

BGCC Community Group Guide



Character of The Church

August 2nd, 2026

The Praying Church

Ephesians

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

Introduction

Prayer has always been one of the defining characteristics of God's people. From the earliest days of the church in Acts, believers depended on prayer before making decisions, during persecution, while proclaiming the gospel, and as they cared for one another. Prayer was never treated as a last resort but as the first measure to a problem. The heartbeat of the Church.

When Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus, he is writing to a congregation he deeply loves. Unlike some of his other letters, Ephesians is not primarily correcting serious problems. Instead, Paul writes from prison to encourage a faithful church surrounded by pagan worship, occult practices, spiritual opposition, and constant cultural pressure. His greatest desire is not that they become more talented, more organized, or more influential. His greatest desire is that they become people of prayer.

Throughout the letter, Paul repeatedly pauses to pray for them. His prayers reveal what truly mattered to him. Rather than focusing on changing circumstances, he prays that believers would know Christ more deeply, be transformed by His love, and continually rely on God's strength through prayer. These prayers provide a model not only for the Ephesian church but for the Church today.

Section 1 – A Praying Church Seeks to Know Christ More Deeply

Ephesians 1:15–23

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." (Ephesians 1:17)

Summary

Paul begins with gratitude. Before asking God for anything, he thanks Him for the faith and love already evident in the Ephesian believers. His prayers begin with worship rather than requests, reminding us that recognizing God's goodness is often the proper starting place for prayer.

From that foundation Paul prays something remarkably simple: that they would know Christ better. His concern is not that they gain more biblical information, but that they experience a deeper relationship with Jesus Himself. Spiritual maturity begins with knowing Christ personally rather than simply knowing facts about Him.

Paul specifically asks that the "eyes of their hearts" would be enlightened. In the ancient world, the heart represented the center of a person's entire being—not merely emotions, but their understanding, desires, decisions, and identity. Paul longs for believers to see life differently through the work of Christ. As believers grow in Christ, their perspective changes. They begin to value eternal things more than temporary ones and see people through the compassion and grace of Jesus.

Paul then highlights three truths believers should continually remember: *the hope of God's calling, the riches of His inheritance, and His immeasurable power at work in believers*. These truths give Christians confidence regardless of changing circumstances. Rather than being driven by fear or uncertainty, believers can rest in the finished work of Christ and the power of God that sustains them every day.

Group Question: Why do you think Paul prays first that believers would know Christ more deeply rather than simply asking God to change their circumstances?

Personal Relevance

Many Christians spend most of their prayer time asking God to fix problems. While God certainly invites us to bring our needs before Him, Paul's example reminds us that our greatest need is always to know Christ more intimately. Better circumstances *is not* the best thing.

When our relationship with Jesus deepens, everything else begins to take its proper place. Difficult circumstances may remain, but our confidence grows because we understand more fully who God is and what He has already accomplished for us.

Flow Question: What practical habits help you intentionally know Christ better throughout the week?

Reflection Question: If someone listened to your prayers over the last month, would they conclude that your greatest desire is to know Christ more deeply?

Section 2 – A Praying Church Is Transformed by the Love of Christ

Ephesians 3:14–21

"I pray that... you, being rooted and established in love... may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." (Ephesians 3:17–18)

Summary

Paul's second major prayer begins with humility. He kneels before the Father, expressing complete dependence upon God. His posture reflects the reality that spiritual transformation cannot be accomplished through human effort alone. Only God can produce lasting change in His people.

Paul asks that believers be strengthened through the Holy Spirit in their inner being. External circumstances constantly change, but God's Spirit works within believers to provide endurance, courage, and stability. The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead now lives within every believer, providing strength that far exceeds human ability.

Paul then prays that believers would become rooted and established in Christ's love. Like the roots of a tree drawing life from the soil while anchoring it during storms, believers receive both nourishment and stability through God's love. His love sustains us during seasons of joy and keeps us standing during seasons of suffering.

Finally, Paul prays that believers would experience the vastness of Christ's love—a love that surpasses human understanding. God's love cannot merely be explained academically; it must be experienced personally. As believers reflect on God's faithfulness throughout their lives, they increasingly recognize His constant presence through every season. This growing awareness transforms not only what they know but who they become.

Group Question: Why is experiencing God's love personally just as important as understanding it intellectually?

Personal Relevance

Most believers can easily explain that God loves them. Yet many struggle to actually live as though they are deeply loved by Him. We often remember our failures more readily than His faithfulness.

One helpful practice is intentionally reflecting on God's work throughout your own life. Looking back at moments of His provision, guidance, and grace reminds us that His love has never abandoned us. Gratitude grows as we recognize His hand throughout our story. And then our **faith** turns to **trust** when our beliefs actually become action.

