

A Pattern for Prayer

Ephesians 1:15-23

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How many of you grew up saying memorized prayers?

- Here's the prayer my sisters and I said at dinner time, usually at a very high rate of speed when we were hungry: *"Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, Amen."*
- Or maybe you prayed this one: *"Rub a dub, dub, thanks for the grub."*
- Beth's family prayed a meaningful prayer which we used with our daughters: *"God you're great, and God you're good. And we thank you for this food. By your hand must all be fed. Give us Lord, our daily bread. In Jesus' Name. Amen."*
- Perhaps you prayed this bedtime prayer: *"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; and if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."*
- Here's a morning prayer many of us can relate to: *"Dear Lord, so far, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, lost my temper, been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. But in a few minutes, I'm going to get out of bed. And from then on, I'm going to need a lot more help."*

Speaking of prayer, let's pray the prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from the evil one.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

George Barna reports 69% of Christians pray at least weekly, but according to a survey from Crossway, only 2% say they are extremely satisfied with their overall prayer lives. Another study released last month found two reasons people give for not praying more.

- Too busy.
- Unsure what to pray.

As we continue in our study of the Book of Ephesians, our topic today is, “*A Pattern for Prayer*” from Ephesians 1:15-23. Here Paul shows us how to pray by demonstrating how he prays. Let’s stand and read this prayer together.

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 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, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

We could summarize our passage like this: *God wants us to pray so we’ll grow to know Him better.*

Similar to the opening of chapter one, this prayer is one long complex sentence in Greek filled with clauses, phrases, and adjectives seemingly piled on top of each other. Last week we learned how God the Father planned our adoption, God the Son paid for it, and God the Holy Spirit protects it. Paul now prays that believers will grow to know God better.

He celebrates our position in Christ by putting the truth out in verses 3-14 and in verses 15-23, he prays the truth in. God has already blessed us, now we need to appropriate these blessings through prayer. We see that in verse 15: “***For this reason...***” Paul is so filled with affection for these believers that he praises them

for two things: “...because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.”

- **He celebrates their profession.** The word “*faith*” means, “*conviction and persuasion.*”
- **He celebrates their practice.** Not only were they in a good place vertically with God, but they were also growing horizontally in their relationships with others. Notice how they practiced “*love for all the saints.*” Can you say you love “*all*” believers? Can I?

The Christian life has two dimensions: faith toward God and love toward people. Faith and love are always meant to go together. Paul writes something similar in Colossians 1:4: “*Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people.*” This also marked believers in 2 Thessalonians 1:3: “*Your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.*” 1 John 4:21 says, “*whoever loves God must also love his brother.*”

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, you are fervent in both faith and fellowship! When I meet people in the community and tell them I’m one of the pastors at Edgewood, I often hear them give testimony of your faith in Christ and your love for one another. I don’t want to pastor any other church! Let’s keep growing in our faith and increasing in our love for others in 2024.

It’s so encouraging to hear how God saves people by His grace for His glory. Check out this brief clip from our recent 4G video podcast of how God worked in a powerful way to draw an Edgewood member to Himself.

→ Play Video Clip.

When we hear a profession of faith and see love practiced, we can’t help but be thankful and prayerful according to verse 16: “*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*” The word “*cease*” means “*to pause, or end,*” meaning Paul couldn’t stop thanking God for them and praying for them by name. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 urges us to “*pray without ceasing.*” I’ve always been challenged by Samuel’s intentional intercession in 1 Samuel 12:23: “*As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.*”

Many years ago, in the town of Itasca, Texas, a school fire took the lives of 263 children. After this horrifying tragedy, the community began to expand, so they built a new school which featured “*the finest sprinkler system in the world.*” Civic pride ran high, and tours were given of the most advanced sprinkler system money could buy. Seven years later, they added a new wing, and construction workers discovered the state-of-the-art sprinkler system had never been connected!

Unfortunately, this is a parable of what has happened in too many of our lives. There is untold power available for every believer, but too few of us are connected to the power source, leaving us impotent and ineffective.

God wants us to pray so we'll grow to know Him better.

Before we look more closely at this pattern for prayer, let's make some observations.

- Although the Ephesians lived in a culture hostile to Christianity, Paul doesn't pray for their protection.
- Paul does not request material items for believers, for good health, or for them to have a good day.
- Paul does not ask God to change their circumstances.
- Letting people know you are praying for them is a healthy practice.
- Paul does not ask for God to give them what they do not have, but rather prays that God will reveal to them what they already have.

What Paul prays for is so much deeper than how I normally pray. My prayers are paltry compared to his. To help us understand this passage, I'm going to borrow Alan Carr's outline. Paul makes three main requests.

