

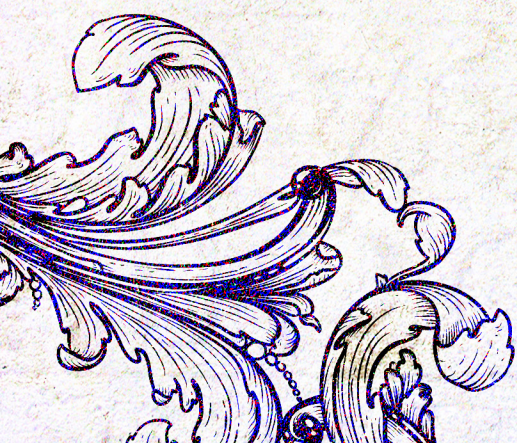


A COLORFUL MYSTERY

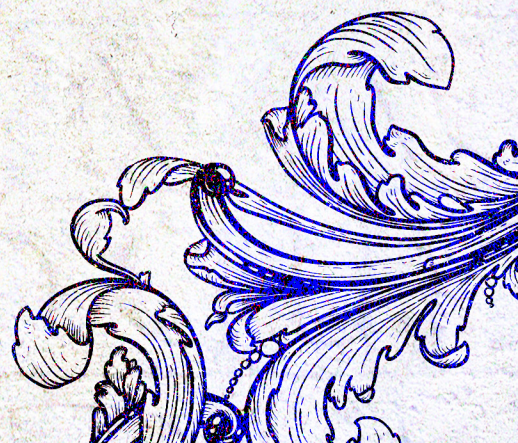
CHURCH

.....
A STUDY IN EPHESIANS
.....

a field guide



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LIVING IN WONDER

DRAWING NEAR

In addition to giving thanks (v. 16), Paul makes three petitions, all of which are instructive for our prayer lives.

- 1] We should pray to know God better (v. 17)
- 2] We should pray to know God's riches (v. 18)
- 3] We should pray to know God's power (v. 19)

The anatomy of God's "for-us" power is remarkable. First, we are told that the One who is for us is at the right hand of God, the position of highest privilege given to Christ for all ages after his resurrection and ascension (vv. 20-21). Next, as Jesus is in that honored position, God places all things under his feet and gives him authority over all (vv. 21-22). Finally, we are told the purpose of Christ's dominion is for the church (v. 22), his body which not only reflects him but ultimately "fills all in all" (v. 23). When we recall that all of this power is for us, it is no wonder that we should pray that our eyes might be opened to see it, marvel, and believe (1:18).¹

Consider the following typical prayers of some many Christians:

- "Lord, bless us today."
- "Father, please help me find a parking spot close to the entrance."
- God, forgive me where I've failed You, and help me to live for you today."

1] What (if anything) is right about these prayers? What (if anything) is wrong with them? Explain.

2] What part does prayer play in your daily life?

¹ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

²MacArthur, John. Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

Q THE CONTEXT

grace drove him to his knees.

