

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

My PWC list

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INTRODUCTION

Years ago Dr. Paul White, affectionately known as ‘The Jungle Doctor’ because of his engaging series of tales from Africa, had a list; it was his BWW list. Keen to nurture and develop younger people as they matured he kept his list of ‘Bods Worth Watching’. He would do whatever he could to help them develop their full potential both for their sakes and for the sake of God’s Kingdom

Well, I too have a list. Mine is my PWC list. In my case PWC stands for ‘Prayers Worth Copying’. I find there are prayers that others have used that express better than I can my own desires and aspirations before God. There are also prayers that teach me the things for which I should pray. They are instructive and directing. The latter group comes mainly from Scripture, and I would like to share some of those with you this morning.

SEGMENT 1

Here is the first one, from Ephesians chapter 1.

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Paul says he gives thanks to God for the faith and love of those to whom he wrote and that he prays for four things concerning them. So I learn first that I need to express heartfelt gratitude to God for the evidence of his activity both in my own life and in the lives of those with whom I associate. I ought not to take it all for granted but see it as it truly is, evidence of the saving grace of God, and be thankful.

After giving thanks he turns to intercession and prays for one thing that has three expressions. He prays that God’s Spirit will grant them such a measure of understanding and insight that will enable them to know God more deeply for in the knowledge of God stands our eternal life. Specifically he prays that the hope and future expectation to which God has called them will loom larger and larger in their thinking and living, shaping and moulding them; that the glorious fact that God has possessed them as his heritage, his own precious possession, will more profoundly capture their attention and stir their gratitude and aspirations; and that God’s great resurrection power displayed in the raising and exaltation of Jesus, the power that is at work in them too, will be their joy, their confidence, and the fuel of their eager anticipation. Now that is a prayer well worth copying.

SEGMENT 2

In the third chapter of the same letter Paul, after writing about his ministry and its purpose, spoke again of his prayers for them. He wrote:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now 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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Knowing the abundance of God's resources he prayed that his generous Father would be wonderfully lavish and, by the operation of his indwelling Spirit, so shape and strengthen them inwardly that it would be patently obvious to all that observed that Christ himself dwelt in them. Now that is a prayer to copy and repeat again and again. Our destiny is to be conformed to the likeness of the one true Son of God. He is praying for that transformation to be advanced in them and so should we. That is our calling: to be like Christ.

In particular the prayer is that his friends be deeply rooted and firmly grounded in love. Love is the nature of God, the sort of love that we see in the Lord Jesus laying down his lives for others. It is the antithesis of all that is selfish and self-seeking. It is service, it is joy-bringing, and it is life-imparting commitment to the well-being of others. Easily professed but not so easily practised. He prays that they may be given the capacity to ever more deeply appreciate the love of Christ, be formed and guided by it, so that they might be filled up to all the fullness of God: God-like in every aspect of their character and life.

As well as praying for them he inspires them to eager expectation not only for themselves as individuals but for all God's people. Here I am reminded that I am part of a great family for whose spiritual well-being I should pray, and pray with a strong sense of the bounty and power of our heavenly Father.

Yes, indeed, a prayer on which to model my own praying.

SEGMENT 3

The community of those who follow Jesus, wherever its members may be found, is a community committed to Jesus as their Lord and Master. That means that they are committed to the values of God's kingdom and involved in the mission of the Son of God. Christ's mission was to honour the Name of God and to draw people everywhere into His kingdom. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost and, his people, each of them, are called to bear witness to that truth and to be engaged in, and to be supportive of, efforts to win lost people. However, within that community of witnesses to God's saving intentions, God distributes particular gifts to particular people for the purpose of advancing the growth of His people. Among those particular gifts is that of the evangelist, that special calling and endowment to be carrier of God's good news. Such a special endowment and responsibility was part of Paul's calling. He knew he had been called to be God's ambassador especially to the Gentiles.

In the closing words of chapter 6 of his letter to the Ephesians Paul requests the prayerful support of his readers for his ministry, particularly as he is, at the time of writing, undergoing imprisonment and restrained in his ability to travel and preach. Here are his words:

¹⁹ *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,* ²⁰ *for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

As individuals and as a Christian community, this is a prayer that we should learn to copy. As a gospel sharing community whose delight is to tell of the grace of the Lord Jesus we are to unite in prayer for our fellowship, but particularly for those whose special calling is to be evangelists. Paul seeks for himself a God-given courage, boldness, and fluency of thought and speech, as he engages with all those with whom he comes in contact. This theme, and these capacities and skills, are matters for which we ought regularly to entreat our heavenly Father. We all need the courage and capacity to bear a faithful witness to Christ as occasion arises. We are all to pray specifically for those who are evangelists and to pray that God will raise up many more of them. This sort of prayer is an important reminder for us of the nature of our life as a Christian community. As well as living day by day the life of God's people, we must keep reminding ourselves that part of that life is to bear witness to others about our Lord. Copying this prayer can be a powerful reminder of that fact.

These three prayers from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians are worth incorporating in your own list of Prayers Worth Copying and used often.

Perhaps more than anything else, prayer is the most telling display of our dependence upon God and our most expressive declaration of our confidence in Him.

In the ordinariness of our daily lives it is easy to forget that we are offered access into the presence of our Creator, Maintainer, Saviour and Friend. There is a vast heavenly reality around us with which we are encouraged to engage.

In the letter from which these prayers are taken, Paul encourages his readers to be continually empowering themselves in the Lord and in the might of his strength. The question is "How?" Among his other directions he exhorts them to keep at the task of praying, praying in dependence upon the Spirit of God.

Let's do it.