

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 1 verses 15 to 23. Let's read these verses together. And Paul writes this, For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power, toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might, that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that's named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

And he put all things under his feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

God will bless this reading of his word this evening. Let's pray together. Almighty God, we come to you tonight in the name of your Son, the Lord Jesus.

And as we come to stand and sit before your word, we pray that you will speak to us from it. We pray that you will give us hearts ready to receive your word. Lord, we pray that you will use me to serve this church tonight, and to glorify you.

We pray, Father, that you will give me all the help I need to do this, as I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Have you ever felt like the disciples when they asked Jesus, Lord, teach us to pray?

[2 : 2 2] You know, I've felt like that many times. But if the disciples' question was remarkable for its honesty, I find Jesus' reply even more remarkable still.

Listen to this. One of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray. He said to them, When you pray, say.

Do you see what's remarkable about that? Jesus is saying that we can learn to pray. We begin our Christian life by praying like the tax collector at the temple, God of mercy and me a sinner.

But as you grow in your relationship with God, you need to learn to pray much more than that. And Jesus is saying here that prayer is not something mystical. It's not something reserved for a chosen few.

We all need to learn to pray. Of course, the first lesson in prayer is that great prayer that Jesus himself gave us, the Lord's Prayer.

[3 : 2 8] But the Holy Spirit hasn't just left us with that prayer. The Bible is full of the prayers of God's people. And tonight we come to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1, written to the Ephesian church and written for us.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with, one of the most exuberant passages in all the New Testament. In the original Greek, there are just two enormous sentences in Ephesians 1.

The first runs until verse 14 and the second, verse 15 to 23. The first sentence is almost incredible. It's like standing waist deep in the ocean and feeling wave after wave come crashing in and breaking over your head.

Verse 3, God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Verse 4, He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Verse 5, In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. Verse 7, In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace that He lavished on us.

[4 : 51] And fact after fact about the wonder of God's grace come breaking over us. And then Paul begins a new sentence in verse 15.

For this reason, because I've heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love to all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

For this reason, these Ephesians are Christians. They have all these blessings.

All these facts apply to them. But this is the very reason that Paul prays for them. You see, just mere knowledge of the facts will not change us.

How many of us have come to know that the hard way as we've amassed theological knowledge and yet we struggle again and again with the same sins? Or as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

[6 : 01] And as we increase in knowledge, we become more proud rather than more Christ-like. Jim Packer writes in his book, Knowing God, how can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God?

The rule for doing this is demanding but simple. It's that we turn each truth we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God.

And that's exactly what Paul does here in Ephesians 1. He takes what we learn about God and his grace in verse 3 to 14 and he develops it into prayer in verses 15 to 23.

And Paul prays, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

Or in the NIV translation, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

[7 : 11] So that you may know him better. You cannot know him and not be changed. And Paul is praying that the Ephesians' knowledge about God will be turned into knowledge of God.

You see, while Christianity is based on objective, historic fact, at the very heart of our faith is a relationship. And Christianity is knowing God.

It's not a cultural choice. It's not a lifestyle. It's not a kind of morality. It's not keeping rules. It's a relationship with God. Remember what Jesus Christ himself prayed to his Father in the night before his crucifixion.

And this is eternal life. That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

That is what God made you for, that you might know him. For our God is Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And he exists in relationship.

[8 : 23] The Father exists in loving, joyful relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son exists in loving, joyful relationship with the Father and the Spirit. And the Spirit exists in loving, joyful relationship with the Father and the Son.

And you were made in his image. You were made for relationships. Family relationships, social relationships, marriage relationships, friendships.

But most of all, you were made to know our relationship with him. But the fall shattered our relationship with God and we became alienated from him, estranged from him, hostile to him.

And yet the Bible is not the story of God's pursuit of man, of man's pursuit of God, but it's the story of God's pursuit of man.

And he is the covenant God, the God he longs for a relationship with his people. And the gospel is his plan to reverse the effects of the fall and draw men and women to him, to know him and to live in relationship with him so that he becomes their God and they become his people.

