

What it Means to Pray Biblically

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[0 : 00] Well good morning Brunsfield, my name is Alistair, I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here at the church. Sadly I'm not able to be with you in person in the building this morning, my wife Sabina and I are self-isolating at home but I hope that that will not stop our attention as we turn to God's word and think about what God would teach us from this wonderful passage in Ephesians today.

But before we dive in, let's pray together. Heavenly Father we thank you so much for the privilege it is to have your word in our own language. Lord as we turn now to think about it, as we come to learn, Father we ask that you would give us open ears and give us soft hearts to be transformed by your spirit.

We ask this for your glory, in Jesus' name, Amen. I want to start off this morning by being completely honest.

Prayer can be difficult, can't it? We speak to people on a Sunday who tell us about a difficult situation going on in their life and we say those very familiar words.

I'll be praying for you. But then we go home, we have lunch and we've already forgotten about our promise to pray. Or think about when you sit in a prayer meeting or a small group, you go around and you share your prayer points, you pray for 10-15 minutes together and then you don't think about them until the next week.

[1 : 34] Or what about those times where you start praying and before you know it your mind has wandered to what you're going to have for dinner, to what time the kids need picking up or that bill that you keep forgetting to pay.

Prayer can be difficult because we get distracted. But also it can be difficult because we don't know all the time what we should pray for.

Thank the Lord that he has given us instructions in his word that help us see what a biblical prayer life should look like. In Ephesians 3 we see a prayer that the Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesians. And I think that it is a really helpful model for us to pray. So this morning we're going to be thinking about what it means to pray biblically by asking three questions of this text.

Who do we pray to? What do we pray for? And why do we keep on praying? This passage will challenge our prayer lives.

[2 : 40] It will lift our eyes to see the character of God. And it will help us think about praying with the glory of God as our priority.

So the first thing we ask, the first question we ask is who do we pray to? In verses 14 and 15. Who do we pray to? This prayer is quite interesting because of how it begins.

Paul begins in verse 14. Read with me. For this reason I kneel before the Father. Now what reason is he speaking about? Well you've probably noticed that verse 1 of chapter 3 and verse 14 both start with the same words.

For this reason I. That's because verse 14 is a continuation of the thought that started off in verse 1. It's as if Paul was going to go into his prayer in verse 1 but felt that he needed to say more about his ministry and the gospel.

And then in verse 14 Paul comes back to his original thought and says for this reason. Now looking at the context of these verses the reason that Paul is referring to must be the mystery of the gospel.

[3 : 58] The fact that the gospel is for both Jew and Gentile. And now those two people groups have become one. A new body.

New citizens. A new family. And a temple. As Ephesians 2 verses 19 to 22 tells us. For this reason Paul says.

He bows the knee and prays. But do you see who he's praying to? The very end of verse 14. 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 is the Father of all people who call on the name of Jesus Christ. Paul is teaching the church. That we pray to God as our Father.

[5 : 04] And the only reason we can come before God is because of what Paul has already been teaching in the book of Ephesians so far. That as Christians we have been chosen by God.

Forgiven of our sins through the death of Christ. Called to be holy and blameless. And called to live according to the will of God. Therefore Paul is saying regardless of where you're from.

Regardless of whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. As a Christian you can come before God and call him your Father. Now that truth should blow our minds every time we think about it.

Not only are we saved as Christians. Not only are we made into a new creation. But we have been brought into the family. Of the living.

The all powerful almighty God. And we get to call him Father. That truth should never stop making us be in awe of the love.

[6 : 15] Of the abundant grace and mercy of our great God. And if we understand that God is a good Father. Who knows how to give good gifts to his children.

Then we realise that there is no better place to run with our petitions. With our worries and with our cares. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7 verses 9 to 11.

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 will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him? No good father is going to pack his child's school lunch and think.

Well instead of putting cheese in their sandwich. You know what I'll throw in a few pebbles instead. No good father would intentionally hand out things to their children that they know will bring them harm.

[7 : 21] And Jesus says well if even you as earthly fathers. Who are evil by nature. Know how to give good gifts to your children. Then how much more?

