

Praying for Friends

Ephesians 1:15-23

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Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Ephesians. We are going to go back, and we are going to look at Ephesians 1:1. I want to give you a little summary of what has happened here. We take the scripture verse by verse and word by word, and we just let the Holy Spirit speak to us. That is what we are going to do.

Last week, we looked at about the first 14 verses of Chapter 1. You can see that it is from Paul. We don't have to worry about who the author is. He calls himself an *apostle*. Only 14 throughout the pages of the Bible or history have ever really been an apostle. He gives this blessing to them of peace and grace. He says in verse 2, "Grace to you and peace from God." Then, we talked about 10 things, 10 blessings. A blessing is something that we get that is unexpected. God blesses us in so many ways. You can read down here beginning in verse 3.

We talked about *election*. We talked about *predestination*. We talked about *free will*. So let me just share with you what our church believes. We believe both election and free will are taught in the Bible. Therefore, they must both be true. Does God know it? Absolutely. Does God choose us? Absolutely. But at the same time, we have this ability to make a choice. I find it interesting that we don't have any problem believing in the miracle of the virgin birth. We don't have any problem believing that somehow, contrary to nature, Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water. We believe that. We don't have any problem believing that a man was dead and was raised from the dead. Yet, somehow we get (you would have had to have gone to seminary to know this word) but we get discombobulated, and we don't understand how that God can choose us and elect us and at the same time we have a free choice in the matter. It is both and. It is not either or. That will be the status of our church. That is what we believe. If you don't, God bless you. Hang in here with us.

Now, all throughout these first 14 verses, he begins to talk about the blessings that we have. I'm so reminded of a story, a story that was told many years ago when a fellow took his entire life savings, and he cashed it in for a ticket to get on this boat to go from Europe to the United States of America. The only problem is he gave all his money for the ticket to get on the boat, and so when he got on the boat all he had was a piece of bread that he brought and a piece of cheese. That is a long journey, even by today's standards. After a while, the bread got stale, and the cheese got moldy. He was coming toward the end of the trip, and he came up to one of the stewards on the boat and said, "Please ... I'm starving to death. Can you give me something that I can eat?" The steward said, "Well, let me see your ticket." The steward took the man's ticket and he looked at it and he said, "Sir, this ticket entitles you to every meal that has been served on this ship since we left." It is hard to appreciate something that you don't know that you have. What Paul is saying to this church through this circular letter (remember he is in prison and he's writing this letter that is going to go around to different churches), he is saying, "Hey, guys. You are blessed. I mean, you have something to be pumped about. You have something to be stoked about because God has blessed you in an unusual way." And for that, we say, "To God be the glory!" We are indeed a blessed people.

This brings us to our text today where we are going to pick up in verse 15. We'll go as long as we can this morning, and then we'll pick it up tonight right where we leave off. You'll certainly want to be here. There is

nothing more important that we could do than to be in the House of God. We are going to study God's word tonight, and I trust that you will be with us.

Well, the title of our message today is "Praying for Friends." Have you ever heard anyone say, "Hey, I'm praying for you. I've got you," and you wonder if they really are praying for you. Or, have you ever said, "Hey, I'll be praying about that," but then you never do. We have all been guilty of that. Prayer is something that certainly is best performed when we are praying for someone or something that is outside of our own will. It reminds me of the young, single woman who is praying, and she is trying not to be selfish and she said, "God, please would you give my mother a son-in-law?" It is best when we are not always just praying for ourselves. It is something best done when we are praying for somebody else and not for ourselves. We tend to pray most of the time when we're in a bind, when things are bad. I know in our family that there have been times that we get on our knees and we weep as a family. Those are typically during poor times. Interestingly enough, Paul has his office in prison, and he is writing this circular letter to this group at Ephesus. Here he is right in the middle of the letter, and he says, "Hey. Timeout here just a second." So he stops writing the letter, and he starts praying for them. His prayer is in kind of a dialogue form here. We see the example for this throughout the pages of the Bible. Abraham prayed for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18. In Exodus 33, Moses prayed for God to spare the Hebrew children. Ezra prayed for the remnant who had returned from the Promised Land in Ezra 10. In Luke 13, Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. Paul was constantly praying for people. We see in Romans 1:9 that he was constantly praying for others. May I say, the greatest ministry you could ever have or perform is to pray for someone else. Maybe you can't give a lot. Maybe you can't serve a lot. Maybe you can't move these chairs that we move so many times a week, but one thing you can do is you can, certainly, pray.

