

# Praying like Paul

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our Bible reading this evening is from Ephesians chapter 1, reading from verse 15 to 23. Ephesians chapter 1 and at 15 to 23, thanksgiving in 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.

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.

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 in his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

[ 1 : 17 ] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Amen.

Well, I wonder if you pause to reflect, I wonder how you would characterize your prayer life. I wonder, would you say it's joyful, vibrant and enthusiastic, or is it perhaps rather more dry, perfunctory or even non-existent?

How much do you pray alone in private? How willing are you to pray in public, as Paul essentially does in these verses here? I imagine whatever you think of the current state of your prayer life, most of us would probably say that there is room for improvement, to say the least, in at least some aspect of our prayers.

So we're going to spend a bit of time this evening considering how Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians and how we might therefore pattern our prayers similarly. Now, just as the letter as a whole is divided into two halves, the doctrinal at the start of the letter and then the practical implications in the second half, chapter one is similarly divided into two halves.

In this case, we might call the praise section and the prayer section. In a healthy Christian life, we need both of these dimensions. Many of us perhaps are so focused on what we do not have that helpfully we're driven to prayer, to come to God asking for new spiritual blessings, to come asking for what we so greatly need.

[ 2 : 59 ] That's good, but is there a danger that we are in so doing oblivious to how God has already blessed us? Do we remember to give Him thanks for what He has already done?

Are we consumed with delighted praise of the God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly realms? Or conversely, does some of us perhaps make the opposite mistake?

As we perhaps so emphasize that undoubted truth that everything is ours in Christ, that actually we become complacent, and we find that we lack appetite to experience those privileges more deeply and grasp the fullness of the blessing we have received.

Well, Paul here in his letter to the Ephesians joins the two resolutely together. Prayer is essential and praise is essential, and we find that many of the same themes occur in both.

What he has praised God for doing, he prays for more of the same. First half of chapter 1, as we considered over a number of weeks, Paul rejoiced that we have every spiritual blessing.

[ 4 : 05 ] From the one God, every blessing is bestowed upon those who are in Christ. We need no more than we possess. We're blessed to have been chosen in Christ, and with that the blessings of adoption, forgiveness, revelation, sealing with the Holy Spirit, and more besides, all to the praise of God's glory.

The prayer of verse 15 and following, therefore, flows on from that. Notice the link at the start of verse 15. Paul says it is for this reason that he gives thanks.

Now that points back, surely, to all of the folk, to verses 3 through 14, the riches of this blessing that was theirs and which is also ours today. Perhaps especially it links to verses 13 and 14, in which Paul particularly notes the inclusion of these Gentile believers in Ephesus, Gentile believers like you and me, on equal footing with the Jews who were first God's people.

Their incorporation into the people of God prompts his thanksgiving here at the start. And since our intention is to learn from Paul's prayer how we might profitably pray, then our first heading is an instruction, pray with thanksgiving.

From there we'll move to say pray for spiritual well-being and pray with confidence in the power of God in Christ.

[ 5 : 23 ] Pray for spiritual well-being and pray with confidence in the power of God in Christ. So first we pray with thanksgiving. Now Paul, of course, is not alone in beginning his letters with a note of thanks.

This is part of the normal letter structure in his day, just like beginning with his own name, as he does in verse 1. But what's unusual even for Paul is that he's begun instead with this eulogy, with the proclamation of blessing in verses 3 through 14.

But he returns now to the more normal structure. But even in doing so, he's still different from the accepted norm of the world around him, different in who is being thanked here.

Because Paul's thanking God, not thanking the people to whom he's writing. He's noticing good things about these people, but it's still God who is worthy of thanks and praise, not they themselves.

And specifically what he first notes is that he's heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all God's people, verse 15. Since hearing of this, he has not stopped giving thanks and praise, verse 16.

[ 6 : 28 ] It's quite something to say of them, isn't it? He's heard of their faith and he's heard of their love for all God's people. I wonder whether, if you were being described by a third party, whether that's how you would be characterized.

Or perhaps more personally, if someone were describing Covenant Church as a whole, is that how they would characterize us? That they've heard of our faith and the love of all God's people.

It would be wonderful, wouldn't it? If we were known for our faith in the Lord Jesus and our love for God's people. And of course, those two have to go hand in hand.

If we profess faith but don't show love, then our profession of faith rings hollow. And so Paul overflows with thanksgiving for this church of saved sinners.

People in whom God's plan of salvation is being worked out. People who are chosen in Christ. I wonder to what extent we overflow with thanksgiving for one another and for other believers elsewhere.

