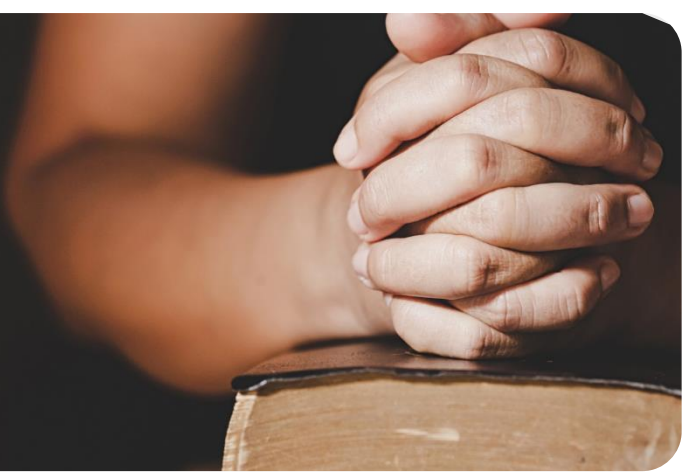


Sermon Series:

Prayers of the Bible



PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS – Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-21

Graeme Odgers (28/04/2024)

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday Bob spoke of the prayer prayed by Hannah. Her faith in God resulted in an intense prayer covering her personal difficulties. This was a prayer that resulted in the birth of Samuel. And as Hannah had promised, Hannah presented Samuel to God at Shiloh, in the care of Eli the high priest.

Samuel went on to become a prophet of God and a judge over Israel. Samuel was instrumental in the establishment of Israel's monarchy. God chose him to anoint and counsel Israel's kings. This is an amazing impact stemming from the prayer of a faithful woman.

There are also many extraordinary examples of answers to prayer outside the Bible as God hears and acts.

Martin Luther was a Catholic priest and theologian who started the Protestant Reformation in Germany by questioning Church policies in 1517, and now 507 years after he started the Reformation, we know his ministry was covered in prayer as he once said, "I have so much business today that I'll never get it done unless I spend the first part of my day in prayer".

Similarly, the busy preacher, **John Wesley**, founder of the Methodist Church, said, "*God does nothing except in answer to prayer.*" "If you want to see anything of lasting worth accomplished, you must pray, and pray with confidence."

The Christian evangelist and author **Pastor Bob Gass** (1944 – 2019) wrote in a book on prayer: "When you think about it, every failure is, in essence, a prayer failure! If you don't pray, the best that can happen - is nothing. You see prayer puts the situation into God's hands, otherwise, whose hands is it in?" Pastor Bob Gass wrote the Word for Today, a free daily devotional, for United Christian Broadcasters (UCB) for many years. This devotional that he started has carried on to the present and is still provided free. Bob also created a foundation that was responsible for creating the Village of Hope in Romania for abused and neglected children hidden away in state run orphanages.

Cornelia Arnolda Johanna "Corrie" ten Boom (15 April 1892 – 15 April 1983) was a Dutch watchmaker and later a Christian writer and public speaker. Corrie worked with her father, Casper ten Boom, her sister Betsie ten Boom and other family members to help many Jewish people escape from the Nazis during the Holocaust in World War II, by hiding them in her home. They were caught, and she was arrested and sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. She is well known for her book "The Hiding Place" As a speaker, I think she was a bit of a character, and this is displayed in some of her statements on prayer:

- Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?
- To pray only when in peril is to use safety belts only in heavy traffic.
- Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it.
- I prayed to dispel my fear, until suddenly, and I do not know how the idea came to me, I began to pray for others. I prayed for everyone who came into my thoughts - people with whom I had travelled, those who had been in prison with me, my school friends of years ago. I do not know how long I continued my prayer, but this I do know - my fear was gone! Interceding for others had released me!

What can we learn from these people? Each of these people learnt the power of prayer in their lives based on their faith in God and their confidence that God can answer prayer. Through their prayer life they brought about wider change in the world working in God's guidance.

