

But What do I Say?

Ephesians 1 v 15-20

- I. Five things to pull out of Paul's prayers for the Ephesians that we need to pray for ourselves:
 1. Pray for Focus
 2. Pray for Hope
 3. Pray for Riches
 4. Pray for Power
 5. Pray for Love
- II. Prayer is dependent:
 - A. To pray is to show your dependence on God.
 - B. We must depend on the Father who knows our needs better than anyone.
- III. Prayer is spiritual:
 - A. Eternal matters, matter more.
 - B. Remove the words "be with" from your prayers. They are unnecessary. – Matthew 28 v 20
 - C. We need to get spiritual before we get practical.
- IV. Pray for **focus**:
 - A. Pray that the eyes of our heart are opened and able to focus on Christ and what He accomplished on the cross.
 - B. We need to learn to enjoy all that we have in Christ.
- V. Pray for **hope**:
 - A. The word "hope" that we see here in Ephesians is a *certain* hope.

B. Biblical hope is the certainty of eternal life with our Creator.

C. *No God, no hope* vs. *Know God, know hope*.

D. We need to put our focus *on* Christ, and our hope *in* Christ.

VI. Pray for **riches**:

A. We have an inheritance *from* God, being kept *by* God, guaranteed *through* the Spirit.

B. God also has an inheritance in His people. – Psalm 33 v 12

C. When we enter heaven, fully glorified, our inheritance will finally be realized.

D. We will enjoy God and God will enjoy us, forever.

VII. Pray for **power**:

A. In the truth of the resurrection, we see a transformation.

B. The same power that raised Christ from the dead, dwells in us.

C. It is important to know that we have this power in us, so that we may live lives of action, living out and proclaiming the gospel for the glory of God.

VIII. Pray for **love**:

A. Paul wants us to know and experience the fullness of the Father's love for us.

B. How do we do that?

i. Going to church

ii. Fellowshiping with believers

iii. Seeking after a head knowledge of God that will lead to a heart knowledge of Him

We need to pray that the eyes of our hearts would be open so that we may focus on the hope of the richness and the fullness of the love that God has for us. And with the power of the Spirit dwelling inside of us, we are able to live for Him and strive to do all things for His glory.

But What do I Say?

For those of you that don't know who I am, my name is Micah, and I'm the youth minister here at Trinity. So, in light of this youth takeover, I have the honor of being able to deliver the message to you this morning.

I also just want to start by saying what a privilege it is to be able to work with the youth kids here at Trinity. They are such a joy to be around every week and I always look forward to getting to teach, and hang out with them on a regular basis.

That being said, when my wife and I took over the youths in March of this year, I knew exactly what I wanted our first Sunday school study to be about.

One of the most valuable and essential tools we have as Christians, is the ability to commune with the Father through His Son, via prayer.

So, naturally, my first order of business was to do a study on prayer.

One of my hopes in doing this was to increase the kids confidence in their praying, so that when they are called on to pray, they won't be so nervous about praying in front of other people.

Another reason, is because even if we do pray a lot, we might tend to enter into this zone of complacency, where we may be praying a lot, but our prayers aren't as powerful as they could be; OR they might just be the same prayer every time.

We don't want to become complacent in *any* part of our spiritual walk, but *definitely* not in prayer. With complacency comes tragedy.

We know this in our jobs, right? We are always being told, or telling other people, not to get complacent, because when you start to go into auto pilot after having done the same task over and over again, you start to lower your guard, and that's when accidents happen.

I had a brief run in the Air Force as an Aircraft Arresting systems mechanic. During my time, one of my duties was to maintain these things called BAK-12's which are basically the land version of the landing system for fighter jets landing on an aircraft carrier.

There was one of these systems on each side of the runway. My job was to make sure they were maintained and functioning properly, so in the event that an aircraft was having an emergency, it would be able to drop its little cable hook and hook this cable on the runway and it would be brought slowly and safely to a stop.

But if there was even the slightest pressure difference being applied by either one of the systems on either side of the runway, the aircraft could be pulled off the air strip, resulting in tragedy.

