his church. He prayed that they would stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I want a prayer wrestler praying that for me, don't you?

Prayer support is one of the greatest reasons believers need to become a part of a Bible-teaching, people-loving, grace-filled church. Wherever you live on the planet, there is probably a group of Christians meeting nearby who could supply "Epaphras"-type prayer support for you. Our church is a member of the Willow Creek Association of churches. This network of churches has exploded internationally over the past 10 or 11 years. The WCA is serving churches of numerous denominations, as well as non-denominational churches, as an effective resource for training and inspiration. If you would like to check out a Willow Creek Association Church in your area, visit www.willowcreek.com. Those churches, as well as thousands of others, would count it a privilege to join with you on your spiritual journey.

How to pray

Paul gives us some great guidelines for praying. To organize my prayer times, I've incorporated an acrostic outline that spells P-R-A-Y. Here are some examples of each of those points, utilizing samples from some of Paul's prayers recorded in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

The "P" is for Praise.

Praise is pretty self-explanatory. We all appreciate a word of affirmation. When we take time to praise, or affirm God, He is honored, and we are humbled. Here are some great examples of praising God:

Ephesians 1:3

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Praise is a great way to begin our prayer time with God. Affirm Him the way you would affirm one of your favorite friends who has just accomplished a major feat. It is not necessary to be as eloquent in your praising as Paul was. Remember, he had had a lot of practice.

I am praising God quietly in my heart as we drive. Singing is a great way to express our praise, and I love to cut loose when our band is playing and vocalists are leading out, but Ann deserves better than to have to put up with my solo efforts in the car.

The “R” is for repent, or recognize, or renounce.

Often, as I praise God for how holy and amazing He is, I begin to realize that I have failed to keep my focus on Him. The “R” in “P-R-A-Y” reminds us to take time to recognize our shortcomings, but with a grateful awareness that if we have received Christ as our Forgiver, He has certainly forgiven us of all our sins, past, present, and future. Even so, it is important for us to humble ourselves, own up, and acknowledge our need for His faithful forgiveness.

Paul gives us some directives regarding the types of things to deal with during the “R” part of our prayers.

Colossians 3:5-9

⁵*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Earlier (at Mile Markers 28 and 29) we discussed the meaning of repentance — to turn around. When we are praying, it is very common for God to bring to our minds some areas that need a little “about face.” As I renounce areas in my life in which I’ve missed God’s best, I am immediately reminded of His complete forgiveness. That brings us to the “A” in our prayer outline.

The “A” is for expressing Appreciation.

Paul admonished his readers to express thanks.

Colossians 3:15

¹⁵*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

Paul frequently practiced the idea of expressing thanks. Here are two great samples:

Colossians 1:3

³*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.*

Ephesians 1:15-16

¹⁵For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

We are constantly giving thanks as we make this journey across America on Route 66. We have been blessed in immeasurable ways. Expressing appreciation to God is the only appropriate response.

The “Y” is for Yearning.

God wants us to bring our needs before him. He cares about what we long for, what we yearn for. Jesus taught His followers to ask, seek, and knock. Paul gives us some great examples of how to present needs to the Lord in prayer. Here are just a couple of those examples:

Ephesians 3:16-19

¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Colossians 1:9

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Paul also frequently urges his readers to pray. Here is one excellent example of his exhortation to pray:

Philippians 4:6-7

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We circled back through Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, in order to pick up some additional verses. It is sometimes like that when traveling Historic Route 66. There are often multiple alignments you want to go back and explore. Similarly, Paul has such a wealth of insight about prayer in these three books, we needed more than one time through.

Prayer can be your greatest ally in your journey from this point forward.