

Ephesians Week #2

Ephesians 1:15-23

JEFF

Last week - video froze. Wonders of tech.
We were exploring Paul's thanks to God for his work of salvation and for the sealing of the Holy Spirit. That just like a letter is sealed until it reaches it's destination, so believers have been sealed by the Spirit of God at our baptism, and marked with the cross of Jesus until we reach our final destination.

Today we move on to the next section of Paul's letter, which is a prayer. Paul prays here for people he loves in a church that he planted in the city of Ephesus.

You know, when I look at the passion of this prayer, it leads me to ask the question,

**How would your life change if prayer didn't exist?
How would our church change
if there was no such thing as prayer?**

When my buddy and I were kids, we often dreamed about finding a genie in a bottle. And we would have these conversations where we would debate...

"What would you ask for if you only had three wishes?"
An airplane. Magical powers. A self-cleaning room. That's the heart of a kid. It shows what I really desired and found important.

Similarly, what you ask God for can tell you a lot about your heart and your priorities. The things you take to God are usually the things at the center of your life.

PATTI

What do you most often pray for?

Finances? Your marriage? Kids? Your Job? School? Illness?

It's good to pray about these things.
 But often, I find that my prayers sound like a **grocery list** compared to the prayers recorded in the bible.
"God, I need this and this and this, and oh yes.... that."

If you have teenagers at home, there might be seasons where it seems like the only time they really talk with you is when they need something.
 But what YOU want most is just to spend time with them.

In this text from Ephesians, we learn from the prayer life of the Apostle Paul that this is what God wants, too.

And there are two questions, then, that we'd like to spend the rest of our time on today.

1. *Why does Paul pray for the Ephesians?*
2. *What does he pray for them?*

Why Does Paul Pray?

v. 15-16

Paul begins by telling the Ephesians that he prayed constantly for them.

It's almost as if it was impossible for Paul to STOP praying for them.

And I'll bet that finding time to pray was difficult for Paul. He wasn't a monk living out in the desert with nothing else to do.

He ministered.
 He labored as a tent maker.
 He planted churches.
 He preached.

A thousand thoughts must have raced through his mind at any given moment. And yet he is always praying.

We are so distracted and busy that we have trouble finding the time to pray.
 So what could make someone as busy as Paul

make prayer such a high priority?

Often what drives Christians to prayer today is a problem. But what led Paul to pray was a **vision** of God's greatness and goodness.

I think what drives most American Christians to prayer is that we want the Lord to fix our problems, not that we are overwhelmed by His glory.

Another way to say that, as we have before is that we tend to **seek God's hand**, or what He can do for us... whereas the Bible encourages us **first to seek God's face** (who He is in his being and character).

Paul prays because He has a BIG view of God. By the way that is the cure for a weak prayer life.

If you struggle with inconsistent prayer, it's probably not so much that your bad at establishing habits, but that you need a bigger view of God.

Paul is moved to pray because he has a BIG GOD, because he's passionate about God's plan for the world, and because he believes the Church is essential to that plan.

JEFF

What Paul Prayed

Paul has told us *why* he prayed, now we'll see **WHAT** he prays for. But first, let's do a thought experiment:

Imagine that you are a Christian in Ephesus at the time that Paul is writing this letter. You have only been a Christian for a few years. Maybe less than a dozen.

You haven't seen Paul in four years. You are part of a tiny faith movement that is considered foolishness by your Greek and Roman neighbors,

who are either into witchcraft, or worshipers of Artemis, whose temple in that city was one of the 7 wonders of the known world at that time.

Plus, you and your fellow believers are threatening the livelihoods of shop owners who sold witchcraft scrolls and idol statues.

People are hostile to you.
And you have the typical added stresses of marriage, work, and parenting.

If you are living that life in Ephesus, what do you feel you need?

A better job, maybe. Or more food.
Protection from any threats against you because of your faith.
A gentler boss or slave master.
Help with your kids. Help overcoming sin or doubts or whatever!

And then you're reading a letter from the Apostle Paul, and he begins telling you what he prays for you. He writes:

17] keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit] the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18] pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened....

He doesn't pray that you have a comfortable life.
He's not praying that your job gets better.
He's not praying that you avoid persecution.

As pastor and author Tim Keller writes in his book on prayer, "It is remarkable that in all of his writings Paul's prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances."

PATTI

He prays that God opens the eyes of your heart.
He's praying that you would know God better.
That's what Paul finds urgent.

