

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 3:14

Session 26: Paul's Prayer

I want to start off today with a thought experiment. I want each of you to pretend for a moment that you are the apostle Paul. The year is 62 A.D. and you have been in prison in Rome for about 2 years. You have decided to write a letter to the Ephesians.

You have been thinking about the Ephesians for a while now and naturally you have been praying for them. Just to set this up, let me tell you some things which you know.

You know the city of Ephesus is located in modern day Turkey.



You know the Roman Empire made the city of Ephesus a provincial capital and its population is around 250,000, making it the third largest city in the Roman empire. Ephesus is a city of size, wealth, and power. The major economies of the city are rooted in trade and idol worship. Containing the temple of Artemis, great

ocean ports, a grand theater, stadium and library, Ephesus is a major cultural center in the world.

You also know there are a number of house churches in Ephesus, the first of which you established circa. 52 A.D. during your 2nd apostolic journey. You were not there very long, so you leave Aquila and Priscilla in charge of the new assembly. Later, Apollos joins them as the main teacher in the various house churches.

About four years later, on your third journey, you spent three years with them, the longest you spent with any church you planted. The people are very dear to

you; they are some of your closest friends. During the time you were with them, you grounded them in the “Romans” foundational doctrine.

That means the Ephesians know about their new identity in Christ in relation to their justification (1-5) and sanctification (6-8). They know something about their adoption, and they have been established by doctrines which are meant to produce an absolute confidence in God and His word (8). They know about the dispensational change and they know they are not spiritual Israel or Israel’s replacement (9-11). They have the five core features of godly love generated in them and they are living out of them (12). They understand the principles of governmental authority and they have put on the armor of light (13). They understand how to treat their fellow members in the body of Christ. (14-16).

Over the years, you have maintained close contact with the leadership of the church in Ephesus. Your farewell to the elders and leaders of the church in Ephesus is recorded in Acts 20. It is one of the most moving, emotional passages in the Bible.

You have been thinking about them for a while and when they come into your mind, you pray for them. So here is the question: what do you pray for them about? What would you say to God about them? Knowing all you know about them, how would you pray for them?

Well, you already know that Paul prayed for them concerning spiritual things and not material. We saw this last time when we noticed how Paul’s prayers differ from the way people commonly pray today. Even so, what do you now pray for the Ephesian saints?

So, why are we doing this little experiment? Because the way in which Paul prayed for the Ephesians should be the way we pray for each other. Paul is our example in everything, including prayer.

So, even knowing what you know, tell me, if you are Paul, what do you want for your Ephesian brothers and sisters? If you are going to ask God for something on their behalf, what would it be? Let me give you a hint: whenever you think to pray for someone, take into account where they are spiritually, how far along they are in the doctrine.

Now, I want us to look at Paul’s prayer and identify the way Paul prays.

Ephesians 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁵ Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
¹⁶ That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
¹⁸ May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Firstly, notice that Paul's prayer is exclusively spiritual. In fact, every part of it pertains to spiritual issues. (Paul prayed one time for something physical and God declined to answer that prayer, but instead, directed Paul to a spiritual principle. We will see this later on.)

I want to say that sometimes we see a physical need that someone has. So how do we pray about that, if we are going to pray like Paul? We need to know about this, so keep it in mind and we will bring up later in this session.

Paul's prayer is not concerned with material things, but spiritual. When Paul prays, he does not pray for a change in their circumstances or for a new building, or anything like that. Paul is concerned with the spiritual condition and welfare of the church in Ephesus and his prayers reflect that.

Likewise, we should be concerned about the spiritual condition and welfare of our fellow saints, and like Paul, that concern should drive us to prayer.

We can do this whenever someone happens to come into our mind (unplanned), but we should be praying for one another on purpose. In other words, we should plan to pray.

I believe that Paul's prayers were on purpose and with purpose. Why should we pray on purpose? **If you want your spiritual life to flourish, you will need to pray. If you want your prayer life to flourish, you will need to pray on purpose.** And know this, sonship prayer is a **lifestyle**, not just something you do. That means there are areas of your life that will change, if you are going to engage in the kind of prayer Paul prays.

So, getting back to our topic, how do we pray on purpose?

Let's talk about two ways that we pray on purpose:

Firstly, when we pray throughout the day, it can happen that some things just come into our mind and we pray for them, that's find.

