

# One Through Prayer

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] You turn back with me or on to your bulletin sheet or your order of service rather to Ephesians 3 14 to 21. As I said before, Richard preached from this last week. I have also preached from it when I was going through a series on the prayers of Paul for the church, which was a number of years ago. But I think you could probably preach from it every week for a year and there would just be new and powerful truth to come from it. As we go through Ephesians, we are looking at it in the context of the letter that we have been studying.

But there is no doubt that it was great here, that Paul moves, it is like a breathing space, and he moves from his teaching and his exhortation and his truth-telling and passing on to be very personal. I think that is a great model. It is important because he makes it clear that for him, he is not just a teacher, he is not just an academic, he is not just a leader. As he has already said, he is personally engaged with his people. He is shared with them not just the truth but his life as well. That comes across in his prayers. It is the second of his prayers so far that are recorded here in this letter. The great thing about prayer like this is, or like any prayer that is revealed, it reveals who we are. Our prayer life, and this immediately takes the sweeping hand of God over us all, our personal prayer life reflects who we are spiritually. It reflects the life that we have spiritually.

In a sense, we are taking light into a holy place here. We are taking into the holiest place of Paul's life, where he unfolds his deepest desire for this people, the Ephesian church. We know he loved them greatly, that amazing passage in Acts which records their parting from one another on the beach, and how moving and emotional that is. He really loved them. The great thing about this prayer is that it is not kind of sappy and sentimental.

It is based on the truth that he has already been telling them. There is a great lesson for us there that the truth that we know from God's word will educate and will feed our prayer life, and will give us the fuel for our prayer life, and will make our prayer life richer and deeper. That is what people say, I don't know what to pray for. I don't know how to pray beyond, thank you Jesus for the food amen. Well, our soaking ourselves in the truth of what God wants for us, will motivate and educate us to know how to pray then to the same God who loves us and who cares for us. We are disciples. So the learning that we do as disciples feeds into the prayer life that we live as children of the living God. So we are probably going to examine our own prayer lives a little bit this morning and feed, be fed on the truth of God's word. I am looking for my phone so I know not to preach or to learn. Okay, the introduction of the prayer is very much recognising really the impossibility of what he is asking. That is why he launches into prayer for them. That is why we pray, isn't it? Because it is impossible for us to live without it. To live as disciples, to live for Jesus, to live the way he wants us. It is impossible without prayer. In verse 14 he says, for this reason I bow my knee before the Father. At the beginning of chapter 3 he says, for this reason I, Paul, and he is launching back in many ways to the theme of the whole letter which is in chapter 1 verse 10 which he says that God's plan is for all of us to be united in him things in heaven and on earth. And you know he spent the last couple of chapters talking about the Jews and the Gentiles and how they are naturally opposed to one another and hate one another but in Christ they are new creations and they come together and united and what are they united in? They are united in the love of Christ and that impossible unity. You remember that? It is the unity of a Jew on the wailing wall meeting with someone from ISIS with a terrorist bomb strapped around their belly and coming together and weeping over one another in love and in unity because they found Christ together. That is the kind of outrageous unity that Paul is speaking about here. And it was this unity that shook the world. It is the unity that turned the world upside down. People said this is unbelievable. See there are slaves here and they are eating at the same table as their masters and there are Jews here and there are Gentiles. There are all kinds of people. There is black and white. There is male and female and they are all one in Jesus Christ. And that unity is the biggest, most powerful apologetic for the gospel because we live in a world that is driven by division and by strife and by self-desire and self-motivation and self-interest. In Christ we are new creations, citizens of the living God and it is this truth of the fact that Christ on the cross died for Jews and Gentiles, died for every person who will come to faith. It is that unity that we have because of his love. It is that truth, that deep and significant truth that drives us to pray the kind of prayer that Paul prays and it is the kind of prayers that we should pray. If you are struggling to know what to pray for, this is a great place to come.

Pray not just for yourself but praying for other people. So let's have a look at one or two things here. The genuine prayer and the faith that lies behind Paul's prayer here and his motivation of the truth enables him to pray reverentially.

