



© 2019 Ginger Hertenstein
SERMON TITLE: What do YOU Pray For?
SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:15-23
DATE: January 13, 2019
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Exodus 15:2-13

We remember from last week that Paul, the writer of Ephesians, wants believers to get a big picture of God. We remember that the believers in that area around Ephesus were former pagans and so they had a shift to make – isn't that what Ross told us we need to do this year? They and we must put Jesus Christ in the center of our faith 100% because Jesus is the full plan of God and all things culminate in him.

Paul said God's plan is 100% sure, Jesus is the center, and God is 100% for you. We SHIFT our confidence to Him.

Paul was so delighted with these Asian Churches' faith that he wrote a prayer for them. When you pray for a fellow believer, a friend, what do you pray for?

- Perhaps you pray for a need,
- Or, you pray for a problem,
- Or, you might also pray for a general blessing

Do you ever pray for spiritual growth? Do you ever pray for maturity? Let's hear Paul's prayer:

Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called-- his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else-- not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself. (Ephesians 2:15-23)

Paul is excited! There are Christians in the Roman Province of Asia so he prays for them constantly. He thanks God for them—they are so important to him and to God! They express the authority of Christ everywhere as they live out their faith because Jesus is present through them. But they needed to be strong.

So do you have friends, perhaps in another place or perhaps right in your neighborhood or church that you care deeply about. What do YOU pray for? Are you praying for spiritual growth for your friends? How about for yourself?

Paul prays for his friends' spiritual grounding. They need to be stable. They need to understand who they are as Christians and then be able to stand in it.

Have you had an injury—broken a bone or pulled a muscle? You've had to wear a cast or a brace. When the cast is off, what do you do? Probably you did physical therapy to make the limb or joint strong. The spirit is the same way. Your spiritual understanding needs to be strengthened.

Well, you might ask, what do you need to know? I'm glad you asked!

Paul prays about three things: hope, inheritance, and power. These are found in Jesus but we have to look for them, recognize them, and grow in our understanding of them.

1. **Hope** – "I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the *confident hope* he has given to those he called." (v. 18)

Hope is one of the greatest gifts of the Gospel. In another place Paul puts it together as the big three elements of Christianity, *faith, hope, love*. You have heard that. It is from a well-known passage in Corinthians. Hope is one of the things you need on this earth to sustain you. It is one of the greatest assets of having faith. Its antonym is despair. Hope counters all kinds of discouragement and unhappiness in life. Hope is grounded in this verse:

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

That is a stunning verse because God had hope for us even when we are at our sinful worst. So Paul also says in Romans, "Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble,

and keep on praying" (12:12). Paul says: "We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." Even in our suffering we can have joy because God allows suffering to produce endurance. And enduring produces character, and character produces hope . . . *and hope does not disappoint us.*

Do you pray for hope? What if we prayed for our parents or our spouses or our children to have hope in Christ? How might that prayer affect someone's depression? Might it be even a better prayer for someone in distress or struggle? We tend to focus on the struggle but what if we asked for hope? Would that not open up the opportunity for the possibilities? Wouldn't that be like seeing the silver lining in the cloud?

Praying for hope is a very positive prayer. When you have hope, it causes you to lift up your head.

When the children of Israel were in the desert beside the Red Sea and saw Pharaoh's army advancing against them, great fear seized them, and they cried out to Moses. What did Moses say? "Do not be afraid, stand firm, see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today," i.e. **have hope!** (Exodus 14:13)

The next thing Paul prayed for was:

2. **Inheritance** – [I pray that you, his holy people, can understand] "what are the riches of his *glorious inheritance.*" (v. 18)

You, as a Christian are receiving an inheritance. An inheritance is property or right or title received by succession or by will or as an heir. You may have received an inheritance from a family member—(or some people receive bills!). But with God you do not receive a bill; rather, you receive an inheritance. It is a reward and it begins here on earth. First and foremost, it is the Holy Spirit, a deposit or down payment of your inheritance to come. You can even ask for more of the Holy Spirit! And God will give you more.

An inheritance is the new city coming down from heaven in Revelation. It is also reward and blessing in this life, even though in this life we also have hardship and persecution. Yet God persistently gives us many reminders in the Word of God that encourage us to expect that very really inheritance.

For example, the children of Israel were being moved into a land that they did not pay for, the promised inheritance that had begun with Abraham. This gives us a picture that we are given "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1Peter 1:4).

But first, before they gained the land, they had to go through the waters of the Red Sea. That would be a sure path of destruction. The children of Israel knew it and feared it, as they stood, backs against the sea facing the approaching deadly enemy. They were toast, except for God. That leads to Paul's third prayer request for believers:

3. **God's Power** – "I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for believers."

Another version says "the immeasurable greatness" of his power (NRSV). It is "the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead." We do not see people raised from the dead. So God gives us a great picture of it, again, as the children of Israel stood by that sea that over one evening and night became dry land which they were able to walk through, with waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. (see Exodus 14:21-23)

And yet when their enemies attempted to pursue them to kill them through the same path, the waters crashed back over them and took them out.

When you understand that great power, you will know that there is no problem on this earth that is insurmountable to God. You will face your trials with confidence in God's ability to handle it. You will see hope for our nation which is currently spiritually weak, needing spiritual therapy. Christians can seek God's help for this nation, and it begins with the Christians. We must be strong, more mature, and more courageous in our understanding of God and God's power.

This power, you see, is exercised for believers; followers, the ones whom God has redeemed. Paul calls it "God's unfailing love" that leads the people God has redeemed. (Ex 15:13)

This power also catches the attention of all people when they see it in our circumstances, and your witness calls them to faith. We must share it, trusting and expecting God to exercise power.

What do you pray for? Think of the people in your life and in your community who need hope, inheritance, and God's mighty power. These are three things that can make you and them spiritually strong. Pursue them for yourself. Pursue them for your friends and family.

Let us be spiritually wise.

AMEN