

Prayer – Prayer Brings Strength

If I were to ask, I think we would all absolutely agree that prayer is powerful, important and should be a vital part of our life of faith. I'm also pretty sure that most of us would say that we absolutely don't pray enough. We know we need to pray more consistently and intentionally, but we don't. We might not pray more because we feel inadequate and don't know the right words or the right way to pray. We might not pray because we feel guilty when we find ourselves dozing off or losing focus. We might not pray because we don't think our faith is strong enough or that our lives are important enough for God to take the time to listen to us. We might not feel worthy enough before God to pray. There are many reasons we don't pray more often, but we know prayer is important.

Because prayer is important and we need to be more intentional and focused in our prayer life, we are going to take the next 4 weeks to reflect on and learn about prayer. We are going to look at what the Apostle Paul said about prayer in his letters to the early church. The early followers of Jesus would have also struggled with prayer.

Until the time of Jesus, prayers would have been structured and formal. Prayers might have come from the psalms and other scriptures or the prayers provided by the religious leaders, but when Jesus came along, He changed all that. Jesus told people they could pray to God as their *father*. Actually, the word Jesus used to address God in His prayers was *Abba*, which is an intimate and personal reference to a father, it's more like *daddy*. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, He wanted their prayers to be personal and genuine. As more people started to trust in Jesus, Paul helped them understand how and why to pray.

Before we look at what Paul has to say, there are two general mistakes we make when we pray, and it's not losing focus or falling asleep. The two mistakes we make is that our prayers are **Too Small** and **Too General**. For example, we might ask God to bless us and there is nothing wrong with that, but I can imagine God saying, *open your eyes! I have already blessed you*. Or we ask God to be with us, to which God says, *have you forgotten that I have*

August 4, 2024

promised to be with you always and everywhere? Maybe we should begin our prayers with gratitude that God is with us and that God has blessed us and then get specific about what we need. **General prayers don't move the hand of God to specific actions.** If we need or want God to provide in some specific ways - we need to be bold and ask.

We also might feel too small or that our faith is too small to pray for something big. Our own lack of faith can hold us back in asking God to move in big and specific ways, but if we believe God is loving and powerful and capable of all things - why not be bold and lay our hearts before God and ask for what we need or desire. Let me give you an example of a big, bold and specific prayer.

Martin Luther was the leader of the reformation which transformed the Christian faith around the world. He had a faithful assistant named Friedrich Myconius. In 1540, Myconius got sick and was on his deathbed. He wrote to Luther saying his final goodbye. When Luther received the letter, he didn't pray a small prayer of thanks for Myconius' life and friendship, he prayed a bold prayer of healing. Here is how Luther responded to Myconius:

I command you in the name of God to live because I still have need of you in the work of reforming the church. The Lord will never let me hear that you are dead but will permit you to survive me. For this I am praying... because I seek only to glorify the name of God. **Martin Luther**

This is a big, bold and specific prayer. Luther not only prayed that Myconius wouldn't die now but that he would never hear of his death. Luther knew what he needed to accomplish God's purpose, so he prayed for that to happen. It was a bold and specific prayer, and the result of this prayer was that Myconius, who was literally about to die, didn't die. He got stronger and lived another 6 years. In fact, Myconius didn't die until 2 weeks after Luther. Luther never did hear of his death. That is a big, bold and specific prayer!

Prayer – Prayer Brings Strength

Now does this mean our prayers will always postpone death and heal people? No, but why not ask? If we believe in the power of God and the love of God - why not be bold and ask. If the prayer isn't answered the way we want, then God will give us what we need. God loves us and will provide for us so let's make sure our prayers are not too small or too general but big, bold and specific.

During this series, we are going to look at Paul's teaching on prayer and today we are going to look at what Paul says to the church in Ephesus.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 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. 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. Ephesians 3:14-19

Paul begins by saying that he kneels before God in prayer. Kneeling is just one posture we can make when we pray. It's a great way to pray because it shows the reverence we have for God, but the good news is that we can pray in any position, in any place, and at any time. We can pray standing, sitting, kneeling or lying flat on our face before God. Many Jewish people at this time prayed standing up and with their palms raised to heaven.

You can also pray at home or at work and even in school. No matter what anyone says, they have not taken prayer out of school because all students, teachers and staff can pray there any time they want. You can even pray driving a car but please pray the way Jesus told his disciples to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus said, *watch and pray*. So, watch the road, but pray.

August 4, 2024

For many people, kneeling in prayer is an important way of showing deep reverence to God. I have prayed on my knees many times, but I will make a confession, for some reason, when I'm on my knees it's like my mind shuts down. I can't think very well or remain focused, so for me, standing or better yet, walking and praying is best. For about 10 years I did a lot of hiking and my mind was full of prayers and conversations with God during those hikes. We all do our best thinking and praying at different times and places. Find the time that works best for you and pray.

Then Paul said, ***I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power.*** Paul tells us that we pray to God because He is spiritually rich and unconditionally loving. We pray to God because God has all the wealth and power of heaven and earth and the love and desire to share it all with us. These are part of the glorious riches of God. God is the good father who desires to give good gifts to His children. While we often beg God to forgive us because of our shame and remorse, God is quick to forgive and show mercy. While we might come humbly before God because we know we aren't worthy, God is quick to lift our heads and call us His children, joint heirs with Jesus in His kingdom. We can't become prideful and arrogant in our prayers, but we also can't forget that out of God's infinite and glorious riches, He desires is to give us all that we need.