But really, the night before, as you plan your day – which I hope you are doing – you not only put down the things you need to do, but on the spiritual side of the ledger you need to decide what you will be working on spiritually in your own life. This is the issue you will be focusing on throughout the day as you fix your coffee in the morning, drive in your car, and go through your day. Let it permeate your mind. Talk to the Lord about this as often as you can throughout the day.

In the beginning, you may find it hard to keep it in your mind, discovering at the end of the day you haven't thought about it until the end of the day. But keep working at it, and you will improve.

Tell your family about the spiritual work you are doing. Pray with your spouse and include this as part of that prayer.

Let me use myself as an illustration. The previous thing that I was working on for several months was to have a greater awareness of the presence of God in my life. I wanted to stop praying like God is "up there" and realize the truth that He is right here, beside me, even right now as I teach this lesson. He will be in the truck with me when I leave. He will be at the table with me, fully present – which is part of His omnipresence. He is even fully present every moment I am sleeping.

This desire to take my relationship to God to a higher level motivated me to study and learn about God's omnipresence so that doctrine could work to transform how I think about His presence. God is not omnipresent as though He is the invisible ether that pervades throughout the entire creation; He is fully present, at every point and place in the entire creation, at the same time. Even those places where there is no man or animal or insect or star or planet. He is at all the spaces in between all the things.

While I want that to continue and abound in me, I am now off to the next thing, which is to expand my understanding of who I am as a created being. When God made me, I want to know what things are true of me and how that knowledge helps me to live for God. Not only that, but the more I learn about this, the more I appreciate the glory and power of God, the more I stand in awe of Him, the more I appreciate what He has done and love Him for it. (You really can't appreciate the value of something until you recognize the details of it.)

Here is the point: plan to pray throughout the day tomorrow about some area of your spiritual life you need to be working on. Write down your prayer and put it in your pocket. Gather some verses and memorize at least one. Take time to read and study about this work you are doing and then integrate that into your meditation and prayer. Work on yourself by praying on purpose.

If I can make a suggestion, don't just dream up something to work on, but use the study on Ephesians or the study on 1 Corinthians as a prompt on what to work on. Look for doctrine that is covered in our studies and have that doctrine effectually work in you to transform some area of your life.

Secondly, we pray on purpose by setting aside a time which is specifically dedicated to prayer. I also have this. For me, this is usually the first thing I do when I wake up. I have developed a habit of getting up, weighing and taking my vitals and recording them. When I sit down to take my blood pressure (BP) and heart rate, I wait. I take time to sit quietly and pray before I start the BP monitor. The length of time varies for me, but I don't rush it.

Now, we talked about praying on purpose throughout the day, now let's talk about another way to pray on purpose. Make a prayer list. And beside each name put your request. Make sure your request is spiritual in nature (not, I pray they win the lottery) and that your request is specific.

And here is the next important element to learn: Paul does not pray a general prayer for the Ephesians, but his prayer is very specific.

We often hear people pray for God to "bless so-and-so" or "be gracious to them" or "be with them," etc. These kinds of prayers amount to little more than saying, "Good luck!" While these prayers may be well intentioned, they are not precise. Paul's prayers are always laser focused, and there is a reason for that, beyond the obvious, which we will discuss later.

Sonship prayer concerns spiritual issues, it is done on purpose, and it is specific. So, when you put those names on your prayer list, out beside them, write down the specific request that you have for them.

So, let's look at Paul's request for the Ephesians. Remember that previously, he has already prayed that they would "know" three things: 1) the hope of His calling, 2) the riches of His inheritance, and 3) the exceeding greatness of His power.

Notice how Paul doesn't just say, "Hey, I have been praying for you guys." He does, but then he tells them what he has been praying for them about. In chapter 1, he tells them three specific things that he is praying for them to know.

Why does Paul do this? He does this for several reasons:

- 1) It is a necessary part of prayer. Our job in prayer is not to give God a list of things to do. Prayer is how God gives us things to do. When we know of a need within the body, we are supposed to respond to it by meeting that need by edifying, by exhorting, by giving, by ruling (administration) or by mercy. These all come out of Romans 12:6-8. Do you remember them?

Prayer is a call to action. If you know of someone who needs the gospel to be saved, it is not enough just to pray for them to be saved. You carry them the gospel. If you can't, then look at our school of evangelism and learn how to do it. In the meantime, take someone who does know how and get the gospel presented to them. I don't like the idea of praying for God to send someone, it seems like a copout; just go take care of it yourself. If you aren't willing to get involved, then don't kid yourself that you are really praying for them. You say, "Well, I don't live close enough to see them in person." Then, write them a letter or send them a video. Find a way to get the message to them.