The fact that we were out there every day, doing maintenance on these things, made it very easy to get complacent. But after remembering what could happen if we screwed up, it made it easier to be thorough in our inspections.

It's the same in our spiritual walk. If we start to get complacent and don't "maintain" ourselves properly, our guard gets dropped and we leave ourselves open to the enemy.

What I thought would be fun to do this morning is to do an overview of what we learned while going through this study. Specifically, for those who have children that come to Sunday school every week, this is an opportunity for you to hear a little bit of what they have been learning.

And for those that don't have children in Sunday school, it might still be good to know what the youths of your church are being taught. So, without further adieu...

Our main point of reference for this study was a book called "Pray Big: Learn to Pray like an Apostle" by Alistair Begg.

In this book, Alistair goes over five things that he pulls from Paul's prayers for the Ephesians that we also need to be praying for. Those five things are as follows:

1. Pray for Focus
2. Pray for Hope
3. Pray for Riches
4. Pray for Power
5. Pray for Love

But before we launch into what exactly he means when he says we need to pray for those things, we need to first establish a couple of things about prayer itself.

Namely, that prayer is *dependent*, and prayer is *spiritual*.

Starting with dependence. One of the things we are doing when we pray, is we are admitting and expressing our dependence on God.

The person who knows how sinful they are, and how great their need for salvation is, will bow their knees before the Almighty God.

Praying in and of itself, is an act of dependence upon God. Why would we pray if we could do it all ourselves? (Exactly, we wouldn't)

Yet, that is what we are saying when we don't pray. When we choose to put prayer on the backburner, whether we realize it or not, we are saying that we don't need God.

Which is absolutely ridiculous!

Because we know what happens when we are left up to our own devices, right?

We will inevitably fall prey to our evil desires. So, yes, we need this link between us and God to keep us out of trouble, so to speak.

We need to depend on the Father who knows us and has known us, even before we were created. Just read Psalm 139 to learn that.

This is why He sent His Son to die for us and to break down the barrier between us and God that existed before Christ.

We now have the privilege to go to Him in prayer, and as His children, He will take care of us.

As the wonderful hymn by Civilla Martin says,

“His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.”

So, prayer needs to be *dependent*, but it must also be *spiritual*.

There is a difference between what we *can* bring to God and what we *should*. If we take a look at Paul’s prayers, we might notice that what tends to be the focus of our prayers, is mysteriously absent from his.

Reading through his prayers, you will begin to notice that he doesn’t really pray for material things.

Not because the people of that day didn’t need the things that we need, like food, good health, employment, and things of that nature.

He didn’t often pray those types of prayers because those things don’t save you from going to hell, they just make you comfortable.

He gets spiritual in his prayers because the spiritual, is what will save your soul. Eternal matters, matter more. Hence why Paul says in Philippians 1 v 21, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain”

But of course, we are fallen creatures, so this does not come naturally.

NO MORE “BE WITH”

One thing we can do to help make our prayers more spiritual is to get rid of the words “be with” in our prayers.

Of course, it’s not wrong to pray “be with” prayers, but it is unnecessary.

It’s unnecessary because in Matthew we are told that He *is* with us. Matthew 28 v 20, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Looking through all of Scripture, you would be hard pressed to find a prayer that simply asked God to just “be with” his people.

Check out Nehemiah’s prayer in Nehemiah chapter 1.

When he hears word that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down and the gates of the city are being burned with fire, what does he do?

Nehemiah chapter 1 v 4-5,

“As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said...” (Nehemiah 1 v 4-5)

What did he say?

O Lord God please be with all the people in Jerusalem...

NO!

I'll leave you to read that for yourselves, but to paraphrase, he says,

“O God, You great and awesome and magnificent God, who rules over the universe. We, your people, bow before you and confess our sins and our shortcomings before you.”

He gets spiritual. He prays first about what matters most.

Confesses their sins, acknowledges dependence, asks for help to focus on God because they have lost sight of Him. He prays about God's glory and His kingdom and the inescapable truth of His sovereignty.