Flow Question: When have you most clearly seen God's faithfulness during your own life journey?

Reflection Question: What would change in your daily life if you truly believed every day that you are deeply loved by Christ?

Section 3 – A Praying Church Lives Daily in God's Strength

Ephesians 6:10–18

"Put on the full armor of God... and pray in the Spirit on all occasions." (Ephesians 6:11,18)

Summary

As Paul concludes his letter, he reminds believers that the Christian life involves spiritual warfare. Our greatest battle is not ultimately against people or circumstances but against spiritual forces seeking to discourage God's people and hinder the spread of the gospel.

Paul describes the armor of God using vivid imagery familiar to his readers. Truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, the gospel, and God's Word all prepare believers to stand firm. Yet immediately after describing the armor, Paul repeatedly returns to prayer.

Rather than presenting prayer as merely another piece of armor, Paul shows that prayer is the environment in which believers put on the armor. Every aspect of the Christian life depends upon continual communion with God. Just as scuba gear only serves its purpose underwater, the armor of God functions properly only within a life saturated in prayer.

Paul emphasizes praying in the Spirit. This does not refer to special spiritual experiences but to relying upon the Holy Spirit's guidance and power. Even when believers do not know what to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes on their behalf. God's provision is so complete that He not only hears our prayers but helps us pray when we cannot find the words ourselves.

Group Question: Why do you think Paul connects spiritual warfare so closely with continual prayer?

Personal Relevance

Many believers try to face life's challenges using their own strength before finally turning to prayer when everything else fails. Paul reverses that pattern. Prayer is not our backup plan—it is our first response.

Every day presents opportunities to rely either on ourselves or upon God's Spirit. Learning to begin each day in prayer reminds us that victory comes not through personal determination but through God's strength working within us.

Flow Question: What situations most tempt you to rely on yourself instead of depending on God through prayer?

Reflection Question: How would your daily routine change if prayer truly became your first response instead of your last resort?

Section 4 – A Praying Church Keeps the Gospel at the Center

Ephesians 6:18–20

"Pray also for me... that I may fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel."
(Ephesians 6:19)

Summary

Perhaps the most surprising part of Paul's request comes at the very end of the letter. Though imprisoned and facing uncertain circumstances, he never asks believers to pray for his comfort or release. Instead, he asks for boldness to continue proclaiming the gospel.

This request reveals Paul's priorities. His greatest concern is not escaping hardship but remaining faithful to Christ. Even chains cannot distract him from the mission God has given him.

Ultimately, Paul's prayers throughout Ephesians reveal a clear pattern. He longs for believers to know Jesus more deeply, be transformed by His love, and faithfully live for Him through continual dependence upon prayer. A praying church becomes a church that increasingly resembles Christ.

Some weeks ago, Matthew shared how his old school closed their doors due to a negligence for the importance of the Gospel mission in their program. Perhaps he wasn't too far off base in believing that the centrality of the Gospel is a life and death issue for the Christian life.

Group Question: What does Paul's prayer request reveal about what mattered most to him?

Personal Relevance

Our prayer requests often reveal our priorities. If someone read your prayer journal (or listened to your last month of prayer and gave you a summary), what would they conclude matters most to you?

God certainly invites us to bring every concern before Him, yet He also calls us to pray for things that have eternal significance: spiritual growth, boldness, wisdom, gospel opportunities, and Christlike character. As these become the focus of our prayers, they increasingly become the focus of our lives.

Flow Question: How can your prayers become more centered on God's mission rather than only your personal circumstances?

Reflection Question: What specific person or opportunity can you begin praying for this week as you seek to share the gospel more faithfully?

Conclusion

Paul's prayers throughout Ephesians provide a beautiful picture of what defines a healthy church. A praying church is not simply one that schedules prayer meetings or recites familiar words. It is a church whose people continually depend upon God for everything.

Paul teaches that prayer shapes every part of the Christian life. Through prayer we come to know Christ more deeply, experience His transforming love, receive strength through the Holy Spirit, stand firm against spiritual opposition, and remain focused on the mission of the gospel. Prayer is not an activity added onto the Christian life—it is the atmosphere in which the Christian life is lived.

As you leave today, consider these questions:

- Am I pursuing a deeper relationship with Christ or merely more knowledge about Him?
- Where do I most need God's transforming love to reshape my heart?
- Am I relying on God's strength through prayer or my own abilities?
- Do my prayers reflect God's kingdom priorities or mostly my personal circumstances?

A praying church is a dependent church. It knows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, acts like Jesus, and continually seeks Him in prayer. When God's people become known as people of prayer, they become a powerful testimony to a world desperately in need of the hope found only in Christ.