- [ 7 : 33 ] Suspect. I suspect, if you're anything like me at least, that we more often pray in thanksgiving for our own salvation than we do for the faith of others.
- Maybe we're likely to pray thankfully for the good we see in others in context where they'll hear us doing it. But not necessarily in private.
- Of course, it can't be wrong to pray in that way, in that context, in order that people will overhear us. Because, well, that's exactly what Paul's doing as he writes this letter, isn't he? He's choosing to recount his prayers to God on their behalf.
- He lets them know what he's praying for them. And he shares that thanksgiving. But my suggestion is that if we only pray with that kind of thankfulness when someone else is listening, then maybe our attitudes and priorities are not all they should be.
- Not all that Paul's are. He says, since I heard of your faith, I have not stopped giving thanks for you. This is not something that he's just saying as they hear him.
- [ 8 : 34 ] No, he has been doing this daily, ever since he heard. This is definitely one that I've been pondering for myself, thinking about this passage.
- Because when I pray with someone, I usually start with thanksgiving. But when someone comes to my mind as I go about my day, well, I'm more likely at that point to pray for their needs than to give thanks for what they've done, or indeed give thanks for what God has done in them.
- I wonder whether you may be the same as me in that. So, pray with thanksgiving. Nevertheless, Paul does, in fact, also pray for their needs.
- It certainly isn't wrong to pray for our needs and to pray for the needs of others. And there's myriad examples in Scripture of such prayers. And those needs can be many and varied. That certainly encompasses pragmatic needs and desires.
- Daily bread, recovery from an illness. These are good and proper things to pray about. But those things are not Paul's focus here. And thus, our second heading this evening, pray for spiritual well-being.
- [ 9 : 42 ] Listen to what Paul actually prays. 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.
- 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.
- How could we summarize that section? He wants them to know God better. Here, the purpose of the Holy Spirit is that they may know the God of our Lord Jesus Christ better.
- That's verse 17, isn't it? That God will give them the spirit, but the spirit of wisdom of revelation so that they can know him better. That the purpose of them having the Holy Spirit, in this context at least, is to know God better.
- And that fits, of course, with what Jesus said the spirit would be coming to do. When he, the spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears.
- [ 10 : 45 ] And he will tell you what is yet to come. This is our great need, isn't it? To know God better. To know his will more fully. To appreciate his blessings more and more.
- So why, then, do our prayers for one another so rarely follow this same model? You may well pray regularly for those you love who don't yet know Christ, for them to have their eyes opened.
- Certainly, I hope that you do pray that. You pray for them to receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may come to know God in the first place. That, I think, many of us are good at praying, and rightly so.

But when we pray for those who already know Jesus, what, then, are we more likely to pray? That they will come to know God better? Or are our prayers more likely to revolve around their exams and their illnesses and their worries?

Of course, we've said it already. It isn't wrong to pray any aspect of our lives. It's good to pray for the exams to go well. But I suggest it's better to pray for the spiritual wisdom and insight to accept whatever result comes from those exams.

[ 11 : 56 ] It's good to pray for healing and an end to pain. But perhaps even better to pray for the understanding, to be able to learn the lessons God maybe wishes to teach through those difficult circumstances.

It's good to pray for food to eat. It's perhaps better to pray for a hunger to feed on God's Word. Paul here prays for the spiritual well-being of his fellow Christians, and I suggest we do well to do likewise.

Specifically, what he prays here in verses 18 and 19, he prays for a better knowledge, a better knowledge especially of the hope to which they are called, of the riches of God's inheritance and of God's incomparably great power.

Three things he wants them to know better. Hope, the riches of inheritance, and God's power. He prays they may know these things as the eyes of their hearts are enlightened.

And all three are aspects of the wonderful salvation that has been won for them. Now, this hope to which God has called them, this is, according to the preceding eulogy, this is established before the foundation of the world.

[ 13 : 03 ] They've been predestined, adopted, and redeemed. They are now different, and therefore their future will be different also. They hope in the outworking of God's plan to the praise of his glory.

Christian hope is a joyful expectation of the future based on true events in the past that changes everything about the present. And that hope, Paul prays, they may understand more fully.

That hope. Not a woolly hope, not a forlorn hope, not hoping against hope. No. Hope rooted in the good news of the gospel. Hope based on a fuller understanding, based on a deeper appreciation of the objective facts of what God has done.

Hebrews 10 urges us, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. So do you pray for the people who are sat around you right now, that they might hold unswervingly to the hope they profess, confident that God who made these promises is faithful.

Second, he prays that they might know the riches of God's glorious inheritance in his holy people. A wonderful thing, isn't it, to be able to count your blessings, to stop and reflect on what God has done, to think about what God has provided for you.

[ 14 : 27 ] That's what Paul has spent the first half of the chapter doing, listing their various blessings and blessing God for having so blessed them and so on. That is some measure of your inheritance in Christ.

And you might be forgiven for thinking that that's what Paul's praying here, for an increased appreciation of those blessings, of that inheritance which is ours in Christ. But if you pay careful attention to the actual wording here, I think there's something else going on in this one.

Paul prays that they may know the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. So who is the his referring to in that sentence? It's God, isn't it?

In other words, Paul here is viewing the Ephesian Christians, and yes, you and me too, viewing us as God's own inheritance. That's what he prays for a better understanding of.

The privilege that God's intention before the foundation of the world was to make us a people holy and blameless, his precious possession. This is to the praise of his glory.

