

# **Missional Prayer Prayers for the Church**

*Ephesians 1:15-23*

1. The person of Christ.

2. The promise of Christ.

3. The power of Christ.  
- *Ephesians 1:19-21*

4. The primacy of Christ.  
- *Colossians 1:18*

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## Missional Prayer Part 1: Praying for the Church

Back in the old days, when you checked into a hotel, the hotel door had one of these on it. Some still do use these. You hang it on the doorknob, and on one side it says, "Do Not Disturb." But, if your room is a mess and needs cleaning, you would just flip the sign around and hang it on the door. This side says, "Please clean the room as soon as possible."

This little doorhanger represents the way many of us approach the practice of prayer. Most of the time we go through our daily lives with this side of the sign toward God: Do Not Disturb. For many people, it's because they don't want God messing around in their affairs; they want to run their lives their own way without any interference from God – they'd rather not seek his input. But for many of us, it's not quite like that; for many of us, we just go about our business and many times don't even think to ask for God's involvement. Sadly, many Christians are living this less-than-effective life. They just go through their lives, running the day-to-day business, and, even if not intentionally, at least by their behavior, they are holding this sign on the door of their lives: Do Not Disturb.

That is, until some type of tragedy or difficulty strikes or a dilemma hits, or we've made an absolute mess of our lives. Then we hold out this side: "Maid: please clean the room." We ask God, like a maid, to come in and clean up the mess we've made. If we are fortunate, he will do it while we are out, so we never really even see him. And once He does clean up our mess, which He often does because he loves us so much, once the mess is cleaned up and the crisis is over, what do we do? We hang out this side again: Do Not Disturb.

We are starting this series on missional prayer because I believe God is calling our church to greater effectiveness in the Kingdom of God, and that means he is calling us to a *deeper* culture of prayer. Now, don't get me wrong – we do an excellent job of praying for each other's needs. When there are health issues, personal crises, or deep needs, we as a church are very, very good at praying for each other when we ask the church to do so. You are a wonderfully praying church. But there is much, much more to prayer than just that.

What do your prayers say about you? Let me put it this way: a person's use of money will say a lot about that person, won't it? If I could look at your spending, it would tell me what your priorities are. It would tell me how impulsive you are on the one hand, or on the other, it would tell me how disciplined you are. It would tell me how much vision you have for the future – how much you are planning for the future. Right? In the same way, our prayers reveal a lot about ourselves. What are the things we often pray for? "Lord, bless this food." "Lord, be with so and so." "Lord, I need..."

I can really connect with what one author and pastor, Craig Groeschel wrote in his book, "Dangerous Prayers" – "My prayers were lame. Maybe you can relate. It's not that you don't believe in prayer. You do. But you're stuck in a rut. You pray about the same

struggles and the same requests. In the same way. At the same time. If you even try to pray at all. Like me, you probably know you should pray more. And with more passion. More faith. You want to talk to God and to listen to him, to share an intimate conversation like you would with your spouse or best friend. You really want to but aren't sure how. So your prayers remain safe. Flat. Dull. Predictable. Stale. Boring."<sup>1</sup> "But none of those prayers reflect the life Jesus came to give us. Instead, he called us to leave everything to follow him...And that's why we can't settle for simply asking God to bless our food or 'be with us today.' Are you ready for more? Are you sick of playing it safe? Are you ready to pray daring, faith-filled, God-honoring, life-changing, world-transforming prayers?"<sup>2</sup>

That's what this series is about, folks. It's time for some change. We need to pray culture-changing prayers. And, at the end of this series on Wednesday, February 2, we are going to have the first of what will be monthly Wednesday evenings of prayer. We will have dinners on the first Wednesdays of the month, and then we will have a time of focused, missional prayer together. Keep an eye out for that, because we'll get to put into practice what we will learn in this series together.

God has great things that he wants to do through us to reach people for Christ, and it's time. If the pandemic told us anything (and it told us a lot!), it's that we can't play it safe with church anymore. We are here for the mission of the Kingdom of God. And we've got to start praying that way. More than just going about our lives without God involved, and then only turning to him when we really need help, and even beyond praying for each other's needs, we are going to learn how to really pray for the church. And in the process, the standard will be raised for us – for the kind of Christians we are to be as we realize that we must become the answer to our own prayers.

So today, I'd like to start by looking at a section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Would you stand with me please, in order to honor God's Word as it's read among his people?

