

To the Saints at Kossuth Street . . . Be a Praying community!

Ephesians 1:15-19 September 19, 2010

Intro. Who, other than yourself or your family have you prayed for today? Who, other than you or your family prays for you on any regular basis? How do you pray for others? What do you say that could possibly make a difference? What do you want others saying to God on your behalf? Could anything someone else says to God in prayer make a difference for you? Today we continue our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians and find both in model and instruction the importance of prayer to the building of God's church in Christ for his glory. Of all the aspects and dimensions of prayer that could be addressed, we have our attention turned by these verses of scripture to the privilege of intercessory prayer – praying to God for or on behalf of others.

'I am praying for you.' Assuming that it is being said to you by someone who knows God through faith in Jesus and they have a reasonable understanding of what the Bible teaches about prayer and you know them to be someone who will actually pray for you, that is a precious, encouraging, powerful and transformational moment in your life. The faithful and focused prayers of God's people for one another are essential to the advance of the gospel for the glory of God. God is on record as saying that the prayer of his forgiven children has great power to work effectively his will in people's lives.

'I am praying for you.' It's a tricky statement. If we are not careful we will not appreciate it. It can easily be dismissed as religious and expected posturing . . . almost like saying 'how are you' and not really wanting an answer. The concept can be trivialized by a lack of following through, actual performance, but is usually minimized by a lack of understanding of the power and meaning of prayer. Prayer has taken on the appearance of something that we do when things get really bad or out of the range of something we can handle or deal with. Healthy people do not need prayer as much as unhealthy people. Employed people do not need prayer as much as unemployed people. You do not need prayer as much as the person 3 seats to your left does. Praying for one another has become something we resort to when someone is in trouble and is then usually confined to getting that person out of that trouble.

Praying for one another is the essential response of God's people to understanding that we are dependent on God for absolutely everything. Praying for each other is in a sense the collective turning of our hearts to God in acknowledgment that we desire his will, kingdom and glory more than anything else in our lives. We desire knowing him so completely that we go to him on behalf of others whose lives also are 'to the praise of his glory.'

Let's ask for God's help as we settle into Paul's prayer recorded in Ephesians 1:15-23 with the intent of having our perspective of praying for each other changed and expanded. Our desire is to faithfully be identified with followers of Jesus Christ from the earliest days of the establishment of his church who devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship and prayers.

This section of God's word addresses praying for each other with an expanding motivation, a renewed commitment and a sharpened focus.

1. Pray for each other with an expanding motivation.

1:15

Note that after the descriptive praise of verses 3-14 where God's blessings are acknowledged and explained, the Apostle immediately turns to prayer recorded in the following verses 15-23. Vs. 15 begins by pointing back to the descriptive praise of 3-15 and acknowledging the clear evidence that God is at work in these ways in the lives of the readers. There are two reasons why Paul prays as he does for his fellow Christ followers. These same two reasons should expand your heart and motivate you to pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pray for each other because . . .

- Only God causes growth in lives for his glory. 1:3-14 1Cor. 3:6

Blessings of election/purpose, adoption/belonging, redemption/forgiveness, God's plan/all in Christ and sealed/Holy Spirit are all ways God is at work in every believer's life. He has begun a good work and is responsible to see it through.

Understanding, appreciating, experiencing these blessings is a supernatural work of God.

Understanding, appreciating, experiencing these blessings is possible only with the help of the Holy Spirit. 1:17

- There is clear evidence that God is at work. 1:15

Contrary to most of our current momentum, the people who don't seem to need prayer are the ones we should pray for because we desire to see God glorified in their lives. Paul says, I see the key evidences of faith and love in your lives and that causes me to pray for you.

These evidences prove that God is at work, the forces of evil are resisting and the potential for weariness and distraction is very real . . . so pray for God's glory and kingdom to advance where it has already gained a foothold.

In addition to these we could add from 3:14, the awesome responsibility of making known the 'unsearchable riches of Christ' to our world as a motivation to pray for each other. Determine to stretch your dry thinking of praying for someone only when asked to, when their life gets really bad or because they are serving the Lord vocationally . . . pray for each other because God's glory is at stake in every life and the battle for the souls of people is real.

