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Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul's Prayer for the Church

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Hello everyone! It is such a treat to be here today to study this passage with you!

Last week, Maureen walked us through the first 14 verses of this chapter, where Paul praises the Lord for the abundant blessings He has given to us in Christ. This week, we are looking at the remainder of the chapter, which is Paul's prayer for the church.

What is so beautiful about the structure of this chapter, is that Paul's praise for God in verses 1-14 leads him into his prayer for the Ephesian believers in the verses that follow. John Stott observes that a healthy Christian life will keep Christian praise and Christian prayer together. One begets the other. Praise and prayer are interwoven, and that synergy is the work of our Triune God. As you read this chapter, you will see all three persons of the **Trinity. God the Father is mentioned in verses 3 and 17. Christ the Lord is mentioned in verses 3, 17 and 20. And the Holy Spirit is mentioned in verses 13, 14, and 17.** Stott says, "It is because the Father has approached us in blessing through the Son and by the Spirit that we approach him in prayer through the Son and by the Spirit also." Do you see the relationships there? We worship a Triune God. We are created in His image. Tim Keller observed that the fact that God is a God of love demonstrates that the Trinity has always existed. He points out that love can only exist in relationship. Therefore, there was

no time when God existed in any form other than the Trinity. Made in His image, we are recipients and conduits of His love.

Our faith is formed in and through relationships. In verse 15, Paul says, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love TOWARD all the saints." Our faith is placed in Jesus, and the natural outcome of that faith is love toward other believers. I am struck by this concept of love moving us TOWARD people. In verse 19, Paul describes the immeasurable greatness of God's power TOWARD us who believe. God moves toward His children in power, and we, His children, move toward one another in love. As we think about our relationships, whether in our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, or our church, it is good to ask ourselves, "Am I moving toward people? Is my love in motion? Do my words and actions move me toward people or away from them?" I find myself challenged by this, because I see how moving toward others in love is the necessary outcome of faith in the Lord Jesus. So where I fail to love, I am failing to believe. When I find myself moving AWAY from people, I am lacking faith to believe that God can work in my heart and in theirs. Of course, this is not telling us to place ourselves in harms way by staying in unhealthy or abusive relationships. It is simply a call to evaluate our relationships within our various circles, and in particular, within the church. Do you find yourself staying within a small circle of relationships within the church? Women's Bible Study is a wonderful way to move toward others in love. As we meet together this year, let's be intentional to allow our relationships to exist beyond Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning. But let's not stop there! Let's look for opportunities to expand our small circles - try a new ministry, sit in a different

row on Sunday morning, invite someone new to join your home group, have lunch with someone of a different generation. Let's look around our church, and ask the Lord to show us what it looks like to move toward ALL the saints in love.

I want to share an example of this from my own life. When I was 23 years old, I decided to return to church after a season of not attending. I visited several different churches near my apartment, and on Palm Sunday, went to Media Presbyterian Church. The people there were so warm and friendly, I kept attending the church because of how genuinely welcomed I felt. Later that spring, as I greeted the pastor after service, he said, "There's a mission trip to NC coming up. I think you'd really enjoy it." I went on the mission trip, and while there, I experienced the love of Jesus so powerfully through the people that I was serving alongside, that my heart was transformed. I mark that trip as the beginning of my relationship with my Savior. I believe that the reason I can stand here before you as a follower of Jesus 29 years later, is that the church continued to move toward me in love. As a young single woman, I was embraced by a home group made up mostly of couples who were old enough to be my parents. I was invited to a young adult fellowship, where we studied the bible and sang worship songs together. I was mentored by an older woman who saw me as a spiritual daughter. I was counseled by my pastor when I went through a dark season. The church moved toward me when I was a visitor in the back pew, and they continued to move toward me as I began my walk with the Lord, discipling me as a new believer and encouraging my continued growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ for many years. They nurtured my mind AND my heart. And that is very much what Paul is describing

here. Can I let you in on a little secret? Even now, I still need the fellowship, encouragement and accountability of being in the community of Christ. As Christians, we don't outgrow our need for one another. It doesn't matter if you've been walking with Jesus for a year, a decade, or a lifetime. We are created for community, and we need one another. Spiritual maturity doesn't mean you're immune from discouragement, fear, or hardship. In fact, sometimes spiritual maturity places a believer in the sights of the enemy. There is not one of us who can walk the path of God's purposes on our own. If you are not in a hard season, you have either just come through one, or you are facing one ahead of you. None of us is immune. One important way we can support one another as we prepare for and endure those seasons is to pray for one another. But it's not just in the difficult seasons that we need one another. We need to nurture our spiritual growth in the seasons of flourishing, too. It is the roots we establish in those seasons that sustain us through the spiritual winters. **Colossians 2:6&7** reminds us, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding with thanksgiving." As our roots of faith strengthen, we will also see more of the spiritual fruit of thanksgiving.