Of course, I am not saying that we don't pray for practical things, just look at Psalm 55 v 22,

“Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you;”

Or 1 Peter 5 v 7, “having cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you.”

Or maybe even Philippians 4 v 6, “in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

But we might be surprised how our practical concerns will change when we really start prioritizing the spiritual things, the things of eternal importance.

So, prayer is dependent, we need God for everything; *and* it is spiritual, we should focus more on our salvation than our satisfaction on earth.

Now, the way that we are doing things today is a little different than how we usually do things on a typical Sunday. We *usually* move verse by verse through a book of the Bible, but since this is a one-off message, we're kind of just jumping into the middle of a book without having much context for why this particular letter was written to this particular group of people.

Gabe read the entire first chapter to shed *some* light on the context, but let me just give a quick summary of *one* of the purposes of this epistle.

The book of Ephesians is written to *Christians* who either don't know, or who are prone to forgetting the great riches, inheritance, and fullness in Jesus Christ and His church.

It informs us of all that we have in Christ, and how we can gain possession and learn to enjoy it.

With that, let me read the portion of Ephesians chapter 1 that will have most of our attention this morning, verses 15-20:

“¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His

might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,”

Alistair Begg says,

“We may be on our knees, dependently... we may be seeking to pray spiritually... but for most of us, sooner or later, the words don’t come and the thought looms large: ‘OK, *but what do I say?*’”

Now, if this has never happened to you, then that’s great!

But for many of us, this is probably not a rare occurrence.

My hope is that after we get through learning about these five things that we should be praying for, that we can eliminate that question of, “OK, but what do I say?”

That first thing that Paul wants the Ephesians, and us, to pray for is focus.

PRAY FOR FOCUS

We all know this hymn, right?

*“I once was lost but now I’m found,
Was blind, but now I see.”*

It will come as no surprise when I say that this song isn’t about your physical sight, so much as it is about the eyes of your heart being opened.

We can see this clearly in Ephesians chapter 1 where Paul expresses his desire for the Ephesians when he says,

“¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...” (Ephesians 1 v 18)

And who better to express this than Paul, who was blind as could be when it came to the truth about Christ; but once he had the eyes of his heart *enlightened*, he was able to *see*, that:

Jesus is real, Jesus is alive, and Jesus is Lord.

But even when these truths are revealed to us, they tend to drift out of focus.

It is something that we must pray for. We must pray that we will truly learn to focus on Christ, and that we can keep our worldly desires from creeping into the center of our gaze.

It’s like when a baby is born. When a baby is born, they can barely see, and the little that they do see, and I didn’t know this, but the little they do see is all in black and white, like they’re living in the 1800’s before color was invented.

But of course, eventually they learn to see.

It is the same for us when we are born again.

We are born blind to the truths about God, and it is only after we receive the Holy Spirit that we are truly able to see Christ for who He is and what He did for us on the cross.

But what specifically are we to focus on?

Well, let's look at what Paul wanted the Ephesians to focus on (we get these from Ephesians 1 v 4-14):

- They are chosen to be holy and blameless in God's sight (v 4).
- They were predestined to be God's adopted children, loved as His eternal Son is loved (v 5).
- They are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, so that they can enjoy the reality of knowing that although they are sinners, they are *forgiven* sinners (v 7).
- They have been brought into the great plan of the Father to bring all things into unity and perfection under the glorious rule of his Son (v 9-10).
- They have an inheritance of eternity with Him ahead of them, and the Spirit from him dwelling in them, guaranteeing that they will reach that place (v 11, 13-14).

You might have noticed this, but the funny thing about this list, is that everything on it is done *by God*, we are on the receiving end of all of it.

Chosen, predestined, loved, redeemed, brought.

We contribute nothing to our salvation except for our sins.

So, one could say, all that we contribute to our salvation is the need to be saved.

And these people that Paul is writing to *are* saved. It is important to remember that he is writing to the *church* in Ephesus.

He's not praying for his readers to *become* Christians, but to enjoy all that is theirs in Christ.

Paul isn't praying for *new* sight but for *focused* sight.

