

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ephesians
How To Pray For Me

William Randolph Hearst was born in 1863 in San Francisco the only child of George Hearst, a successful miner who became a multi-millionaire.

Hearst was once expelled from Harvard for bringing a mule into the dean's office with a pejorative reference attached to it.

At 24 years old William took over management of a newspaper, which his father had won in a poker game, the San Francisco Examiner.

That was the beginning of the Hearst Newspaper Chain that consisted of 28 papers, in 18 major cities, read by over 20 million Americans.

Hearst started off wealthy, and made tons more money. He became a collector of art in all shapes, sizes, and kinds.

He collected pieces from all over the world and stored them in his two castles and multiple warehouses. One day he read a description in an art magazine of an incredibly valuable piece of art.

Hearst knew he just had to have it. He sent his most trusted agent to go look for this art treasure, but no one knew where it was.

After months and months of searching all over the world, the man finally came back to Mr. Hearst and said, Mr. Hearst, I found it!" With great anticipation, Mr. Hearst said, "Where was it?"

The answer, of course, was "It was in your warehouse sir. You bought it years ago."

William Randolph Hearst was frantically searching for something that he had all the time.

In the first chapter of the New Testament Book of Ephesians the Apostle Paul is trying to prevent the Ephesians from doing the same type of thing in their spiritual life.

It's amazing, how much we suffer in this life, how much we allow sin to get the upper hand, and how discouraged we become looking for the strength of God. Searching for peace, joy and success.

According to the Bible, God has given us the victory. God has given us the power. We are complete in Christ. We have all sufficiency. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

So, why are we still looking for something we've already got?

We're a few weeks into a study of the Book of Ephesians chapter 1.

Open Bibles to Ephesians 1 PG 1038 Today we'll pick up in verse 15.

Ephesians 1, verses 3 - 14 is one tremendously long sentence in the original Greek. In it, an apostle of Jesus named Paul spells out in detail what we possess, who have trusted Jesus Christ as the way to heaven.

But now today, as we come to verse 15, not only do we begin another new sentence (this one is only 9 verses long, instead of 12) but we also come to a new approach by Paul.

He's made it clear what all Christians have by faith but now he realizes that there is something more he needs to do than just explaining the blessing.

The explanation is step 1. But now step 2 involves the application of what he has written.

In another one of his letters, I Corinthians, God used Paul to explain about the fallibility of human wisdom.

Through mere human wisdom and intellect, we could never understand the things of God. It takes the Spirit of God to reveal to us the things of God.

The Bible says, a person who doesn't have the Holy Spirit in their life can't receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him, they are spiritually discerned.

We call this the doctrine of illumination. It takes the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit to “flip the switch,” to turn on the light, so that we can take to heart and understand and appropriate God’s word.

So this morning we’re going to read a prayer. It’s going to be made up of the last 8 verses of the chapter and the prayer is that the words on the page would become real in people’s lives. That all the doctrines like predestination, grace, and redemption, might actually be understood and impact the way we live.

If you want to pray for me, this is what you need to ask God for in my life right now. This is what we need to focus on right now.

There’s nothing wrong with praying for people’s physical needs, financial needs, family issues. They’re all important.

But most of the time they’re all we pray for. There’s so many urgent pressing things going on in people’s lives that center on this temporary existence that we just shove aside prayer for the stuff that’s eternal.

There’s so much to learn from this section.

So let’s look at it and learn today.

I. When We Pray For Each Other We Need To Start By Recognizing Spiritual Issues

Read 15 & 16

The word “therefore” at the beginning of verse 15 takes us back to what has been said in 3 through 14. And so Paul is saying “on the basis of all of your spiritual blessings which you have in Christ, I pray for you.”

This is a church that he started. It’s been almost 5 years since he’s had any personal contact with these guys.

Paul was in prison for his faith in Rome at the time he was writing but he was allowed to have visitors. Since Rome was the central city in the empire and Ephesus was a trade center, Paul would continually gotten reports by traveling believers.

And he had heard reports about the faith and love of the church.

The two most important aspects of the Christian life are faith and love.

Faith in Christ and love for other Christians. We become Christians through trusting in Christ. Through putting our faith in him as our Savior. And then we live for him on the basis of that faith.

You might translate the word faith as, "devotion" here.

He's probably thinking of both of these aspects "Faith in Christ as Savior" and "trusting in His promises."

Those two things devotion and love, go hand in hand. Our love for others is always a manifestation of our relationship with God Himself.

I'll guarantee it, when a Christian is at odds with another Christian, it's a symptom of a deeper problem. There is something wrong with that person's relationship with Christ.

And so in this case Paul gives thanks to God for the reports of faith and love which he has been receiving about the Ephesians.