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray 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 his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:15-23, niv)

This is the Word of God for the people of God! Thanks be to God! Thank you for standing – you can be seated.

Paul starts out with the basics of faith; he's saying in other words, now that you've been

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Groeschel, *Dangerous Prayers: Because Following Jesus was Never Meant to be Safe* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2020) 13

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 18, 19

saved, your life is marked by the basic characteristic of every true believer: one of those is your faith or trust in Jesus. That means that you don't have the "do not disturb" sign on the door of your life – you have a "Please come in and own the place" sign on the door. You trust Jesus in everything and for everything.

Secondly, you love the other believers around you. Paul just sort of mentions this, as if it's a given – and then gets to the business of prayer. So that's what we're going to do, too: we're going to get to the business of prayer. But let me first ask you: is what Paul said true of you? Are you famous for your faith in Christ? Is that what you are known for? When other people gossip about you (because you know they always do), what do they have to gossip about? If they have anything, it should be your faith in Christ. And beyond that, do you love the people in this room around you? In your home and neighborhood? At your work or in your classes at school?

You might be asking yourself what any of that has to do with prayer, but it has *everything* to do with it – if you want your prayers to be answered. Here's why: what did Jesus say was the greatest commandment? It's in Matthew 22:37-40, and it was this:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and the second is like it – love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-40)

In other words, love God supremely and others equally. *That is what God calls righteousness.* And that's important because in the book of James, God tells us that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (James 5:16).

Got it? Since we've established that fact, which I pray is true for you, let's move on to this passage. In these verses there are four things that Paul prays for, for the church, including us. Paul's prayer is also instruction for us on how we are to pray for the church. Four things that we want to pray for and want to be answered in us.

The first prayer is for...

## 1. The *person* of Christ.

A lot of us know all about Jesus, but how well do we know Jesus personally?

Years back when we lived in Idaho, I read the story about a ninth grader at Eagle Rock Junior High who won first prize at the Greater Idaho Falls Science Fair. In his project he urged people to sign a petition demanding strict control of or the total elimination of the chemical "dihydrogen monoxide." And for plenty of good reasons. He made his case for some of the following reasons:

1. It can cause excessive sweating and vomiting.
2. It is a major component in acid rain.
3. It can cause severe burns in its gaseous state.
4. Accidental inhalation can kill you.
5. It contributes to erosion.
6. It decreases effectiveness of automobile brakes.
7. It has been found in tumors of terminal cancer patients.

So the freshman asked 50 people if they supported a ban of the chemical. Forty-three said yes, six were undecided, and the last one? Well, only one knew that the chemical dihydrogen monoxide, was *water*: H<sub>2</sub>O.

Here's the point: we might think we know a lot, but there is always more to learn if we're going to get it right, isn't there? So when Paul prays for us, and what we want to pray for our church is, that we would grow in our understanding of and our relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice specifically what Paul prays for: the spirit of wisdom and revelation. That's the Holy Spirit, and that wisdom and revelation is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, counsel, righteousness, and power. So you cannot gain this kind of understanding of God or closeness to him without the Holy Spirit.

This knowledge of God that Paul prays for us to have, and that we want to pray for our church, means not just the knowledge *of* God, but the knowledge of him *as* God, the living and true God, and the source of all life and truth. This kind of **personal knowledge involves communion with Christ, adoration of Christ, and obedience to Christ, all out of our love for Christ.**

The original Greek word that Paul uses for knowledge means so much more than an intellectual understanding.

The word is *epignosis* – **it is knowledge that comes from experiential intimacy.** In other words, it means that you know Jesus so well because you are experiencing a deep level of actual intimacy with him. It's so, so much more than academic or theoretical or theological – it is *personal!*

Now, if you are a Christian, you've already experienced some divine illumination or revelation – there are things about God and spiritual things that you understand, that an unchurched person could never understand. But this knowledge goes much deeper than a saving knowledge.

A smaller form of this word is used in the Bible and in Bible times to describe the sexual, emotional, and relational intimacy between a husband and wife in the healthiest sense. As great as *that* kind of knowledge is, *this* knowledge of God is far deeper, far higher, far more wonderful than even *that*. Your understanding and knowledge of God will be deeper, clearer, stronger, and you will understand even greater the love, greatness, power, and purpose of God. That's why the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 that the Spirit-filled person has deep insights into the things of God.

We pray for our church to actually, intimately experience the reality of the person of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we pray for our church to have...

