

# Praying Biblically

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, isn't that a wonderful truth to end our singing and begin as we look at God's word, that our saviour is king. My name is Alistair, I have the privilege of being the assistant here at Brunfield and of taking us through that marvellous passage in Ephesians chapter 3.

It would be really helpful if you have that open in front of you as we look at it this morning. But before we do that, let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we pray that the words of my mouth and that the meditations of our hearts would be pleasing to you, our rock, our king and our redeemer. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I want to start off this morning by being completely honest with you all. Prayer is difficult, isn't it?

We go up to people on a Sunday morning and they tell us of a particular situation and we say these oh so familiar words. I'll be praying for you.

But how often do we follow through on that promise? Think about when you sit in a prayer meeting or a small group. You go around and you share prayer points. You jot them down on a piece of paper.

[ 1 : 14 ] You pray for 10 or 15 minutes but then they're put in the drawer. Never to be thought of again until the next week. Or what about those times when you start praying?

And then before you know it, you're thinking about what you want to have for dinner. Or that dish you left in the oven. Or you're thinking when you need to pick up the kids or that bill that you haven't paid.

Prayer can be difficult. And often it can be difficult because we don't know what to pray for. But thank the Lord that he has given us instructions in his words that help us see what a biblical prayer life looks like.

That's what we see in Ephesians 3. The Apostle Paul is praying for the church in Ephesus. And I think that this is a helpful model for us to pray. So this morning we'll be thinking about what it means to pray biblically.

And ask three short questions of the text. Who do we pray to? What do we pray for? And why do we keep praying? So as one year comes to an end and another begins.

[ 2 : 23 ] Wouldn't it be great to see a real difference in our prayer lives in 2020? That's why I chose this passage this morning. Because it will challenge our prayer lives.

It will lift our eyes to see the character of God. And it will help us to think about praying with the glory of God as our priority.

So the first question that we ask of Ephesians 3 is. Who do we pray to? Verses 14 to 15. Who do we pray to?

Now the prayer is quite interesting because of how it starts. Look with me at verse 14. Paul begins with, For this reason I kneel before the Father. Now what reason is he speaking about?

Well as you look at the passage you've probably noticed that chapter 3 verse 1 and chapter 3 verse 14 start with the same words. For this reason I. And that's because verse 14 is a continuation of thought that started off in verse 1.

[ 3 : 30 ] It's as if Paul was going to go into the prayer in verse 1 but felt that he needed to say a little bit more about his ministry and about the gospel.

And then in verse 14 Paul comes back to his original thought and says for this reason I. And looking at the context of these verses that come before the prayer.

The reason that Paul is referring to is the mystery of the gospel. The fact that the gospel is now for all people. Both Jew and Gentile.

And now they have been made new. Become a new body. New citizens. A new family. And a temple. Of God. As Ephesians 2 verses 19 to 22 tells us.

So for this reason Paul says I bow the knee and I pray. But do you see who he's praying to at the end of verse 14?

[ 4 : 28 ] He says he's praying before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. Paul is highlighting the fact that the dividing wall that existed between Jew and Gentile has been turned to rubble.

God is not just the father of the Jews who believe in Jesus. But he's the father of all people who call on the name of Jesus. And this makes me think back to the Sermon of the Mount.

Because in that teaching of Matthew 5 to 7. Jesus is lifting people's eyes to see God as a heavenly father. One who provides for.

Cares for his children. And that's the idea that Paul is giving the Ephesian church. As he's teaching them to pray biblically. You pray to God. Because he's your father.

And he listens. And the only reason that we can come before God as our father. Is because of what Paul has been teaching in Ephesians so far. That as Christians we have been chosen by God.

[ 5 : 35 ] Forgiven of our sins through the death of Jesus. Called to be holy and blameless. And called to live holy lives. Therefore Paul says regardless of where you are from.

Regardless of what you have done in life. Regardless of whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. As a Christian. You can come before the throne room of God. And you can call him father. Father. Now if we understand the fact.