How much more will your good Father in heaven give good gifts to his children? This is an important place for us to begin when thinking about praying biblically.

Because it is the very foundation of our prayers. We are not coming to a mean distant far off deity. Who doesn't care about us.

Who reluctantly gives things to his children. We are not coming before a father who delights to see his children in pain and anguish. We are coming before a father who is good.

A father 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 family. Do you see God as a good father?

[8 : 25] Are you like a child who knows that in their father they can find shelter, protection, provision and care? Because that is how God is revealed to us in scripture.

Not as a distant stone faced far off deity. But as a good father. Who calls his people. Who loves his people.

And the one who takes sinners like you and like me. And calls us his family. Praying biblically means that we come before God as our heavenly father.

The second question that we ask of this text is. 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 realise that I spend so much of my prayer time focusing on the things of this life. This world and the problems that exist.

[9 : 32] To the neglect of the deeper spiritual things. We pray for the sick. For those in financial need. For those looking for jobs.

For those who need comforting. And those are all good and right things for us to pray for. But do you notice how Paul immediately takes our eyes off of our own situation.

And teaches us instead to focus our prayers. On the spiritual well-being of a person. In these verses we see two petitions.

In verses 16 and 18. And in both. Paul is praying that the believers in Ephesus would have power. But he isn't praying that they would have some kind of electrical boost.

Or that some mystical force would carry them through the difficulties of life. He isn't praying that God would make them into the Duracell bunnies. That we see advertised on television.

[10:32] Who can run longer and faster than any other battery. But he starts his petition. His first petition in verse 16. Read with me. I pray.

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 these glorious riches? Well they are the absolute breathtaking spiritual blessings. That all Christians have received through Jesus Christ.

Mentioned in Ephesians chapter 1. Please go away after this service. And read that passage. And be blown away. By God's goodness towards his people.

Those truths. Are the foundation of Paul's prayer. And he prays that they may be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. In their inner being.

[11:30] So that Christ may dwell in their hearts. Through faith. Now 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. That he may dwell permanently in their hearts. Through faith. The word used there for dwell.

Conveys permanency. That Christ would be the immovable. The unchangeable factor. In the Christian life.

And that they would grow more and more in him. He is praying. That they by the power of the Holy Spirit. Would be able to walk the walk.

To run the race. To persevere. Amid all the struggles of living the Christian life. In a sinful world. He's praying that they would be absolutely unshakable.

[12:31] In their love for and devotion to Christ. Friends. Is your prayer life anything like this? If I'm being honest.

So often my prayers look nothing like this. We get so caught up with the day to day of life. That we forget the reality that we are spiritual beings.

As Christians we are in the world. But not of the world. We are passers by in this life. And the destination that awaits us is far.

Far greater. Than this one. But. We are here for a reason. And so we should constantly be bringing each other before the Lord.

Praying. That through the Spirit. We would have strength. To persevere. Until the day that Christ returns. Or we are called home to glory.

[13:28] So friends. Pray for each other. That Jesus would dwell in your hearts permanently. And that we would grasp. What that means.

That we have Jesus. The fullness of God. Dwelling within us. That is the truth. That we want all believers to know.

And Paul continues his prayer. In verse 17. With his second petition. Read with me. 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. And long. And 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 all the fullness of God. Paul's words in verse 17.

[14:26] Of being rooted and established. Make me think of a tree. So the living room in our flat. Looks over a nice park. And every morning and Sabina. And every morning and evening.

As Sabina and I sit and have a meal together. We can't help but notice some of the big trees. In the park. Now Edinburgh is a lovely city. But one of the things.

That all of our friends. Visiting friends and family members. Comment on. Is the wind. And from our window. On a breezy day. We can see those big trees.

Being battered. By the gales that blow through the park. You can see the leaves. And the top branches. Being swept to and fro. With the wind. That carries them. In whichever direction it pleases.

But the trunk of those big trees. And the roots. Do not move. Because they are rooted. Deep in the soil. And established.

[15:24] 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.

He is stating that they are. He is saying. Because you are deeply rooted. In love. Meaning the love of God. God has demonstrated. In the gospel. Through Jesus Christ.