THE FIRST PART OF PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS

The Ephesian church was known for its faith and love in the Lord Jesus after hearing the Gospel message from Paul. In Ephesians Paul prays two sections of intercessory prayer for the believers in Ephesus. He commences a prayer in 1:15-19a, then leaves the prayer in praise of Jesus, returning to prayer in 3:14-19, finishing with a well-known doxology in verses 20 and 21. Paul helped start the church at Ephesus and at this time he is in prison in Rome writing this letter to those in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia. At this point Paul hadn't been back there for many years.

Paul starts by giving thanks for the saving grace given by God through His son, Jesus in the first fourteen verses. Then, in verse 15, he commences a prayer:

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, (1:15,16)

Paul has heard the wonderful news that the people in the early church at Ephesus have a strong faith in the Lord Jesus and show true love to all people. And as a result, he writes "*I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers*".

There are a few points we can see from the opening of this prayer, Paul's prayer was:

- **Continual:** Paul didn't just pray once or twice but continued to pray for the believers at Ephesus day after day.

- **Thankful:** The Greek word for thanks here is eucharisteo (from which we get Eucharist or Holy Communion). There is a deeper meaning here than just “giving thanks” – here, giving thanks carries the idea of expressing deep appreciation for benefits or blessings given – Paul is expressing his full deep appreciation for the believers in Ephesus to God.
- **Mindful:** “remembering you in my prayers” - Paul is sincere in thinking of those far away from him, the distance not separating their faithful fellowship from his thoughts.

We could use this as a templet for our prayers, when praying for others:

- We need to be consistent and “continual” when we pray for someone.
- We can always express our thanks to God, for holding those we pray for in His care, no matter what happens.
- So we don’t miss a person that the Holy Spirit has prompted you or I to pray for, each of us could have a list that we cover others in prayer each day, so that we “remember them continually with thanksgiving to God”.

Paul’s first intercessory request

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. (1:17)

Paul’s first request in this prayer that he asks of God, is that the glorious Father, the Father spoken of by the Son, Jesus, “*may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.*” This aspect of the Spirit is mentioned a fair few times in the Bible, e.g. Job amplifies this idea:

But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right. (Job 32:8,9)

And Paul’s purpose from prison in this first request to God – is that “you may know Him better”. Paul is praying for the Holy Spirit’s work among the believers in Ephesus to know God better through revelation from the Holy Spirit.

The concept of the “*breath of the Almighty*” is another way of showing the work of the Holy Spirit as an intimate part of the way in which the glorious and powerful Father moves in a person’s life.

For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 2:6)

Again – so that you will know Him better!

Paul’s second intercessory request

I pray 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 His holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. (1:18,19a)

In these two verses Paul prays for four specifics that he longs for the Ephesians to understand and each of these still apply to us today:

- *“The eyes of your heart (the very centre and core of your being) may be enlightened (flooded with light by the Holy Spirit)”* - Amplified Bible. Paul stresses the intensity in which he wants the Holy Spirit to reveal our hope in Christ as firm foundation in our lives.
- *“The hope to which He has called you”*. Our hope stems from our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It’s a hope that believers need and is based on the promise of Christ’s return and the reign of God throughout the earth.
- *“The riches of His glorious inheritance”*. Jesus is the hope of glory, through Him we have an eternal and glorious inheritance, and this will be in the presence of God.
- *“His incomparably great power for us who believe”*. Paul prays that believers will understand and experience God’s immeasurable and unlimited and the surpassing greatness of His power in us. The life to come will be so different it is hard to put it in words.

THE SECOND PART OF PAUL’S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS

After covering salvation by grace through faith and believers being one in Christ in Chapter 2, Paul begins chapter 3 discussing the mystery of the Gospel and that it is now revealed.

