

## Lesson 2

# Praying for Each Other

For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen, Ephesians 3.14-21.

## Introduction

Paul strongly believed in the power of prayer. We are blessed to have a few of his prayers written down and preserved in the word of God. As we read them, we receive keen insight in the degree he surrendered his life in service to the Lord. We are also able to gauge the strength of his great confidence in the delivering and sustaining power of God. And finally, we observe his deep and abiding trust in God's ability to effectively carry out the mission of saving souls leading to church growth.

Paul's love for the churches never diminished. In fact, the Christians in them were constantly on his mind ... despite his often need to tend to other matters and concerns. Even in his absence, he was committed to doing all he could do to ensure their continued progress. He knew that prayer is both needful *and* powerful, which led him to continually lift his brethren up in prayer to the Lord.

The prayer we will examine in this lesson (Ephesians 3.14-21) is indeed rich. It is a prayer that encourages action and application which ultimately leads to the goal expressed in verse 20, i.e., the point where we come to the place where God's power within us is doing things that go beyond our imagination. Each of the things Paul prays for here build upon the other and lead to our bringing glory to God, 3.21.

How can we arrive at the place where we experience the reality of Ephesians 3.20? And what does this have to do with our being *knit together*?

## What prompted this prayer?

The first part of Ephesians 3 contains insight on Paul's commission by God and the effectiveness of his apostolic ministry. Despite the fact he was, at the time of this writing, in Roman custody, he did not want them to lose heart. *So, then, I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory*, 3.13. Here we must note the closeness and personal nature of the relationship between Paul and the Ephesian church. He worried that his circumstances would impact them emotionally. We should hear Paul pouring out his heart as he prays for them. What was happening to him was for their glory. (See also Colossians 1.24, where Paul makes a very similar statement.)

Can you imagine what an encouragement it would have been to the Ephesians to know of Paul's great concern for them? How does it make you feel when you know others are praying for you? How does this

bring attention to the fact that God is knitting us together . . . helping us draw strength from not only Him, but each other as well?

What is the primary focus of your prayers? For many, they are mainly focused on self. This does not mean we should never pray for our spiritual development and the physical and spiritual needs we face, but that greater emphasis needs to be made on our prayers on behalf of others. There may be no greater way to maintain unity inside the local church than by actively praying for our brothers and sisters. When we constantly pray for others it:

- Becomes harder to hold onto a grudge, offenses, or grievances we have with them.
- Fosters a sense of togetherness and comradery as we share in their victories *and* their struggles. The Christian should understand experientially what it means when we say *we're in this together*.
- Reminds us that our own problems and concerns pale in comparison to what some may face.
- Moves us in thankfulness for the continuing work of God in the transformation of His people.

As you read verses 16-19, now think of how you can use this prayer as a model in praying for your brothers and sisters in your local congregation. What would happen if we all regularly prayed for our brethren using these principles?

## Pray for the Spiritual Strength and Development of Others

I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, Ephesians 3.16.

We need to be praying for the growth of one another. If the church is to continue and prosper there must be continual growth. Here Paul prays for the strength of their inner being. The *inner being* Paul refers to here is our soul, the eternal part, or spirit, that has been created to live on throughout eternity. This part of us needs to be strong because life is difficult and often filled with pain, which can accumulate as the years go by. If our spirit is weak, then we'll be characterized by doubt, fear, anxiety, and distrust. Because they have not given proper attention to the nourishing of their soul, some people are continually frustrated and live inside great emotional and spiritual imbalance. This is not how God designed the spiritual life to be.

The world only cares about the outer person, which decays and wears out as we get older. All around us people are preoccupied with trying to preserve the body and defy nature. It is difficult to quantify the amount of money Americans spend each year on beauty products, health supplements, exercise equipment, and mental health products to keep the body going. Please do not misunderstand. Taking care of our bodies should be a priority, but more important than that is the development of strength and sustainability in our inner person. Paul explained his experience this way:

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day, 2 Corinthians 4.16 NASB.