That God is a good father. Who knows how to give good gifts to his children. Then that will serve as the very reason that we run to him. In our times of need.

And with our petitions. Jesus says in Matthew 7. Verse 9 to 11. You don't need to turn there. But he says. Which of you. If your son asks for bread.

Will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish. Will give him a snake. If you then. Though you are evil. Know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more.

[ 6 : 38 ] Will your father in heaven. Give good gifts to those. Who ask him. Now no good father. Is going to pack his child's school lunch box.

And think. Oh you know what. Instead of putting some cheese in that sandwich. I might throw a few pebbles in. No good father would hand things to their children. That they know are going to harm them.

Are they? And Jesus says. Even as earthly fathers. Who are evil by their very nature. If they know how to give good gifts.

Then how much more. Will our heavenly father give good gifts to his children. Now why is this an important place to start. When we think about praying biblically.

Well because this is the very foundation of our prayers. Because. We're not coming to a mean man in the sky. Who reluctantly give things to his children.

[ 7 : 34 ] We're not coming before a father. Who delights to see us in pain. And anguish. We're coming. Before a father who is good. Who wants to give good gifts.

To his children. And a father who has gone out of his way. To show how much he loves his children. Do you see God as a good father this morning?

Are you like a child who knows that in their father. They can find shelter. Protection. Provision and care. That is how God is revealed to us in scripture.

Not as some distant stone faced far off deity. But as a father who calls his children. Who loves them.

And who takes sinners like you and me. And calls us his own. Praying biblically means we come before God. As our heavenly father.

[ 8 : 40 ] So the second question then is. Well what do we pray for? In verses 16 to 19. What do we pray for? Have you ever stopped and asked yourself that question?

I realized that I spend much of my prayer life focusing on this life. On this world. On the problems that exist.

Often to the neglect. Of deeper spiritual things. We pray for the sick. For those in financial troubles. For those looking for jobs.

For those who need comfort. And for those. And those are all good and right things for us to pray for. For those in the world. For those in the world. But notice how Paul immediately takes our eyes off of our own situations.

And teaches us to fix our gaze on Jesus Christ. And the deeper spiritual things. Because we are spiritual beings. In these verses we have two petitions.

[ 9 : 40 ] In verses 16 and 18. And in both of these petitions. Paul is praying. That the Ephesians would have power. But he is not praying.

That they would have some electrical boost. Or that they would have some mystical force. That would carry them through the struggles of life. He is not asking that God would make them into the Duracell bunnies.

That we see advertised on telly. Who can run faster and longer than any other battery. He starts off with his petition in verse 16. I pray.

That out of his glorious riches. He may strengthen you with power. Through his spirit in your inner being. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Now what are those glorious riches? Well they are the absolute breathtaking spiritual blessings. That every Christian has received in Jesus. From Ephesians chapter 1.

[ 10 : 44 ] We don't have time to read that. But please do go home and read that this afternoon. Because you will be blown away. Of God's kindness and goodness towards his people. Those truths are the foundation of Paul's prayer.

And they are the very reason that Paul can come before God. The creator and sustainer of this whole world. Solely because of Jesus. He prays that they may be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in their inner being.

So that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. Now there are countless discussions on exactly what this means. Because here we see the Holy Spirit as the one who gives power.

And strengthens Christians. And Jesus is the one dwelling in the hearts of believers. But Paul isn't praying that they would become Christians. He's speaking to a church of Christians.

But instead. Paul is praying that Christ may take up residence. And dwell permanently in their hearts through faith. The word in the original conveys permanency.

[ 11 : 53 ] That Christ would be the unchangeable. The immovable factor in the life of every single Christian. And that they would grow to know him more and more.

He's praying that they would be strengthened by the Spirit to walk the walk. To run the race and to persevere through the struggles of living in a fallen world.

He's praying that their love and devotion to Christ would be unshakable. We see Paul explaining this very same thing in 2 Corinthians 4.

