

Introduction

I went hiking once with a few mates, and one mate had a single-man tent. The rest of us were in two-man tents. On the second or third night, there was a violent wind-storm. My tent was OK, but over the wind we heard a 'help, help!'. Going outside, we saw the guy in the single tent leaning out of his door, hanging on to the fly; the outside part of the tent that was about to be blown away by the wind. He couldn't move, otherwise the main part of the tent would blow away, and he couldn't get the fly back in place. So, after recovering from our laughter, we had to help him, banging the pegs back into place and securing the fly to the ground. He needed us, his friends, to keep his tent on the ground.

It's a constant battle, isn't it, living in the world as a follower of Jesus? We need to be strong to resist what the world throws at us. A few days ago I was deeply encouraged in my daily time with Jesus. I meditated upon 1 Corinthians 5:15, which tells us that Jesus died so that we would live for Him instead of ourselves. Like you, I long to live 100% for Jesus. In verse 9 of Romans chapter 1, Paul could say that he served God '**with my whole heart**'. That is, in the depths of his soul he served God. Like you, I want to be more like Paul, living always for Jesus. But we cannot do it by ourselves. We need each other, brothers and sisters.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul gives a reason for his upcoming visit to Rome: '***I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.***' Brothers and sisters, we give each other strength to live for Jesus. There are three ways for Christians to strengthen each other in verses 8 to 15. Winds of temptations and trials and hard work threaten to un-roof our lives. We need to hold tight to Jesus, so that we continue to live for him. Three tent-pegs help to hold us firm. Other Christians hammer those pegs in firm.

In verses 8 to 10 Paul speaks of Prayer, then of Encouragement in verses 11 and 12, then of Gospel preaching, verses 13 to 15. Prayer, Encouragement and Gospel Preaching: P, E, and G. In our relationships with each other we are to pray for each other, encourage each other in Growth Groups, and hear Gospel-preaching in Church.

Prayer

The first peg is prayer, verses 8 to 10. '***First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to see you.***'

People sometimes ask me how they should pray. In these three verses there are five excellent tips on prayer for other people. Prayer should be relational, thankful, constant, particular and dependant.

1. Firstly, prayer only happens within a relationship with God. We are not performing a ritual or saying a spell when we pray; we are talking to God our Father. Paul says that God is '**my God**'. We can come Him '**through Jesus Christ**'. There is no other way to relate to God, than through Jesus Christ. We pray to God because of what Jesus has done for us. He died for us and rose from the

dead to make us *'acceptable to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit'* (Rom 15:16). On top of this, Paul says in verse 9 that God is the one, *'whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son'*. We come to God as his servant. Prayer is relational.

2. Secondly, prayer must include thanks. Paul said in verse 8, *'I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.'* Paul had not met these Romans, but he had heard about their faith. Even though we may not all know each other well, we can thank God for each others' faith. Be thankful for each other; that we have been enabled to trust in Jesus.
3. Thirdly, we must constantly remember each other. Paul called God as his witness *'how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times'*. He thought of them as he prayed. Brother and sisters, do you have a list of people you are praying for? Or some other way of remembering each other? In our bulletin we have a list to help us remember each other every day. Perhaps you could use this to remind yourself of others.
4. Fourthly, in verse 10 Paul speaks of asking God for particular things. *'I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to see you'*. Paul wanted to come and see them, and asked God to make it possible; for him to open the way. Prayer should be particular, Church, not always general. We cannot simply naming people in a list, and saying, 'I pray for him and her and them and ...'. Think of particular things you can pray for people. Again the prayer list in the bulletin is helpful in this regard.
5. And fifthly, prayer must be dependant upon God's will. Paul had *'planned many times to come to'* Rome, but so far God had not let him. Now in verse 10 he was praying that *'at last by God's will the way may be opened'*. We can only do what God allows us to do, and our prayers must recognise God's sovereignty.