[9 : 47] It was planned an eternity ago in heaven by God the Father. It was accomplished 2,000 years ago here on earth on the cross outside Jerusalem by God the Son.

And today the gospel is applied to us by God the Holy Spirit who makes that relationship possible. We sang Margaret Clarkson's hymn about God the Holy Spirit.

He himself, the living author, wakes to life the sacred word, reads with us its holy pages, and reveals our risen Lord.

Jesus is not on earth today. He's alive. He's in heaven. And our relationship with him is therefore spiritual. And we get to know him through the Holy Spirit.

And so then you understand while Paul prays in verse 17, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, or may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

[11 : 09] He prays that God the Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, the Holy Spirit, that we know him better.

And he prays that the Holy Spirit will, in verse 18, enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we know three things. First, what's it mean to enlighten the eyes of our hearts?

When we use the word heart figuratively, we think about broken hearts and hearts and sleeves and all that kind of thing.

And we tend to think of hearts as a metaphor for feelings and emotions. But in the ancient world, the heart was the centre of knowledge, of understanding, of thinking, and of wisdom.

And Paul is praying that the Holy Spirit will help us to know and understand these three things.

[12 : 12] First, verse 18, the hope to which he's called you. Secondly, again in verse 18, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

And third, in verse 19, the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. And in knowing these three things, we will come to know God better.

And in knowing God, we will be changed. First then in verse 18, Paul prays that the Holy Spirit will help us to know and understand the hope to which he has called you.

If medicines taught me one thing, it's this, the amazing capacity that human beings have for hope. Even in the most difficult circumstances, men and women are so often able to imagine and look forward to a brighter future despite their present circumstances.

the patient with cancer hopes that a cure can be found before they die. The patient with the abusive husband hopes that he's really changed and this time it'll be different.

[13 : 41] The unhappy patient hopes that trying yet another antidepressant will change their life altogether. But human hope so often isn't based on fact but simply on our vision of the future as we want it to be.

And we can never be sure of what we hope for. You hope your marriage will be strong and last a lifetime but you can never be sure. You hope that you love children but you can never be sure.

You hope that your job will be secure until you retire. but you can never be sure. You hope you'll live a long and healthy life but you can never be sure.

Our hope is so often wishful thinking yet it seems that we just can't live in this world without it. And for many it's the only way to deal with the pain of living in a broken world by telling ourselves that things will get better.

And when too many of our hopes end in disappointments we become bitter and cynical. A song was recorded in 1969 entitled Is That All There Is?

[15 : 01] And in stanza after stanza the singer describes how one hope after another ended in disappointment. And then the song ends with this Is that all there is?

Is that all there is? If that's all there is my friends then let's keep dancing let's break out the booze and have a ball if that's all there is.

Life ultimately in this world without God ends in hopelessness. The awful realization that without God that is all there is.

Is that where you are tonight? You've had too many disappointments. You've run out of hope. Well these Ephesians were just like that before they knew God.

Paul writes in chapter two of this epistle you were separate from Christ excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenant of promise without hope and without God in the world.

[16 : 10] but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ and through Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection they have been brought into a relationship with God and have been given hope.

That is where you'll find hope. Paul prays that you may know the hope to which he has called you. Christians you have been called to hope.

You haven't been called to wishful thinking. You haven't been called to some vague vision of the future as we'd like it to be. You have been called to hope. Christian hope is the only way to deal with the pain of life in a broken world.

Christian hope is God's promise that he's going to fix the world. He's going to renew it, going to cleanse it, going to beautify it, and going to make it just like he'd always intended it to be.

Christian hope is the confident expectation of a new heaven and a new earth. And no disappointment in this world can ever take away that hope.

[17 : 31] The Bible tells us to expect disappointment in a fallen world. But the Bible assures us that Jesus Christ's victory at Calvary has set in unstoppable motion God's plan to reverse the fall and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth.

A world in which every one of God's people will have a future beyond anything that we can imagine. A future where the fall is reversed and where as one of the characters says at the end of Lord of the Rings everything sad will come untrue.