Sometimes, we as Christians live as though we booked a vacation on an all-inclusive resort, but instead of enjoying all of the free activities and free food and drinks and what not, we bring peanut butter sandwiches and play solitaire by ourselves all day (no offense to the folks that enjoy doing that).

But for real, we need to pray that God would allow us to focus on Him and all that He has done for us, so we can learn to view all things in light of that reality.

And with that reality comes a hope of eternal life with Him. Which leads to our next prayer point. Pray for hope.

PRAY FOR HOPE

Verse 18,

“¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling,” (Ephesians 1 v 18)

The first thing that I need to mention is that the way in which the New Testament writers use the word “hope” is different from the way that we use it in our everyday conversations.

When we use the word "hope", it is used in a context of uncertainty.

For example, someone might say, “I sure hope it rains today, because let me tell you, we really need it.”

Or for these youth kids, “I hope the food at youth group isn’t expired.”

Sorry Esther and Amanda. Or for Hannah and Dalton,

“I hope Micah actually remembers to get gluten free stuff this week.”

Wow, these poor kids. Thank you, guys, for putting up with us. Yikes...

But I digress. When we see the word “hope” used here in Ephesians, it is a certain hope. Which sounds like a contradiction, but I assure you that it is not.

We know this hope is certain because of what Paul tells us in Romans 8 v 29, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son”

As well as Philippians 1 v 6, “*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus.”

These two verses are saying that those whom God called, and those who have, in turn, received His Spirit, *will* be conformed to the image of his Son, and *will* be glorified.

Not *might* but *will*. There is no, “I *hope* I go to heaven.” (Fingers crossed)

If you *truly* believe that you are a sinner and that Jesus Christ died for your sins, and you turn away from that sin and acknowledge Him as your Lord and Savior, you *will* go to heaven.

That is what biblical hope is. It’s the certainty of our eternity with the Creator.

This biblical hope is what allows us to remain calm when thinking about death. Our hope in death lies in Jesus’ resurrection.

I can’t help but be reminded of that hymn,

“What is our hope in life and death?

Christ alone, Christ alone.

What is our only confidence?

That our souls to Him belong.

Who holds our days within His hand?

What comes, apart from His command?

And what will keep us to the end?

The love of Christ, in which we stand.”

God's *promise* where we find our *hope* is, “a reality that is absolutely assured but that is not yet fully experienced.” (Begg)

Let's just quickly jump over to Ephesians 2 and go through the first five verses to see where we get this hope:

- Verses 1-3 basically says that before we knew Christ, we were *dead*, children of *wrath* like the rest of the world.
- For these people that don't know God, there is no hope. Without God, without hope. Or,
- *No God, no hope.*
- BUT, take a look at verses 4-5, “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together¹ with Christ*”
- We were dead in our sins, but God because of His grace and His mercy and His deep deep love for us, made us alive.
- God knows us and He loves us, and He grants us a saving knowledge of Him.
- Those of us that have been given this knowledge of God, have this certain hope.
- *Know God, know hope.*

The hope of the gospel is real, folks. Embrace it!

It is a privilege to have this hope, so we must live our lives in such a way that others will see the hope of Christ in us.

We know from observing the world, that one out of one die, except for a few exceptions, of course. It's inevitable. I guess, unless Christ returns in your lifetime, but no one knows when that will happen, so don't bank on that.

Now, whether you die as a believer or an unbeliever, your soul is going to live forever.

There are two options in the afterlife (you're sensible people, you know the two options):

- Spend eternity in the perfect, loving, blessing presence of God – *heaven*.
- Or absent from all of those things, in the presence of His wrath – *hell*.

There is no middle ground here. There is no, “Well, I'm a good person, so there's no way I'm going to hell.”

One of the problems with that is what even is good? Everyone has their own idea of what “good” is, or a false idea of what “good” is.

We can just look at stuff that used to be considered good and now isn't. Doctors used to tell people to smoke cigarettes because they thought it was good for you!

There used to be words that we could say that were considered normal, or good, but now if you say certain words you're condemned by the culture!