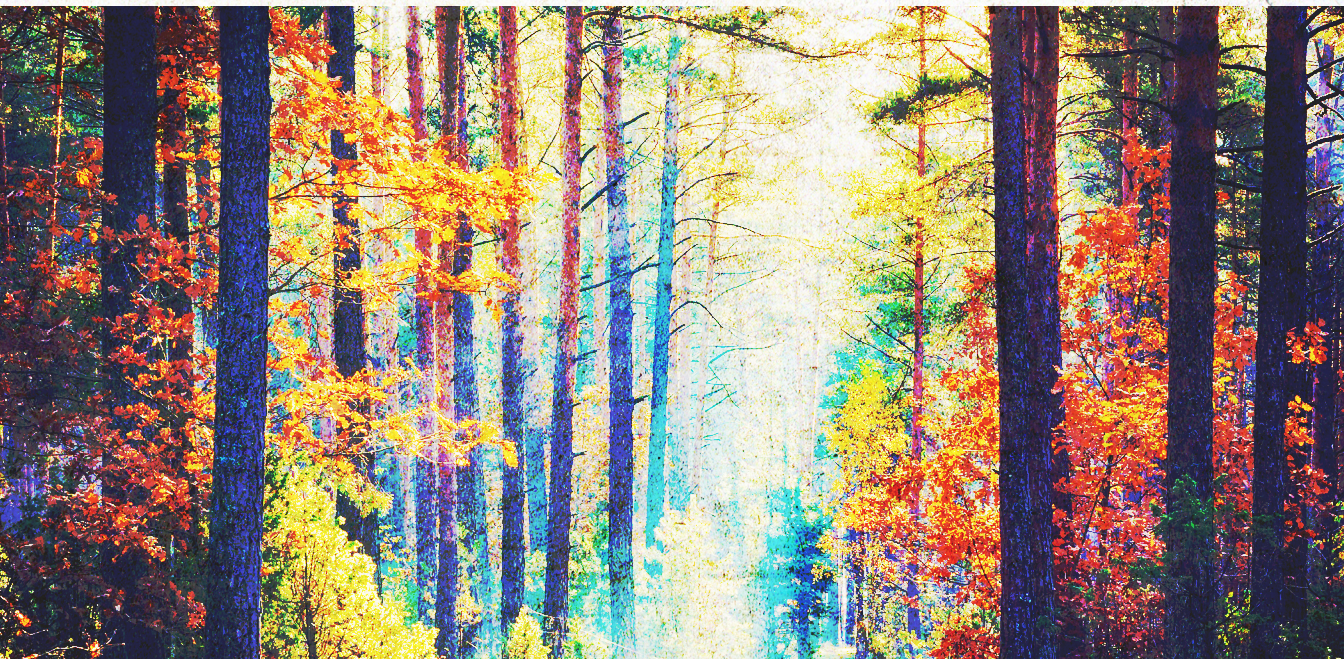
With a backdrop of God's cosmic plan of salvation and in light of eternity, Paul's intercession takes on a weighty quality. He makes no trivial requests here. These recorded prayers serve as a wonderful model for how to pray for those we love and for whom we have been given responsibility to care for in the faith. Inspired as they are by the Holy Spirit, they also reveal the priorities that are on God's heart for His people. Let's look now at the kind of prayer that pleases the Father.¹



KEYS TO THE TEXT

PRAYER: Fellowship and communion with God involving adoration, worship, praise, thanksgiving, supplication, petition, confession, repentance, mediation, dedication, and intercession. Based on the confidence that God hears His children, Christian prayer is addressed to God as Father, through and in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son. Prayer is

drawn partly from the urgency of human needs and partly from the promise and challenge of God's Word. Personal prayer is shaped by the awareness of God's presence. Corporate prayer is the living breath of the church. Through prayer the church resists the assaults of Satan (Matt. 26:41; Eph. 6:13-20), receives the gifts of grace (Acts 4:31), seeks deliverance, healing, and restoration for the saints (Eph. 6:18; James 5:15; 1 John 5:16), supports evangelization (Col. 4:3-4), and hastens the return of the Lord (Rev. 22:20).²



¹MacArthur, John. *Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

²Kurian, George Thomas. *Nelsons New Christian Dictionary: the Authoritative Resource on the Christian World*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pubs., 2001.

UNLEASHING THE TEXT

Key Terms

Ephesians 1:15-23¹

Thanksgiving and Prayer

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, **17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, **18** having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might **20** that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **22** And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

GLORY (V. 17)

opinion which determines value; splendor; brightness; corresponding to the OT word meaning "to be heavy, weightiness". Both terms convey God's intrinsic worth, substance, and essence.

REVELATION (V. 17)

A disclosure of truth, instruction. Principally used of the revelation of Jesus Christ (the Word), especially a particular (spiritual) manifestation of Christ (His will) previously unknown.

KNOWLEDGE (V. 17)

Gained through first-hand relationship – properly, "contact-knowledge" that is appropriate (fitting) to first-hand, experiential knowing.