Every day your outer body grows older but also, every day your inner person grows younger and more vibrant. Think of how this is true in your life as you experience the work of renewal and transformation God has continually performed in you since your conversion. We need to be praying for that increasing

spiritual energy to take hold in each other so that we are not easily swayed by the flesh, our pride, or what we see. You should, at this moment, be able to look back over your life and see progress. Some of the things that troubled you and exploited your weakness years ago now no longer have any power over you. Isn't God amazing? We should always live with gratitude for his power and help.

The longer you are in Christ the more your life should be characterized by resolute confidence, boldness, courage, and fearlessness. We should be moving toward the place where we are so strong that we can face anything and not be moved. Can we exult in the power of God as Paul did? He writes,

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed, 2 Corinthians 4.7-9.

### ***The source of strength***

Before moving on, let's consider the source of this strength. In verse 16 Paul prays that we be strengthened by the power of God. He was not counting on the worldly systems of politics, education, and culture to provide strength for the church. The power comes from the Spirit, who every Christian has access to, Romans 8.9. He is the one who strengthens our inner being. Therefore, we are to cooperate by:

- Walking in the Spirit, Galatians 5.16.
- Being filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5.18.
- Allowing the word to dwell within us richly, Colossians 3.16.

God's strength is inexhaustible. He possesses extraordinary might and He lives to impart that to his sons and daughters.

### ***Why we need to be praying for the strength of others***

As we can see Paul was very concerned about the lives of his fellow Christians. He was very concerned about their spiritual struggles. The same needs to be true for us. Life is not easy, and, on some days, it feels as if we are surrounded by a large and growing majority of those who do not know the Lord. The world does not embrace or encourage our faith. The world could care less about our spiritual wellbeing or our relationship with the Lord. If we do not pay attention to the needed spiritual maintenance, things just have a way of grinding us down. If we are to thrive spiritually, we need the prayers of others urging us along to become strong in our inner being. What a difference it can make when we know others are encouraging us, pulling for us, and praying for us.

### **Pray for Christ to Dwell Inside the Heart of Others**

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, Ephesians 3.17a.

We all know the difference between being inside a house and being at home. When Paul uses the word *dwell* here, he is speaking of "settling down and being at home." Home is where we feel comfortable and relaxed. What Paul is praying for is that Christians allow Jesus into their heart, not just for a brief and pleasant visit, but for the purpose of dwelling permanently. The idea is for each of us to allow Christ to

always have the preeminence in our life. This part of the prayer stresses one of the fundamental principles of the new covenant: the experience of the nearness of the Lord.

We should be praying for each other in that we come to possess the humility and desire for righteousness that pushes us to empty our hearts of the cares and lusts of the flesh in order to make room every day for the Lord. This is the power which God supplies to fuel our activity in living within the moral boundaries that Paul will expound upon in the next chapter. This is also the power of God that helps us display the virtues referenced there as well. When we are exercising that power, Christ can dwell in peace inside our heart. When this is the case, His power is made manifest in our lives in ever-increasing ways.

## Pray for Others to be Rooted and Established in Love

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, Ephesians 3.17b-19a.

Can you see the result of Christ settling down to dwell inside your heart? It is incomprehensible and unrelenting love. When Christ dominates your life, you will be known by love. Paul is praying that love comes to define you, that it become all of who you are. His love will flow through you enabling you to make it known to others that you are disciple.

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,” John 13.35.

This is the love of God, *agape* love, a love not determined by circumstance or situation. This is a love void of prejudice and restraint. It is a constant, pure, and unchanging love.

O that the hearts of God’s people were filled more with love. It is a constant challenge to do this with consistency. We might do well with those we love (close friends and family), but God calls upon us to love everyone as He loves them, Matthew 22.37-39. We need to be praying for each other to be rooted and grounded in it, so that it be established solidly as a way of life, strong and secure through all of life’s difficulties and offenses. This rests in our objective knowledge and experience of God’s love (2.4) being poured out upon us through:

- Our having been made alive with Him, 2.5.
- Our having participated in a spiritual resurrection and enthronement, 2.6.
- Having been made a part of His body, 2.15-16.
- Having been forgiven of all our sins and trespasses, 5.2
- Understanding our having been chosen from before the foundation of the world, 1.4-5.
- Being recipients of every spiritual blessing, 1.3.

