

Ephesians 1:15-2 — What should I pray about for people I love?

January 26, 2014

What should we pray about for people we love? Parents, how should we pray for our children? If you are married, what should you pray about for your spouse? Should we pray for the success of their businesses? Should we pray for their comfort and health? If they are single, should we pray they meet their someones special and get married? If we really care about someone, what should we pray about for them? That is a good question. It is not wrong to pray for the health and success of our loved ones. Did you ever wonder how God wants you to pray? What do you think he would say? This morning, we will find the answer.

We are in a series of studies on the book of Ephesians called, “Who Am I?” The book of Ephesians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to churches in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus is a city Paul lived in for three years. He planted a church there. It was a city filled with people he loved.

Last week, we studied the first 14 verses of Ephesians where Paul taught us how incredibly blessed we are through Jesus. Through Jesus, we are the most blessed beings in the universe. In fact, if God wanted to bless us more than he already has through Jesus, God couldn’t improve on what he has already done.

For many of us, when we look in the mirror, we struggle with our self-esteem. We see failure in our grades, our sports and our relationships. We don’t think of ourselves as loved or important.

When God looks at us, because of what he has done for us through Jesus, he sees us as the most blessed, most valued and most loved beings in the universe. We don't deserve any of this. We didn't choose this — it is all from God's love and kindness.

This morning, we finish Ephesians chapter one. This time instead of praising God for how he blessed us in Jesus, Paul prays for his Ephesian friends. From seeing how Paul prayed for people he loved, we learn how to pray for people we love. Let's jump in.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers... Ephesians 1:15–16 (ESV)

Paul was stoked for the people of this church. How did he pray for them?

Pray God would open the eyes of their hearts to understanding what God had done for them through Jesus.

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him... Ephesians 1:17 (ESV)

Paul's prayer was that the people he loved would grow in their knowledge of Jesus. It is not wrong to pray that the lives of those we love would be free from difficulty, that they would be a financial success, that they would be star athletes and have straight As on their report cards but Paul prayed for something more important. He asked the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of their hearts to grasp more of what God had done for them in Jesus.

I think a greater understanding of what God has done for us in Jesus is probably the most important thing we can ask for.

The more we understand what God has done for us in Jesus, the more it changes our lives. When we face failure, we aren't as devastated when we know that in the end we win through Jesus. When we are rejected by people we love, knowing how much God loves us through Jesus keeps us from falling off the deep end of despair. When tragedy comes into our lives, knowing that God loves us and promises to work everything together for our ultimate good and God's ultimate glory gives us the hope we need when the future looks dark.

One of the problems is too many of us, especially the men, are content with a knowledge of Jesus that is less than our children have through AWANA. Why study the Bible? We are men. Church is women's stuff. Who are you fooling? Only yourselves. The more impoverished we are in our knowledge of Jesus, the more foolish our everyday choices will be in light of eternity. The greater the devastation we will make of our lives, our families and our relationships. Why study the Bible, pray and grow in Christ? Every blessing in eternity and in this life flows from understanding our identities in Jesus.

One of Satan's greatest strategies is to keep us ignorant of who we are. He wants us to suffer from identity ignorance. The classic case of this is Nebuchadnezzar from the book of Daniel. He was the king of Babylon, which was the world superpower of the day. He was more prideful than Richard Sherman was after last week's football game between the San Francisco 49ers and the Seattle SeaHawks. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a case of identity ignorance. He lost his mind for a few years and went into the field and grazed on

grass like a cow, when as the ruler of the world, he could have dined in the palace.

Satan wants us to be just like Nebuchadnezzar. He wants us eating grass like a cow rather than knowing we are the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus.

How are our eyes opened to what God has done for us through Jesus? The easiest answer would be that we study. We read our Bible. We listen to other preachers on the radio. We read Christian books. We learn together in Life Group. We attend a CrossWinds University class. We listen on Sunday to the sermon. Here is something that is very important to understand. This is not just a matter of academics. While studying and learning are part of this, the Bible tells us that spiritual truths are spiritually discerned. This means that we need to pray that those we love would not just study God through his Word but that God would open the eyes of their hearts to see Jesus and understand their new identities through Jesus as they study.

The Holy Spirit has to open our minds to comprehend what God has done for us through Jesus.

For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 1 Corinthians 2:11–13 (ESV)

The picture is that the Holy Spirit works in our lives and helps us. For example, nobody besides Christ, has come back from the dead to tell us about heaven. How do we know that heaven exists? How do we know that we don't

just die and cease to exist? In the book of Ephesians, we learn how much God loves us. How do we know any of these things are true unless when we hear them? The Holy Spirit confirms them in our hearts. Human wisdom can't deduce these things.

