

HUNGRY FOR GOD: STUDIES ON PRAYER

5

INTERCESSION

Part 2

Ephesians 3:14—19

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 is it 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

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints...."

Ephesians 3:17b-18a

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 your group members will be blessed with the fullness of God in their lives and that each person will learn to pray as Paul did and see how this can make a difference.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

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

This is the second of Paul's prayers for the believers at Ephesus. He picks up the thought he began in Chapter 3:1, by repeating the same words, "for this reason."

Let's take a quick look at the verses that come before these words, so we understand his response of prayer.

In the verses preceding this prayer, Paul is emphasizing *the grace of God* as he reminds the believers of the “mystery” that was made known to him by revelation (v. 3). He is completely overwhelmed as he considers what he has been privy to know and what he could not have known apart from God showing it to him, and this is that the Gentiles are now made heirs with the Jews of all God blessings and promises which have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ (v. 6). This is too amazing for him to make up. Remember, Paul was once the Pharisee extraordinaire! This would have been unthinkable to him apart from something very dramatic and life changing. Then there are the “unsearchable riches in Christ” (v. 8), “the manifold wisdom of God which has been made known” (v. 10), and the fact that because of what God has accomplished in Christ, we now “may approach God with freedom and confidence” (v. 12). Can you see how Paul's mind has been completely captured by Jesus Christ?

OPENERS

Do any of you that are married remember how you proposed to your spouse? Have any of you heard stories of your parents or grandparents “popping the question”? The traditional picture we have of a marriage proposal was one that involved the hopeful groom to be down on his knees looking longingly into the face of his beloved as he “popped the question.” Can you think of any other times when you might have been down on your knees for something important?

As Paul begins this prayer in Ephesians he does so ‘for this reason’ (referring to all that he has sighted previously), and he kneels. Most Jews stood when they prayed so it is very special that Paul notes his posture. Kneeling was a sign of deep emotion and earnestness. Jesus knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:41), Solomon knelt at the dedication of the temple (I Kings 8: 54), and Stephen knelt when he was stoned (Acts 7:60, cited in Stott, p. 132). Paul is down on his knees in deep-felt and earnest intercession for the people he loves. This is where we begin.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Ephesians 3:14—19

Would someone read Ephesians 3:14—19 aloud for us?

1. Paul is aware of only one person when he kneels. Who is that (v. 14)?

Note: This verse has been translated various ways, but “in effect the apostle is saying, think of any ‘father-headed group’ (Allan) in *heaven and earth*. Each one is named from Him. From Him it derives its existence and its concept and experience of fatherhood.... To such a Father, Father of all, the One in whom alone fatherhood is seen in perfection, men come when they come to pray” (Foulkes, p. 101).

2. Jesus started His well-known prayer out the same way by saying, “Our Father Who art in heaven.” If it was important for Him and for Paul, how should our awareness of God as Father affect the way we approach our intercession for others? What difference does this make?

3. What is Paul’s first request for the believers (v. 16)?

Note: This is a prayer for strength. The Greek word here implies being made strong or capable (Foulkes, p. 102).

4. Why would a Christian need to be strengthened? Why would a follower of Christ need power?

5. Where does this strength and power come from?

Note: It is the constant teaching of the New Testament that the strength for the Christian to walk out his life of faith comes from the Holy Spirit.

6. When the Holy Spirit brings this kind of strength and power, what does Paul want to happen as a result?

Note: The Greek verb he uses for *dwell* (*katoikeo*) has the idea of one who abides with, makes a home with, settles down somewhere, not someone who just comes by for a visit and leaves (Foulkes, p. 103).

***Do you think that this type of request for someone would have impact and might be needed in their life more than the material or immediate needs that the person has? Would you feel like you were asking for the right thing or asking for something too intangible by praying this way?**

7. What else is Paul requesting for them?

(to be rooted and established in love)

Note: Remember in the Greek-speaking world, intellectual knowledge was highly valued. The intellectual schools and exercises of the philosophers and their students often set them apart, as in another realm or class. Paul realizes that ‘true knowledge’, the knowledge of God, is unattainable without love. If there is no love, the Spirit of Christ is not present, and there can be no understanding (Stott, p. 136). Love is to be both the root and the foundation of our experience.

***When a person is rooted and established in love, how does that make you feel about being around them? How could this affect an entire church?**

8. Once this foundation of love is present, what does Paul want them to have next (v. 18)?

(may have power with all the saints to grasp the love of Christ)

Note: Paul is praying for “an earnest grasping, suggesting the difficulty of the task envisaged, simply because it is no mere intellectual feat, but a matter of practical experience, a living together in love which is no easy thing” (Foulkes, p. 105).

9. For the Christian, why does power have to be connected to love?

10. What is the nature of this power? Is it just for one person to have for himself or herself?

11. What is Paul’s final desire for them, the climax of his prayer (vv. 18–19)?

Note: “Paul does not pray for them to receive an attribute, or any gift of His [God’s]—not love, not knowledge, not strength, alone or in combination—but no less than the very highest he can pray for, the full indwelling of God.... God can never be limited to the capacity of any one, or all, of His sinful creatures; but the apostle does not want to pray for anything less than that God’s people may be filled to (*eis*) the very fullest of Himself that He seeks to bring into their lives...” (Foulkes, p. 105).

APPLICATION

***Is Paul’s request for the Ephesian Christians, “to be filled with all the fullness of God,” something we should be interceding for on behalf of others and for our church? How could this change someone’s life or our church?**

***What might a prayer like this accomplish that we could not do on our own?**

*** Ask the group to summarize how these prayers of Paul have changed their thinking about intercession.**

Help them reflect on Paul's mindset. Paul is very aware of the purposes of God and he has integrated these into his intercessory prayer. *The way Paul thinks about God and what He has done and will do makes a difference in how he intercedes for others.* How can it make a difference for us?

WRAPPING IT UP

What a privilege for us to peer into these awesome prayers of the apostle Paul that he prayed for early believers in the church! As Paul pours out his heart for them, our own hearts are stirred with yearning to know God as Paul did and to see others come to know Him as well. In the coming week, go back to these verses and make them part of your personal prayer time. Insert your name and others as you ask God to dwell in us empowering us to grasp His immense love for us and His eternal purposes for His Church.

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