

Joyful Prayers

*"In all my prayers for all of you,
I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel
from the first day until now."*

Philippians 1:4-5 (NIV)

A wonderful study for anyone interested in prayer is the examination of the prayers of Paul for his spiritual children. It seems to be a very earnest and regular exercise on the part of Paul and gives us an opening into his private spiritual life.

As I wrote this devotional I took a break and collected the mail. Among the items in the mail box was a beautifully illustrated sales brochure from a local Bible Bookstore. I eagerly searched its pages in order to find any books on prayer. It listed hundreds of volumes but I did not find one on prayer. Then I looked again and did manage to find a lonely title for prayer.

What is the matter with the Christian Church today when the stores advertise hundreds of "Christian romance" fictional books (especially Amish ones) but prayer to God apparently does not sell? Can that be a

wakeup call for the church?

Paul found enormous joy in the exercise of prayer especially when it was for his beloved Philippian believers. Therefore we should look at this spiritual exercise in a brighter light than we sometimes do.

We are all familiar with prayers of lament or regret. We find such prayers scattered throughout the entire Bible. These prayers seem to be crushed out of us by the great burden we carry. Alternatively, prayers of joy are also found throughout the Bible and are in the context of praise, celebration, responses to the blessing of God upon us.

People who suffer need to mix prayers of joy with their prayers of lament. Find people in whom you rejoice, faithful friends, pastors who minister Scripture effectively, good examples of faithful Christians to model your own life after. Then consider the ways the Lord has blessed

you and ministered grace even in the context of sorrow. Pour out prayers of thanksgiving for mercies received. God loves to hear of our gratitude to Him for His lovingkindness.

Remember that Paul was in the most intolerable of conditions physically, spiritually, and psychologically as his jailers were holding the sword of death over his head unjustly. Such circumstances can play with a person's mind powerfully. What helped to keep Paul calm was the assurance that his followers, in whom he rejoiced, continued to serve the Lord effectively.

So look around you and find the people or things in which you can truly rejoice and then praise the Lord for them. Bring your prayers up a couple of notches today by offering prayers of thanksgiving right in the midst of your suffering.

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