The first thing we pray for those we love is that God's spirit would work in the life of those we love so that they would begin to get their arms around what God has done for them in Jesus and who they are in Jesus. We pray that God would supernaturally help them overcome their identity ignorance.

Then Paul said that we are to pray that once the eyes of their hearts are enlightened, they would grow in understanding of three things.

Pray God would show them three specific things.

The great future in front of them.

It is only when God opens the eyes of our hearts to see it that we will live for it.

...the hope to which he has called you... Ephesians 1:18 (ESV)

Apart from God working in our hearts, there is no way we can live for things of eternal value. This world is all we know so it makes sense that this world is all we live for. When the Holy Spirit helps us comprehend our future reigning and ruling with Christ for all of eternity, we start looking forward to our future and living for it.

For example, imagine I told you that five years from now Publisher's Clearing House would come to your door with a \$500,000 check. How would that change your life today? Would it make your problems more bearable? What

if I told you that in addition, every act of kindness you extended to someone today would be paid back to you in five years, and for each act of simple kindness, you would receive a \$10,000 check with your Publisher's Clearing House check. How would that change the way you lived? I think it would radically alter your life when you know that how you live now will make a difference for the future.

If you don't know what lies around the corner, you won't live for it. We are the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus and as the future unfolds he will unfold more and more of that blessing, plus he will reward us in eternity for how we live today.

When we invest financially for God we will be rewarded in heaven for how we gave.

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. 1 Timothy 6:17–19 (ESV)

The Bible tells us that if God has given you resources, you are to be generous and ready to share them. God promises that your generosity is not wasted. It is stored in heaven, and God promises to return it to you as an eternal reward. Those who are financially comfortable are usually good investors. God says to be a good investor. Plan for the future, your eternal future. The good works you can do today through your wealth are an investment for the future.

...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. Matthew 6:20 (ESV)

What good investors can't stand are depreciation and crooks. Rust is a form of depreciation because when valuable metals corrode, they weigh less and lose their value. God says that when we lay up our treasures in heaven, they will not be stolen and they will not depreciate. They are a good investment.

Why love the hard-to-love people?

Why not avoid hard to love people?

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Matthew 5:46 (ESV)

God promises to reward us for loving the hard-to-love people in our lives. That changes the way we live when we know we will be rewarded in eternity for how we love.

Why say "No!" to sin?

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:24–26 (ESV)

As a son of Pharaoh, Moses had access to sinful pleasures in Pharaoh's place that few of us can comprehend. He turned his back on them and chose to be considered weird as he lived for his future with Christ because he knew God would reward him in eternity for saying "No" to sin in this life. God will do the same for each one of us.

Our reward in eternity for saying "No" to sin now is guaranteed to outweigh the pleasure of sin or it wouldn't be a reward. It would be a white elephant gift. Whenever you are tempted to sin, realize that saying "No" to sin is not saying

“No” to pleasure, it is saying “Yes” to a greater pleasure. It is saying “Yes” to God’s reward for honoring him.

Why work hard in school, sports or the office?

Many people think the way to live is to take the path of least resistance through life. If you won’t be rewarded for working hard why waste your energy? The Bible tells us something different.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV)

God promises to reward us in eternity for how we work today. Even if your employer isn’t paying you enough to work hard, you work hard anyway knowing that in eternity your heavenly boss will repay you.

I love what Jesus says in Revelation about what it will be like when he returns.

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.” Revelation 22:12 (NIV)

“Guys, I am coming. I love you. I can’t wait to reward you. I am not going to say the check is in the mail. I have my reward with me so I can give it to you the moment I see you.”

This is why Paul said that for those we love, we must pray God would open their eyes to not just understand who they are through Jesus but that they would catch a glimpse of their futures so they would live for it.

The incredible value God places on them.

It is only when the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts do we comprehend how much Jesus loves us that we can escape from the tyranny of despair.

...what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints... Ephesians 1:18 (ESV)

Paul told us to pray that those we love would comprehend what an incredibly high value Christ places on us. The Holy Spirit needs to open the eyes of our hearts to comprehend our love and value to Jesus.

Where did Paul get this? From his Old Testament.

But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. Deuteronomy 32:9 (ESV)

If you trace this in the Bible, what you find is that a glorious inheritance refers to the crown jewels of a king. It is another way of saying they are the king's most precious possessions. Jesus looks at us as his most precious possessions. We are Christ's personal treasure.

When the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see how Jesus thinks about you, it changes the way you think about yourself. A great analogy the Bible gives us is the church is called Christ's bride. Think of the love a groom has for his bride on his wedding day. She is his most precious possession. He is fiercely protective of her. He would sacrifice his life to protect her.