In each of the teachings on prayer we are going to look at, we will see Paul use a similar format. Paul will say, **I pray ___so that ___.**

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.

Paul prays so that Christ may dwell in us through faith. And if Christ dwells in us, we have power. Specifically, Paul wants us to have God's power so we can understand the full measure of God's love. The reason we need God's power to understand God's love is because God's love surpasses our knowledge. Paul said.

Prayer – Prayer Brings Strength

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.

As much as you think God loves you, He loves you more. As much as you think God forgives you, He forgives you more and even before you asked. As much as you think God wants to help you, He wants to help you more. The love of God is higher, longer, wider and deeper than we can possibly imagine. It surpasses common sense and all our understanding and so it takes God's power to help us understand and grab hold of God's love. And the reason we need to grab hold and understand God's love is because that is what strengthens us in life and faith and prayer. Knowing the unconditional and all-powerful love of God is what helps us pray with power. It helps us pray big, bold and specific prayers.

When we know the full love of God and the power there is in that love, we won't pray general prayers of God watching over us and helping us, we will pray specific and bold prayers for God to heal our relationships and provide what we need in life. We will pray for patience to wait for God and for the peace we need in our community and world. We will pray to find joy in the midst of adversity and self-control in our out-of-control lives. We can pray big, bold and specific prayers when we know the love of God.

Last Sunday we were blessed to have Ruslan and Archie with us from Raising Hope Ukraine and they are a great example of people who know the power of Christ in them and the love God has for them and it shows in how they pray. Archie and Ruslan heard God call them to bring several orphaned and foster children into their families when they were working as part of a ministry, and so they did. After adding many children into their family, they ran into problems with the ministry and parted ways with them. The problem was that the ministry owned the house they lived in, so they had to move.

August 4, 2024

Ruslan said he prayed, "God, you gave us all these children, this was your plan, now you have to help us and provide us with shelter. We need a home ." God did provide what they needed and then God increased their faith and gave them more children, which meant there were more needs and God continued to provide. And then God grew their ministry and they had new needs and then they had more big bold prayers to pray.

That's what is so great about changing our prayer life. When we pray big, bold and specific prayers and see how God provides, it gives us the power to pray more big and bold prayers. As this cycle goes on, we find our faith growing and pretty soon we are doing things and praying for things we never thought or imagined.

Today, Ruslan and Archie have another big, bold and specific prayer, they are praying to build a Hub of Hope. The ministry center they had used at the start of the war has taken over by the government, so they are working out of their home which is just too small. They stepped out in faith to build a hub of hope and are trusting God for the resources they need to finish. Ruslan said they need about \$30,000 to finish the building so they can continue their ministry. It's a big, bold and specific prayer. Can we be part of God's answer to this prayer?! Let's give generously and sacrificially and help make their hub of hope a reality. We can step into the gap and provide all that is needed for the hope of Christ to shine in the darkness of war.

What have you prayed for recently? Was the prayer too small? What prayer has been too general? How do those prayers need to change? How can you make your prayers big, bold and specific? Don't just pray for your family, pray for your children to come to know the Lord, or family members to overcome addictions, or for jobs that are needed, new opportunities to pursue, or broken relationships to be restored.

Prayer – Prayer Brings Strength

As we pray for our blessing of the backpacks next Sunday, let's not just pray that we are a blessing to our community, let's pray for children and families to experience the love of Jesus in such a way that they come back to learn more about Him. Let's pray for children to find the hope they need to keep working for their dreams. Let's pray for children to lead their families to Jesus if that's what needs to happen. Let's pray for abuse and addiction in families to stop and for transformation to take place because someone here on Sunday shared with them the love of Jesus. Let's pray some big, bold and specific prayers about our outreach next Sunday.

As a church, our prayers need to be big and bold and specific. Paul prayed to rich and glorious God so that we might be filled with the full measure of God's love and be able to draw upon God's power. So, God, open our eyes so that we can see how deep and wide and high and long your love is so that our prayers can be filled with power, so that our prayers will be big and bold and specific, so that our world might become more like the Kingdom of God.

August 4, 2024

Next Steps

Prayer - Power

What keeps you from praying? Guilt, boredom, busyness, distractions, pain, doubt, insecurity...

In what ways have your prayers been too small?
In what ways have your prayers been too general?

How can you take your too small and general prayer and make it big, bold and specific? Write it out.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Identify some of the "glorious riches" that are yours through Jesus Christ.

How can focusing on these things change your prayer life?

Read Romans 8:37-39. How have you experienced God's love and how has that love made a difference in your life?
How can God's love help you pray with more power?

If you knew that God loved you no matter what and that all His power was at your disposal, what would you pray for?

Be bold and make that your prayer this week.

Find one way to grow and expand your prayer life this week.

- Set aside a specific time every day to pray.
- Pray with a friend.
- Ask a friend to hold you accountable in praying every day.
- Read a psalm every day and use it as a prayer.
- Find a new posture to pray (sit, stand, kneel, walk...)