I. The Purpose of the Prayer (v. 15)

We see here in verse 15 of Ephesians chapter 1, the Bible says, "This is why." We'll just stop right there. Maybe your version says *therefore* or *wherefore*. That little *this is why* or that *therefore* or that *wherefore* is referencing that which has just previously been said. If you will look in your Bible, Paul has just told them, "you have been sealed with the Spirit," in the previous verse. And so, "since you have been sealed with the Spirit, [therefore, consequently, because] I want to share with you some things, and I want to begin to pray for you." While it is unlikely to pray right in the middle of a letter, that is what Paul did. These verses we studied last week, verses 1 through about 14. Remember, we said 3-14 was one continuous, long, ongoing sentence. Here he probably quotes the longest sentence in ancient literature. Now he is going to go into a prayer mode in which he is praying for these people.

Anyone remember the name William Randolph Hearst? William Randolph Hearst was one of the most wealthy men in all of the world in his day. William Randolph Hearst was a famous art collector. William Randolph Hearst said to his agent, "I want you to go, and I want you to find this specific piece of art for me. I've got to have it." So, he sent out his agent far and wide around the world to get this one specific piece of art. After several days, the agent came back and Hearst said, "Do you have my art? Can you tell me where this piece is? Money is not an object. I've got to have this piece of art." The agent looked at William Randolph Hearst and said, "Sir, as a matter of fact, you currently own the piece of art that I've been looking for, and Sir, that piece of art has been lying dormant in one of your warehouses for years." As it is with the blessings of God and the gifts of God and everything God has for us, if we are not careful, we will take that which we already have, which God has already purchased for us on Calvary's cross, and we will let it lie dormant in some kind of warehouse, spiritually speaking, somewhere. Things like ... abundant life—it is ours! The peace that passes all kinds of understanding—that is ours! It is a done deal. It has already been paid for. We don't have to ask God to meet

our needs according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus. He has already done that. Hallelujah! Paul is saying, (and we want to get the message from these Ephesians) “Grab on to what God has already accomplished for you and begin to walk in a manner worthy of being a child of God.”

A. Good Reports

As we look at praying for others today, there are a couple of observations. The first one is in verse 15, and that is *The Purpose of the Prayer*. Now, let's give a teachable moment here. We have given you a bulletin, and then we have the Power Point or the IMAG up here. It doesn't really matter to me whether you write things down or not. I only know this ... you tend to remember more which you are actively involved in. If you will retain more, then write it down. We are giving you every possible way for you to get what God's Holy Spirit is saying to you, so I say ... write it down! The purpose of the prayer ... well, he is saying, “You have been sealed,” in the previous verses, and then there are two purposes. First of all, notice what he says, “I hear good reports.” Notice in verse 15, “This is why, since I heard about your faith.” This is cool. Paul is hearing about all of these churches that he has planted in Asia Minor. We understand there is some semblance of accountability because it is being reported back to Paul, the church planter, how they are doing. The language that he uses here is interesting because he has used it one other time, if you'll look in 1 Corinthians. That was a group of people that were all torn up. They were doing all kinds of terrible things. In reference to the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul said, “I hear that there are divisions among you, and I partially believe it.” Teachable moment here. You hear something about someone, you need to be careful. You need not to be quick to pass judgment. The apostle Paul said, “since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.” If you write in your Bible, circle two words—*faith* and *love*. What has he heard about them? Well, I heard about your faith, and I heard about your love. This is the *Good Report*. This is what he has heard about them. He heard that they have been doing well. What is Paul saying? He is saying, “Keep up the good work.” I heard about a little boy who was praying to God, and the little boy said, “God, thanks for all you've done and keep up the good work.” I think that is kind of the message that Paul was getting across to this group of people, “You've done good. Now, keep on keeping on,” is what he is saying to them. Then he mentions two things, very interesting, I think. “I heard about your faith.” Go ahead and write that down, *faith*. Circle that. What do we know about faith? We only know what the Bible tells us. In Hebrews 11:1, it “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” We have faith that God wants to do a great work in our church right now. We can't always see it. We don't always know what the future is, but we believe God because Hebrews 11:6 says what? “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” We also know that in Romans that everyone is given a “measure of faith.” Romans 10:17, tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Here we see Paul saying, “Wow, you Ephesians. I hear about how your faithing things. You're believing God for things you are not even seeing. You're trusting.” Their theme song might have been, “Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.” Essentially he is saying, “Hey, keep on keeping on. You're doing well.” This good report, it says that you are doing well.