[ 15 : 37 ] So do you pray for yourself and do you pray for others that we might more fully understand and might more fully appreciate the colossal privilege that is ours?

that we are part of the glorious riches of what belongs to God. Third, he prays, they may know the riches of God's power.

Don't we need that prayer? How often do we not even attempt to withstand temptation because we don't functionally believe in God's power to sustain us in the midst thereof, however much we piously profess his omnipotence?

We need to know the riches of God's power. How often do we chicken out of speaking about the hope we found because we don't believe God has the power to soften this particular hard heart?

Or because we don't believe he has the power to overcome our lack of eloquence? Or because we don't believe he has the power to stop us looking like a fool? We need to know the riches of God's power.

[ 16 : 40 ] Or just as bad, how often do we do things but try to do them in our own strength and in our own power? How often do we accept that yes, we needed God to save us and then suppose that we must now grow as Christians according to our own abilities, in our own strength?

No. Folks, pray that you and I and all of us pray that we may know the incomparably great power. And note that this is power, quote, for us who believe.

God's power is for you. It's available. It's there for your good. He delights to give good gifts to his children. His incomparably great power is there for us.

And therefore, we come to our third and final point. If we're going to pray like Paul, then we need to pray with confidence in the power of God in Christ. We need to pray for a knowledge of that power and we also need to pray with a knowledge of that power.

Otherwise, what on earth would be the point? If we did not believe in a God who can do exactly as he chooses, if we did not believe in a God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us, if we did not believe that, then why would we pray at all?

[ 18 : 02 ] This, by the way, is one reason why praying to departed saints is utter folly. They are not the ones with the power. Do you wonder how powerful he truly is?

Do you wonder whether he can really do it? Do you wonder whether he really will use that power to meet our needs? Well, Paul says the power which, according to the first part of verse 19, is, remember, for us who believe, that power, the second half of the verse, is the same mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come, and God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The miracle working power of God stands ready to be exerted for your good and for mine. What could be a greater miracle than raising a man from the dead?

Well, maybe raising the man on whom all the wrath of God had been poured out. Maybe raising the man in whom all believers throughout history are also raised. The resurrection power of God is beyond compare.

[ 19 : 20 ] His power is absolute, ultimate, and he has the authority to match. There our Savior is seated at the right hand in the heavenly realms.

Not just one rung above, he is far above. Not just above some kings, above all rule, all authority, all power, all dominion. Can you think of any conceivable authority which is not encompassed in those phrases?

Every name you could think of to call on. Every dictator who's ever acted as a God among men. Every supposed deity man has ever dreamed up. Every demonic power that has ever masqueraded as a God.

He is far, far above them all. And not just all of them that ever have existed. All of them who ever will exist. Not just in this age, in the age to come as well.

All things. All things. Everything in all creation has been placed under his feet. Well, does Psalm 2 warn the rebellious kings of the nations and the rebellious petty tyrants of our own hearts.

[ 20 : 30 ] Rightly, we are warned. Therefore, you kings, be wise. Be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction.

For his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Jesus has all of the power.

All of the authority. He is the head of the church which is his body. Folks, all of that awesome power, that absolute authority, all of it exerted for our good.

we're his own body. We're united to him. We're his precious inheritance. We're the ones he chose before the foundation of the world.

What can we not ask of him in prayer? What's too much for such a God? What's too much for such a father? What's too much to ask of the one who has already died to redeem you?

[ 21 : 42 ] Nothing is too much. Nothing ever could be too much. So let us pray with thanksgiving for what God has already done.

Let us pray for our spiritual well-being. And let us do so with absolute, unshakable confidence in the immeasurable power of an almighty God.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord God, we give you thanks.

We rejoice in what you have done. We rejoice that you have done what we never could have done. We rejoice that you have chosen we who did not deserve it.

We who look at our own hearts and see the most miserable of sinners. you have chosen us as a people for your own possession and you have washed us.

[ 22 : 46 ] You have forgiven our sins. You have redeemed us from our captivity. You have equipped us for what lies ahead.

it. And so Lord, we pray that you would increase in us that knowledge, that recognition of what you have done. We're sorry that we so easily lose sight of it.

We forget who you are. We forget the character that you have shown us. We forget your awesome deeds down through history. We forget your willingness to save. We forget your willingness to meet not just some of our needs but all of our needs.

and we forget to thank you when you do. Lord, our God, we rejoice that you have the power.

You have the authority. No weapon forged can ever prosper against you and therefore no weapon formed can prosper against us.

[ 23 : 50 ] We are safe, hidden with you. protected by your awesome power, protected until the very last day, protected for that future hope that you have set in our hearts.

Lord, we are sorry that we forget that that power is at work. We come to these situations and we wonder how we will possibly cope because we do not turn to you for the power that we need.

We come to situations and we think we're fine and we just get on with it. And in your grace, we do not always fall flat on our faces in those moments.

And yet also in your grace, sometimes we do and are reminded of our great need of you. Lord, show us that need and show us your power.

you are ready. Ready to do immeasurably more than we think to ask or dare to imagine. Thank you, Lord Jesus.

[ 25 : 07 ] Amen.