MAY BE ENLIGHTENED (V. 18)

Illumined or given light; a reference to the Holy Spirit's ministry of continually illuminating spiritual truth for the child of God.

To cause something to exist and thus come to light and become clear to all; (figuratively) God sharing His life, exposing and overcoming darkness – like the ignorance (prejudice) caused by sin.

CALLING (V. 18)

A divine invitation to embrace salvation of God—with all His blessings that go with it (Rom. 11:29; Eph. 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:10).

RICHES (V. 18)

Much in number, quantity, abundance, possessions of many kinds.

SAINTS (V. 18)

Holy; set apart; different (unlike), other ("otherness"), for the believer; means "likeness of nature with the Lord" because "different from the world."

WORKING (V. 19)

Typically refers to God's energy which transitions the believer from point to point in His plan (accomplishing His definition of progress).

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²MacArthur, John. Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

3] Why characteristics of the Ephesians prompted Paul to be thankful? Why?

4] Underline in the passage the specific items (nouns) that Paul appealed to God for on behalf of the Ephesian church. One request was that their "spiritual eyes" might be opened, and thus come into a deeper knowledge of God. Why was this

5] How does Paul describe the power of God? Why is it significant that Paul prays for the Ephesians to "know" this power rather than to "receive" this power?



CHECK OUT THESE ADDITIONAL PASSAAGES

- Jesus's prayer for us: John 17: 20-26
- Colossians 1: 9-14
- Ephesians 3:16-19
- Philippians 1:9-11

6] What do these prayers have in common with the longing of Paul in Ephesians 1?

EXPLORING THE MEANING

7] In what ways does this passage specifically echo the Pauline teaching that right thinking leads to right living?

8] Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your mind on the things above, not on things on the earth." How does this admonition relate to the manner in which Paul prayed?

9] How should the truth that Christ is exalted above all (1:20-23) alter the way you live every day?

TRUTH FOR TODAY

For Christians, prayer is like breathing. You don't have to think to breathe because the atmosphere exerts pressure on your lungs and forces you to breathe. That's why it is more difficult to hold your breath than it is to breathe. Similarly, when you're born into the family of God, you enter into a spiritual atmosphere wherein God's presence and grace exert pressure, or influence, on your life. Prayer is the normal response to that pressure. As believers we have all entered the divine atmosphere to breathe the air of prayer. Only then can we overcome the darkness of the world, and live in wonder.

Unfortunately many believers hold their spiritual breaths for long periods, thinking brief moments with God are sufficient to allow them to survive. But such restricting of their spiritual intake is caused by sinful desires. The fact is, every believer must be continually in the presence of God, constantly breathing in his truths to be fully functional. God's deeper truths cannot be seen with our eyes, heard with our ears, or comprehended by our reason or intuition. They are revealed only to those who love Him.¹

REFLECTING ON THE TEXT

On Sunday, Sonny talked about how our appetites for God's majesty can be diminished when we fill up on spiritual junk food.

10] What are things in your life today that could be robbing you of your sense of wonder? What kinds of things have captivated your fascination? What do you find yourself thinking about the most?

11] Is there something temporal you could fast during this Ephesians series in order to feast on something eternal?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

As you grapple with Ephesians 1 and ask God to give you a firsthand experiential knowing, consider writing yourself a letter from God using the verbiage of this chapter. Address the letter to yourself, then write a line of Scripture as though God were saying it to you directly and add insights you gain as you meditate on His words. It's a good idea to start your letter with three simple words: I love you. This is the over-arching theme of all of Scripture and it may help you step into a posture of receiving truth as love. The start of your letter may look something like this...

Dear _____,

I love you. I have blessed you in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Not just some, ALL! I chose you to be in Me before the foundation of the world. Before everything fell apart, I had already made up my mind about you. Before anyone could say anything about who you were, I declared who you would always be. I chose you, so that you could be holy and blameless - set apart and without fault before Me. In love, I predestined you for adoption. It wasn't pity, guilt, or obligation. It was my desire, my love. Adoption was the whole point of my desire to choose you! - Love, your Father