

# Open the Eyes of our Hearts, Lord

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[ 0 : 00 ] What do you hope for when you pray? What do you hope that your prayers will do?

What will change? Or to put it a little bit differently, how do we measure the success of our prayers? When do you feel heard by God?

What do you hope for when you pray? Amen. This morning, we are coming finally to Paul's prayer report in his letter to the Ephesian church, where he tells them how he prays for them.

Normally, in his letters, that's the first thing he does, but in this letter, we saw last week, he spent the first 14 verses simply praising God for his blessing.

And not only that God is the giver of blessing, as if he's at the tap out of which water flows, but that he has blessed his church, that he has given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places to his people.

[ 1 : 13 ] He has opened the taps of heaven, and he has turned on the showers of his blessing and emptied them. And last time, Ben took us through blessing after blessing in those verses, we saw that the triune God really has nothing left to give us now that he already has in Christ.

The Father's eternal love, choosing us before the beginning of the world, planning our adoption before the beginning of time.

The Son's redeeming us by his blood poured out on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. The Spirit's giving us faith to believe, guaranteeing our future inheritance in the new creation, sealing us as God's own.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the triune God has blessed his church. And why did he do that? Here's the best bit. Because he wanted to.

Because he wanted to. Why did God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do that? Paul simply says he did it according to the counsel of his own will. Because he wanted to, he loved you, and saved you, and sealed you, and all to the praise of his glorious grace, and all heading towards the great purpose for the end of time to unite heaven and earth in his Son, Jesus, everything back in its proper place.

[ 2 : 58 ] That's what God wants to do. And so right now, he has emptied all the treasures of blessing, all the riches of heaven into the church, in and through Jesus.

And so as Paul begins praying, you perhaps were asking that question that we've all asked at birthdays and Christmases. What do you give the person who already has everything?

What do you pray for the church that already has everything that God has to give? What can Paul possibly pray for the church that has every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places?

What do they need now? What do we need now? Well, the answer this morning we're going to see is this. The prayer that Paul prays for the church is not that God would give them more, but that they would know more of what God has given.

Not that God would give them more, but that they would know more of what God has given. And the challenge for us is, how can we make his prayer our prayer for ourselves and our church family?

[ 4 : 14 ] Let's see. Firstly, then, remember that you might pray. Now, that's not the same as remember to pray, although that might be a timely reminder for some of us.

But it's really asking, what prompts us to pray for ourselves, for each other? Just have a look at what prompts Paul to pray in verse 15.

So, he begins, for this reason. What reason? So, back to verses 1 to 14, right? Because they've got God's total spiritual blessing in Christ.

And, he says, because I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints.

So, because of the evidence or the fruit of God's blessing in the life of their church, for those reasons, verse 16, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

So, what's Paul remembering? What's prompting him? He's looking back, isn't he, on what God has done for them and who they are now in Christ.

[ 5 : 25 ] And when he remembers that, he cannot stop giving thanks and praying for them. Now, I don't know if you do this. Sometimes I use that word remember as a shorthand for saying, I'm praying for you, remembering you today.

But I was challenged by these verses during the week to think, when do I say that? When do I pray for people and when do I tell people that I'm praying for them?

Think, when was the last time you told someone you were praying for them? And what prompted you to do that? For me, normally, it's when something's going wrong, right?

If someone's having a difficult time or hasn't been in church much, then the natural thing to do is to pray for them and to let them know and be in touch, which is fine and we should, but that's not what Paul says.

In fact, he says the opposite, doesn't he? Verse 15 does not say, for this reason, because I heard of the difficult time you were having and the doubts that plague you and your struggle to belong to the church because I'm concerned for you.

[ 6 : 40 ] I remember you in my prayers, though that would be good. Verse 15 says, for this reason, because I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks to you, remembering you in all my prayers.

Do you see the difference? Just to rub it in a little bit, okay, imagine how weird it would sound if you were talking to somebody after church and you said, you know, my faith's really growing this year. I'm really enjoying church. I really, I can't wait to have people over for life group or when it's my turn to serve. And the person you're talking to said, I'll pray for you.

Right, brothers and sisters, I dare you to try that. I dare you. No, no, you misheard me. I was saying how I love the Lord Jesus and I love his people.

And yes, as Paul, I know. And because I heard of your faith in Christ and your love for all the saints, I can't stop praying for you. Who's the next person you're going to tell that you're praying for them?

[ 7 : 57 ] And why? Who are they to ye? What defines them as a person? Is it their suffering?