Now unfortunately, in Revelation 2:4, we see that the Ephesians didn't stick with it totally because later on in Revelation 2:4, the Bible says that they left their first love—the same people. Just because you are doing well once doesn't mean that you've got your ticket punched from now on. I want us to see that faith is important, that prayer is important. Listen to what Martin Luther had to say about prayer. He said, “He that hath prayed well has studied well.” Listen to what John Wesley said, “God does nothing but in answer to prayer.” The Native American prayer warrior David Brainerd said this, “I love to go into my cottage where I can spend time alone in prayer.” Do you? Do you love to pray? Do you find yourself too busy to pray? There is nothing more important

that we could do than to pray.

B. Good Graces

So, Paul heard good reports, but also he heard good graces as well. He talked about their love for the brothers. Here is how it worked. Faith represented the Ephesians attitude to God, and love represented their attitude to each other. You could say *vertically* and *horizontally*. I was trying to teach our grandkids the other day about vertically and horizontally and you always know your left because the steering wheel is typically on the left-hand side of a car. You know, all of these things that you do—these teachable moments, especially those of you that homeschool. I mean, life is a teachable moment. So I was trying to help our grandkids with that. It just became abundantly clear to me that children learn by object lessons. So we are going to have one today. Paul said, “I’ve heard about,” can you say, “your faith and your love.” In the love, he says this, “love is made up of l-o-v-e.” This is our teachable moment—four things. Actually, I want to be very clear. A guy by the name of Charles Lowery wrote this. He said that *love* stands for the fact that if we really love somebody, we are going to Listen to them. Are you a good listener? I’m not. I struggle with this. I’m a good talker. I’m not a good listener. So if you want someone to talk to you, come see me. If you want someone to listen to you, go see Doug. It’s good. That is why we work together. Now, love means that you listen. I want to tell you I pray and I try and I want to do better. I want to be a better listener. I mean there are times I’m sitting here saying, “Don’t talk,” under my breath, “don’t talk ... don’t talk ... don’t talk.” I go for a few seconds, but if I love someone I want to listen to them. Secondly, LO, the O means that you Overlook their faults. He said, “I’ve heard of your faith, your relationship to God. I’ve heard of your love.” Love is listening. Love is overlooking their faults, not finding faults. Boy, I found this true in our church, in this church. People find something fault worthy, and they’re going to let you know about it. Let me tell you ... we are all trying, OK? We’re doing our best. We might have something go awry, but just understand we’re trying. Love is not fault finding. V—love expresses the fact that you find the person Valuable. They are valuable to you as they are valuable to God. Then E, if you love someone you are going to Encourage them. Paul is saying this, “Hey I heard about your faith, your attitude toward God, how that you believe the things that aren’t, and then I heard about your love.”

This is an old Bill Gothard definition. Here is what Gothard would say about love. He would say, “Love is meeting needs without expecting anything in return.” That is Bill Gothard. Meeting needs without expecting anything in return. So, Paul said, “I have heard about your faith. I have heard about your love,” and the grace is here that he talks about, the object of our faith, the object of our love. Listen to the Bible in Acts 2:36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” It is Jesus who is Lord. So I really say this—I want to move on, but I’m having a hard time moving on here, honestly, because I want to impress upon you that I think a primary characteristic of someone who is born again is that they have a love for people but particularly those of the household of God. So you say, “Pastor, I like the church, I just don’t like those people up there.” You have a problem. I’m going to tell you how to find the problem. Go in your bathroom and look in the mirror. We must ask God to help us love people. Not everyone is as easy to love as some people. Just listen to what the Bible says. In 1 John 4:7 it says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” I have heard about your faith, your attitude toward God. I’ve heard about your love, you attitude toward others. Now, I’m calling that *The Purpose of the Prayer*.