Verses 16 to 18. Where he says. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away. Inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

For our light and momentary troubles. Are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So fix your eyes.

[ 12 : 49 ] Not on what is seen. But on what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary. What is unseen is eternal. Friends is your prayer life anything like this?

If I'm being honest. So often my prayer life looks absolutely nothing like this. We get caught up with the day to day of life. And we forget the reality that we're spiritual beings.

As Christians we are in this world. But not of this world. We are passers by in this life. And the destination that awaits us is far. Far greater than this one. But we're here for a reason.

And we should be constantly bringing each other before the Lord. And praying. That the Holy Spirit. Would give us strength to persevere. Until that day. That Jesus Christ returns.

Or we are called home. So friends pray for each other. That Jesus would dwell in your hearts permanently. And that you would grasp.

[ 13 : 58 ] What that means. That we have the fullness of God. Dwelling within us. That is the truth. That we want every believer to know.

And Paul continues his prayer in verse 17. With the second petition. Where he says. And I pray that you. Being rooted and established in love. May have power together with all the Lord's holy people.

To grasp how wide. How long. How high and deep is the love of Christ. And to know this love. That surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

Is Paul's words in verse 17. Of being rooted and established. Make me think of trees. So the living room of our flat.

Overlooks a nice park. And so every morning. As my wife Sabina and I sit down for a meal. We can't help but notice these big trees. Now Edinburgh is a lovely city.

[15:00] But as we noticed yesterday. It is windy. And so from our window. We can see these massive trees. Being battered by gales. That blow through the park.

You can see the leaves. And the tree top branches. Being swept to and fro. By the wind. As it carries them. In whichever direction it pleases. But the trunk of those trees. The roots of those trees. Are established. They are deep in the soil. And no wind can move them. That is what Paul is saying.

But notice that he isn't praying. That they would be rooted. And established in love. Instead he is stating. That they are rooted. And established in love.

He is saying. That you are rooted in love. Meaning the love of God. As demonstrated in the gospel. Through Jesus. And he prays. That they would have power.

[15:58] To grasp how long. And wide. And deep. The love of Jesus is. Paul is encouraging. These Christians. As he prays for them.

With their identity. In Jesus. It's as if he's saying. Despite all of your difficulties. All of the struggles. In life. Of living. Holy lives.

In an unholy world. Know. That 100%. You are rooted. In Christ. And nothing. Absolutely nothing. Can take that away from you.

Paul prays. That they would have. Power to grasp. That wonderful truth. But that cannot. Simply be. An intellectual exercise.

As I was thinking. About these verses. I remember the song. That I was taught. As a child. And one you've probably. Sang. Many times. Over the years. Jesus loves me. This I know. Because.

[16:53] The Bible tells me so. And the refrain. Goes. Yes. Jesus loves me. Now you sing that. With a four or five year old. And you smile.

Because it's cute. Isn't it? But then sing that song. Standing next. Standing next. To a convicted criminal. Who's done the unspeakable. Things.

Of this world. But who's come to a saving faith. In Jesus Christ. Do you think there'll be a difference? Well of course. There will be. That person has lived life.

They are not naive. Or blind. To their own sin. They understand. Their identity. In Jesus. And how through his. Death on the cross. They've been taken. From death.

To life. From darkness. To light. People with experience. Will belt that song out. At the top of their lungs.

[17:49] Because they know it to be true. But friends. We are that criminal. We all should be. Asking.

How can God love me? Like the song says. How deep the father's love for us. And it conveys so powerfully. When we imagine Jesus on the cross.

Our response should be. None other than. Ashamed. I hear my mocking voice. Call out among the scoffers. Because it was my sin. That held him there.

Until it was accomplished. And his dying breath. Brought me life. And so I know. That it is finished. If you're a Christian.

Here this morning. That should be your response. To the love of Jesus Christ. Not a checklist. In our heart. Of the doctrines. That we like. Not an intellectual exercise.