Paul stresses:

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. (3:12)

Now Paul turns back to prayer in verse 14 commencing with,

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. (3:14,15)

With the grandeur of the glorious Father on his mind Paul kneels before the Father as he continues to pray. Normally priests of his day would pray when standing, but here Paul kneels in a submissive position. In those days you would only kneel before a king. So this verse suggests that Paul views God as the ultimate King, “from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”

Paul’s third intercessory request

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, (3:16)

Paul requests that through God’s abundant ability that He strengthens the believer’s inner being through the Holy Spirit. The inner being is sometimes referred to as a person’s spirit or even heart may be used. And here Paul is requesting God to strengthen their personal spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah uses the word heart to indicate the inner non-physical spirit of a person. This is different to a person’s physical mind that will contain knowledge:

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33b)

The Law in this case is knowledge that God puts in all people's minds. But the Spirit writes it on our heart.

Paul expresses the difference in a God's makeup of a person in Thessalonians:

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

God strengthens a person through the power of the Holy Spirit working with our "inner being" which in Thessalonians Paul specifies as our spirit and soul, both non-physical aspects of a human that God recognises as part of a person.

Paul's fourth intercessory request

In verse 3:16, Paul prays that the Believers in Ephesus be strengthened in their "inner being", but in verse 17 Paul writes it another way:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. (3:16,17)

We think of our heart as being the centre and source of our whole inner life. The Holy Spirit's inner strengthening means the same thing as Christ dwelling in the believers' hearts. Paul is asking that the Ephesian believers might be strong in the Holy Spirit, and that the Messiah in all His might and strength might fully empower them in their life of faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (3:17-19)

The early fellowship of the Ephesian believers was known for its love for one another. Paul finishes his intercessory prayer asking that they would know the power of the Holy Spirit together with the wider church of the Lord's people.

When they first heard the Gospel they felt the full impact of Christ's love, a love that is so exceptional that Paul wants all to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ - and for believers to know the unknowable - to know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge.

Why is this, so that all may be filled with a power that changes one's life through the Holy Spirit. This Spirit drives some to do exceptional work for God, but it also drives some to be great preachers of the word and others to do smaller things for the Lord.

Paul sums this up with a rich Doxology, which is an expression of praise to God.

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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (3:20-21)

SUMMARY

If Paul were here, he would encourage us and possibly pray the same prayer for the faithful believers today. Summarizing these verses, we see that Paul calls on the Lord with the following:

Ephesians 1: 17-19	
Paul's Request	Purpose
1. May He give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph 1:17a)	So that you may know Him better. (Eph1:17b)
2. May you receive insight (Eph 1 18a)	So that you will comprehend and appreciate your hope, your inheritance, and God's power. (Ep 1:18b – 19a)
Ephesians 3: 14-21	
3. May He strengthen your inner person by His Spirit (Eph 3:16)	So that you can comprehend and experience Christ's love. (Eph 3:18-19a)
4. May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith (Eph 3:17a)	
5. May you, yourself be anchored in love (Eph 3:17b)	So that you may be filled with God's fullness to carry out His will. (Eph 3:19b)
6. Doxology	So that in all we do that God may receive all glory. (Eph 3:20-21)

Paul's prayer shows the importance of intercessory prayer, praying for others. This prayer focuses on knowing God, understanding our inheritance as believers, growing in Christ, and in all we do that God will receive the Glory for our actions.

Paul's prayer applies to us today as much as it did to the Ephesian Church.

Now you and I might think that we would not be able to pray like Paul, and that might well be true. But if you have faith in Jesus, then you need to pray and pray intentionally and regularly. Prayer is not about the right words, or the right feeling, or the right posture or the right length of time.

You can pray anywhere, at any time and about anything. However, it is best if you set aside a time specifically to meet with God, just as Martin Luther stated.

Finally, as a message from the lives of Christians who lived before us, we need to:

- 1. Be consistent in praying** – setting time aside to speak with God on a regular basis, seeking His direction involving God in your issues.

2. Be sincere in praying – understanding who God is and getting to know Him makes our prayer sincere and heartfelt.

3. Strengthen in faith – prayer strengthens faith by spending specific time with God, reviewing His Word, and putting your thoughts and concerns in God's care.

Norm and Pam prepare a prayer update each week and it is great, commencing with a Bible verse that you can use for meditation before praying, then a list of things that need prayer. This guide is a great way to meet the above points in our life and is a strong starter to help you be consistent, sincere, and strengthened in your faith.