

HUNGRY FOR GOD: STUDIES ON PRAYER

4

INTERCESSION

Part 1

Ephesians 1:15—23

By Rhodie Shreve

“The basis of Paul’s prayer was His knowledge of God’s purposes. It was because of what God had done in Christ and revealed to Paul that he had the necessary warrant to pray. For the indispensable prelude to all petition is the revelation of God’s will. We have no authority to pray for anything which God has not revealed to be His will. This is why Bible reading and prayer should always go together. For it is in Scripture that God has disclosed His will, and it is in prayer that we ask him to do it.”

John Stott

“You cannot truly intercede through prayer if you do not believe in the reality of redemption. Instead, you will simply be turning intercession into useless sympathy for others, which will serve only to increase the contentment they have for remaining out of touch with God. True intercession involves bringing the person, or the circumstances that seem to be crashing in on you, before God, until you are changed by His attitude toward that person or circumstances.... Intercession is putting yourself in God’s place; it is having His mind and His perspective.”

Oswald Chambers

AIM OF STUDY

- To learn from Paul’s intercessory prayers what he understood about God, how that influenced his prayers for other Christians, and how we can better intercede for others.

KEY VERSE

“I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking...”

Ephesians 1:16

PREPARATION

Read over the notes on “**How to Teach the Bible in Small Group**” and “**Some Practical Suggestions for Leading a Small Group Discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then, read through the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are supplying this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to provide resources for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously, we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* and *The New Bible Commentary* as excellent resources for study.

Pray that the members of the group will be deepened in their understanding of how to pray and what to ask for when interceding on behalf of others.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

[This is information for the leaders. You may decide how much to share with your group members.]

The book of Ephesians is an amazing and invaluable book. There is no other way to describe its breadth and depth in terms of the foundation it lays down for our understanding the “new society” God has called forth through the body of Christ—His church—for all believers. John Stott, one of the great British theologians of the 20th century, wrote a commentary on Ephesians and quoted Karl Barth, another well known theologian of the same century, who wrote that,

“First, Ephesians is intercession. More than any other New Testament Epistle, it ‘has the character and form of prayer.’ When somebody argues with us, he may or may not persuade us; but when he *prays* for us, his relationship to us changes. ‘So it is with the stranger at the door. Ephesians has gained a right to enter because its readers have a place in the intercession of the author’” (Barth, *Broken Wall*, p.22, cited in Stott, p. 19).

This book is written to an audience of Asian believers living in Ephesus, the capital of Rome at this time. It was a busy commercial seaport and the headquarters for the cult of the goddess, Diana. The main theme is what God has done to bring together people of different backgrounds to form a “new society” through His Son, Jesus Christ. God has given *new* life, *new* standards to live by and *new* ways of being in relationship with one another. Paul clearly communicates to these believers that the “new creations” have come by God’s design and initiative, not by the schemes of man (Stott, p. 25).

In the passages of this study, you will encounter prayer language that may seem lofty and even outdated to modern ears. It may even seem hard to fathom what Paul is trying to say, but stay with him because this is, in fact, the greatness of Paul’s prayers. They call us to a higher and deeper place with God, a place where we can build a stronger faith so that we might ask for greater things.

OPENERS

Lexington, Kentucky is the world capital for thoroughbred horses. There are about 10,000 horses in this area alone. If you visit one of the large horse farms and watch trainers run the horses around the track, you will see just how breathtaking it is to watch these horses in action. They are utterly magnificent and unspoiled. One owner recently said, “In Lexington, the horse is king.” The average horse farm in this area is worth about \$5 million, and horses sell for staggering amounts of money.

Ask the group what they would picture as riches beyond their wildest dreams.

In the first chapter in Ephesians, Paul talks about our riches in Christ, the things Christ has purchased for us. Paul begins with the phrase, “for this reason,” referring back to the first half of this chapter in which he lays out our spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3–14). Briefly review these by noting what God has done:

- a. He chose us in Him before the creation of the world.
- b. He predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters through Christ Jesus.
- c. We are recipients of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in Christ.
- d. In Christ, we have been given redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of sins.
- e. He has lavished on us the riches of this grace.
- f. He has made known to us the mystery of His will.
- g. We were included in Christ and marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit.
- h. We have become God's possession in Christ.
- i. All of this has taken place for—and to the praise of—His glory.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Ephesians 1:15–23

Would someone volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 1:15–23?