Listen to what the Bible says about that new heaven and new earth. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them.

They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

Just look at the hope to which God has called every Christian. You will know God. He will be with you. He will be your God and you will be his people.

[19 : 01] and then look what happens. He will wipe every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

You know I think that's one of the most amazing sentences in the whole Bible. God isn't going to fend for an angel. He isn't going to call a servant. The almighty God is going to stoop down himself to wipe away the very tears from your eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

How? How have all these things that are such an inevitable part of life, how are they gone forever? How has God done this?

You know it's all because of Calvary. It's all because that in Jesus Christ the very same God stooped down to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, to Galilee, to Gethsemane and finally to Calvary.

No more mourning, but he mourned by the grave of his friend Lazarus. No more tears, but he knew what it was to weep over disappointments as he wept over Jerusalem and the people who had rejected him.

[20 : 21] No more pain, because he endured the agony of crucifixion. No more death, because he died in the place of his people, and his resurrection is the first fruits of that great resurrection where he raised every Christian from their graves never to die again.

And because of Jesus' death and resurrection, every one of God's people can look forward to a future with no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, and no more pain.

And that is the hope to which he's called you. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to know the hope to which he's called you. For if you do, you'll know God better, the God who'll stoop one day to wipe your tears away.

And if you know this God, then you will be changed and you'll live in hope. second in verse 18. Paul prays that the Holy Spirit will help us know and understand the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

An inheritance is something that someone leaves us in their will. But in the Bible, an inheritance isn't always associated with death. It simply means something that someone gets in the future.

[21 : 51] Look at this inheritance for a moment. You have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every blessing in Christ. You have been called to hope, to eagerly await the new heaven and new earth.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has brought you indescribable blessings and a glorious future. But what does God get? what does he get?

After an eternity of planning? After 33 years of walking on this earth? After the pain of the cross? What does the gospel of Jesus Christ bring him?

Friends, what does he get? He gets you. You are his inheritance. You are the riches of his glorious inheritance and the saints.

And that saints just in the biblical use of the word. Just everyday Christians. Just you and me. His glorious inheritance is you.

[23 : 01] Listen, you Christians who feel marginalized, unimportant, insignificant. Do you realize that you're God's inheritance?

Do you realize that you're his possession? Do you realize that he chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world? Before the first star ever shone in space? Before the first bird ever sang?

And before the first day ever dawned? You were chosen in him before the foundation of the world. And the very wonder of it transcends human understanding.

You know, there are so many whys. things. Why did God ever create us in the first place? Knowing that we'd sin and cause him such pain, even to the very death of his son.

You know, I was in a theology class once and someone asked the professor that very question. And there was a long silence. And then he said this, I suppose that the father looked on his son, the Lord Jesus, and loved him so much that he wanted to have other sons just like him and bring them to glory too.

[24 : 21] And that, friends, is your destiny. Look at verse 5 of Ephesians 1. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.

To be sons, sons, to come into his family, to be in relationship with him, to know him, to be his inheritance. Gerhard Terz Degen captured this perfectly in his 18th century hymn about heaven.

And he writes this, he and I in that bright glory, one deep joy shall share, mine to be forever with him, his that I am there.

It's no surprise that our deep joy is to share heaven with him, but is it not amazing that his deep joy is to share heaven with us?

Zephaniah writes of that day, the Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save, he will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing, that is you, he will rejoice over you with singing.

[25 : 47] Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to know what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, that is you, for if you do, you will know God better, the God who delights in you and wants to spend eternity with you, and if you know this God better, then you will be changed.

Third in verse 19, Paul prays that the Holy Spirit will help us to know and understand the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

Or the NIV is more explicit, his incomparably great power for us who believe. What kind of power is it worked within us?

Is it strong enough to bring us that hope? Is it great enough to bring us to heaven to be God's inheritance? is it enough? Well, Paul says it's like the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and above every name that's named, not only in this age, but also the one that is to come.

And here Paul uses the Greek words hooper from which we get super, dynamos from which we get dynamite, and megatos from which we get mega.