John Piper describes prayer as **a wartime walkie-talkie**, not the intercom to call your butler to fluff your pillow.
It's not that God doesn't care about the small things – He does!

But later in Ephesians, Paul will say that our struggle

is with spiritual forces, and he's going to use warfare imagery. He knows that the Christian life is a war. And because prayer is an important weapon in this context. It's also a matter of urgency - of life and death.

Paul prays, then, that the believers under attack will come to know God and grow in their relationship with Him. With all the issues that the Ephesians were dealing with, Paul prays that they will be enlightened by God so that they can see three things:

1. The hope of their calling.
2. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.
3. His incomparably great power for us who believe.

I think we can be tempted to see becoming a Christian as crossing the finish line. The goal is the waters of baptism. Or confirmation, maybe. But that is wrong.

Becoming a Christian is just the beginning of growing in the knowledge of God, not the end.

Unless we grow in knowledge of God, we will lack guidance to know what God expects us to do, or we may know what God expects, but lack the power to do it.

Worse yet, we may be able to do what God expects, but we will do it, not out of love, but with a grudging obedience.

JEFF

Though Paul mentions three things that he hopes the Ephesians come to see, he focuses on seeing the power of God.

In v. 21b-23 Paul says,
 "The same power that raised Jesus from death to life and exalted him is working in you!"

We often focus on the Resurrection as the more relevant thing here. You hear people talking about "resurrection power," but when was the last time you heard someone talk about "**exaltation power**"?

You might think the exaltation of Jesus is a piece of irrelevant theology, but you'd be wrong.

The ASCENSION of Jesus to the right hand of God in glory MATTERS. Paul tells us that we are at war with the spiritual forces of the world.

These are the powers that pile temptations and struggles on you until you are at the breaking point.

Paul says that Christ was raised above everything, even these forces that cause you so much trouble.

Christ was raised above all of that, and you are in Christ.

He is Lord over all of them.
They did defeat Him, and,
because that same power is at work in you,
those forces cannot overcome you.

I am again struck by how Paul's view of God differs so much from ours. I would pray this way: "God, do something powerful among us."

But Paul doesn't ask God to use his power. Paul is so aware that God is *already* doing something powerful in and around us, that he simply prays that the Ephesians will see it.

Christianity is NOT a set of rules for self-improvement. It is faith a God who is at work in our lives and in this world to restore what is broken. That's why you can't live the Christian life in your own strength.

The second reason that Paul wants us to see God's power is that seeing God's power *motivates us to join Him in His mission.*

Parents understand this, I think. You ask your kid to do something, and their response is, "**I can't.**" They don't have the confidence or the power or even the motivation to do what you've asked them to do.

It's amazing how all of that changes the moment you help them,

the moment you are doing it together
and **they are sharing in your work**.

PATTI

Right. We, as a church, serve others, not because
we see a void that God has left that we need to fill.

Instead, we see the presence of God
in the oppressed,
in the struggling addict,
in the dying grandparent,
in the impoverished communities,
in the tribes who haven't heard the gospel,
in our own lives in the midst of our weaknesses.

It's seeing God's presence and power that
drives you into the work....

Not because God needs you to pick up where He left off,
but because God has invited you to be,
as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "**co-workers in God's fields**"

Let's be honest.
Some of you have tuned in tonight, and
you're at your breaking point.

You need, today, to begin to see a BIG God.
To glimpse the MIGHTY POWER of the Lord who is
on your side, with you in the depths of your struggles,

whether those struggles involve
your marriage, or temptation, or illness, or grief.
He's there working powerfully in your life,
whether you realize it or not.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the dangers of preaching and preachers
is that if something makes a great illustration,
it continues to be used whether it is true or not.
So I can't vouch for this.

But I've read that early African converts to Christianity were devout in their personal prayers. Supposedly, each person had a separate spot in the thicket where he or she would pray.

Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others.

They would kindly remind the negligent one,
“Brother, the grass grows on your path.”

Let us not let the grass grow on your path.
 Let us be constantly in prayer to our Big God
 for each other, that we would come to know Him better...

Let's not let the grass grow on our path
 as we pray to see God's MIGHTY POWER at work
 at work in our midst - in our families, and churches, and communities.

With that power, there's nothing we can't overcome.
 No conflict.
 No weakness.
 No temptation.
 No attack from the Evil One.

PRAYER:

Ephesians 3: 14-21

This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:

Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.