1. What has Paul “heard” about these believers? What do you think it would have been like to hang around with the Christians at Ephesus? What does this motivate Paul to do (vv. 15–16)?

2. What is Paul's first request for the Ephesians (v. 17)?

(deeper knowledge of Jesus)

Note: The Ephesians already “knew” Jesus, but here Paul asks that they might know him *better*. The regular Greek word for personal knowing is “gnosis,” but here, the word is intensified with the preposition, “epi.” Paul is asking for an “epignosis,” a “real, deep, full knowledge” or a “thorough” knowledge of Jesus (Stott, p. 54).

3. What does our culture think is important for us “to know”? How is this different from “knowing” Jesus?

4. According to Paul, how does this “knowledge” come to us? Is it gained by study or getting more information *about* Jesus?

(also see I Corinthians 2:10,11)

5. Who should we ask for this “knowledge”?

(also see Luke 11:13)

***How much do you “know” Jesus in this deeper sense? Do you even have a desire for this kind of “knowledge” of Him?**

6. What is Paul’s second request for (vv. 18–21)?

(better spiritual vision)

Note: In Scripture, the “heart” is the center of a person’s being, where the intelligence, the will and the emotions all come together (Stott, p. 54). We operate from this spiritual center, whether we are in or out of touch with it, wounded or in the process of healing.

7. What does it mean for something or someone to be “enlightened?”

(to have our eyes opened to the truth that surrounds us)

***What might we be unable to see clearly about Jesus right now?**

8. Paul asks that we might have our vision made better in order to see what three things?

(hope, riches and power)

- a. *Hope*: In what is our hope grounded (refer to Ephesians 1:4, Romans 5:2, 8:17, Colossians 3:4, I John 3:2 to help develop this)? Do we have reason to be confident in our hope? Why? Paul wants us to be able to get a handle on how big this hope is. Help the group to see the reason for this hope.
- b. *Riches*: Whose inheritance is this? What is the inheritance? This is a bit of a twist, because Paul says that we are God’s inheritance. It is “His inheritance in the saints,” not something for us. This puts the emphasis on *the value God has placed upon us* as “His possession” (refer back to v. 14). He wants to accomplish His purposes through us, not apart from us. And guess what: we are His riches! This is part of the Christian basis for true worth and value.
- c. *Power*: Is this power available to anyone and everyone? Why is it so great? You probably won’t catch this if you don’t know Greek, but Paul is using synonym upon synonym here to capture the greatness of this power. Verse 19 reads like this: “... and His incomparably great power (*dunamis*) for us who believe. That power (*kratos*) is like the working of His might strength (*ischus*).” Paul expresses the highest power possible. This power is the power that has conquered sin, raised Jesus from the dead, placed Him above all things and will one day raise us from the dead! This is *extreme* power demonstrated in a concrete way for us (Foulkes, p. 62).

9. Where is Jesus right now (vv. 21–22)?

10. What specific authority has God given Jesus?

Note: “the fullness of him that fills all” can be paraphrased as such, because it is God’s purpose that the Church should be the full expression of Jesus Christ, who Himself fills everything that exists. Similarly, Christians are to receive the fullness of all the attributes and gifts of God possible for men to receive...our growth in spiritual maturity is ‘to attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’” (Foulkes, p. 66).

APPLICATION

***This prayer can’t help but make us think about what we are asking God for and why. Wrap up the study by challenging members of your group to reflect on the following:**

If Jesus Christ has been given authority over all things, including the Church—which we are incorporated into when we become a Christian—how might your awareness of His authority affect your intercessory-prayer life?

***Now “step back” with the group and reflect on this prayer in it’s entirety.**

- Ask people to share what Paul’s prayer illustrates for them in terms of intercessory prayer.
- Ask how, what, or whom they might begin to pray for in greater measure and for greater fullness as Paul did?

WRAPPING IT UP

The apostle Paul, just like us, could have prayed for many people and their needs as the Church was spreading throughout the Mediterranean world. But in the first Chapter of Ephesians, we see what mattered the most to him: that people would not just know about Jesus, but that they would get to know Him and experience Him in all His fullness and glory. This week, when you spend time in prayer, go back to these verses and personalize them for yourself and for those you usually pray for. Let Paul’s inspired words stretch and deepen your intercession and your vision of what God might reveal in response to our requests.

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