[27 : 28] Paul is describing the super mega dynamite power of God. You know, when you think of God's power, is the first thing you think of not the wonders of creation, unexplored galaxies, a world of natural wonders, and continents teeming with life of all kinds.

But instead, Paul says, the power that has worked within you, isn't like the power that God used at creation. It's even greater than that.

You see, to create, God only had to speak. To make you his child, he had to suffer. And God's redemption of his people is an infinitely more powerful act than even creation itself.

The evidence of God's power in creation is a seemingly endless universe of grandeur and infinite variety. The evidence of God's greater power of redemption is an empty tomb and an enthroned Christ.

And just look at him, seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that's named, not only in this age, but also the one that is to come.

[28 : 58] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is your Jesus. The Jesus of biblical Christianity is risen from the dead. He is God the Son, enthroned beside God the Father in heaven, and he today has authority over all things.

He isn't just another religious leader. He isn't equal to any other religious figure. He isn't just one way to God. Paul says in verse 22 that God has put all things under his feet.

Have you ever seen one of those old yellowing photographs taken at the end of a big game hunt in Africa or India? And in the foreground of the photo are the scattered corpses of lions or tigers or some other now endangered species.

And in the middle of the photo stands a hunter holding his gun with his foot resting on the head of the biggest animal.

[30 : 25] And the picture is saying, look at me, look at how I have fought and overcome all these ferocious beasts. They're under his feet. Well, here is Jesus.

But he hasn't taken this exalted place by way of the gun, but by way of the cross. And all things are under his feet. Other religions, other great religious figures, all thrones, empires, presidencies, kingdoms, world authorities, under his feet.

Friends, he is a son of God. He alone is Lord. John Blanchard has written a great book called Meet the Real Jesus.

Here he is in Ephesians 1, alive, almighty, reigning over all things. Meet the real Jesus of the Bible. And if this is not the Jesus you know, you don't know the real Jesus.

Come to him, bow to his authority, and accept him today as your saviour. And did you notice his conflict of interest in verse 22?

[31 : 45] You all know what a conflict of interest is. For example, if I were head of the civil service in Scotland and I also were head of the SNP, perish the thought, that would be a conflict of interest.

For when I was doing my job as a civil servant, I would be trying to advance the cause of independence. Now look at what this passage says about Christ.

He is head over all things. And he is head of the church, which is his body. Do you see the conflict of interest?

It's the most blessed conflict of interest possible. It means that when he's head over all things, head over all authority, power and dominion, and above every name that's named, he is also advancing the cause of the church.

He exercises his sovereign authority for the church, for you, your health, your employer, your family, finances, your tears, your prayers, your struggles, all fall under his sovereign authority.

[33 : 04] Whatever you fear, whatever you dread, whatever keeps you awake at night, all under his feet and under his authority. And friends, he has the power to bring every last one of his children home to heaven.

he has the power to realize that hope to which he's called you to. His power is at work within you. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to know his incomparably great power for us who believe.

If you do, you will know God better, the God who raised Jesus from the dead and who inflamed him in heaven where he reigns for us. And you will be changed.

You will know he has power to sustain you through the darkest times in life and bring you at last through the grave to glory. And so in conclusion then, if our request tonight is, Lord, teach us to pray, then this is Paul's lesson for us.

Pray this prayer for yourself, for your wife, for your husband, for your brothers and sisters. You will be changed and you will get to know God better.

[34 : 35] Pray it until that day when, in the words of Donald MacLeod, we shall never stop getting to know God, not any longer in a book, but beside him, face to face with him, in him, at the very source of life.

We see him, we are with him, he holds us and hugs us and whispers, this is forever.

Let's pray together. Almighty God, we thank you tonight for the wonder of your word, for the wonder that you are a God who can be known, and a God who makes yourself known to us in Jesus Christ.

We thank you for your gospel, for your great work of power and authority in Jesus Christ that brings us hope and the promise of heaven as our future.

Father, we pray that tonight everyone in this place may be fully trusting in him and confident of heaven as their home. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Our closing hymn will appear in the screen.