

Ephesians 1:15-23

Three Things to Pray For

Introduction: It is hard to be a faithful Christian in a rich country that is apathetic or hostile towards God. That is why we need to pray for God's help. In Ephesians 1:15 to 23 Paul tells us what he prays for when he thinks of the churches under his care.

This beautiful and complex prayer can be summarized under three headings: that they will grow wiser by getting to know God better; that they will have a deeper understanding of what awaits them in heaven; and that they will discover the enormous potential of a life that falls captive to God.

1 Growing Wiser by getting to know God better.

In verse 17 Paul prays *that the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation so that you may know him better*; in other words, that they may become wiser in order to live for him.

This is more than natural wisdom which we sometimes call 'common sense' or even the ability to learn from our mistakes. It relates to *spiritual* wisdom; wisdom that comes from knowing God. The reference in verse 17 to 'revelation' means God's revelation in the gospel. This revelation is found in the Scriptures alone. Another way of putting it is to so understand God's word that we start to think and live more and more the way *he* wants us to.

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Notice the link between 'wisdom' and *knowing* God better. You may know *about* God but that is not the same as knowing him personally. That is only possible as we put our faith in Jesus as our saviour and Lord. Having begun our journey like that, Paul prays that we will get to know him better by reading and reflecting on his word, which alone is the source of true knowledge about him.

As we do that, we need also to pray, verse 18, 'that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened', in particular, about what the future holds for us. This brings us to the second part of Paul's prayer.

2 Understanding more deeply what awaits us in heaven.

In verse 18 Paul *prays that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.*

This is referring to our understanding of the true meaning and goal of life, which is not about this world, but what awaits us in heaven. We tend not to think about this enough. That is why Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened so that we will know about these things.

In other words, so that we might be more and more oriented to eternity and to what God has in store for us, what he calls 'our glorious inheritance'. Well, what is it? In Colossians 1:5 Paul refers to the 'hope laid up in heaven'. In Titus 1:2 he equates this to eternal life and in Titus 2:13 he says it is 'the appearing of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ'.

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Our hope is the return of Jesus and the glorious inheritance laid up for us in heaven. Essentially, this inheritance is the *fellowship* we will have with him in heaven and with all his people, verse 18, 'the saints'. Our hearts will be enlightened about this as God's Spirit takes the teaching on this in Scripture and uses it to fill our hearts with joy, hope and anticipation.

Why does Paul pray that we should be focused on the future? It is because the strength of our Christian commitment is directly related to the clarity of our heavenly perspective. If we allow that to determine our values, our decisions, our priorities and our standards in *this* world, we will have a different attitude to those who think and live as if *this* life is all there is. Remember the parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21.

It is hard to have this eternal focus because this life and world can be so attractive and difficulties can sometimes be so great. We forget that everything in this world is destined to pass away. That is why Paul prays that Christians will have the 'eyes of their hearts enlightened so that they will *know* the hope (their destiny if you will) which is stored up for us in heaven.

We need to pray for this enlightenment also because, apart from God's Spirit at work in us, we will forget or devalue what life, and our ultimate inheritance is all about. Without this, our present day lives will be lacking in joy and peace. Still, while we are still here we also need God's power to live for him. This is the focus of the last part of Paul's prayer.

3 Discovering the enormous potential of a life that falls captive to God through faith.

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Paul prays in verse 19 that we '*will know his incomparably great power for us who believe*'. This is all about the power of God in the life of the believer, that is to say, the power to live godly and useful lives. Paul says that this is the same power that operated to raise Jesus from the dead and then seated him at God's right hand in the heavenly realms, as verse 20 says.

What Paul wants is for *that* power to operate in *us*. For what purpose? Not to indulge our fancies or to feed our egos. No, he wants it so that it will help us to submit in grateful dependence on him as we seek to live godly lives.

Exactly what that life will look like is spelt out in detail in chapters 4, 5 and 6. For example, Chapter 4 says, '*as a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*'. That is so hard to do, and that is exactly why we need God's spiritual power to help us to do it.

We should pray for this power to be given to us and we should all encourage one another as we strive to be people who are; growing wiser by getting to know God better, deepening our understanding of what awaits us in the heavenly realm and discovering the power to live lives worthy of our calling.