In verse 16, Paul writes, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." We need to be praying for our church, little c, and for THE Church, big C. Our prayers for one another are what Paul Miller refers to as the "powertrain" of the church in his book, "The Praying Church". He observes that the church makes Jesus come alive in our midst through the power of prayer. Miller teaches that "By opening up to each other (in prayer) we're not just loving the people we are praying

for, we're also loving the people we are praying with." In his commentary on Ephesians, Richard Coekin notes that, "prayer is about maintaining our relationship with our heavenly Father. He wants us to learn to care more about our brothers and sisters than ourselves. This is why the Lord's prayer is a plural prayer, "OUR Father who art in heaven... give US this day OUR daily bread." Jesus expected us to pray both for and with one another as the church.

So what should our prayers for one another look like? Let's look at the next few verses for some guidance. In verse 17, Paul prays **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."** Paul says, I want you to grow in knowledge... knowledge comes from reading your bible and listening to sound teaching, and wrestling through our questions and doubts with other believers. As we do these things, we can pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal Himself to us, equipping us with wisdom and an understanding of His marvelous will, that we may grow in our knowledge not just ABOUT Him, but also in our knowledge **OF HIM**.

1Corinthians 2:10-13 says, "The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 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*."

Richard Coekin says, "The greatest blessing that anyone can experience is to know God, and to know Him better every day. God is the source of the deepest

satisfaction and joy to His adopted children. **Let us pray for each other not just to be happy, but to know God better.**" That is Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus, and for all who believe. Notice he's not praying for better circumstances or better health. He's not praying for world peace, or an end to suffering, or for material blessings. Although all of those things are worth praying for! But what is foremost on Paul's mind as he prays for the church is that they, that WE, would know God the Father more completely, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus prayed this prayer for us, too. **John 17** contains a prayer known as "the High Priestly Prayer." In this prayer, Jesus says, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world... I am praying for them. I am praying for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them... keep them in your name... that they may be one, even as we are one... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, **just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us.**"

When I read this, it struck me that I often pray for Jesus to be **with** people. I ask, Lord, be with this person who is starting a new job, or be with this person who is going into surgery, or be with my child as they go off to school or work or get into a car with friends... and there's nothing wrong with that! But I read these prayers in scripture, and thought... I need to pray, "Lord be **WITHIN** them, within ME. Give us a desire to know you more and more, and to receive the wisdom and revelation of your Spirit. Transform our hearts with your love, filling them to overflowing, so that we make you known to others by our love." As Jesus taught the disciples in **John**

13:35, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Now, I feel like we could easily just say, "Amen" and end right here, but we **really** don't want to miss what comes next! Verse 18 describes what Paul prays will be evident as the Spirit works in the hearts of the church. Paul says, "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened..." He emphasizes that any knowledge we have of who God is, any understanding we have of His Word, any ability we have to apply what we believe to our daily lives, it is all the result of the Holy Spirit opening the eyes of our hearts and revealing His truth to us. We can read scripture and listen to sermons and study doctrine, but we have no power in and of ourselves to truly understand what it means to be a part of the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes, shedding light in the darkness, that we may grow in our understanding of who we are in Christ.

As a result of the Spirit's work of enlightenment in our hearts, Paul specifically prays for three things he wants the church to know intellectually and experientially.

These **Three Great Truths** are found in verses 18 and 19. They are:

1. **The hope of His calling**
2. **The riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints**
3. **The immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe.**

First, what is "the hope to which he has called you"? **1Timothy 1:1** says, "Christ is our hope." **Titus 2:13** says our hope is "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ". **1Peter 1:3&4** says we are "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is

imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you." Richard Coekin puts it this way, "God has called us to the certain future of eternal life, an incorruptible righteousness, a new creation, heaven, and God's glory - the kingdom of the risen Christ." That is our hope!

