

Opening Words

What moves you to pray? How earnest is your praying before God? I am sure you pray because of circumstances in your life. That is good. But I want you to learn to pray because of the great things Christ has done and to let His great work inspire great praying.

44 Eph How to Be Filled Up with God 1

Finally, we are here! In his writing his letter, Paul was starting to pray. He said in Ephesians 3:1, “For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles ... but then he breaks off his thought. He doesn’t pray. He goes into detail about his ministry – the mystery of God and how he was bringing the mystery to light. But now he is ready to pray. Let’s listen to Paul’s prayer for the believers in Ephesus, for those in Asia Minor, his prayer for us.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Don’t you wish you could pray like that? You can! Why not take these words of Scripture and make them your prayer! God loves this!

This is Paul’s second prayer in this letter. It is the only epistle where he records two prayers. The first prayer fit in well with his topic in that great chapter where Paul talked about the remarkable achievements of Christ that he passed on to us by his grace. He prayed that God would open our eyes to the wonders of his calling, the wonders of the inheritance, and the wonders of his mighty power toward us. He then closed his prayer by talking of the great exaltation of Christ above all powers and how he is now head over all for us.

But the prayer here, as you can see, is more personal and experiential. Paul talks about God’s work in us. He talks about the Spirit. He talks about the love of God and he talks about a mighty work in us to comprehend this love.

We need both kinds of prayers. We need the type of prayer where we ask God to enlighten us to see the glory of Christ and to see our future exaltation in him. This is the big picture. This is the vision casting prayer. We also need prayer where we ask God to be real to us and to change us on the inside and make us stronger people. This is the daily picture. We need the long-range vision of Ephesians 1, and the short range daily experience of Ephesians 3. When we have the long-range vision only, we can cut ourselves short by failing to see how things work in everyday life. When we

have the short-range picture only, we can cut ourselves short by failing to see how our everyday lives fit into the greater goals God has for us and for the whole Church. We need both kinds of praying.

When I was a younger pastor, some of my mentors used to impress me by teaching on a great verse in Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no **vision**, the people are unrestrained.” They would exhort on the need to be men and women of great vision, of world vision, and men and women who asked God for great things. I am grateful for this emphasis in my life.

One day, I ran across another verse in Proverbs that helped me with some frustration of implementing this big vision in my life. The verse is Proverbs 17:24 and it says, “**Wisdom** is in the presence of the one who has understanding, But the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.” I came to love that verse because it said it was a mark of foolishness always to have one’s eyes on the ends of the earth, always to be thinking about far off places and grandiose ideas. I came to love it because it said a mark of wisdom is to recognize the wisdom that is right in front of us everyday, in everyday situations.

I think we need to hold to both verses. We need to see wise steps to take every day, the wisdom that is right in front of us. And we need to be people of vision, great vision. We need to be men and women with a small picture of what must be done today and with a big picture of the great overall objectives of evangelizing the world, advancing the kingdom of God on earth, and the ultimate picture of being glorified in Christ.

Paul gives us two prayers in Ephesians that helps us to keep both perspectives in our lives and we would do well to pray both – the prayer of Ephesians 1 – the big picture prayer, and the prayer of Ephesians 3, the daily, experiential, small picture prayer of God’s work in us.

But I don’t want to give the impression that this is a small prayer. This prayer in Ephesians 3 is glorious and packed with insights that will have far ranging consequences in our lives if we pray this regularly for ourselves. Several years ago, a book called *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson was published? It was a powerful little book that took a relatively unknown prayer of Scripture from 1 Chronicles 4 and challenged believers to pray it consistently for a month to see what God would do. Wilkinson had his own stories of blessing from this prayer and he wanted to pass them on to God’s people and we thank him for that. But I think this would be true of any prayer. If we take any prayer in the Bible and pray it fervently and honestly for a month, there will be great blessing in our lives according to the emphasis of the prayer. And this is true of Paul’s prayer in Eph 3.

After the Lord’s Prayer, I have prayed Ephesians 3, more than any other. After the Lord’s Prayer, I have meditated on the words of this prayer in Ephesians 3 more than any other prayer in the Bible. And I have probably prayed this prayer in Ephesians 3 for others more than any other prayer. As we go through it, I hope you will see why and I hope you will make it your consistent prayer.

Paul begins by saying, “For this reason.” For what reason? For the reasons that he stated in Ephesians 1-2. After talking about the wonders of the spiritual world, after talking about the great work of Christ to reconcile us to God and to one another, and after telling us the purpose of this

twofold reconciliation was so that God might dwell among us, Paul shows us that the first proper response is to pray. It was his comprehension of all that Christ had done for him and for the Church in carrying out his great purpose on earth that moved him to pray. And perhaps, this is why our prayers can be so weak and so infrequent. Do you know what I fear is the most frequent motivator for our praying? I believe it is our circumstances and our needs and our desires. Now don't misunderstand. Those are legitimate motivators of prayer. And we find many examples in the Bible of people in difficult situations who called upon the Lord. Christ Himself prayed because of the terrible ordeal that was ahead of him.

But all praying must eventually move beyond that. Praying must consider not only what is happening around us, but also the glorious work that God has already done for us and His eternal purpose to move us forward toward the day of our inheritance of all things. And Paul, in thinking about all that Christ had done was moved to pray and so he said, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father." And brothers and sisters, I hope that that is one of the effects these messages on Ephesians are having on you. As you learn about the glories of Christ and the glories that await us, I hope that it is moving you to pray great prayers.

Paul said he bowed his knees before the Father. This is interesting because the standard Jewish way of praying was to stand. When Solomon prayed after the Temple was completed he stood. When Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah he stood before God. But often, God's people would kneel and bow and this posture added an earnestness to the praying. Posture, ultimately is not important. The attitude of the heart is more important. But often, the attitude of the heart will cause a change in posture.

Usually, I sit when I pray, but sometimes I sit forward when my prayers become more earnest and sometimes I sense a prompting in my heart to kneel before God when things are very serious. I think of the passage in Daniel 6 when Daniel would kneel three times a day by his open window facing Jerusalem. He would kneel because his heart was greatly moved for his city, Jerusalem, that had been conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians, and he knew the prophecies of God were that God would restore his people and his city and carry forward his plans for the whole world. Daniel was moved by his awareness of the great eternal purpose of God and it moved him to bow his knees before the Father.

What moves you to pray? How earnest is your praying before God? I am sure you pray because of circumstances in your life. That is good. But I want you to learn to pray because of the great things Christ has done and to let His great work inspire great praying.

And brothers and sisters, would you not agree that the Church needs great praying right now?

Would you pray with me right now?

"Heavenly Father, we want to be great pray-ers like Paul in Eph 1 and 3. We want to be great pray-ers not so that we might be known as such, but because you are a great God. You have done so much for us. Your salvation is remarkable. It is breathtaking. It is the greatest achievement in the universe. It is greater than your creation and certainly greater than anything man can devise or accomplish. God, there is no one like you. We praise you for all that you have done for us in Jesus

Christ to bring us to yourself and to bring us to one another. Oh Father, we pray that the Church would come to know all that you have done and would come to know your eternal plan. We fear that we have reduced your work to some feel-good, quick step remedies for our little problems. Move us beyond that Father to see your mighty work in Christ who died for us, who rose for us, and who took his seat at your right hand for us that he might reign over all. And as we study this prayer in the coming days, we ask that your Spirit work mightily in our hearts to comprehend your great love for us. And we ask this in the name of the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. Amen!"