See 6:18-19 . . . spiritual warfare . . . pray for each other/pray for me . . . we all need supernatural help.

2. Pray for each other with a renewed commitment.

1:16

Note the delighted commitment of the Apostle toward the readers in the phrase 'I do not cease.' This phrase is not a claim to uninterrupted, continuous prayer but rather it is a way of expressing strong regularity. At all times, day and night, customarily, typically . . . not a very long time passes without me praying for you. I have not stopped remembering you in prayer since I began remembering you in prayer.

1. Pray for each other with an expanding motivation. 2. Pray for each other with a renewed commitment.

Renew your commitment today to pray for each other by . . .

- Acknowledging the grace of God at work in each other with gratitude to God. *'thanks for you'*

Each member of God's family is a piece of work . . . God's work (2:2) . . . and therefore reflects the power of his grace in some way. Glory is given to God as we sharpen our ability to perceive and recognize God's grace in others. When we do not remember others in prayer, it is due to our limited perception of the power of God at work in people. It was an obvious and unalterable habit of the Apostle as he served with people.

1Cor. 1:4 Phil 1:4 Col. 1:3 1Thess 1:2 2Thess 1:3; 2:13

- Devoting yourself to remembering people in prayer. *'remembering you in my prayers'*

Remembering is an active making mention of someone before God in prayer. It assumes discipline, devotion and alertness. Again, the model before us is one of significant commitment that stands out in clear contrast to the thinking and practice of most of us today.

Rom. 1:9 2Timothy 1:3 Phm 4

Cmp. Col. 4:2 Intercessory prayer . . . place, time, list . . . SG, directory, needs

3. Pray for each other with a sharpened focus. 1:17-19

The focus of our prayer for each other should be that we would know God better. With the understanding that God helps us know him by his Spirit and through his word, we pray for each other that God will let us know him in and through the circumstances that we are facing.

The focus of our prayers is described by the phrase *'having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.'* This is a metaphor for spiritual understanding. That the darkness, confusion, doubt, distractions that keep us from connecting to God at the deepest and most personal levels would be removed. It is an assumption that your brothers and sisters in Christ need to know God at a deeper heart level and that there is a battle for their affections being fought.

2 Cor. 4:6 Eph. 5:8 (discernment) Psa 86:11, 12 Psa. 119:33-40

In general we pray for each other to . . . v.17

Appreciate God's glory understand God's words know him better in a personal way

Specifically we pray for each other to . . . v.18-19

Abound in hope Appreciate your value to God Experience supernatural power

Cmp 3:14-19

Lord, I am listening . . . please help me . . .

1. Repent well . . . of my lack of love for you and your glory in others.
2. Pray for others with greater commitment and focus.
3. Ask others to pray for me as if my life depended on it.

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Study Questions

1. Read Ephesians 1 together. Note/mention any repeated terms or themes in 15-23. Note any questions you would like to ask for clarification or better understanding.
2. Share your responses to the questions used in the opening paragraph of the introduction of the sermon. What is the point of the questions and responses make?
3. What do you mean when you tell someone you are praying for them? What do you think/feel when you hear someone tell you they are praying for you? What do you do to remember to pray for people?
4. What is the connection between praying for these readers and the list of blessings from God just described in 1:3-14? Is it possible to enjoy these blessings for the glory of God without the help of God accessible through prayer? Why? Support your thoughts with scripture.
5. Why do we tend to gravitate toward only praying for each other when we are in some type of distress or trouble? What evidences of God's grace do you see and thank God for in the lives of people in your small group? What is a new level of commitment for you to pray for each other . . . what does it look like?
6. Summarize the focus of Paul's prayer in 1:17-19 in 2-3 words. How should this focus shape your praying for each other? Have each group member share a prayer request that comes from, is connected to or is worded in terms of the passage we studied today. Role play how these requests would be actually prayed before God . . . what words or phrases would you use?