You're not "good" you're just current. The world doesn't even know what good is, so how is being good going to get us into heaven.

If God just wanted us to be "good" people, then what in the world was Jesus doing up on that cross?

The only way we can know what good is, is by looking to God.

There is only one way into heaven, and that's through Christ. Without Him, there is only one other option.

And you can't be on the fence about following God and wait to decide until *after* you die. You can just read Luke 16 to discover that truth.

It's like the illustration Randy gave us last week of the guy who is on the fence about whether or not he will choose God.

And while he's sitting on the fence, the devil comes back and says, "Hey, man. Let's go, you're coming with me."

And the man is like, "Whoa whoa whoa. I may not have chosen God, but I *definitely* didn't choose you."

To which the devil replies, "The fence is mine."

It's God or nothing. There is no hope for those who are on the fence.

Your soul is going to live forever, the only question is where?

This is why we need to pray for spiritual things, asking God to open the eyes of our heart so we can see our sin. And after we see that sin, we can turn from it and run to Him; putting our focus *on* Him, and placing our hope *in* Him.

PRAY FOR RICHES

Pray for focus, pray for hope, now let's talk about praying for riches.

Verse 18 again,

"¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, **what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,**" (Ephesians 1 v 18)

We can also learn about these riches in 1 Peter 1 v 3-5,

“³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ⁴ *to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,* ⁵ *who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*” (1 Peter 1 v 3-5)

We know that we have an inheritance *from* God being kept for us *by* God in heaven, and because we have the Holy Spirit, that inheritance is guaranteed.

We’ve been talking a lot about the Holy Spirit while going through 1 Corinthians. Mainly with respect to spiritual gifts.

But here we see that with the Spirit, comes the greatest gift of all. The gift of God and all His glory as our inheritance.

The Holy Spirit is our proof, or ticket, to our inheritance. Once the Spirit has been sent to dwell inside of you, He will *never* be removed from you.

We can rest assured that the hope of our inheritance is guaranteed since we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Now, Pastor Dan talked a little bit about this inheritance a while ago and I’m sure everyone remembers exactly what he said about our inheritance in Christ, so I won’t belabor this point.

What I *will* say, however, is that while *we* receive God as *our* inheritance, He, in turn, gets us.

We have an inheritance in Christ, and God has an inheritance in His people.

The Father has promised the Son an inheritance, right? And that inheritance consists of all who are in Christ.

Take a look at Psalm 33 v 12, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
The people He has chosen for His own inheritance.”

I mean, how cool is that!?

We get to inherit God, which is absolutely incredible; and God inherits us, which is kind of strange when you think about it.

Why would He want to spend eternity with a bunch of people who sin against Him all the time?

Because when we are glorified, we will be ex-sinners, redeemed and forgiven, able to enjoy and be in His presence. When we enter into heaven, our inheritance will finally be realized, and we will be met with celebrating as God enjoys us and we enjoy Him forever.

Paul wants the Ephesians, and us, to know, “the riches of His glorious inheritance” and to constantly keep our *focus* on that future.

We need to look through all the troubles of the world and see this glorious inheritance that awaits us. But we need God’s help in order to do that.

We need to ask Him to open the eyes of our heart so we can *focus* on the *hope* of the *riches* we have in Him.

We as believers have this unique ability to have an overwhelming sense of peace even in the hardest times, because we know what ultimately lies ahead for us.

We should be asking God, not only for ourselves, but also for people we know, to make Him our vision.

Now, I could quote that Hymn that goes,

*“Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always.”
(Eleanor Hull, “Be Thou My Vision”)*

But I won’t do that because you’re probably sick of hearing me quote Hymns by now. So, we’ll move on.

Pray that you can *focus* on the *hope* of the *riches* we have in Christ.

PRAY FOR POWER

Moving on to verses 19-20, we see that the fourth thing Paul desires for us to pray for is *power*.

“¹⁹ and what is the boundless greatness of His **power** toward us who believe. *These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might* ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,”

Alistair says,

“Not many of us feel powerful. In fact, we often feel ourselves to be the antithesis of powerful; we feel ourselves to be weak... We know what it is to experience fears about our future, regrets about our past, worries about our health, and concerns about our loved ones.”