Note 3.18. Paul prays that this love be *comprehended*, i.e., to where we begin to grasp and experience this immense love of Christ and its limitlessness. We should desire to have a greater understanding and deeper appreciation for the immense power *and the love* of God that has been directed toward us. Its breadth goes beyond any boundary. Its length is never ending. Its depth reaches to the lowest level. Its height could never be measured. There is nowhere anyone can go to escape the love of God, Romans 8.38-39.

We will never be able to comprehend it all, but we can grow to where no matter what happens in this life, we trust God to carry out his loving plan of redemption on behalf of His children. Having this assurance (confidence in my relationship with Him) frees me to be able to love one another more fervently. We need a better understanding of this love. We need more wisdom in how to effectively share this love with the lost.

## Pray for Others to be Filled with the Fullness of God

that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God, Ephesians 3.19b.

In the original language, *fullness* carried the idea of a ship that has been filled with all its cargo and completely manned for the journey with its sailors, rowers, and soldiers. It is something that is made full or complete, *to be filled up*. By praying this prayer, Paul desired that Christians experience the greatest measure of the divine presence of Christ in their lives. In the previous chapter, Paul spoke of the church as the new temple (2.19-22), and this may have triggered his thoughts here. Just as the glory of the Lord filled up the temple during Old Testament times, here he prays that the glory of God will fill the new covenant temple, i.e., you and me.

Being filled with the fullness of God means that we are going to be like Him. This is the process to which we must be committed.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit, 2 Corinthians 3.18.

Let us be praying for each other that we not be content with going through the motions, just making our way through life in survival mode. Jesus came so we can live life with abundance, John 10.10. A life of defeat, where one rarely experiences the power and presence of God should never characterize us. Instead, we need to be praying for everyone to experience the wonderful fullness of God, filled to the top *with Him*.

## The Result

As mentioned earlier, each of the parts of Paul's prayer build on the other. Inner strength (3.16) leads to the indwelling of Christ (3.17), which brings incomprehensible love (3.17b-19a), which results in overflowing fullness (3.19b). To what does this lead? Verse 20:

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, Ephesians 3.20.

The four steps in 3.16-19 are steps to spiritual power. As we look at Paul's life, we could easily surmise that he was the living example of what he wrote in 3.20. Because of God's powerful working in him (Colossians 1.29), he did many things beyond what he asked or thought. He possessed tremendous power for every issue of life. What he possessed is fully available to every Christian in every day or age.

You have this power at your disposal. It is high time for Christians to quit discounting themselves by telling themselves how inadequate they are and unable to follow through. This is a faithless disposition. If you are not experiencing this power in your life, it is because you are not filled with the fullness of God. If you are not filled with the fullness of God, it is because you are not rooted and grounded in love. If you

are not rooted and grounded love, it is because you're not filled with Christ. If you're not filled with Christ, you are not strong in your inner being.

But as you travel down the path of progress and come to where you are filled with the fullness of God, you will see things happen in your life beyond what you could have imagined. When the trials come, you'll possess the strength you never knew was there. When God sets an opportunity before you, you'll have a strength and power to accomplish that had gone unrealized before.

All of this is for the glory of God:

to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen, Ephesians 3.21.

God wants to display his wisdom and love through you. When the world looks at you what do they see?

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary, Isaiah 40.28-31.*

## For Thought and Reflection

1. What prompted the prayer of Ephesians 3.14-21?
2. Why is it so important that we elevate the prominence of our prayers for others? Who do we usually concentrate on the most?
3. What are the signs and symptoms of a weak inner spirit?
4. What does it mean for Christ to  *dwell* inside our heart?
5. Why does Paul want us to come a better grasp of the infinite love of God?