[ 6 : 41 ] That is just by way of introduction that we recognise that he prays reverentially. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father. It is both reverential and intimate actually but it is reverential. He bows his knees. Very often that is not the language of scripture for prayer. Prayer is often about standing in the presence of God or even being prostrate in the presence of God. Bowing the knee was a terminology for reverence and submission.

This is the one into whose presence the great apostle Paul is coming. We can walk down the road, we can pray as we are driving, we can pray prayers in all kinds of places but there is something about making the physical effort and the time and the dedication to bow the knee in reverence and in submission because it is a recognition of who he is. So there is this great humility before the living God that Paul has. It is beautiful because it is not a distant reverential desire that he has. He is not afraid of God but there is this recognition of who God is. But then he goes on to say that he is his Father and that balances it beautifully with the intimacy. You know, hey God is my Daddy. I can say anything to God. Yes, but he is also the one to whom we bow the knee. There is an intimacy but it is not disrespectful. I think sometimes as we maybe say, oh I don't need to bow the knee, I just pray to God as I am walking in the hills. It means we can't be bothered.

And it is because we are walking in the hills anyway, we just happen to pray. And it can be that we give him just part of our time or half an year or half our knowledge or concern. But he has this great knowledge of reverence and intimacy that God represents in Christ and in the Father, the family unit that we now belong to, the love that we have been overwhelmed by, the divine parental love that is ours, that he accepts us, the prodigal Father who prodigally accepts us because of his Son Jesus Christ. And what sin does at every single level, sin is what divides the family and divides people from one another. You see it right from the very beginning. It is terribly obvious that Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel and the people following them are divided and separated and that is Satan's task, separating us from God and from one another. And that is what we have fallen for and are deceived by. And yet God in Christ as we come to him by faith is our Father. Sin has destroyed that image of the family so that even sometimes we struggle with the concept of fatherhood because of maybe abusive or distant or absent fathers that we have known ourselves. But we seek the living knowledge of God to give us an understanding of his perfect fatherhood as is reflected in our relationship with him. We belong. You belong in Christ. It is the greatest belonging. There is actually nothing else that matters than belonging to the Father through Jesus Christ and recognising the estrangement that sin brings that separates us from him. Even as Christians, the sin that we lurch back into is always separating us from the Father. However enticing and tasty and enjoyable it seems to be, it separates us from the good grace of God. So truth allows this reverential and intimate prayer. But truth also allows Paul to pray in a focused and in a confident way. So he knows what he is praying for. He knows that unity is absolutely crucial because it reflects the trinity and it reflects salvation. He wants that for his people because that is what will change the world. That is what will change the world. So he is confident of what he is praying for for his people. It is not pie in the sky, airy-fairy stuff, it is what will change our day to day lives every single day for Jesus Christ. That place of prayer, intimate, personal, individual, private relationship with the living God. You need to ask yourself if you have got that. Don't rely on anybody else. Don't rely just on church attendance or anything else. What is your personal walk, knowledge as a child of the living God? Do you have that? Nothing else matters. Your knowledge, your covenantal background, your flirting with Christianity at different levels will not save you. It needs to be in an ongoing way that on-going personal relationship of prayer. If you haven't got that, you must cry out to the living God for it. And if you are a Christian and haven't prayed this last week, then you need to stand up straight and get a grip of yourself and stop kidding yourself about life and start living every day as an impossibility because it is in Christ. You

cannot live the Christian life tomorrow without prayer and without recognising that you need bathed in the prayer of the Holy Spirit of God to enable you to live the Christian life.

There are two main requests here and the requests are rooted in our struggles. Our struggles as Christians because we struggle with being weak. He is praying for strength because he knows we are weak. Our struggles with being unfulfilled, he is praying for fulfilment in our lives. Our struggle of feeling empty, he talks about wanting to be filled. He knows what we are struggling with. This is not an ivory tower message. He knows what we battle with every single day as Christians and he is praying into that for the people. And this is what we can learn and what we can grow in our own lives and in our own walk with Jesus Christ. So what is he focused on? He focused on two things. I am going to mainly deal with the first one and just mention the second. The first is the power of God's love.