But you know, I find something significant here as I read these verses.

The Ephesians apparently did express faith and love and yet they weren't without problems. I have a number of commentaries on my shelf that say that Paul wasn't writing this letter to correct any problems in this church but just to encourage the people.

That's not true.

Chapters 2 & 3 are all about the unity and the oneness of Jewish and non-Jewish believers. I think there was a problem brewing between these two groups. You might call this a first century racial problem.

He goes on to command love and unity. He challenges the Ephesians to stop lying, to let no corrupt communication proceed out of their mouths, to forgive, to submit to one another.

This letter was written to deal with specific problems, and even though he didn't jump right into them the way he did for the Corinthians, Paul still sees at least the beginning of a serious situation in Ephesus.

And keep something in mind. When we read about the church at Ephesus in the 2nd chapter of Revelation, Jesus Christ is warning them that their love is growing cold. He's about to remove them from their place of blessing.

And so even though Paul could legitimately praise these first century Ephesians for their faith and love I believe even at this point he could see they were headed for trouble. There were some cracks appearing in the wall. Some sign posts that warned that all things were not as they should be. They were gradually moving away from love and faith.

And so Paul under God's inspiration goes on to give what is the only preventative for this situation. And its the preventative for what can so easily happens to any church, any home, or any individual.

This is so practical!

This preventative is given in the form of a prayer. And in this prayer Paul beseeches God for something that's the key to maintaining the right relationship with him.

There is just one request in Paul's prayer. He asks God for only one thing on behalf of the Ephesian people. But what a request this is. This is what you need to pray for me and I need to pray for you.

I. When We Pray For Each Other We Need To Start By Recognizing Spiritual Issues

II. When We Pray For Each Other We Need To Focus On Spiritual Understanding

Verse 17

The Bible says that all Scripture (all of the words of the Bible) is given by inspiration of God. God used human authors but He breathed out His words through them.

That means something extremely important. It means that we don't find any extra words here or terms just thrown in to look good. This isn't just flowery, religious talk.

Every word has significance. The best way to benefit from the Bible is to ask questions when you read it.

"Who was the writer?" "Who was he writing to?" "Why did he say this?" "What was his purpose behind that?"

When we take that approach here the first thing we find is that Paul took time to remind his readers of some things.

And the first thing he reminded them of was the identity of the one to whom he was praying. His prayer is that they would be spiritually illuminated and the source of that illumination is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now listen. This is so important. In eternity past, God the Father was not the God of God the Son. The relationship of father and son existed. But when Jesus Christ came to earth and took on him "the likeness of a man" "born of a woman" he then approached the Father as a man and so God became his God.

That's why he spoke of "my God and your God; my Father and your Father."

The God whom I'm approaching, says Paul in effect, is the God of Jesus my Lord. He's the same one that Jesus prayed to when He walked this earth.

But even beyond that, He's the God in whose presence the Lord Jesus Christ is at this moment. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father ever living to make intercession for us. He's our advocate, our mediator.

But then the Apostle adds even more. He describes the God of our Lord Jesus Christ as the "Father of Glory."

This is so exciting!

And an understanding of how we fit in to this plan leading to God's glory is the subject of Paul's prayer. "That he may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."

Now you may find this a little difficult to sink your teeth into. In fact you might be thinking, “Dude. I have no Idea what this is about.”

Well let’s see if we can unpack it bit by bit and see if we can discover what he’s actually asking.

First of all there’s a question as to what he means by the spirit.

Most every translation takes it to mean “a spirit,” or an attitude. Only the NIV takes this to refer to the Holy Spirit.

It’s true that the Holy Spirit illuminates the word of God so that we can understand it. But if you think about it, we don’t need to pray that God would give Christians the Holy Spirit since we already have him.

In context, and there’s no definite article in Greek so it reads “a spirit,” it makes more sense to see Paul asking God for “a frame of mind” for a special measure of wisdom and revelation for his readers.

As we saw in our study of Proverbs, wisdom is the ability to use knowledge that we already have. It’s a deep understanding of truth.

For instance, you might understand that we are all to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, but one day your studying your Bible, or you hear one of those great sermons at Faith Community Church, or you read a book on living for God and suddenly it all falls into place and the truth you already know really impacts your life. You are able to utilize that truthfully. That’s wisdom!

Revelation is revealing of new truth. It’s something that you did not know before, that God reveals to you as you study His Word. It’s always been there, you just didn’t know it.

And so then putting this all together, see what Paul’s request is? That God would allow the Ephesians to come to know Him in a very unique way. That they would have enlightenment. That they would come to a deeper understanding of truth they already know.