Or is it who they are now in Christ? What do you remember them for? When? Why should we pray for each other?

Friends, remember. Remember that what defines your brothers and sisters in the church, what defines ye if you are in Christ, is that we are loved, chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, sealed forever by God.

And that that is reason enough to give thanks and to pray for each other. It's a permanent reason to pray. Lots of us find it hard to pray.

Maybe especially, actually, when there's not something specific for us to pray for. It's much easier in a way, isn't it, when there is something that's going wrong. But what about when there's not?

[ 9 : 04 ] How do we pray? Well, I wonder if it would come easier if you had someone in mind or your family or your life group or your church, and you just took time to read through Ephesians 1, verses 3 to 14, but put their names in.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed Jonathan in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose him before the foundation of the world, that he should be holy and blameless before him.

In love, you predestined him for adoption as a son through Jesus Christ. How much easier would it come when we remember what God has done for us, each of us, and all of us together in Christ, and therefore give thanks and pray for our brothers and sisters, for ourselves.

Try it this week. See what God does in our hearts and our church family when we pray for each other like that. Remember that you might pray. But then, what do we pray for each other?

Well, a second point then. Paul says pray that we might know pray that we might know. See that in verse 17? Remembering you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

[ 10 : 36 ] Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know. What do you get the person who's already got everything? Or what's the best thing that a person like that could get?

That they would know the true value of what they've got. Brothers and sisters, God has nothing left to give us in this present age than he has already given us in Christ.

We already have it all. And so, Paul prays for the church that we would know the true value of what is ours already in Christ. I had a story a while back about a theater.

They were having a clear out and buried under piles of old sets and props and stage equipment was this really old, like, super beaten up piano. Like, totally out of tune.

Cannot be played. And so, they got someone into it to have a look at it and see if they could just shift it for a few quid. And the guy came, but after he'd finished inspecting it, he said, I'm sorry, I can't buy this from you.

[ 11 : 50 ] And they said, you know, I know it's seen better days, but can you not just take it off our hands? We'll give it to you for nothing. And he said, no, you don't understand.

I cannot buy this from you because it is priceless. And he took them to the piano, he opened the lid and he pointed to a place inside the piano where there was something scribbled in pencil inside on the wood.

It was the signature of the maker, Heinrich Steinway, who lived in the 1800s and was famous as the world's best piano maker. They had no idea that they were possessors of an incredibly rare original Steinway piano.

It had long been forgotten about, long been buried. They were going to give it away for nothing, yet it was incalculably valuable, priceless.

But they needed someone with eyes to see to point that out to them. And friends, that's what Paul's praying here. For the church, we have something better than an old piano. We have the one true living triune God as our God.

[ 13 : 01 ] And Paul prays that a person who knows that better than anyone, namely God himself, God the Holy Spirit, would point that out to us, that God would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

And notice that he's not talking here, is he, about people who are not already Christians. He's not talking about conversion. He's talking about people of whom verses 1 to 16 are true.

They have God. We have him. But do we know he's ours? We have him, but do we know what he's worth? They, and I take it we, still need his priceless worth and the incalculable value of his blessings to be pointed out to our hearts repeatedly by the Holy Spirit.

We need eyes to see what can't be seen. That is, the eyes of our hearts to be opened that we might perceive him with the eyes of faith. This isn't intellectual knowledge, is it?

He's not saying so that you might read loads of books, though that is a good thing to do. It's God revealing himself to us by his spirit. It is a personal knowledge.

[ 14 : 22 ] And that being not a one-time thing, but a sight that we need to see again and again a revelation that we need over and over, a communion with him on repeat.

I wonder, when was the last time you prayed for yourself or for somebody else? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are ours. So come, reveal yourself to us that we might know more of you.

Open the eyes of our hearts that we might know you better. Is that how we measure the success of our prayers? As God opens himself up to us, Paul prays that the church would know or would grasp three things in particular which are there on your sheet.

Here are three specific ways that we can pray for each other all the time to grow in our knowledge of God. Here we go. Firstly, verse 18, he prays that you might know what is the hope to which he's called you.

What is the hope to which he's called you? He's heard of their faith in Jesus and their love for the saints, but he prays for their hope. It's that familiar triad of Christian faith that for Paul marks out a true, genuine church, faith, hope, and love.

[ 15 : 45 ] And Paul prays that they would own and grasp the hope to which God has called them. And we're not told why hope, but we know the church in Ephesus is overshadowed by a hostile city and a pagan temple, the temple of Artemis.

