

Praying for Change

LESSON 3



Topic

Intercessory prayer

Theme

God's mighty power displayed in Christ's resurrection persuades us to pray confidently for the spiritual needs of others.

Desired Response

The learner will pray with confidence in God's power.

Materials

- Visuals 10, 11.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 1:15–23

Summary

Paul prayed confidently, depending on God's great power to help the Ephesians and focusing on their spiritual needs for wisdom and knowledge to know God's calling, grace, and power.

Outline

I. The Character of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 1:15, 16)

- A. Informed (1:15)
- B. Intercessory (1:16)

II. The Content of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 1:17–23)

- A. Spiritual resource (1:17)
- B. Spiritual request (1:17)
- C. Spiritual results (1:18–23)
 1. Immediate result: Enlightenment (1:18)
 2. Ultimate result: Knowledge (1:18–23)
 - a. Of the hope of His calling (1:18)
 - b. Of the riches of His inheritance (1:18)
 - c. Of the greatness of His power (1:19–23)

Memory Verses

*"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers"
(Ephesians 1:15, 16).*

GETTING STARTED

Confidence in Prayer

ASK: What might cause people to lack confidence as they pray? *A lack of understanding of God's person and power; unconfessed sin; a focus on circumstances instead of God; selfishly motivated prayers; lack of experience.*

ASK: What has helped you pray confidently?

This lesson features one of the apostle Paul's prayers. Look for encouragement and challenge in Paul's powerful prayer. Let his example build your confidence in God's person and power to bring about spiritual change in your life and in those of fellow believers.

Life-changing Power

The wheel, nail, compass, paper, and gunpowder all make the list of the greatest inventions of all time. They all changed the course of history and continue to affect our lives hundreds, or in some cases, thousands of years later.

ASK: What powerful machine, invented in your lifetime, has had the greatest impact on your life? (Q1)

ASK: What do you think your life would be like without it? (Q2)

The apostle Paul was familiar with the wheel, nails, and paper. Gunpowder came much later. But nothing so affected Paul's life like the power of prayer. His letter to the Ephesians encourages us to pray with confidence in God's life-changing power.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. The Character of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 1:15, 16)

The Ephesian Christians, like us today, needed divine guidance and illumination to understand significant teachings about God's grace. So Paul prayed for them in an informed and intercessory manner. His prayer was brief but filled with big requests.

A. Informed (1:15)

Paul knew many of the Ephesian Christians personally because he had founded the church in Ephesus. While he was under house arrest in Rome, he heard about other Ephesians coming to Christ. He addressed those new converts in his letter, writing that he had heard of their faith and was praying specifically for them (Eph. 1:15).

READ: Ephesians 1:15. **ASK:** What is the relationship between faith and love? (Q3) *Love is evidence of our faith in God. Paul knew the Ephesians had truly trusted God because of their love for each other.*

Jesus named love as the identifying mark of genuine disciples (John 13:35). The absence of love for others might show that a person is not genuinely saved. No doubt the report of the Ephesians' love for each other was welcome news to Paul. He had confidence they were true believers and ready to grow.

B. Intercessory (1:16)

Unlike self-centered, give-me-this-and-that prayers, Paul's prayers were focused on the spiritual well-being of others. He genuinely cared whether the Ephesians grew in the Lord. In fact, he cared far more about the Ephesian believers' spiritual needs than he did about his own physical needs. Instead of whining about his adverse circumstances, he expressed thanks for God's work in Ephesians' lives.

ASK: What generally characterizes your requests in your intercessory prayers? (Q4)

ASK: In what sense are physical needs also spiritual needs? (Q5) *People spiritually respond to physical needs. The physical needs provide an opportunity for a person to grow in faith in God.*

II. The Content of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 1:17–23)

A. Spiritual resource (1:17)

Paul addressed his prayer to God the Father, calling Him "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (1:17). It may seem strange that he called the Father the God of Christ, but Christ Himself addressed the Father as "My God" both on the cross and after His resurrection (Matt. 27:46; John 20:17). In Paul's reference, he seems to emphasize that God the Father does the changing in our hearts because of the work of Christ on our behalf. Indeed, Christ made the way for us to boldly approach God's throne of grace (Heb. 4:14–16). Without Christ's work, we have no resource for spiritual change.

In calling God the "Father of glory," Paul identified God the Father as both the source of glory and the possessor of glory. His glory is an essential attribute of His being and a manifestation of His divine excellence. And His glory is both the goal for our Christian experience on earth and the promise of our eternal existence in Heaven. We spiritually grow in glory now knowing we will one day be completely glorified in Heaven.

