



WITH DR. MICHAEL WRIGHT

Lesson Brief | Season 2 | Episode 4 “Unanswered Prayer”

Michael W. Wright, DMin
President | Bible Teacher

Introduction. Romans 1:8-15.

A Prayer Request.

It is possible to want something that glorifies God and is good for human creation, and yet that specific request is not the Lord’s plan. Paul experienced this when he prayed to go to Rome. The apostle wanted to visit the church to strengthen and encourage the believers. Take a look at the content of his request and consider how great a prayer it really was.

Be where God is working.

Paul had heard stories about the authentic faith of the Christians who were in Rome. As a result, he wanted to be where God was working. For the Christian, it is always attractive to be at the center of a great work of God. When a true work is reported, it is perfectly normal for Christians to earnestly seek to be a part of it.

When I was a young pastor, I would sometimes attend large annual meetings where a great number of pastors would gather. Thousands came together to hear powerful preaching and great testimonies. Some of those speakers would boast about the growth of their church and the number of baptisms they had experienced since the last meeting. Hearing how God was working in particular places among a certain church was attractive to most attenders. I have to admit that I sometimes wished to serve in that church where God was working so I could see with my own eyes the wondrous miracles of God. I wanted to be in the middle of it. I might have even prayed to the Lord, “Let me be a part of a church where I can experience a great move of God.” I thought then (and still do now) that such a prayer is a good prayer. Paul wanted to be in the middle of God’s work in Rome. It was a good, God-honoring prayer.

Share spiritual gifts.

Paul prayed to share spiritual gifts with the Christians in Rome. By the time Paul wrote the church he had been a believer for over 20 years. He was a seasoned missionary and preacher. He was aware his personal gifts from God. He was equipped to help the church in many ways. Paul possessed confidence, experience, and maturity. He had been using his gifts for years and wanted to do the same in Rome.

Closely associated with Paul’s prayer to share gifts was his desire to share his authentic faith. Paul also prayed that they would share their faith with him.¹ True faith pleases the Lord. The Bible say, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Hebrews 11:6) Without faith it is also impossible for God’s church to be encouraged. True faith stirs more faith, person to person, generation after generation. Paul desired to give and receive real faith. Believers today need to exercise faith and to encourage one another by the exercise of

¹ Read and study Romans 12:6-8. There are seven motivational gifts listed. Those gifts help to establish and grow the local church. Those gifts are (1) prophecy, (2) service, (3) teaching, (4) exhortation, (5) contributing, (6) leading, and (7) showing mercy.

faith in Christ. Paul's request to share gifts and faith and to receive encouragement from the believers in the church in Rome was a good prayer.

Use gifts to strengthen and encourage.

Jesus said, "I have come to build my church." (Matthew 16:18) The global church was launched by Christ at Pentecost. (Acts 2) The church expanded quickly as thousands of believers were added to the church. Much of Paul's missionary service was a response to the multiplied work of God. Paul was called to strengthen and encourage the local work in as many cities as possible. He was busy teaching and training. Paul appointed pastors and elders to lead and feed the growing flock of God. As a result of using his gifts, many churches grew and experienced strength and encouragement. Paul's desire to serve the church with his gifts was a good prayer. Paul's prayer is the kind of request all Christians should be making to God.

Reap the harvest.

Paul wanted to reap a harvest of souls in the church at Rome and among the Gentiles. As an evangelist, Paul often sought to preach the Gospel so that people might hear and be saved. Paul had been preaching the Gospel for years. Watching God transform hearts must have been very exciting to the apostle. Preaching is exciting to an evangelist, a pastor, or to a church planter. Reaping a harvest is perhaps the ultimate joy of those called to local church ministry. Paul's prayer to go to Rome and reap was a great prayer. Would it not be wonderful if all contemporary Christians would pray such a prayer before attending worship gatherings?

Paul's desire to be where God was working, to share his gifts, to strengthen and encourage, to reap a harvest among Jews and Gentiles, was a prayer that God was certainly please to hear. If any one of us heard someone pray about the opportunity to preach the Gospel, we would certainly think it a great prayer. Yet, it was not God's plan for Paul to go. Instead, Paul returned to Jerusalem with an offering he had gathered on his third missionary journey. He stayed in Jerusalem for some time. He eventually traveled to Rome, but as a prisoner. While God was please to hear Paul's prayer, God worked a plan for Paul that brought an even greater harvest of souls for many hundreds of years to come.

Unanswered Prayer

One might charge that Paul's prayer was unanswered. God answered Paul's prayer to go to Rome, but in the Lord's own way. Paul arrived as a prisoner. The apostle therefore had opportunity to write four of his thirteen epistles – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

When we pray God-honoring prayers, it pleases the Lord, and it transforms our hearts. When we pray, God might say yes, or maybe no, or maybe wait. If he says yes, the Lord has the authority to say how. Why did God use Paul the way he did? We may not know all the good reasons on this side of heaven. What we can determine is that God must not have needed Paul in Rome as a free man. God wanted Paul there, but behind bars. If we are not careful, we might wrongly think that God has to answer our prayers our way in order to accomplish his work. Not so. What God desires are our genuine prayers. What we should really want is for God to hear us and be pleased and do precisely what he deems best to accomplish his great work.

The mission of Gospel in Real Life is to transform the global culture with the truth of the Gospel through biblical preaching and teaching via blog and podcast. The GRL Podcast is available on most major media platforms including Apple Podcasts and Spotify. GRL is now being heard in 18 countries across the globe. Dr. Michael Wright is the Founder, President, and Bible Teacher for GRL. For more resources and information go to GospelInRealLife.org.