He prays. That they may have power. To grasp. How long. And wide. And high. And deep. The love of Jesus is. Paul is encouraging.

These Christians. By stating their identity. In Jesus. As he prays for them. It's as if he's saying. Despite all the difficulties.

Despite all the struggles of life. Know. 100%. That you are in the love of Christ. And that there is nothing on this earth.

[16:20] That can separate you from it. There is nothing. That can take that love away. And Paul prays. That they would have power.

To grasp that wonderful truth. But this cannot simply be. An intellectual exercise. As I was thinking. About these verses. I was reminded of the song.

I was taught as a child. And you've probably sung it. Hundreds of times. Over the years. Jesus loves me. This I know. Because the Bible. Tells me so.

And the chorus. Repeats the refrain. Yes. Jesus loves me. Now if you sing that. With a child. Who's four or five years old. We'll smile.

And we'll think it's cute. But stand with a convicted criminal. Who has done atrocious things. And yet has become a follower of Jesus Christ.

[17:15] Sing that song with them. Do you think that there would be a difference? Well. Of course there will be. The person who has lived life.

Who knows their sin. Who is not naive. To their identity in Jesus. How through his death on the cross. They've been taken from death.

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

It is true. Friends. We are that criminal. We should be those who ask the question. How could God love me?

Like the song. That we often sing together. Says how deep the father's love for us. As we imagine Christ on the cross. And our response should be.

[18:11] Ashamed. Ashamed I hear my mocking voice. Call out among the scoffers. Because it was my sin. That held him there. Until it was accomplished.

His dying breath. Has brought me life. I know. That it. Is finished. If you are a Christian.

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

Or a factual understanding. That doesn't lead us. To praise God. But. Our response. Should be an outburst. Of joy. Because that is the testimony.

Of a Christian. We have gone. From being criminals. To children. Of the living God. Ephesians chapter 2. Verse 1. You were dead.

[19:09] In your transgressions. And sins. That is who we were. But then the glorious truth. Of chapter 2. Verse 4. That should blow our minds.

And make us lift. Our voice. In endless praise. 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. God who is rich. God who is rich. God who is rich. God who is rich. God who is rich.

If you are not a Christian. Here this morning. Then the reality. That the Bible teaches. Is that you are still in darkness. A slave. To sin. And dead. In it.

Would you listen. To the voice. Of a saviour. Who calls sinners. Out of death. And into life. That is the wonderful news.

[20:03] That we want to share. With you this morning. That there is a saviour. Who knows. Everything you have ever done wrong. Who knows. All of your thoughts. Everything you have ever said.

He knows. That you are not walking. In a right relationship. With him. And yet. Despite all of that. He loves you. And he calls you. To repent. And believe in him.

And find life. That is the only reason. That I can stand before you. This morning. That is the only reason.

That we gather. As a Christian. Church. Because once. We were dead. In our sins. And rejecting of God. But now through Jesus. We are alive. Please think about that.

This morning. Think about who Jesus is. Ponder the truths. That this king. And Lord. Loves the broken. Loves the corrupt sinner. And makes us rooted.

[21 : 01] And established. In love. Paul prays. That these Christians. Would grasp. The love. Of Christ. This love.

That is too broad. Too long. Too deep. Too high. To grasp. We cannot begin. To imagine. The extent. Of the love.

Of Jesus. Because as verse 19. Says. It surpasses. His knowledge. But that doesn't mean. We stop thinking. And wrestling. With the extent. Of that love.

And it certainly. Doesn't mean. That we leave it. In a nice. Closed. Neat box. Of doctrines. That we bring out. On a Sunday. But it means. That every single time.

We hear. Of the love. Of God. We are blown away. And we stand. Amazed. In the presence. Of Jesus. Friends. Imagine.

[21 : 55] Imagine. 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 God's great love. For us. I think. That we would see. A very. Different. Global. Church. We'd see. People. Who.

Whose love. For God. Is ever growing. And a people. Who take that love. Out to the lost. People. Of this world. And point them. To Jesus. Praying.