John Stott explains that the hope of our calling points back to the beginning of our Christian life, and our 2nd Great Truth, "the riches of His glorious inheritance" points on to the end of our Christian life, to the final inheritance of which the Holy Spirit is the guarantee. Stott says, "God's children are God's heirs, in fact fellow heirs with Christ and one day by his grace, the inheritance will be ours."

The theme of inheritance runs throughout the scriptures. In **Exodus 19:4&5**, God said to Israel, "I have brought you on eagle's wings to myself and **you are my inheritance.**" In Christ, the church has become His people, His inheritance. So what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints? As simply stated in the ESV study bible, it is God enjoying forever the people He has saved, and therefore, it must also be God's people forever enjoying Him. The inheritance of Jesus, which is every blessing of unity with the Father and the Spirit, now also belongs to those who are in Him. The unimaginable splendor of abiding in His glory for all of eternity is ours. We are co-heirs with Christ. We are not slaves, working for God in hopes of receiving a wage. No, we are His children, receiving all that belongs to the Father, who tells us in His Word that the way He enjoys these glorious riches is by sharing them with us. Tim Keller illustrates this with the example of a trust fund. When a child is given a trust fund, they have received an inheritance, it is all theirs. However, they don't receive full access to everything in the trust fund until they reach a

certain age. This is not a perfect illustration, but it gives a picture of how our inheritance in Christ works. The inheritance is ours, today, all of it. However, the blessings we experience are like those little distributions a child gets from their trust fund. They're glimpses of what is to come when we are at home in the glorious Kingdom of God.

John Mitchell expounds on this by pointing us back to John 17. He says, "in **John 17:24** Jesus prays, 'Father, I will that all those whom thou has given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory'. So this is where you and I come in; you and I are going to share in His glory. For example, Paul says in **Romans 8:18**, 'I reckon the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed **in us**.' We are the Father's gift to the Son. This is the purpose of God - His riches and the place of His riches in His saints. Mitchell concludes by saying, 'You remember how Jesus put us in the Father's hand to be kept. Words of mine fail to begin to present to you this amazing thing, that **you are a peculiar treasure to God**.'

Sisters, I want to pause here to speak to the hearts in the room that are struggling with feeling worthless. To anyone who has felt like you're not enough. To anyone who has felt like you have no value in this world. I want you to hear this: the God of the universe, who created the world and the stars and the depths of the ocean, who paints the sky at sunset and gives breath to a newborn's cry... this God looks at you and says, here is my cherished possession, my glorious inheritance, my precious treasure, worth more than anything else in all of eternity.

Now the third of the great truths: The immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe. Let's go back to John Stott for a recap. Stott says, "If God's call looks back to the beginning of our Christian life, and God's inheritance looks on to the end, then surely God's power spans the interim period between."



Our Pastor, Anthony Gammage taught this passage in 2023. In his message, Anthony observed that the word, "power" can have a negative connotation in our culture. But God's power is unlike the power we see in our culture, which is so often abused and misappropriated. God's power is nothing like that. All power belongs to God, and He has given it to us as stewards. His power is perfectly demonstrated in Jesus, His Son. In his sermon, Anthony quoted Diane Langberg, a Christian psychologist, who explains, "Jesus uses His power to protect, to expose [evil], and to restore dignity. He calls His people to be in the world, using our power under His authority, displaying His character by speaking truth, shedding light and tending and protecting the vulnerable."

One way Jesus used His power during His earthly ministry was by healing. He gave sight to the blind, restored the leper, healed fevers. I especially love the story of the woman with the issue of bleeding. Listen to her story as recorded in **Luke 8:**

As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and

touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

The woman's faith enables her to reach out and receive the healing power of Jesus. Faith is the starting point. The power of Jesus healed this woman, but look at what happens next. Jesus responds to her faith by turning toward her and then, He calls her Daughter. He restores her physically and He restores her relationally to Himself and to the community which had for 12 years ostracized her as "unclean". When we reach for Jesus in faith, He turns toward us in the power of the Holy Spirit, eager to restore us to relationship with Himself and with the church.