1. That we might understand the mysteries of God. The first thing Paul asks is found in verse 17: “*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.*” The word “*wisdom*” speaks of “*insight and skill,*” while “*revelation*” refers to an “*uncovering in order to understand.*” Paul wants believers to understand their position and their possessions in Christ. We see this in 1 Corinthians 2:10: “*These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.*”

The main request in this prayer is found at the end of verse 17: “...***in the knowledge of Him.***” I like how the 1984 edition of the NIV captures it: “***That you may know Him better.***” The NLT renders it like this: “***So that you might grow in your knowledge of God.***” This verb for “***know***” is more intimate than intellectual and means, “*to know personally, deeply, and thoroughly.*”

Because we have received countless spiritual blessings, Paul’s prayer is that God would grant us a deeper experiential knowledge of Him. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who preached 232 sermons on Ephesians, was right when he said, “*Our supreme need is to know God.*” We should pray this prayer for ourselves and for others: “*Lord, give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so we know you better.*”

Jeremiah 9:23 says, “***Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me.***” Hosea 6:3 gives us this exhortation: “***Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD.***” In John 17:3, Jesus prayed this prayer: “***And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.***” Paul’s aim in life is summarized in Philippians 3:10: “***That I may know Him.***” Do you know God, or do you just know *about* God?

In Romans 1:18-32, we see a descent into depravity that comes when people refuse to know God as Creator. As Warren Wiersbe says, this slippery slope of sin goes from *ignorance* of God to *idolatry*, to *immorality* to *indecenty*.

My mind goes back to a paragraph from *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer, which was one of the first Christian books I read as a new believer.

“What were we made for? What aim should we set ourselves in life? What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment than anything else? The answer to all these questions is the same: Knowing God...would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated...once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life’s problems fall into place of their own accord.”

After praying to get to know God better, verse 18 provides this encouragement, “***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.” The word “*enlightened*” means, “*to see, to illuminate, to have the light turned on.*” Luke 24:45 says when Jesus walked on the road to Emmaus with two disciples, He “*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*” In the Bible, the word “*heart*” not only refers to the emotions, but also to the inner person which includes the mind and the will. It’s the real you.

When we pray, we should ask God to turn the light on so we can understand at least two things.

- **God loves to restore hope when we’re hopeless.** The word hope in the Bible doesn’t mean, “*I hope so,*” but rather, “*I know so.*” For many, hope has a question mark attached to it, but the Bible uses an exclamation mark to show absolute certainty. Our ultimate hope is laid up in Heaven and it is a certain hope because it is God who has called us. Our hope is tied to our calling, which according to Romans 8:29, is to be “*conformed to the image of His Son.*”
- **God longs for us to understand that we are His inheritance.** This is an easily overlooked phrase because at first glance it appears to repeat the truth found in verse 11 and verse 13 which speak of our guaranteed inheritance in Heaven. But look more closely. This verse insists that *we* are God’s inheritance! Kent Hughes writes: “*Think of it: He owns all the heavens...but we are His treasures. The redeemed are worth more than the universe. We ought to be delirious with this truth!*”

This is first alluded to in Deuteronomy 32:9 which reads, “*But the Lord’s portion is His people...*” Psalm 33:12 proclaims, “*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!*” God treasures you because you are His treasure! The church is His prized possession! Paul wants us to get a glimpse of our glorious future so we will live in light of it right now.

Zephaniah 3:17 describes God breaking out into song when He thinks about His people: “*The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.*” You are of significant value to God. You matter to Him and He looks forward to being with you for all eternity.

Just as a groom eagerly awaits his bride, so Jesus longs to welcome His bride, the church, as His own. We see this poignantly portrayed in Revelation 19:7: ***“Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready.”*** Revelation 21:9 tells us what an angel said to John, ***“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”***

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2. That we might understand the might of God. The next part of Paul’s prayer in verse 19 focuses on believers locking into the greatness of God’s power at work in their lives: ***“And what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might.”*** The adjectives and synonyms used in these verses are pregnant with meaning.

- ***“The immeasurable greatness of His power.”*** The word ***“immeasurable”*** means, *“exceeding, surpassing, over and above”* and ***“greatness”*** is the Greek word *“megas.”* God’s surpassing power is mega great and is more than we will ever need! The word ***“power”*** is the Greek word *dunamis*, which refers to dynamite and dynamo. Notice this power is only for those who believe. Paul picks up on this idea in Ephesians 3:20: ***“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.”***
- ***“The working of His great might.”*** The word ***“working”*** is the word *energia*, which means, *“energy”* and refers to the Lord’s work within us. The word ***“might”*** can be defined as *“ability, force, and strength.”* Paul circles back to this idea in Ephesians 6:10: ***“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”***

Martin Lloyd-Jones points out the logical flow here: *“He first speaks of energy, a power in action; and then says that it comes from a force which is irresistible, which in turn comes from the ocean of God’s might, the eternity of God’s unlimited power.”*

An illustration of that power is given in verse 20: ***“That He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.”*** Alan Carr writes, *“The same power that invaded the tomb of Jesus, raised Him from the dead and carried Him home to Heaven, is the power that is at work in our lives.”*

The mightiest power ever unleashed on earth was not the atomic bomb or earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, or snowstorms. The mightiest power was unleashed when Jesus was raised from the dead and when He ascended into Heaven where He is now exalted. We'll develop this in a future message but ponder this amazing truth from Ephesians 2:6: ***“And raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”***