[ 13 : 46 ] That is what he focuses on. If you had one prayer to make for the church here, one crucial prayer, one theological prayer, one doctrinal prayer, one important prayer, one deep prayer, one intellectual prayer, what would it be? This is it. This is it. You cannot go beyond it. That we understand the power of God's love, 16 to 18. What does he want for this people in Ephesus, in this early church that was part of the life changing movement of Christianity, that they may understand through the Spirit that Christ would dwell in your hearts and that you may be rooted and grounded in love and so on. It is wonderful to memorise it, memorise this passage, memorise this prayer and make it yours. He is saying, look, this people need what you have. He wants them to plug into the glorious resources of God.

Is that what we have? God's weak, God's helpless. He doesn't do much. I don't see much. This is someone who can see that it is God who has the resources to enable us to only, got the resources to enable us to live this way, to love Him, to love one another when every atom of our being maybe goes against that. He has glorious riches, riches of His glory, that He focuses on giving to us when we ask for this. So, Lord God, give me a new Mercedes.

He doesn't promise that His glorious riches will give us that. Lord, give me the relationship I wanted or give me the house that I would like. He doesn't promise that. He may give it, but He doesn't promise it. What He promises is this outstanding, glorious recognition of His love. And Paul prays into our inner beings. He recognises this is not a surface request. This is to do with our very inner beings. You may strengthen with power through the Spirit in your inner being, in your very core person, what you are as an ego, what you are as an individual, that in that very inner being what is the real you, the truth, the depth and the honesty of what makes you you that you know His strength there. Not on the surface. Not I live in a clock on a Sunday. Not just for the two minutes that we read the Bible in the morning or at night, but in our inner being what makes us tick is made strong in the person and in the presence of Jesus Christ. And I recognise these are difficult terms and they are difficult to explain and they are difficult to experience actually.

I find it very difficult sometimes to put into words for myself or put into experience what that means. But somehow we just know what it is to love and serve God. But in order to do that impossible reality to live out grace, this is God's gift and we need the power. You know He says that you may be strengthened through His Spirit in your inner being with power. This is God's work. We can't work up ourselves. It's not about the number of degrees you've got theologically or the number of years you've been in church. This is His work and we need His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God in our inner being is the power that will enable us only to love Him and understand Him. We need the Holy Spirit. This is not a step up. This is not for a special Christian. This is not a second blessing that you're a kind of ordinary Christian and then you become a very super holy Christian by having the Holy Spirit. This is for every Christian and it's not a second blessing. It's multiple blessings. It's what we seek and crave for till the day we die. More filling of the Spirit of God which will enable us to understand what that means. What does it mean? What does it mean? It means Christ in us. That's what it means this, that you may understand by the power of His Spirit that Christ dwells in your heart through faith. Now that's what we want to experience as Christians in our inner being, Christ dwelling in our lives.

Not just alongside us, not just when we come to church, not just intellectually, but that Christ by His Spirit lives in every believer. There's a unity with the trinity in every believer that makes, that's your identity and mine, that makes us special. Not because of ourselves, but because of His glorious commitment to us. It speaks here of Christ dwelling in our hearts. Now you know that word, you know that word. It's like the word for tabernacle. It's like the word for, you know, how God dwelt with His people in the Old Testament. He lived in the tabernacle or the sanctuary or the temple and that was His presence among the people. But now we are the temple, we're the tabernacle. He comes not and just, He doesn't just dwell around us, He dwells in us. And the word is that He makes His home among us. That's what it means. It means God makes His home with us.

[ 19 : 36 ] He's not lodging. He doesn't just stay with you as long as you're a good boy or a good girl and the minute you're bad, He's away. I'm going to try somewhere else. I'm going to lodge with some other people who are holier and nicer than you. You're bad. He doesn't do that. He dwells. He is committed to being with us forever. He's not passing through.

Now we've got a visual illustration today, John and Kim. Okay, they've had a baby this week. Elijah, Elijah. Now they take the baby home. That baby's with them. Their lives are changed forever. It'll never be the same. No longer just one, but two in the home. And that's the family unit. And you don't give them away. You don't have them just for a month. I say, well, I've had enough now. I'll go back to what it was. You now have this child. The child resides with you. It's part of the family, part of the home. And that's the kind of, it's an imperfect illustration, but it's the kind of idea, you know, their lives will be turned upside down again. And so with Christ, Christ dwells with us. He's not going anywhere. He's not leaving. He will always be with us every single step of the way in our best moments and in our rubbishiest moments. When we let him down most and when we glorify him most by the means, he will be with us. Yes, we will grieve him. Yes, we will quench his spirit. Yes, we will not sense his presence because we will be far from him.