Sisters, where do you need the healing power of Jesus? What would it look like for you to reach out to touch Jesus today? Whatever it is you need, know that you have a loving Savior who turns toward you when you reach for Him.

Bryan Chapell notes that the Ephesians, in their historical context, were surrounded by pagan notions of cultic and magical power. Paul 's prayer for the church is that we would see that the power of God isn't something magical or something that can be conjured. Verse 20 tells us that God's power - this power that is in the world,

acting on behalf of the church - is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

It is this same power that, through the Holy Spirit, exists in us, the body of Christ.

Chapell says, "The power that is at work on our behalf is resurrection power, able to overcome sin and death. For those once dead in sin, new life is possible..."

Paul further describes this power in the remaining verses of this chapter, verses 21-23: Paul writes, "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, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

What is "the fullness of him who fills all in all"? John Stott writes, "As His glory filled the Jerusalem temple, so today Jesus who is the glory of God fills the church by His Spirit."

The Holy Spirit fills the church, which exists in a world governed by the rule, authority, power and dominion of Christ, the Son. Bryan Chapell explains, "The power that is at work on our behalf is also the sovereign power that places our Savior and Advocate above all rulers and forces of this world... from political rule to physical might to spiritual forces, Paul says that Jesus is greater than them all... The power of Christ is expressed FOR THE CHURCH of which you and I are a part. He who created all things and who is the head of all things is ordering all things in the interest of the church. The power of God is present in the world through the church, and this power is working in the world for the church. The church is the primary instrument of the glory of Christ in this earth."

As Jesus said in **Matthew 28:18**, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." **Philippians 2:9&10** says, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." In **Revelation 5:11-13**, John describes how this will look in glory: "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!' And I heard **every creature** in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

Richard Coekin expounds on the authority of Jesus this way,

"Our Savior is enthroned far above all the satanic powers and magical demons of which Ephesian culture was so fearful - indeed, far above every name and position imaginable. So no one can get remotely close to taking us away from our Savior."

The 8th chapter of **Romans** is a great place to turn as we meditate upon the synchronicity of God's power, the authority of Jesus, and the everlasting assurance of His work for our good and His glory. Beginning at verse **31**, Paul writes, "If God is for us, who can be against us?... v. 35, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who

loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jackie Hill Perry says, "Paul reminded {the Ephesians} (and us!): Jesus is on His throne! He reigns with power and dominion in this age and in the one to come. Everything is subject to Him. This knowledge gives us needed hope as we live our daily lives." In **Matthew 25**, Jesus describes the final judgment saying, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me....Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me."

The truth of Jesus on the throne means that every act of kindness, every word of grace, every offer of mercy matters in the Kingdom of God. We have a God who came to show us how to live as servants, humble and thankful, pointing one another to the truth of our eternal home, prepared for us before time itself. Jesus on His throne means that we don't have to control everything and everyone in our lives. We can release our grip on all those things that weigh us down because we

have a God who holds it all in His hands, and who moves in power for our good, and His glory.

Let's conclude by looking back at the three great truths.

What is our hope? Our hope is our call to faith, our salvation sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit, found in our Savior, Jesus Christ, secured once and for all on the cross. If you have any questions about this hope, or if you would like to learn more about how to invite Jesus to be your Savior, please don't hesitate to talk to me, your small group leader, or any of the women's ministry leaders. We are so glad you are here, and we would love to walk with you as you seek to grow in your knowledge of who Jesus is, and who you are in Him.

What are the riches of our inheritance? The promise that we, His treasured people, will live in the eternal enjoyment of His glorious presence. We are kept as His own, and nothing can take that away from us.

What is the immeasurable greatness of his power? It is a power that has overcome death, a power that holds all of creation together, and that moves constantly and intentionally on our behalf, for the fulfillment of God's kingdom purposes.

Let's commit to pray together for ourselves, our church, and the church throughout the world, that we may have the eyes of our hearts enlightened, and look forward together to the glorious day when Jesus returns and all of creation worships together, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever, Amen." Amen? Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the hope we have in Jesus. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of our hearts. I pray for my sisters here today, that you

will nurture their relationship with you through their study of Your word, their conversations and through their prayers. Thank you for this time together. May we grow in our ability to love one another and glorify You as we live in the power of the resurrection. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.