My friends, that is how Jesus feels about you. He is fiercely and passionately in love with us, like a groom's passion for a bride on their wedding day.

If you think you are unimportant, unloved or insignificant, you don't have a vision of how much Jesus loves you.

If we love people, we will pray that the Holy Spirit gets their minds wrapped around Jesus' love for them. When the Holy Spirit opens your heart to this, it keeps you from trying to find your identity someplace else.

The greatness of God's power that is in them.

It is only when the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts to comprehend the greatness of God's power in us that we can avoid being enticed by the second-rate powers around us.

...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe...
Ephesians 1:19 (ESV)

Remember the context of this letter. It is written to Ephesus. Ephesus was a city that majored in the demonic, occult, seances, Wicca, and ouija boards. The Ephesians were into spiritual power and how the spiritual powers would help them in everyday life. They were into putting curses on their enemies and casting love spells on those they found attractive. Everybody was wondering how their spiritual power stacked up with the new spiritual power in town called Jesus.

Paul said, "You want to see power? I pray the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to comprehend the kind of stone-splitting power God will display in your life."

Paul described the power at work in their lives as the same kind of power that raised Christ from the dead.

...according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church... Ephesians 1:20–22 (ESV)

Let's roll this around in our minds. The grandest display of God's power on record is the creation narrative in Genesis. This is when God created the entire universe out of nothing. From that point on, God has continued to display his power every day but it is not at the same level of power. In the creation story, God does Olympic weight lifting. He does a clean and press with 1,000 pounds on the bar. From that time forward, God has still displayed his power but he is only using 5-pound hand weights.

Along came Jesus. God raised him from the dead and sat him at the right hand of God. The Bible tells us that in raising Christ from the dead, and seating him at his right hand, God displayed the same kind of power that he displayed in the creation story of Genesis. Jesus was the first-born of the new creation story. That is the kind of power God displayed in raising Jesus from the dead.

Here is where it gets sweet. A power of the same magnitude as raising Jesus from the dead is at work in you and me. Pray that the Holy Spirit would help you get your mind wrapped around the kind of power God will display in your life.

This is not all in the future. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is displayed in our hearts when we come to Jesus, and through Jesus, God make us into a completely new creation, a totally different person.

It doesn't matter how messed up you are. It doesn't matter how ruined your life has become. If you give your life to Jesus and ask him to be in charge, the same power that raised Christ from the dead will raise you from the dead.

How does this power stack up against the other spiritual powers in the neighborhood? Remember that Ephesus was a pretty dark spiritual place that tinkered with demons. Jesus is above all rule, power, authority and dominion. In the Jewish culture, those terms are titles for angelic being of differing ranks. The power that raised Jesus and is in us is far above all angelic beings.

When the Holy Spirit begins to open your eyes to the magnitude of the power of God that is now at work in your life and will be at work in your life for all of eternity, that really helps you understand how you stack up against the demonic forces of your friends and neighbors.

The demonic forces around you have the power of squirt guns, when through Christ, you have a bazooka. Who wants to pull the trigger and find out which one is the strongest?

Unless the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to understand this, you will live in fear wondering if spells, curses and demonic forces can overwhelm you.

Conclusion

There is nothing wrong with praying that those we love would be successful. There is nothing wrong with praying that our kids would get straight As in school, but honestly, if that is the way you are praying for those you love, you are under-requesting from God.

Pray for something of life-changing value.

Pray God would open their eyes to understand what God has done for them through Jesus. Pray specifically that he would open their eyes to:

1. The great future in front of them. It is only when God opens the eyes of our hearts to see it that we will live for it.
2. The incredible value God places on us. It is only when we see how much Jesus loves us that we have escape from despair.
3. The greatness of power God will display in us. It is only when we understand the greatness of God's power in us we can avoid being enticed by the second-rate powers around us.

This week, I have some homework for you. In your bulletin you will find a small business card. On that card are the points we studied in Paul's prayer. On the back side is a place for you to write the names of a few people you love and deeply care about.

My challenge is for you to pray this prayer for them every day this week. When you are done, put it in your wallet or on your bathroom mirror and continue to pray this prayer for them every time you run across it.

In addition, I want to encourage you to keep reading through the book of Ephesians. Our challenge is to read through the book of Ephesians twice a week. Preferably one chapter a day on Monday through Saturday and one Sunday read the whole book in one sitting. My hope and prayer is the Holy Spirit uses your reading of Ephesians to the section we have already covered and to prepare your heart for the section we have yet to cover.

Along the way, I pray that the Holy Spirit opens your heart to see Jesus and all he has done for us with greater clarity, and your life is changed because of it when you can answer the question, “Who am I?” because of Jesus.



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