And it's likely that the Christians were losing out because they were no longer part of their world in the same way. So to try to kind of translate that into our context, though it doesn't quite fit, imagine it was normal for business deals to be done in strip clubs, or it was normal for birthday parties to be held in Masonic lodges.

And we're getting closer to understanding what it was like for these Christians not to go to the temple of Artemis. Saying no to Artemis was saying no to opportunity, networking, advancement, saying no to a future that looked really bright in Ephesus.

Their neighbors, their families, and friends could see with the eyes of their faces the greatness of Artemis and what a privilege it was to be in Ephesian, whereas the church needs the eyes of her heart opened to see the glory of the risen and reigning Christ and the eternal privilege it is to be his and the hope that is theirs in him.

And so Paul prays that they would know not only that they have everything now but that there is more to come in the future, in the coming age.

[ 17 : 28 ] And that that more to come is not a conditional offer like you might have got from uni, if you get the right grades then you're in, or a bonus at work if the company does well enough then you'll get a big bonus at the end.

No, that more to come he says is an inheritance. God has written his adopted children into his will. His riches are ours because we are his.

Paul said back in verse 11 that in Christ we have already obtained an inheritance. And verse 14 that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

the inheritance is ours. That future is secure. But like children wait for an inheritance, so we wait for that future hope and glory to be fully paid into our accounts.

I wonder, brothers and sisters, what hope, what future are you looking forward to? is it sharing in the fickle wealth and the unreliable comfort of this world only?

[ 18 : 50 ] Are we living for a future that we can see and touch and feel? Don't we need the eyes of our hearts to be open, the fresh, to know that sure and certain hope to which we have been called?

Pray then, pray, pray for yourself, pray for the person sitting next to you, pray for us as a church that we would grasp that unseen but certain hope in our hearts, the inheritance and the future that is ours in Christ and live our lives living for that future and looking forward to that future and that we would know what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, verse 18.

We've prayed that we would be sure of our inheritance, so what's this inheritance doing, right? Well, it's his inheritance in us, do you see that?

His inheritance in the saints, he is ours but brothers and sisters, we are his and we've been reminded just now an inheritance is something for us to look forward to.

So what does it mean that we are God's inheritance? In what way are we his? Are we like his kind of left luggage that he just kind of dumps at the station while he goes off to work?

[ 20 : 21 ] Or like, you know, the stuff in his spare room that just kind of builds up and he forgets about it and shuts the door because he just doesn't have time to sort through it? No. In what way are we his?

His inheritance? Listen to how he describes us. Exodus 19, out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Out of everything I own, says God, everything in all creation and the universe and the cosmos, my people are my treasure.

That is what I value. Or we heard last week from Deuteronomy 7, the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

But it was because the Lord loved you. You were not the obvious choice, he says. There were better options than you. That was super obvious in Ephesus, they were not the brightest, the best.

[ 21 : 31 ] But he set his affection on you because he loves you. The church is God's inheritance. The church is what God has chosen to spend the rest of eternity with.

And if I can say it like this, that is what he is looking forward to. Having the church dwell with him and there not be anything coming between us or to separate us again.

The church is like his premium saver account. It's his retirement plan. It's his investment portfolio. It's growing all the time. He's pouring his wealth into it and guess what?

He can't wait for it to come to maturity. That is his plan for the fullness of time. time. Because when it does, he will have what he's been saving for since before the beginning of time, a people for his own.

And so Paul says and prays that we would have our hearts opened to grasp what? The value of the church to God. That what we can't see with our physical sight, our incalculable worth to him.

[ 22 : 50 ] We are his inheritance. Paul's prayer is that we would treasure and love the church like God treasures and loves his church. That we would see the church through his eyes, beautiful,

radiant, precious, priceless.

That for which his son gave his priceless blood as a ransom to buy back for him. Brothers and sisters, how do we know that God is answering our prayers?

Well, one way we know is that we are growing in appreciation of God's family and its members, that we would know the inheritance that he has in us.

And thirdly, Paul prays that we would know the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe. And that is in contrast with those who don't believe.

believe. Remember the cry in Ephesus, in Acts, do you remember the crowd's chant on the day of the riot, great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

[ 23 : 57 ] For two hours, look at her immeasurable greatness, look at the power that she has over our culture and economy and lives in our great city. Hence Paul's prayer, that the church would know what is the immeasurable greatness of Christ's power towards us who believe.

Who is backed by real power in the world? Who are the power players? Who are the powerful groups? The church in this country has been through decades of humiliation.

Once it had power, people cared what the church said. A few generations later, people don't know what the church is or what Christians believe. believe. We are not the influencers anymore.

