

# “Say a Prayer”

Philemon 1:1-7

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**All Scripture quoted from NIV unless otherwise noted**

The book of Philemon is a personal letter written by the Apostle Paul, addressed to his faithful friend Philemon and the church that met at his house. Philemon is the 3<sup>rd</sup> shortest book of the Bible (behind 3<sup>rd</sup> John and 2<sup>nd</sup> John). As with all his letters, Paul begins by identifying himself and the intended audience, followed by a brief greeting. It would appear Philemon was a resident of Colossae (Col. 4:9) and at the time of writing, Paul is a prisoner in Rome. This is a reminder that there are no circumstances that are sufficient to excuse any fully devoted believer from service to Christ Jesus. Apphia is traditionally believed to be Philemon’s wife, while Archippus may have been his son, brother, or perhaps a family friend. Archippus is mentioned only here and in Colossians 4:17, while Apphia only appears in this passage.

Paul’s greeting in Philemon is slightly different than his typical style, but does contain a prominent feature of many of his letters, namely **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** (v.3) These words appear together in the same sentence 17x in all of Scripture, and every single time, the word grace appears first – a reminder that you will never know true and lasting peace unless you first experience the grace of God.

In Philemon, we observe two distinct elements of Paul’s prayer that are applicable for us today. The first is to Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for other believers (v.4-5). Paul is not thanking Philemon for his love and faith; he thanks God for what he has heard about Philemon’s love and faith. All true acts of worship are about God, for God, and to God; He is not only the subject of these acts; He is also the recipient of them. This is demonstrated by Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:35-40, which culminate with Him saying, “...Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Paul thanks God for what he sees in Philemon’s life, and offers a word of encouragement for Philemon to continue following Him closely. Paul is in prison, so he can’t be there with Philemon and his crew, but he celebrates their active love and faith – faith in God and love for both God and man – through this prayer of thanksgiving. Paul goes on to encourage Philemon to allow the sharing and fellowship of faith that these early Christians experienced to become a powerful and effective witness to the goodness and praiseworthiness of our God and deepen their sense of community. Paul had seen much in their lives that he was truly thankful for.

A 2<sup>nd</sup> element of Paul’s prayer that we are wise to emulate is praying a prayer of intercession. “Intercession” means intervening (or speaking up) for someone else, not for yourself. It means being an advocate for another. Paul prays that the sharing of

their faith would prove effective, for them and for those to whom they are speaking. The word from which we translate 'effective' is ἐνεργής [“en-er-gace”] – which as you can see, sounds suspiciously like our English word “Energize.” Surely, there is power in sharing your faith – it invigorates you, sort of in the way getting up and going to the gym energizes you in the morning.

Paul prays that the household (and house-church) of Philemon would have an active, outreaching faith in Jesus Christ, and that as they do share their faith, their love for God and for one another would grow even stronger. On top of that, Paul prays that they would grow in their understanding of every good thing that they shared in Jesus.

Paul prayed for his good and faithful friend, Philemon. Following his example, we can pray prayers of thanksgiving and intercession over our fellow believers today, thanking God for what we've already seen in their lives, and praying for the effectual and powerful sharing of faith to the community around them.

By way of suggestion, allow me to suggest three areas in which you may want to consider praying for one another. The first is to pray for personal faith to grow. Each individual begins his/her Christian journey of faith by making a personal decision to trust Jesus as Savior. But like a garden, this faith can only grow if it is fed by regular doses of God's Word, time with the family of believers, and time spent speaking to and listening to God. Pray that individuals would come to faith, and that once they do, that they would take healthy steps toward making that faith grow.

A second suggestion for areas in which you can pray for other believers is to pray that their Christian relationships to grow. This includes relationships between Christians as well as the relationship between each of those individuals and God. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian faith is knowing that you are not alone. There are believers around the world who share the same faith as you; who struggle spiritually and mess up and fall flat on their faces, just like you do sometimes, but who have a family of believers and a mighty God who is faithful to pick them up when they do fall. Be the church! Don't just think about your church family on Sunday. Let thoughts of them flood into your mind every day, and as that happens, commit to praying for them, for their faith, and for their gospel witness to grow.

This is the third prayer suggestion; praying for gospel witness to grow in their lives. Paul wrote of the importance of gospel witness when, in Romans 10, he wrote that, *'All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved...how can they believe if they have not heard?'* Furthermore, Jesus referred to His followers as the light of the world, going on to say, **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”** (Matt. 5:16) This is what Paul prays over Philemon – deepening of understanding, not only for the believers, but for the community around them.

Commit to praying for one fellow believer every day this week. Pray prayers of thanksgiving for the good things you see in that person's faith and life; pray prayers of

intercession over that person, that God would provide exactly what they need at precisely the right time; pray prayers of growth over that person, that they would grow in their own relationship with God and with other believers, but also that they would have a greater impact – a stronger witness for the sake of God’s eternal kingdom. Let’s celebrate with one another, root for one another, and encourage one other to grow deeper in our faith, deeper in our fellowship, and deeper in our witness to our world.

## **Takeaways from this message.**

*No circumstances are sufficient to EXCUSE any fully devoted believer from service to Christ Jesus.*

*You will never know true and lasting PEACE unless you first experience the GRACE of God.*

### **Two ways to pray:**

- *Pray a prayer of THANKSGIVING.*
  - *God is both the SUBJECT and RECEIPENT of all true acts of worship.*
  
- *Pray a prayer of INTERCESSION.*
  - *Pray for PERSONAL FAITH to grow.*
  - *Pray for CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS to grow.*
  - *Pray for GOSPEL WITNESS to grow.*

## **DIG IN!**

**Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning’s message.**

1. *What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today’s passage/message? Why?*
2. **This week, will you commit to reading the book of Philemon in full at least once each day?**
3. **What do you surmise about Philemon from today’s passage? Why? What three titles does Paul assign to him (verses 1 & 7)?**
4. **If you were going to ride any animal you’ve never ridden, which would you choose?**
5. **What does it mean to be devoted in prayer? Can this be said of you?**

6. **Name 3 benefits of being part of a community of believers. Why are these most meaningful to you?**
7. **Who, from your church family, will you commit to praying for every day this week? (You don't need to write his/her name down here; just do it. Pray.)**
8. **For further application, check out Colossians 4:2-17; Matthew 6:6-8; Matthew 25:35-45; Romans 10:11-15; Matthew 5:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.**
9. *What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?*

## **17 Scriptures where **Grace** and **Peace** appear together**

1. Romans 1:7  
To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: **Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. 1 Corinthians 1:3  
**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. 2 Corinthians 1:2  
**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Galatians 1:3  
**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
5. Ephesians 1:2  
**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. Philippians 1:2  
**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. Colossians 1:2  
To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: **Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father.
8. 1 Thessalonians 1:1  
Greeting  
Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace** to you and **peace**.

9. 2 Thessalonians 1:2

**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

10. 1 Timothy 1:2

To Timothy, my true child in the faith: **Grace**, mercy, and **peace** from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

11. 2 Timothy 1:2

To Timothy, my beloved child: **Grace**, mercy, and **peace** from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

12. Titus 1:4

To Titus, my true child in a common faith: **Grace** and **peace** from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

13. Philemon 1:3

**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

14. 1 Peter 1:2

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:  
May **grace** and **peace** be multiplied to you.

15. 2 Peter 1:2

May **grace** and **peace** be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

16. 2 John 1:3

**Grace**, mercy, and **peace** will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

17. Revelation 1:4

Greeting to the Seven Churches

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: **Grace** to you and **peace** from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,