But Christ is with us for the long haul. That's what we need to grasp about the love of Christ. It's the essence of our faith. This is what Paul is saying. He said, what do you think is the essence of the faith? The essence of the faith is Christ in us and His love. His love in us. That is the essence of the faith, His love in us and for us. It's the basis for our very existence. That is the basis, you know? For our existence as Christians is that God loves us in Jesus Christ so much that He gave Himself for us. And now you can reject that all day long, but you will be impotent and you will be lost if you will reject that. And if your hope and trust is on anything else, you are hellbound in a most dreadful way because His love is the greatest thing of all. And He explains that by saying, you are rooted and grounded and I want you to know that. You're rooted and grounded in love.

He gives us these two very quick illustrations that are different. One's about a tree roots and one's about a building foundation. And the Bible uses these illustrations all over the place. Now we've seen this week in Edinburgh what it's like when you don't get the building foundation right if you're in school and there's a lot of primary kids that are delighted, but that's not good because things go wrong. Eventually it gets found out when we cut corners, when we don't get the foundation right. You can look and I can look like a Christian and even a preacher for all my days. But if the foundation's not right, if privately there is no life of love and prayer and commitment to Christ, then when the storms come, we will stumble and fall. And so here you've got this great picture of being rooted and grounded in it.

What keeps us standing? Last man standing, last woman standing, we will be standing if we are rooted and grounded. What in? Reformed theology. No, although Reformed theology covers that. It is rooted, grounded and established in a personal relationship of love with Jesus Christ which will lead you to Reformed theology always. And what he's saying here is that that covers everything. It covers absolutely everything that you may face and it may go through in your life. It's deeper than any darkness that you might go through. He says that.

[ 24 : 02 ] So, however far you've strayed today, now there's people that are not coming to church here now who love Jesus Christ but have drifted from Him because they think they've gone too far. You've never gone too far to turn back to the Lord Jesus Christ because of its width or breadth. I never know which quite one to use. It doesn't matter how high your experiences of life are. What buzz that you've received from any experience in life that you might be tempted to think is better than Christ. Nothing will top knowing and experiencing the height of Christ's love that he speaks about here. The breadth and the length and the height and the depth. It engulfs us so that every grain of sand that we experience is nothing compared to the vast and glorious love of Jesus Christ which covers everything.

And so I ask, do you know it? Even in a tiny proportion, because that's all we ever know, isn't it? But do you know it? Do you shake your fist at God when things go wrong? He's not my Santa Claus. He's not giving me what I want. I'm going to turn my back on him.

It's too hard. It's too tough. It's not too hard and too tough. It's far worse than that. It's absolutely impossible to live the Christian life. Don't kid yourself that it's just hard and tough. It's hard and tough. We're so oppressed. It's difficult and hard.

It's impossible to be a Christian unless we are plugged into the power of God and into the love of God. And knowing that it's his love that sustains us and keeps us going. And you know what the great thing is? The great thing is it's beyond knowledge. So you can't get a degree in it. And you can't study more to attain it, although you will find out more as you look into God's word. In other words, it's not simple. I think what he means there when he says that it surpasses knowledge is that knowledge isn't enough. Bible knowledge isn't enough. It's hugely significant, but it's not in itself enough. I know, and I've met many proud, ignorant, godless people who know their Bibles very well. It's not simply about knowledge. It's surpasses knowledge. It's about relationship that feeds the knowledge and that inspires the knowledge and it makes us want the knowledge more. You know, it's beyond knowledge. I think that's hugely important. It's beyond knowledge. And so the power of

God's love, that's what he wants to talk about. And then very briefly, he also wants not just to know God's love, but also to know therefore as a follow on the fullness of God.