What’s going on here is the same kind of thing you’ll see in chapters 2 & 3. He’s

given the doctrinal truth of what God has done and now he's praying that God would take that truth and plant it down into, and make it real and understandable to the Ephesians.

He's praying for enlightenment in the knowledge of God. That they might come to know God.

There is not another prayer that you could pray for another Christian that's more critical than this one.

We should be down on our knees every day praying, "Oh God, may the people of Faith Community Church come to know you in a way they have never know you before."

We all need it.

That discouraged, depressed Christian, needs to know God in a fresh way.
That sinning Christian, needs to know God in a fresh way.
That Christian couple with marital problems needs to know God in a fresh way.

This is about as practical and down to earth as you can get.

To really know God means to have that deep insight into 3 areas: What God's doing, God's power, and who God really is.

Maybe you've had the experience of talking with someone who prides themselves on being an agnostic.

It's always interesting to me how many agnostics seem to be proud of that title.

The word agnostic comes from *agnosis* which means "without knowledge" in Greek.

Before 1869 there was no such word as agnostic. Thomas Huxley, who was an ardent proponent of Charles Darwin decided he wasn't an atheist or a theist and always felt left out at the Theosophical Society meetings so he made up the word so he could put a name to his belief system.

A true agnostic is a person who says “I believe in God but since He’s so far above the realm of our human understanding I don’t believe that I can know God. I believe the human mind is not able to take in the concept of God and therefore I reject supposed revelation such as the Bible.”

What a total contradiction that philosophy is to the truth of the Bible. God is a knowable God. God has gone to great lengths to reveal himself to us. He’s done it through his Son, through His creation, through His Word, the Bible.

And while it’s true that we can’t grasp the truth of God by just our own intellect, when we’re taught by the Holy Spirit we can.

And not only can we know God’s plan and purpose in sending Jesus Christ to die for the sins of the world but we can know it personally and intimately. We can say “Christ died for me. God loves me. Of the 6.5 billion people on this little speck of dust floating around in the vastness of space, God has revealed himself to me individually.” What a beautiful truth.

If that doesn’t give you a feeling of self worth and purpose then you haven’t come to know the truth of God in the way that Paul is praying here.

The source of our enlightenment is God himself. And now notice the place of enlightenment.

Read verse 18a *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened.*

The word “understanding” might read “heart” in your Bible.

Actually in the Bible the words heart and mind are often used interchangeably.

When we talk about the heart, in some way other than speaking of the physical organ in our body, we normally mean someone’s emotions. We use the term “broken hearted” to mean someone is emotionally devastated.

But the word “heart” in the Bible is seldom, if ever, used that way.

Instead its the seat of the will, its the place of understanding.

Proverbs says, , *As a he thinks in his heart, so is he.* Proverbs 24:7
Stephen talked about an idea coming into the heart of Moses.

Mark described *certain of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts.*

Paul wasn't asking that the Ephesians would be enlightened in their emotions. He wasn't praying that they'd feel really good about God. He was asking that they would be enlightened in their brains.

His desire wasn't that they have some kind of feeling sweep over them but that deep understanding of God might be impressed upon their minds, upon their wills and upon their thoughts.

John McArthur writes: "Christianity is not designed to appeal to the emotions, emotions are designed to respond to the mind. If emotions get in front of your mind you're going to go off in the wrong direction."

"Any brand of Christianity that appeals at the emotional level is only asking for trouble. Why? Because it generates response apart from the truth."

We've got a lot of wild and woolly things going on today in the name of Christianity and a lot of its been accepted because it appeals to emotions and the average person runs his life on emotions and feelings rather than the commands of the Bible.

This is why you have so many people saying "I know what the Bible says - but I'm doing something different. I'm going to act on the way I feel rather than doing what God has said I should do."

"I just have to follow my heart. I have to be true to myself and who I really am."

Listen, a deep understanding of God.; knowing Him in this unique and special way, will often produce an emotional response. It is a tremendous experience to really begin to understand God. To fall in love with God.

The difference is what you know generates the proper emotional response, rather than your uncontrolled emotions clouding over and hiding what you should know.

And so Paul prays that the eyes of their understanding would be opened and enlightened in the knowledge and comprehension of God.

Now when that happens there's 3 results. And we can see them marked off by our English word "what".

When God through His word, is comprehended by us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives we will know 3 things in particular: **(Read vs 18)**

- a) What is the hope of God's calling.
- b) What is the riches of his inheritance
- c) What is the greatness of God's power.

Now, if you've been with us the past few weeks that should all sound familiar because each of those things is explained in detail in verses 3 - 14.

This is the order it's always got to be in.

The doctrines have to be explained - what we have, what we are, and what shall be in Christ.