Biblically. Means. That we come. Before God. With petitions. Of. Spiritual maturity. And endurance. To run the race.

And then the third. And final question. We ask of this text. Is. Why do we keep praying? In verses 20. And 21. Why do we keep. Praying?

[22 : 53] Well we keep praying. Because the only response. To these wonderful truths. That Paul has been. Praying. Is absolute. Praise. In these two verses.

Paul. Praises God. And puts his two. Earlier petitions. In perspective. By bringing. Two themes. To mind. He states.

In verse 20. That God. Can do. Immeasurably. More. Than we can. Ask. Or imagine. And in verse 21. He speaks. About the glory.

Of God. Now. How do these two themes. Change. The way we pray. Well. They change. The things we pray for. And. The way we pray.

Because. We take our eyes. Off of our own situation. Off of our own desires. And our own interests. And instead. We pray. For.

[23 : 46] And through. The character. Of God. We pray. For. The glory. Of God. Praying. This way. Means. That we want God.

To get all the glory. That we want. Him. To get all the glory. In the church. And that we want. Jesus's name. To be lifted. Above every. Other. Name.

We can come. Confidently. Before. The almighty. All powerful. Good. Father. Because we know. That he answers. Prayer.

How often. Do we face. A situation. And neglect. To take it. To the Lord. In prayer. We think that. Oh no. That's too big. Of an ask. For God. And then we think.

Another. Is too small. Or insignificant. To bother him with. And so. We don't pray. For the problems. That we have. In the house. That could set us. Back thousands.

[24 : 43] We don't pray. For our work. Problems. With the bad boss. That is constantly. Harassing us. Maybe we don't bring. Our health. Problems. Our physical.

Issues. Before the Lord. Anymore. Because we just say. Well it's. Part of life. But if you're like me. And every other human being.

I know. Then your tendency. Is to first rely. On your own strength. You try to do things. On your own. And then. Only once you learn. Again.

For the millionth time. That you can't do it yourself. You turn to God in prayer. Friends. We need to understand. That no petition. Is too big. No petition.

Is too small. God can do. Immeasurably more. Than we can ask. Or imagine. And if we grasp.

[25 : 37] Who God is. Then we will come. To the realization. That our petitions. Are in the hands. Of an all powerful. God. Who sustains. His people.

Paul. And Paul. Ends this prayer. Not by focusing. On himself. Or the church. In Ephesus. But instead. He focuses. On God. On his glory.
And on his son. Jesus Christ. I've wrestled. With this. And I've thought. And I've asked myself. How often. Do I pray. Consciously. With the glory. Of God. In mind.
As a filter. Through which. I bring my petitions. And the answer. If I'm honest. Is far fewer. Than I should. The only reason.
That Paul. Can pray. Can pen. These words. Is because God. Transformed. His life. The only reason. I stand before you. This morning.
[26 : 31] Is because God. Changed mine. The only reason. We gather. As a church. Is because God. Has done a tremendous. Work. In our lives. So why. On earth.
Why. Would we. Focus. Would our prayers. Focus. On anything. Other. Than God's glory. And giving him. All the honor. That he deserves.
This doesn't mean. That we stop praying. For our immediate needs. But it means. That all of our prayers. Should be for the glory. Of God.
And that should be. Our priority. Friends. As we draw. To a close. Let's remember. That praying. Biblically. Means that everything. We do. Is done.
With the desire. To see God. Glorified. To see him. Receive all the honor. And to see the name. Of Jesus Christ. Lifted above. Every.
[27 : 26] Other. Name. He alone. Deserves. All the glory. We just have the privilege. Of praising him. And pointing people.
To that wonderful glory. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father. We thank you. For the privilege. It is. That we can come. Before you. With our prayers. Our petitions. Our worries. And our fears. Father. I pray. That you would change. Our prayer lives.
Would we focus. On your glory. Would you. Strengthen us. In our inner beings. With the knowledge. Of the love of Christ. And would you help us.
Make Christ. Be the unchangeable. Immovable person. In our lives. Lord. We ask all of this. For your glory. In the name of our wonderful.
[28 : 22] Holy. And precious. Savior. Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.