ASK: What might characterize a prayer from someone who fails to recognize God as the resource for spiritual change? (Q6) *It focuses on trying harder and becoming better on our own. It uses phrases like "help me be" rather than "I trust in You."*

B. Spiritual request (1:17)

The second half of Ephesians 1:17 provides the key to Paul's prayer. The rest of this chapter also draws its support from these lines: "That . . . God . . . may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."

What did Paul mean by "the spirit"? Some commentators have suggested that

“the spirit” means the Holy Spirit. Because the readers were Christians, however, Paul would not have prayed that God would give them the Spirit. The Holy Spirit already resided in them (Rom. 8:9).

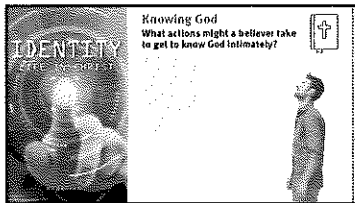
A better explanation is that “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” is the disposition to the wisdom and revelation that comes to us through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. When people examine our lives, we should show evidence of the Spirit’s wisdom and revelation.

Paul’s prayer request aligned with James’s teaching. James encouraged believers to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5).

ASK: When has God answered your prayer for wisdom? (Q7)

C. Spiritual results (1:18–23)

Paul prayed that his readers would receive from God the spirit of wisdom and revelation “in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:17). Paul wanted them to know God more fully. Such knowledge of God would produce valuable results.



DISPLAY: Visual 10—Knowing God. **ASK:** What actions might a believer take to get to know God intimately? (Q8) *Examine God’s character and ways as recorded in God’s Word; study how God interacted with Bible characters; read biographies of believers who knew God well; develop close friendships with people who know God well.*

1. Immediate result: Enlightenment (1:18)

In knowing God, the Ephesians would have their eyes of understanding enlightened. The Greek word for “understanding” suggests that this understanding would affect the Ephesians’ innermost being, the seat of their affections, intellect, and will. Similarly, the better we know God, the better we love Him; the clearer we discern His thoughts, the more fully and gladly we obey Him.

ASK: How did your affections, intellect, and will changed after becoming a believer? (Q9)

ASK: How have they changed since? (Q10)

2. Ultimate result: Knowledge (1:18–23)

a. Of the hope of His calling (1:18)

God illuminates our hearts and minds so we “may know what is the hope of his calling” (Eph. 1:18).

God has called believers into a life of fellowship with Him that will culminate in being with Christ and like Christ (1 John 3:2). Being with and like Christ is the hope to which God has called us. When God fulfills His purpose for us, we will be free from the ravages of sin and the reach of temptation, trouble, and trials. In eternity, we will enjoy the beauty, peace, and fulfillment of unending life with Christ. Knowing what God has planned for us gives us an invincible hope in a world that seems to be hopelessly on a collision course with disaster.

b. Of the riches of His inheritance (1:18)

The inheritance Paul mentioned is God's inheritance (Eph. 1:18). The phrase "in the saints" tells us that the believers are the inheritance. God is going to lavish the riches of His glory on His people. Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know how inconceivably great is the glory of God that He will shower on His redeemed people.

READ: 1 Peter 2:9. **ASK:** Why should believers not belittle themselves, as if they are worthless? (Q11) *God has chosen us to be part of a royal priesthood to show forth His praises. God wants to use us to reach the world.*

God looks upon believers as a treasure of incomparable worth (Eph. 5:2). He ultimately receives glory as He works in and through us (3:21).

c. Of the greatness of His power (1:19–23)

The third aspect of the knowledge Paul prayed about concerns God's power. Paul's words "exceeding greatness" reveal the overwhelming magnitude of God's power. The two words "who believe" indicate that Paul was referring to God's redemptive power. God showed great power—awesome power—in creating the universe. He showed great and awesome power in bringing the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. The power He showed in redemption, however, is the greatest manifestation of His power. This power is the power available to believers today.

The words "according to" show that God's power in effecting our conversion is comparable to His power in relation to Christ. Paul went on to make four observations about God's power in the life of Christ. The first is the resurrection of Christ (1:20). The power that raised Christ from physical death is the same power that raises the believing sinner from spiritual death. Only the omnipotent God could raise Christ from the dead, and only He can raise a spiritually dead sinner to spiritual life. If we can comprehend the power of God displayed in Christ's resurrection, we can comprehend the power of God displayed in our salvation and available to us now.