[18:45] That does not move us. To praise God. But our response. Should be an outburst. Of absolute joy. Because as Christians.

That is our testimony. From criminal. To child of God. As Ephesians 2 verse 1 says. You were dead. In your transgressions.

And sins. That is who we were. Before we became Christians. But the glorious truth. Of chapter 2 verse 4. Is that. And that should blow our minds.

Every time we read it. And lift our voices. In endless praise. Is that because of his. Great love for us. God who is rich in mercy. Made us alive.

With Christ. Even when we were dead. In our transgressions. It is by grace. That you have been saved. So if you're not a Christian.

[19:40] Here this morning. The reality. That the Bible teaches. Is that you are still in darkness. That you are a slave. To your sin. And you are dead in it.

But would you listen. To the voice of a savior. Who calls those who are dead. In their sins. To life. That is the wonderful news. That we want to share with you.

This morning. That there is a savior. Who knows your wrongdoings. He knows everything. You've done. And thought. And said. And he knows you're not walking. Right with him. And despite it all. He calls you to repent. And believe the good news of Jesus. That is the only reason.

That I can stand before you this morning. That is the only reason. We gather as a church. Because once we were dead in our sin. And rejecting of God. But now through Jesus.

[ 20 : 36 ] We're alive. Please think about that this morning. Think about who Jesus is. Ponder the truths. Of this king and lord.

Who loves a broken. Corrupt sinner. And he makes them. Rooted and established in love. Paul prays that these Christians.

Would grasp. The love of Christ. The love that is too broad. Too long. Too deep. And too high. To fathom. We cannot even begin.

To imagine the extent. Of that love. Because as Paul says. In verse 19. It surpasses all knowledge. That doesn't mean. We stop thinking.

And wrestling. With it. And it certainly doesn't mean. That we keep it. In our little box. Of ordered doctrines. That we like to talk about. But it means.

[ 21 : 32 ] That every time. We hear of this love. We are blown away. And we stand amazed. In the presence. Of Jesus. Now imagine.

If we prayed. These two petitions. For each other. Imagine if. In our prayers. We asked that God. Would help. Us be amazed. And taken aback. By that great love.

That God has for them. I think the global church. Would look quite different. I think we'd see a people. Who love. Whose love for the Lord.

Is ever growing. And a people. Who take that love. Out to the lost world. And tell people. About it. And point them to Jesus. Jesus. So why not take this.

Into the new year. And pray it for everyone. You know. Pray it for the whole. Church family. I think our prayer lives. Would be much better. Praying biblically.

[ 22 : 30 ] Means that we come. Before the Lord. With petitions. For spiritual maturity. And endurance. To run the race. If our focus.

In 2020. Of our prayer lives. Was God. And the spiritual maturity. Of our brothers and sisters. In Christ. We'd be changed. Our church.

Would be changed. And we'd love. Each other more. But then the third question. Is well. Why do we keep praying. Verses 20 to 21.

Why do we keep praying. Well we keep praying. Because the only response. To those wonderful truths. That Paul's been telling us about. Is absolute praise.

Praying biblically. Means that we cannot hold back. From praising God. As our father. To whom we come. And bring petitions. That we would be mature. And grow in our understanding.

[ 23 : 27 ] Of love. In these two verses. Paul. Praises God. And puts. The two earlier petitions. Into perspective.

By bringing two themes. To mind. In verse 20. That God can do. Immeasurably more. Than we can ask. Or imagine. And in verse 21. He speaks about.

The wonderful glory. Of God. How do these. Themes. Change. The way we pray. Well they change. The way.

And things we pray for. Because we take. Our eyes. Off our own interests. Off our own desires. And we think about. The character. And glory. Of God.

And praying this way. Will mean that God. Gets all the glory. In the church. And it will mean. That we want Jesus's name. To be lifted. Above every other name. We can pray confidently.

[ 24 : 24 ] And come confidently. Before this almighty. And good father. Because. We know. That he answers prayer. How often do we face.