So where is the church's strength? We're regularly told, aren't we, at least I see articles and polls all the time saying the church will be gone in X number of years.

Look at the numbers, look at the social attitude surveys, the census says that people of no religion have overtaken Christianity. We need the eyes of our hearts to be open, don't we, to see what the world can't see, that in fact, the church is the strongest, most enduring, most permanent body of people on the planet.

[ 25 : 22 ] Generations come and go, social attitudes change, the church will still be here because we are backed by the infinite and eternal power of God. I wonder, brothers and sisters, do we know the greatness of his power towards us who believe?

pray that we would, pray that we would not see power and influence in this message or in that organization and say, that's where the world's going and the church needs to get on board, but rather see that power and greatness lie with God and he backs the church's life and witness into eternity, the greatness of his power towards us who believe.

three things then that I think we rarely pray for ourselves or for each other, for our church, but Paul says are the prayers that he prays for us, the church, that we would know the true worth of what we have already now in Christ, the hope, the value, the power, ultimately the God who is ours in Christ. brothers and sisters, let's own these prayers, take them as yours and see what God will do in our hearts and in our church as we pray like this through each other.

Remember that you might pray, pray that we might know and as we finish, know that our hearts might be lifted. Paul flies off the end of his prayer, doesn't he, into this amazing, this stunning description of God's power towards us in verses 20 to 23.

[ 27 : 07 ] His power towards us who believe, he says, is 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 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.

These words lift our hearts, don't they, to the power and greatness of the risen and reigning Christ. How great is this? Not only resurrection power, life from the dead power, yes, that power is a power that the world can't replicate, only God raises the dead, it's that power at work in us, but more than that, it's ascension power, the power by which he raised Christ and seated him at his right hand in heaven on a throne of power.

And if the world can't replicate his power, well, Paul says nothing in existence can challenge his power. power, he is far above, not even close, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion. Those are spiritual forces, opposition to the church, to his people, to God and to Christ, things we cannot see but that are at work in our world, but he is far above them and they are under his feet and there is no contest.

And he is above every name that is named, that is, every false god of every false religion that every false worshiper might call upon, including the power that lies behind the cult of Artemis and Ephesus.

[ 28 : 54 ] And not only in this age, but also in the one to come, this is a forever throne. His reign will never end, he will never be challenged, and his rule will never come to a close.

And guess what, says Paul? God seated Jesus in the place of supreme power with all things under his feet, head over all, and gave him to the church.

So can you get your heart around this? Can we grasp this? That the one who commands legions of angels, angels, and galaxies of stars, and has crushed the head of the serpent, and bound his demons in chains of gloomy darkness, who rules over nations and their leaders, bends all his might, uses all his energy, gives all his thought to blessing us.

his church, his church, his people, his body. Brothers and sisters, he rules over all things, seen and unseen, for me and ye.

Friends, wouldn't you love to know him? And to grasp what we've been given in him, and to know him more, that the eyes of our hearts would be opened and lifted to these heavenly heights, that we would see him where he is, in all his power and majesty and radiance, and in that place of supreme power, so that we would know his power towards me and ye, to know that hope and the inheritance that he's given us.

[ 30 : 47 ] then won't you pray? Won't you pray and pray for ye? Won't you pray for your brothers and sisters and for us as a church, that God would give us his spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, that we would know him and know him more?

Pray it daily for yourself, pray it often for others, pray it always for your church. Not that he would give us more, but that we would know more of what he has given us.

Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Let's pray that together.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we are awed by ye.

We fall before ye. You are head over all things. And even now, you sustain the universe by the word of your power, and yet you draw near to us, and you draw us near to ye.

[ 32 : 07 ] Living God, how we thank you that in him you have blessed us in every way. We lack nothing, and we do not want, but we confess how little we know of ye, and how little we grasp the fullness of your blessing that you have given us in Jesus.

Father, we confess the weakness of our prayers. Lord, we confess that we have looked for more when we should have been looking to know more of what you have given us.

So, Father, we do pray now now for our church, for each other, that you would give us your spirit of revelation to know ye, that the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of our hearts to see you more and more, that we would treasure your every blessing, or that none would slip through our fingers or the fingers of our hearts, but that we would grasp them with faith, that we would know what it is to be your children and to live in this world with a hope that cannot fail, to be your treasured possession in all the world, and to know that great power that lies behind our lives and the life of your church, even the power of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Father, grant us that communion with him, that we would know him. We pray in his name.

Amen. Amen.