But,

“God’s power, demonstrated in Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, is the very source of our strength, allowing us to live in obedience to Him. When God works through us, our weaknesses highlight His might.”

What Paul is saying to the church in Ephesus, is that he wants them to know, “what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe.”

But what is this power?

To answer that, we can take a look at the way Jesus’ disciples reacted to His death.

In the truth of the resurrection, we see a transformation.

Immediately after Jesus died and was buried, the disciples were defeated, thinking that Jesus was gone forever and that they had lost.

They had given up. They had gone into hiding... But then in Acts chapter 2 we see Peter proclaiming,

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses ... Know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2 v 32, 36).

Where did Peter, the defeated man, the *denier*, the lowly fisherman, where did he get this power?

How did he become so bold? Why is he back?

Because the same power that raised Christ from the dead, raised Peter and the rest of the disciples from their doubts, their fears, and their lack of faith.

Without the resurrection we would have no reason to follow Christ. And again, you may remember Dan talking about this on Easter.

But not only has Jesus been resurrected, He has been exalted.

End of verse 20, “and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,”

Jesus’ ascension into heaven proves the full acceptance of the Father for Christ’s one sacrifice for *all* our sins.

As Hebrews 10 v 12 says, “when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God”

We see there that Christ is sitting down at the right hand of the Father; but He is sitting there not to rest, but to rule. He is upholding and directing the universe and He works all things for the good of those who love Him.

But why is it important to know that we have this power in us?

So that we will live lives of action. Not only that, but it will change our view of the world. It helps us realize that we *can* obey God, and that we *can* live our lives in a way that brings Him glory and honor.

The truth of the matter is, that without this power, the disciples would have failed miserably in their task.

But with this power, they were able to spread the truth of the gospel from Jerusalem, throughout the Roman world within one generation.

If you believe that Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, then you should also believe that you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, which contains the same power that undeniably raised Christ from the dead.

Christ now reigns supreme, and that should be a great comfort to us as Christians.

There is only one who has the power to forgive our sins.

There is only one who has conquered death and allowed us to pass through death.

There is only one who is directing us to good.

There is only one who knows the worst of you and loves you regardless.

There is only one.

And listen, I get it. You might be thinking, “All of this power, but I still feel so weak.”

And it’s strange, because we do have this power within us, but we won’t experience the fullness of it until we are glorified.

And in the meantime, we go through trial after trial here on earth. You may look back on times in your life and think, “I have no idea how I got through that.”

And I can tell you 100% that God was in total control of that situation, and He alone gave you the power to make it through.

And through those situations you have become stronger, whether it be physical, mental, or most importantly, spiritual. And He will continue to be there with you as you encounter more hardship or difficulties in your life.

You can rest assured that whatever God is putting you through, is meant to strengthen you, even if it makes you physically weaker. Your spiritual growth and your sanctification are more important than your physical well-being.

You may at times feel like Paul Simon must have felt when he wrote the lyrics, “Hello darkness my old friend, I’ve come to talk with you again.”

Feeling as though you’ve been buried and forgotten, surrounded by darkness. But that’s not the case. Check out this quote by Christine Caine,

“Sometimes when you're in a dark place you think you've been buried, but you've actually been planted.”

I recently saw this cartoon on Instagram, of a guy who plants an apple seed. And it shows him sitting there praying for this apple tree to grow. And of course, God makes it grow!

But then a storm comes and destroys the tree, and the apples go flying everywhere, and this poor guy is just sitting there distraught.

However, as time goes on, he starts to see that from that storm and that tree being destroyed, hundreds of other seeds had been planted amidst the chaos, and now all these other apple trees are beginning to grow.

God is sovereign, and nothing happens that is out of His control.

So, we need to pray that we become more aware of this power, and more aware of God’s power, because He has power over all things.

Because with that knowledge, even in the darkest times, we can find peace in Christ who is our Light.

And in that Light, we get to experience the love of God.