A situation. And neglect. To bring it to God. In prayer though. We think it's too big. Of an ask for God. Or we think it's too small. And insignificant. To bother him with.

And so we don't pray. About the problems. With the house. That will set us back. Thousands. We don't pray. About our situation. At work. With that boss. That keeps nagging us. We don't pray.

About our health issues. And we just say. Well it's just part of life. If you're like me. And every other human being.

That I know. Then your tendency. Is to first rely. On your own strength. To do things. By yourself. Until again.

[ 25 : 21 ] You realize. Like you have a hundred. Times before. That you can't do it. And only then. Do you turn to God. In prayer. But friends. We need to understand.

That no petition. Is too big. That no petition. From God's children. Is insignificant. To a father. Who listens. God can do.

Immeasurably more. Than we can think. Or even imagine. If we fully grasp. Who God is. Then we will come. To the realization.

That our. Petitions. Are in the hands. Of an all powerful God. God. Who sustains. All things. That's why Paul says. In verse 20.

According to his power. That is at work. Within us. He isn't saying. That we are the ones. Who answer our prayers. He isn't saying.

[ 26 : 13 ] That we are our own saviors. But he's jumping back. To that same thought. In verse 16 to 17. It is Christ. Who dwells in you. It is his power.

That is at work. In you. And that spurs us on. And pushes us. To do the will of God. It pushes us on. To pray things.

According to his will. And to act. Out. A holy life. For God's glory. And then Paul ends. This prayer. Not by focusing on himself. Not by focusing on the church. In Ephesus. But he focuses on God. On God's glory. And his son. Jesus Christ. Now I've wrestled with this.

And asked myself. Well. How often do I pray. Consciously. With the glory of God. At the forefront. In my mind. As a filter. Through which. I bring all of my petitions. And the answer is.

[ 27 : 11 ] Far fewer than I should. But the only reason. That Paul can pen. These wonderful words. Is because God. Has transformed his life.

The only reason. I stand here this morning. Is because God. Changed mine. And the only reason. We gather as a church. Is because that is our testimony. That God has done.

A tremendous work. In our lives. And so. Why on earth. Would we want to give. Anyone else the glory. God. God. God.

God. This doesn't mean. We stop praying. For our immediate needs. But it means. That all of our prayers. The glory of God. Should be of utmost importance.

We shouldn't pray. So that others hear our. Words. And like our beautiful language. But we should pray. Because God hears. Every single word.

[ 28 : 06 ] We should not pray. To tickle the ears. Of others. But we should pray. In accordance. With the will of God. As revealed. In the Bible. We shouldn't pray.

So that others look up to us. We should pray. In such a way. That people are pointed. To God. And his glory. Friends. As we draw to a close.

Let's remember. That praying biblically. Means that everything. We do. Should be done. For the glory of God. To see him.

Receive all of the honor. And to see the name. Of Jesus Christ. Lifted above. Every other name. Because he alone. Deserves the glory. We just have the privilege.

Of praising him. And the privilege. Of pointing people. To that wonderful. Glory of his. Let's pray together. Father. Father.

[ 29 : 03 ] As we stand. At the end. Of a year. And we look. At the beginning. Of a new year. We confess. That your glory. Probably hasn't been. The first priority.

In our lives. In 2019. But Lord. We pray. As we start. This new year. That you. And your glory. Would be. Of first importance. And Father.

I pray for all. My brothers and sisters. In Christ. Here before me. Lord. That they would. Understand. That they are rooted. And established. In love. That they would.

Understand. How deep. How high. And how wide. That love is. And Father. That it would lead us all. To pray biblically.

To pray in such a way. That you are glorified. That your saints. Are built up. And that the gospel. Goes forth from our lips. Every single day.

[ 30 : 02 ] We ask this. In the holy. And precious name. Of our king. Of our lord. And saviour. God with us. Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Amen. You're the one. Amen. Up. People. toppingine. playingauto. Wow. If at night.