Prayer for each other should be relational, thankful, constant, particular and dependant. You won't remember all of these points from this sermon. I won't remember these five points tomorrow. Next time you sit down or kneel to pray, though, why not get out this sermon text and look through these five points before you begin to pray. And then hammer that peg in for your Christian brothers and sisters. Give them strength by praying for them.

Encouragement

In that second half of verse 10, Paul has said what he prays for: to come to them. Why? So that he can encourage them. The second peg in our service to each other is encouragement. Verses 11 and 12 say, *'I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.'* Paul longed to see them, he was passionate about meeting up with them, because he had something to give them.

He speaks of *'some spiritual gift'* that he wanted to share with them, to impart to them. We'll understand that better in a moment when we come to Gospel-preaching in verses 13 to 15. That was Paul's spiritual gift - teaching to make the Romans strong. But in verse 12 Paul recognised that it was not a one-way street - they would

be *'mutually encouraged by each other's faith'*. In chapter 15, and verse 13, Paul says he is looking forward to being refreshed by them.

When Christians come together, they naturally encourage each other. Many times I have come to Church or to Growth group feeling harassed or down-hearted, only to be given peace and joy by you, my brothers and sisters. As we speak together, and as we serve each other, we are refreshed and mutually encouraged.

This encouragement is always best face-to-face. Paul was writing a letter to the Romans, but was conscious that seeing them would be much better. This is one reason why regular attendance at a Growth Group is so powerful in each others' lives. Texts, emails and social media are not best. Every week people from this Church get together and encourage each other to live for Jesus in Growth Groups. We read the Bible, talk and pray for each other. It's intentional, much more than a social gathering. Because, we need to be encouraged *'by each other's faith'*. When we are speaking of Jesus, and of following Jesus practically, we experience the faith of each other, and that encourages us.

In verse 8, Paul said that the faith of the Romans had been *'reported all over the world'*. This is not just about what they believed, it was about what they did. Up in verse 5, Paul had mentioned *'the obedience that comes from faith'*. As we spend time together, intentionally sharing our walk with Jesus, we hear about the different ways of being obedient, and that is encouraging.

So can I urge you, if you are not in a Growth Group, join one. I long to see you in a Growth Group sometime soon, that we might be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. For I need you just as much as you need me.

Gospel-Preaching

Prayer and Encouragement are the first two pegs. The third peg is Gospel-preaching. We need to listen to sermons together to keep each other strong. The spiritual gift Paul mentioned in verse 11 is the preaching of the gospel. In verses 14 and 15 he writes, *'I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome'*.

Jesus told Paul, *'I am sending you to [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light'* (Acts 26:17-18). That became Paul's obligation to all people of all nations, to open eyes. The way he did that was to preach the gospel. He didn't heal all people, through sometimes people were miraculously healed through him. He didn't give money to all poor people, though he was concerned for them. He spoke to all people about what Jesus had done. About how he had died for their sins so that they might not live in darkness (for themselves), but in the light (for Jesus).

Paul's obligation to the world is my personal obligation to Rockdale. I came here to preach the gospel. Each week in Church you hear me speak of Jesus. We open up God's Word together, try to understand it and apply it to our lives. This Gospel-preaching is the means by which God prepares us to Pray and to Encourage each other. As Ephesians 4:11-12 says, pastors and teachers are given *'to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up'*. The Holy Spirit softens and changes our hearts as His Word is preached.

So come to Church to receive this spiritual gift, to be made strong, so that you can pray for and encourage each other. Pray before you come to Church, that God would work in you. Prepare yourself mentally and physically beforehand. Get enough sleep on Saturday night. Eat so that you are not hungry. Go to the bathroom before Church starts, and not during the sermon. And be attentive; discipline your minds as you listen.

As we listen together, we will be hammering in that third peg of Gospel-preaching, so that we will be made strong together.

Family of God, we need each other. We need each other to secure each of us to Jesus Christ, so that we might live for him and not ourselves. The tent-pegs we use are Prayer, Encouragement and Gospel-preaching. Hammer away, beloved friends, hammer away.