- 2) It activates the doctrine. Prayer turns our thoughts toward the doctrine, for us and for those we pray for. It makes us act for godly reasons instead of fleshly reasons.
- 3) It encourages those we pray for.
- 4) It builds a spiritual bond. This is one of the ways that we learn to love each other. This is one of the ways we are "fitly joined together." This is one of the ways we create unity as a body and become members one of another.
- 5) It edifies us and them. The more we do this, the more we are built up in the faith and the more they are as well. How so? Because this is the pattern for prayer. Paul reports his prayers to those he is praying for.

But Paul does not stop there. Paul does report his prayer in chapter 1, but then he follows up by giving them the doctrine which produces their "knowing" these three things. In other words, Paul is providing God's answer to his own prayer. And that is another key to prayer.

When you pray for something for someone, you should do two things which Paul also does: 1) let them know what you are praying for them, and 2) give them that which will answer your prayer.

Paul does this every time he reports a prayer. So should we. So, what does Paul pray for the Ephesians (and us)?

Ephesians 3:16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, **to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;**

Paul is praying a radically different prayer. Have you ever prayed this for someone? Have you ever prayed this for yourself?

Well, let me end this session by making an application of what we have covered so far. Think of something you need to be working on, and go to work on that.

Then, create a prayer list for other people and specific requests. Start off small so you don't get overwhelmed and give up. Let's say 2 or 3 people you can begin to pray for.

If you do not know enough to determine what a genuine prayer for them should look like, then what should you do? You should get to know them. Ask them what you can pray for them about.

And you should be able to give an answer to that question yourself. If someone asked you what they can pray with you about, what would you say?

Billie and I, years ago, used to ask this question of our waiter when we would go out to eat. But, when sonship came along, and a new understanding of prayer, we found that almost all of their requests were for physical things and not for spiritual things. Let that not be the case for us.

So, let me start it off. I am asking you all to add me to your prayer list for this week. What can you pray for me? I can actually think of several requests, but let me just give you this one: Pray for me to love those who oppose, criticize and seek to discredit this ministry, and not to be sidetracked from our purpose of edification. I am saying it to you this way, but what I actually need, in order for that to happen, is for me to be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in my inner man. That prayer request actually covers a multitude of issues and areas. But I am saying it this way to start you thinking about the request that Paul gives us in chapter 3.

Here is my prayer for you:

If you have given up on prayer, my prayer for you is that you will recommit yourself to prayer, starting with what we have covered today. “Father, I pray that we would all be encouraged to pray, and to make our prayer lives a priority. May we identify Satan’s lies that seek to discourage us, and choose to believe the truth, that we can pray effectively. I pray that this week would be a turning point for anyone who has given up on prayer. What we have talked about today is the kind of prayer all of us can do, and it is the kind of prayer You have been waiting to hear. I pray that You, our great Father, the God of our Savior Jesus Christ, would rekindle a fire in our hearts to spend time with You this week.”

If you are already praying, let me encourage you to do a couple of things:

- 1) Turn Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians into a prayer for yourself – write it down and look at it often and pray it. As we continue to study Paul’s prayer, you will encounter things to add to this prayer. Who doesn’t want to be strengthened with might by God’s Spirit in their inner man?
- 2) Determine to pray on purpose throughout the day. Write it down the night before and stay with it until you feel like it is time to move on. Look at your life and take inventory. It doesn’t have to be some deep doctrinal or philosophical issue. For married men, it could be creating that spirit of oneness with your wife we talked about a couple of Tuesday’s back in our study on 1 Corinthians. For married women, it could be this coming Tuesday where we will be talking about How Wives Can Show Respect to Their Husbands, and win their husbands to Christ, or, if they are already saved, deepen the relationship with their husband. There is lots of practical advice and God would certainly be pleased with it.
- 3) Make a prayer list and have a prayer time; create a routine. Maybe keep the list short in the beginning, praying for people in the assembly. Pray like Paul – find out what they need spiritually and pray for that. Then follow up, let them know you are praying for them and what you are praying. Find ways to help that prayer get answered by God.
- 4) Make a prayer list for yourself. If anyone asks what they can pray for you about, pick something off the list and tell them. Ephesians 3:16 might be a good place to start.

- 5) Branch out your prayer life. Pray as a family. Teach your kids early on. Let them get used to praying and use that time to instruct them in prayer. Pray as a couple. Pray on our own. Pray throughout the day, but pray with direction and purpose. Plan your prayers and then go to work on them. Invest the time in prayer.