II. The Petition of the Prayer (v. 16)

Let me hasten on to share with you *The Petition of the Prayer*. Go back, if you would, to verse 16. It says, “I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.” See, he is praying for them. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” We are to be thankful in everything—humbly grateful not grumbly hateful.

A. Begins with Thanksgiving

We see here that the petition begins with thanksgiving. I find it interesting that the word “thanks” is used some 26 times in Paul’s writings. That has some significance with it. He goes on to say how that you *cease not*. “I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.” He says how that you never stop; you cease not.

B. Continues with Intercession

It begins with thanksgiving, but it continues with intercession. The word *intercession* means *to have a meeting*. It means to have a meeting for the purpose of praying for another. So, here is how it works. Sometimes, and we have had this here at our church, we deal with business people and we deal with folks in the community and so sometimes they will send someone as an emissary or a go-between. So they are representing someone else. They are coming essentially saying, “I’m interceding on behalf of someone else.” Maybe it is people that own contiguous land around us or something. They will be someone interceding on behalf of someone else. When you pray for someone else, you are having a meeting and you are praying on behalf of somebody else. So, that is what that word means. It continues with intercession in the fact that he says this. Do you see those words there? I’m in 17, “that God ... would give you a spirit of wisdom.” *Wisdom* is an attitude that has common and uncommon sense. A lot of people can have common sense. Now, some people don’t have any sense. But common sense is kind of like ... horse sense. You just know what is right. What he is talking about in reference to wisdom here is not just common sense, but it is uncommon sense. It is supernatural. It is what God would have you to do. We see there that this one is pleading the case for us.

Notice in verse 18 what the Bible has to say. “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints.” He wanted their eyes to be open. He said, “I want you to have this uncommon ability to have your eyes open.” See this is how we love people. We have our eyes open to what God has for them in their life.

I’m going to give you 3 things, not in your outline. Here is how you have your spiritual eyes open:

1. You must spend time with someone to get to know them better. It works two ways. For the church at Ephesus, Paul wanted to go spend time with them, but he was in prison. He is really saying, “I want you to have your spiritual eyes open to God. You must spend time with God.” Take time to be holy. Are you too busy to spend time in the morning with God? Are you too busy before your head hits the pillow? Before your feet hit the floor to take time to be holy?
2. Another way that your eyes can be open is not only through time but through talk. We have a very unique situation here. Do you know our church has really only two full-time personnel, Debbie and myself. So the others, Darrell and Doug and Michelle have a huge responsibility, but they also have full-time jobs. So it is very

important to me that every week I talk to these people. I just want you to know how it works. So, every Wednesday night I'm not in prayer meeting. I'm meeting with Darrell because he has been at work all day. And then every Wednesday afternoon, I meet with Michelle. And then, on the fly, on the phone, or e-mail or text, Doug and I talk every week. If I'm going to lead, if I'm going to know these people, I must spend time with them. If we are going to get to know God, we must spend time. He said, "I want your eyes to be opened." Your eyes are only opened to spiritual things by having time, by having talk.

3. Here is the third "T," by thinking. The Bible says, "Think on these things. Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are good. Think on these things." I really believe if we are going to have our eyes opened and we are going to get the prayer that Paul was praying for the Ephesians, we must think on the things of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, in 17 and 18 he talks about wisdom—that is knowing the deep things of God. Then, he talks about revelation—that is knowing something that we could not understand on our own. We took our grandkids fishing the other day. Tried to get the grandson to cast a little bit deeper because that is where the fish were, not over on the bank where the snakes were. We need to go deeper with God, and that is to have the revelation of God.

Then, in 18 and 19 he talks about the "hope of His calling." You know, someone has said, "When you're at the end of the rope and you can't cope, you need hope." And we do need hope. We need to know that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. That we would dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name. So, notice this phrase here "the hope of your calling." Someone has said life is like a grindstone. What life really does is it either grinds off the rough edges of our life, or it polishes us and helps us to shine for Jesus Christ. I believe what Paul is saying to this church at Ephesus is, "Because of your faith, your attitude to God, because of your love, your attitude to others, you can have the wisdom of God, you can have the revelation that only comes from God, and you can have your spiritual eyes opened and life will not just grind you, but life will polish you that you will be more in the image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." Let's stand for prayer.