ASK: How should the availability of God's resurrection power affect our prayer life? (Q12) *We should pray with confidence in God; we should not hold back any requests; we should pray consistently.*

The second way God showed His enormous power was by seating Jesus at His right hand in "the heavenly places" (1:20). The "right hand" signifies a place of honor. Christ sits in the heavenlies, in a place of honor "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (1:21).

Not only did God exalt Christ above the innumerable multitude of angels, but He also exalted Him above "every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (1:21). "Every name that is named" includes every title and every name of excellence and honor, whether prince, king, ruler, potentate, or any other distinguished authority. Christ ranks higher than every member of humanity in this present age and in the age to come. He will always be highly exalted above all others.

ASK: How should knowing the permanence of Christ's position help us as believers now? (Q13) *We should not fret about the future nor wonder whether Christ will be able to remain on the throne.*

The fact that Christ sat down demonstrates that His redemptive work is done. The writer of Hebrews echoed this truth. He said Christ offered Himself as the “one sacrifice for sins for ever” and “sat down” (Heb. 10:12). Christ purchased our redemption once for all. His work is done, and there is nothing we could ever add to it.

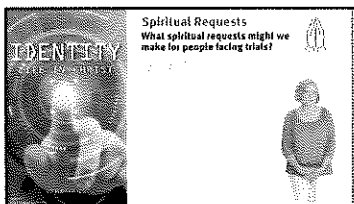
Paul cited a third way in which God's power worked in connection with Christ: God granted His exalted Son the right to rule over everything (Eph. 1:22). Everything—angelic beings, saved humanity, and lost humanity—is subject to Christ. The unregenerate may defy God and rant and rave at Christ, but someday when He exercises His authority over all the earth, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9–11).

Fourthly, God in His power gave Christ “to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22). Christ functions as the supreme ruler of the church. He is its ever-present source of direction and power.

The church is Christ's Body. As such, it is to be under His lordship. The body of Christ is made up of many members, but all must work together in harmony for the good of the whole and must be subject to the Head.

Paul further taught that the church “is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (1:23). But how is the church the fullness of Christ? On one hand, the church is the fullness of Christ because He fills the church with His presence. On the other hand, the church is the fullness of Christ because the church is the instrument He uses to perform His will on earth.

The power seen in Christ's resurrection, ascension, and appointment to be head of the church is the same power God manifested on our behalf at our conversion. If we catch hold of this dynamic truth, it will give us unwavering confidence as we go to God in prayer.



DISPLAY: Visual 11—Spiritual Requests. **ASK:** What spiritual requests might we make for people facing trials? (Q14)

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Praying with Power

ASK: What truths concerning God's power did you glean from Paul's prayer for the Ephesians? (Q15)

ASK: What do your prayers communicate about your beliefs concerning God's power? What adjustments do you need to make? (Q16)

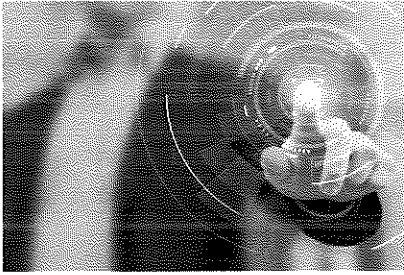
Change of Focus

ASK: How might you need to change the focus of your intercessory prayers? What can you take from Paul's example? (Q17)

Memory Verses

Encourage your learners to memorize Ephesians 1:15 and 16. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

Saved to Work



Topic

Saving grace

Theme

Salvation is by grace through faith for good works.

Desired Response

The learner will pursue good works while depending on God's enabling grace.

Materials

- Visuals 12, 13.
- Paper and markers.
- Drinking glass.
- Clear mixing bowl.
- Pitcher of water.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 2:1–10

Summary

Both Gentiles and Jews are spiritually dead and separated from God and must be saved by grace. God enables believers to lead godly lives and do good works also by His grace.

Outline

I. Separation from Christ (Eph. 2:1–3)

- A. Gentile separation (2:1, 2)
- B. Jewish separation (2:3)

II. Union with Christ (Eph. 2:4–6)

- A. God loved us through Christ (2:4)
- B. God gave us life in Christ (2:5, 6)

III. Purposes of Union with Christ (Eph. 2:7–10)

- A. To portray grace (2:7–9)
- B. To produce good works (2:10)

Memory Verse

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).