



**Palms West**  
— Presbyterian Church —

**Sermon Series:** Lessons in Prayer from the Bible's Leading Characters

**Sermon 6:** Prayer and the Apostle Paul

**Date:** July 17, 2016

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

**Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:**

**MONDAY July 18, 2016 Acts 9:1-20** In this story, two people heard startling messages from Jesus. For Ananias, the call to heal a sworn enemy took great faith and courage to obey. For Saul (soon to be known as Paul), the message completely changed his focus. It was a simple, personal message: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." It changed him from a fiery, hate-filled persecutor of Jesus and his followers to a tireless, love-filled preacher of Jesus and his grace.

- With which of the people in this story do you identify more: Saul or Ananias? Has God ever showed you the need to change an attitude, behavior, or prejudice? Have you ever had to move beyond your dislike or fear of another person in order to obey God?
- Paul's trip to Damascus was, it turned out, only the first stage of a life-long journey with God that led through Asia Minor and Greece, in time to Rome, and will go on through eternity. Prayerfully map your own spiritual journey. Where have you come from? Where do you see yourself as being now? Toward what goal are you journeying?

**TUESDAY July 19, 2016 Ephesians 3:14-21** Paul wrote many letters to various churches all through the Roman world. These letters give us a rich record of much of what he taught about prayer, and of many of his prayers. Here he asked lyrically that the Holy Spirit, dwelling in our hearts, would give all believers the power to grasp the vastness of God's love. Then he ended with a glowing expression of praise.

- Paradoxes bother most of us, but Paul's faith happily embraced the paradoxes of God's world rather than avoiding them. Here he prayed that all believers would be able "to know this love that surpasses knowledge." How have you been able to "know" God's love even though it reaches beyond the bounds of logic and intellectual expression? How can your heart know things that stretch your mind to its limits?
- In John 21, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" As you ponder Paul's awe-inspiring prayer, open your heart and ask God, "Lord, do you love me?" Spend some quiet time letting God unfold new dimensions of the divine love for you.

**WEDNESDAY July 20, 2016 Romans 8:14-27** Could Paul really have meant, "We do not know what we ought to pray for"? Most of us can readily come up with "wish lists" for God. But Paul had just described our struggle as we wait in hope for what God will do, but hasn't yet done. Our "wish lists," he suggested, don't always match God's. In prayer we always need to trust that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us."

- Paul said we have "the first fruits of the Spirit," meaning the Holy Spirit's presence is the beginning (but not the end) of God fully restoring human nature. (In Ephesians 1:14, he used a Greek word that meant "down

payment” to describe the gift of the Spirit.) In what ways do you think the Holy Spirit has helped you start experiencing eternity now? In what ways do you want to open yourself more fully to the Spirit’s work?

- In what area of life are you most at a loss? In your prayer time, focus on that. Do not try to figure it out, and ask God to give you what you’ve figured out. Instead, lay the issue before God, asking the Spirit to pray for you the prayer you don’t know how to pray.

**THURSDAY July 21, 2016 Philippians 4:4-9** Our Thanksgiving holiday did not exist in Paul’s world, of course. But it seems likely he would have loved a day like this! “In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,” he wrote.

- Paul was either hopelessly naïve or filled with divine wisdom. Try him out. Use his words as a guide: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” See how it affects your own thoughts, and your interactions with others.
- If you’re in a setting open to this, read Paul’s words about worry, thanksgiving and prayer aloud before saying grace over your Thanksgiving meal. If that’s not an option, find a time to read them to yourself, and then pray them into your life.

**FRIDAY July 22, 2016 Philippians 1:3-11** Paul wrote Philippians, like Ephesians, from prison. His letter is so full of words of praise and gratitude that it’s known as “the epistle of joy.” The Philippians had sent a substantial gift to sustain Paul in his imprisonment (2:25-30, 4:18). This was really important since, as a general practice, Roman jailers did not provide food for their prisoners!

- On Tuesday we looked at ways our heart can “know” things beyond our mind’s logical reach. In today’s reading, Paul spoke to times when spiritual growth moves in the other direction. He prayed “that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.” What makes it important for us to deepen our knowledge and insight about our faith, rather than relying solely on good or bad feelings about God?
- Who are the people, beyond your immediate family, to whom you could say, “I thank my God every time I remember you”? Thank God for them in your prayer time today. Then be sure to let them know how grateful you are for them, as Paul did the Philippians.

**SATURDAY July 23, 2016 Ephesians 6:10-20** As a prisoner (Ephesians 3:1, 6:20), Paul was constantly with Roman soldiers. At times, he may even have been handcuffed to one of them. Here he used each part of the soldier’s armor as a metaphor for some aspect of Christian faith. But not prayer (verse 18). Prayer was not “part,” but all-inclusive for Paul - “all occasions,” “all kinds of prayers and requests,” “all of God’s people.” Me too, he added humbly. Please pray that I’ll speak for God clearly and fearlessly.

- Donald Miller’s book *Blue Like Jazz* ends with this invitation, a good invitation with which to end these studies on prayer: “If you haven’t done it in a while, pray and talk to Jesus. Ask him to become real to you. Ask Him to forgive you of self-addiction, ask Him to put a song in your heart. I can’t think of anything better that could happen to you than this.” What have you learned from this series on prayer to help deepen your relationship with God? What practice or insight will you integrate into your life from now on?

**Family Activity:** Explain to the younger members of your family that Jesus promised to be with us through the Holy Spirit, and compared the Spirit to the wind. Both are always with us. Even though we can’t see them, we can see and feel what they do. Take a walk together. Talk about what the wind is doing. Watch it move the trees, grass, water, your hair, papers, etc. Spend some prayer time outside feeling the wind and watching it move things around. Remind everyone that the Holy Spirit, being God, will only move in ways that are for our good. Encourage your family members to remember the Holy Spirit whenever they feel the wind. Say a prayer of thanks for the Holy Spirit and for the wind.