Which leads us to our last point of focus for our prayers, namely, love.

PRAY FOR LOVE

To see what Paul wants us to learn about love here, we need to jump over to the 3rd chapter of Ephesians and read verses 14-19,

“¹⁴For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.”

Paul’s desire here is that we would experience the joy of knowing how loved we are by our heavenly Father. And how do we do that?

Well, we can start by going to church!

You will not be able to fathom the love of God in Christ by sitting in your room alone. Or by watching sermons on YouTube instead of attending in person. The love of Christ is discovered by communion with fellow believers.

It takes the entire family of God in order for us to experience the tiniest glimpse of what the love of God is. No matter how loved you feel by any person, or group of people, on earth, it is just a fraction of the love that God has for you.

He is infinitely loving, and we all get the fullness of His love.

What’s great is that we get to glimpse this love when we gather with one another and sing about him *together*.

When we hear about Him *together*.

When we affirm it *together*.

When we encourage one another *together* in Christ, we grow in our appreciation of his love *together*.

This is why fellowship is important. This is why maybe we don’t book it out the back as soon as the service is over. And hopefully, if you’re new, someone will come and introduce themselves to you. Or if you aren’t new, check in with some folks before you leave.

Obviously, there are exceptions, right? There are some days when the sermon couldn’t have ended soon enough because one of your kids had a blow-out and the other one spilled juice on her dress.

But make it a point to hang out with your brothers and sisters in Christ so you can get a glimpse of the love that He has for you.

We will also experience this love by both comprehending it with our minds and knowing it with our hearts. We must be sure that we are thinking properly.

When you think of love, you might automatically think about the emotional aspect of it. When you say you love someone, that is typically a feeling that you feel.

But real love should stem from knowing a lot about whatever it is you are saying that you love. You can't meet a person one time and say, "Oh, I'm so in love!"

Well, I guess you can, but at that point it's strictly emotional. You know nothing about this person, so you have no way of knowing if you actually love them or not, or if they are even capable of loving you.

It is the same with God. We can't just hear an emotional worship song that stirs us up and as a response we "give our lives to God". But then, after that feeling has been gone for a while, we revert back to our old ways and live as an apostate until that emotion is stirred again.

This is why God didn't just give us songs to sing, He gave us His word to read. We are able to learn about Him. Learn about His Character and how loving He is to all people, but especially loving to His children.

We must start with the head knowledge of God, the knowledge of His lovingkindness and faithfulness despite our unfaithfulness, and this, in turn, will result in a heart that yearns for Him.

God's love has no limits, it's limitless and infinite. We live in a three-dimensional world, but Paul gives four dimensions to describe the love of God.

Breadth, length, height, and depth.

Many have pondered what Paul meant by these four descriptors.

One being Matthew Henry, who wrote:

"the apostle designs to signify the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ...which is higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

Another being John Stott:

"[Christ's love] is 'broad' enough to encompass all mankind... 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven."

And these are both great quotes, and we can glean a lot of knowledge and insight from them. But another thing we can do is just look at what Christ did for us on the cross and measure the love that He has for us by trying to comprehend the *depth* to which He went to save us from eternal suffering, and the *height* to which He was then exalted.

This love is limitless. It's this love that caused God to adopt us as His children from before the beginning of time.

Finally, we need to pray these things not only for ourselves, but also for the people in our lives. We need to pray that the eyes of our hearts would be open so that we may *focus* on the *hope* of the *richness* and the fullness of the *love* that God has for us. And with the *power* of the Spirit dwelling inside of us, we are able to live for Him and strive to do all things for His glory.

And with that, let's close in prayer. And as our eyes are closed and heads are bowed, I would just like to read this final prayer from Alistair Begg,

“Father in heaven, I thank you for the gift of prayer. Even though there are some things that are a mystery to me, I know that this is a necessity—and I exercise the privilege fully confident in both your ability and willingness to do far more than I could ever imagine or guess. Help me to ask then for big things, for the sake of your glory and through your matchless power. Enable me to pray big. For Jesus' sake. Amen.”