They have to be committed to God so that He might apply it to our understanding, and then when that truth grips our lives in the way that it should we can be challenged to Holy living on the basis of our position.

When I'm in the process of preparing my messages I always pray something like this, "God enable me to minister grace to my hearers." Before the service I pray, "God this is Your service, we're delving into Your holy Word. Take Your Word and apply it to every mind here today so that our lives will be brought into conformity with Christ."

Paul is praying, "Lord work through your Holy Spirit to energize these Ephesians so that they might know you - that they might not just have general knowledge in their brains, but they might have a full, exact and intimate knowledge of you."

Look at the results of knowing God in this way. That you may know what is the hope of his calling.

The hope of God's calling is pointing forward to the future.

It means that eventual destiny which God had in mind for us when he called us. It includes the fact that we're going to be with Christ and like him forever. We're

going to be manifested to the universe as the children of God and will reign with him as His spotless bride.

This is our hope. And the word translated as hope *elpis*, is a noun and not a verb. We don't hope all this is going to happen, as if there was a chance it might not. But the settled fact of our glorification is our hope in this life.

It's what gets us through the clashes and the disillusionments and the heartaches. It's the thing that stabilizes us and fortifies.

And you know what, the only way that I'm going to grasp what I shall be someday when I'm like Christ is when I comprehend the plan and the purposes of God.

The hope of his calling! Do you know it? I John 3:2 John said, *Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself.* It's a purifying hope.

The 2nd result of this knowledge, this grasping of God in a full deep sense, is to know *the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.*

This takes us back to verse 11 **Read 11 & 12**

When we trust Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, we become children of God. As children of the father we share in the inheritance of the father. We're joint heirs with Christ.

All that's His is ours, because of our relationship with God.

So here's the prayer: That our understanding may be enlightened in order that we may come to know the character of our inheritance to which we are going, the inheritance that God is preparing for us.

We're not supposed to be so locked into this life that our heavenly inheritance is remote and strange and foreign to us.

You know, some times Christians are accused of being so concerned with the future that they aren't realists when it comes to this life. Maybe you've heard the phrase, "He's so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good." Well, in reality that's a contradiction in terms.

The very point of this prayer that we should be praying for each other is that we'd be absolutely heavenly minded.

The only way we can really be holy is to have our sights set in the right direction.

The Bible compares the Christian life to a race. How do we finish the race? Only by *looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*

We're not to live under the control of our sin nature. How do we do that?

We're supposed to set our affection on things above and not on things of the earth. Seek those things which are above where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

We're to fix our heart's desire upon the Lord Jesus Christ and the things which He has prepared for them that love Him.

The Bible says, there's a glory waiting for us which eye has not seen nor ear heard, which has not even entered into the heart of man to perceive. But God has revealed them to us through his Word and he wants them to penetrate our calloused hearts and our stubborn minds.

When God captures our lives we'll know the riches of the glory of his inheritance.

Heaven isn't wearing a sheet, sitting on a cloud, playing a golden harp. No wonder some people say, "I don't want to go to heaven. It sounds too boring!"

We're talking about life to the fullest. We're talking about being in the awesome presence of almighty God. There's not going to be anybody bored. We're going to be entranced with our holy, magnificent, wonderful God.

But then there is a 3rd final stabilizing motivating result of know God that we need to experience and its found in verse 19

Read verse 19

God has a plan for us which originated in eternity past. He's called us to a glorious future. We have overwhelming riches. Now what is the final link?

What is our confidence that what God has said he will surely bring to pass?

Read 20 - 23

God is working in our lives with the very same power that raised Christ from the dead, exalted him at his own right hand and put all things under his feet and gave them headship over the church.

Can't you see this guy just weeping, "Oh God may these Christians at Ephesus so comprehend you and your plan and your work that they may have unshakable confidence in you."

And he culminates all this with power because that's what's what we desperately need.

God has called us, His power is the guarantee of the completion His inheritance, but what about the time in between?

Sometimes we can feel like this: "God I know you've know me since before I was born. I know you have an inheritance for me that's glorious and eternal but I have to live here. I have to deal with this stuff, now."

I struggle with sin. I'm anxious about my future. The pressure of life seems way too much to deal with at times - how do I live?

My prayer for you and your prayer for me should be that we'd would be so enlightened that we'd realize that the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and exalted him and made him head over the church is the same power that's available to us.

Don't be disillusioned, don't be discouraged, don't turn back, don't fold up.

Realize the overwhelming greatness of God's power.

May God grant to you today that spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. Don't frantically run around trying to find what you already own.

If you know Jesus as Savior you have more than you can begin to imagine. Now you need to beseech God that he would make it all so real in your life that every

thing you think, do, and say would be shaped by your knowledge of Him.