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3. That we might understand the majesty of Christ. Paul's third request is for believers to comprehend the person of Christ. In verse 22 we see Jesus is ***“Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”*** Jesus is not just above, He is ***“far above.”*** Jesus said it like this in John 3:31: ***“He who comes from above is above all.”***

The phrase, ***“rule and authority and power and dominion”*** may refer to different gradations of rank in the spiritual world, including angelic beings and evil spirits, both the loyal ones and the lethal ones. This shows the cosmic scope of redemption. Romans 8:38-39 says there is nothing and no one who can separate us from the love of Christ: ***“...neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers.”*** Ephesians 6:12 reminds us we are in a spiritual battle already won by Jesus: ***“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”***

According to Acts 19, the believers in Ephesus came out of a culture steeped in idol worship, satanism, and the occult. When they got saved, they burned their books of magic because they knew they had a new Master and Lord, who is seated far above all spiritual powers.

Jesus is ***“above every name that is named,”*** meaning He is above Caesar, above former President Trump, President Biden, the Supreme Court, and yes, even Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift. As Christ Himself said in Matthew 28:18 before giving the Great Commission: ***“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.”***

In the first part of verse 22 we see Jesus rules over everything: ***“And He put all things under His feet...”*** This is a fulfillment of Psalm 110:1: ***“Until I make your enemies your footstool.”***

Jesus is also the head of the church as we see in the last part of verse 22 and verse 23: ***“...and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”*** The order in Greek is emphatic: *“Him He gave as Head over all things to the church.”* One paraphrase renders it like this: *“At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church.”* The church is at the center of God’s plan for the world. As we’ve said before, the church is God’s Plan A, and there is no Plan B.

Edgewood does not belong to any pastor or leader. We bow to Jesus as both Savior and Sovereign. He is our head, and we are His body. He fills us so we will live on mission in our messed-up world, pointing people to Him.

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Prayer Pointers

I’ve read that early African converts were so devout in their personal prayers that each believer had a separate spot in the thicket where he or she would pray. Over time, the paths to these places of prayer became well worn. As a result, if one of them began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others and they would kindly remind the straying saint, *“Brother [or sister], the grass grows on your path.”*

In order to help us make sure the grass doesn’t grow on our path, here are some prayer pointers.

1. Pray the prayers in the Bible out loud. I’m told there are over 650 of them, including the Psalms, the Lord’s Prayer, and Paul’s prayers.
2. Write out your prayers in a journal.
3. Use published prayers like those found in the “Valley of Vision,” which is a collection of Puritan prayers. Beth and I are praying one of these prayers each night.
4. Read a book on prayer. I recommend the one called “Prayer,” which is available at our Resource Center in the Café.

5. Attend the Concert of Prayer we're scheduling for Sunday night, February 18. More details to come.
6. Attend the Quad Cities Prayer Meeting next Sunday night at 6:00 pm at Calvary Church in Moline.
7. Pray on the spot when someone shares a prayer request.
8. Call and leave a prayer on voicemail for someone. I have a friend who has been leaving me voicemail prayer every Friday for over 20 years.
9. Continue to pray that God will provide our next Administrative Pastor and Director of Children's Ministry.
10. Use this prayer from Ephesians 1 as a pattern for how to pray for yourself, our church, missionaries, family members, and friends.

I'm going to lead us in prayer now using Ephesians 1:15-23 as a guide. Copies are available in the lobby if you'd like one.

A Pattern for Prayer

O Father of glory, ever since I heard how believers are growing in faith and love, I am filled with thankfulness and moved to this time of intercession. May You give them wisdom and insight which leads to a deeper and more personal knowledge of you. Would You enlighten the eyes of their heart and restore the hope of Your calling in the middle of whatever is going on in their life. Impress upon them the truth that You treasure them as your glorious inheritance.

May You unleash the immeasurable greatness of Your power toward them as they seek to know You better. May they experience that same resurrection and ascension power over sin and the struggles in their life. May they see You, Lord Jesus, seated in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only now, but in the age to come.

Remind them that You have put all things under Your feet and that You are the heart and head of Your church. Oh God, may we realize that in Christ, we have everything we need. May we press into Christ today in deeper and deeper ways that we might experience the fullness of Your Spirit, leading us in every facet of our lives as we live on mission to our neighbors and the nations, all for Your glory and the fame of Your holy name.

The wealthy newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst, spent a fortune collecting art treasures from around the world. One day he found a description of some valuable items he felt he must own. So, he sent his agent abroad to search

for them. After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasures. Do you know where he discovered them? They were already in Mr. Hearst's warehouse! Hearst had been searching for treasures he already owned.

If you are a Christian, God's mighty power is already yours, but perhaps, like him, you have not been aware of what you possess. It's our joy today to hear from two of our Go Team partners, Dean and Sue Zemke.

Dean and Sue Zemke Interview

1. Please introduce yourselves, tell us what your ministry is and where you are serving.
2. Tell us about one life you saw changed by the gospel during your last term in Japan?
3. Can you share a lesson God taught you during this last term and how it has changed you?
4. How can we pray for you personally and for your ministry?

Louise Dolvig Membership – 10:45