[ 27 : 08 ] Not just a dribble of God, not just a tiny bit to keep us going. The fullness of God, that's what he says. And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. What do you think? What do you think it would be like to be filled with the fullness of God? What do you have in your mind when you think of someone filled with the fullness of God? Someone kind of serene, distant from everyone else with a kind of halo. Now being filled with the fullness of God is loving Christ that enables you to walk in the gutter to help someone in need and give them a cup of cold water for Christ's sake. It is living out the kind of love, the sacrificial love that Christ had for us in crossing the road to help, in caring about other people because we are motivated, not for merely social reasons, but because the love of Christ constrains us to serve and to know and to love God and to love one another. So the fullness of God is being full. Okay? So it means being full. And what he is talking there about in prayer is fulfillment. You know, you are not empty. You are not looking around for the next buzz, for the next excitement to make your life worthwhile. You found fullness, contentment, peace because you know who you are and you know who you are loved and you have got a purpose, a noble purpose in life. Even as the most ordinary person we have got, I have got the most noble purpose because I have to share this love and I have to be part of this new citizenship that lives in unity with one another. That is where completeness is for us and that is where our relationship with him will blossom. You will not get that from us, Erwin. I am sorry. You are going to need to have to work at your relationship with Jesus Christ. Not to earn your salvation. It is all being done. It is freely done, but simply to develop it and to understand it because this prayer is based on truth. It is based on truth. I do not really have much time for people to say, yeah, I love God and it is great to serve God, but do not give me theology of the Bible. That is just what divides churches and that is what causes problems. That is too easy and it is too cheap because unless we know the truth, okay, I know there are lots of problems and difficulties and misunderstandings and wrong emphasis, but the truth will set us free. It is the truth that sets us free and God, Jesus came as the word, okay, in fleshed. Yes, we see him, but we see him because of the word and so the truth will motivate and stimulate our prayers. We are going to the most important week ever in St. Columba's, the week of prayer, next week. The building across the road could be blown up tomorrow. That is insignificant.

What we are doing is building a spiritual kingdom and we can only do it by prayer. So make the time to be there at seven in the morning and join in this foundational work and pray these prayers for one another, not just for ourselves but for one another, so that we blossom and grow in the work. And therefore, we come to the conclusion very briefly which I am not really going to spend time on, but truth and prayer, what will it lead to? It will lead to praise and doxology. Doxology is just praise of God. Now to him who is able to, it is like Paul just knowing this, he cannot stop, but he has to stop and just praise God. And with this great doxology, who is able to far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power of work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever amen. Now we are going to repeat that together at the end of the service, that you have got it on your sheets. We will all say the doxology together today. That is a good mark of our unity and it is a good mark of our prayer for one another. But this is a great prayer, it is a great praise. I wonder sometimes how dull I am in response to God and His Word. You know I read the Bible and I close it and I go on with my life. There is no praise, there is no doxology. It is routine, it is ritualistic, it does not change what I am doing or thinking or being. Genuine interaction with the living Word will feed our prayers and will stimulate our praise to Him. And this is a great little doxology. It is full of superlatives, it does not come across terribly well in the English, but this is to the one who is able to do more, more than we ask, more than we even think. You think a great year brain is and what it can think. I am amazed by the ability of surgeons to work on the brain as they have done with Katrina this week. So easily, but yes so delicate, what knowledge they have got. And we can think great thoughts and we have great imaginations. But He says He is able to do more than we can ask. You know we think we have asked for a big thing, God will give me a little thing.

You know how it is? You ask for the most and maybe you will get something. It is the opposite with God. He can give us more than we ask or even think. And more than we can even ask or think. Much more than we can ask or think. Super much more than we can ask or think.

That is the language that we have here. That is the superlatives in the Greek that we have. It is super much much more than we can ask or think. That is the God that we have. We often treat Him like a miser because we don't base our knowledge of Him and our prayers to Him on the truth. And we don't think we are more sinful than we can ever imagine.

And more separate and distant from Him than we can ever put our finger on. Yet more loved than we can ever imagine. I am just going to finish with this great verse that Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 9 which I guess is in the same theme altogether. But as it is written when he speaks about the wisdom of the Spirit and the Lord of glory says, but as it is written, what no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him. We are not even, we are not even in the starting blocks for knowing what God has provided, what lies ahead for us but which we can taste now. As we pray this prayer, as we live this prayer, as we focus on loving God and loving one another as the absolute foundation and root of our faith. May that be what we do.

[ 34 : 47 ] Amen. May God bless our thoughts on that word and if you are not a Christian today, then I just implore you to come to Jesus.