## 2. The ***promise*** of Christ.

Paul's prayer for us, and the missional prayer we must pray for each other, is that we would

experience all the fullness of the promise of life that Christ has given us.

First, Paul prays that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” That’s a poetic statement when you first read it, but it’s meant to be real fact. The word that is used is “kardia.” What word in English does that make you think of? Yes – cardiac, or heart. But for Paul, and for his readers at that time, it didn’t mean the physical organ that is your heart. Neither did it have romantic intentions like we might use it for. It meant something much, much more than that. For Paul and his readers, the meaning here has little to do with emotions and has everything to do with *the will*. “The heart” means the moral understanding of a person, a person’s essential inward being, their sphere of good and evil, their moral character, the place where you decide to sin and the place where you repent of sin, the place where you can have communion with God and the place where you can reject God.

So what Paul is praying for is right in line with what we talked about in the previous point – that moral and spiritual understanding and comprehension that is far more important than intellectual understanding. The opposite of this is the kind of person that Paul describes in chapter four of Ephesians when he says, “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.”

If the eyes of your will are open, or in other words, you have determined to see God in Christ, you’ve repented of your sin and follow Jesus with your will, then you will know and experience his promises for you, which Paul lists next in this passage.

Paul lists a few parts of this promise. *First*, Paul says, is the hope to which God’s called you. This hope is the sure and certain fact of eternity forever with Jesus and all the saints. It’s an objective certainty. It’s not an emotional wish; it is a fact. So we can live today in the certainty of our future. We can deal with any difficult situation, difficult people, even times of real grief, loss, and betrayal. That’s what Jesus was able to do in all that he went through for us and from us, and that’s what we can do because that certain future is a fact – we just haven’t experienced it yet.

The *second* part of the promise in Christ is the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. You might wonder what that phrase means, but it means a couple of things. One is the inheritance that is ours from God. A Christian has been adopted into the family of God, and through the death of Jesus, God allowed us to receive all that God has promised in his will. As his children, we enjoy all his resources and will one day enjoy all his riches. We’ll inherit it all. God will give us all we need in this life and bless us in many ways beyond that, and then unbelievable riches in heaven. But there is a second meaning to this phrase, “God’s inheritance in the saints.” That means that God inherits *you – us*. God inherits *West Valley Church*. God considers you to be his riches! Because of what Jesus had done for you, the day you accepted his death and resurrection and determined to follow him, God inherited YOU! God considers us as his riches!

St. Lawrence is not very well known here in the US, but he has been sculpted, painted, and crafted in bronze or stained glass more often than almost any other saint of the Christ Church. In England alone, more than 250 churches are named for him, as are six in Rome.

St. Lawrence was the Archdeacon in Rome in the early to mid 200’s – a mere hundred and a

quarter years after Paul wrote this letter. St. Lawrence was martyred in 258 AD, during the persecution of Christians that the Roman Emperor Valerian had ordered, and the story is inspiring. While he was Archdeacon, part of his leadership was to care for the treasury of the church and distribute those funds to the poor, orphaned, widowed, indigent, immigrant, and handicapped. The church didn't have much money (at least not at that time), and what little it had, it distributed to those in need.

But the prefect of Rome believed the church had great wealth and treasure, and so he demanded that Lawrence turn it all over to him. He called Lawrence into the royal court and ordered him to produce the "treasures of the church." St. Lawrence said that the church didn't have gold, jewels, or other valuables. But the prefect ignored the bishop's objection, and demanded that the riches of the church be brought to him in the morning. The bishop left the royal presence quietly.

The next day the bishop appeared at the palace doorway. He was empty handed. The emperor was enraged and furiously shouted, "I told you to bring me the treasures of the church!"

The bishop then invited the emperor to look out at the palace steps. Humbly gathered together at the great doors of the royal palace was a mass of ragged beggars, cripples, slaves, and outcasts. St. Lawrence said with a sweep of his arm, "*These* are the treasures of the church!"

For that, the bishop was roasted to death over an iron grill. But he was exactly right – YOU are the treasure of the church. We are – ragged beggars, cripples, slaves, and outcasts, all of us. God considers West Valley Church his treasure!

The *third* promise Paul lists that Christ has made to you is God's power, which is the third prayer for the church: a prayer for...

### **3. The *power* of Christ.**

The word for "power" that Paul uses is "dunamos"; is there a word in our language that sounds like that? It's the word "dynamite." We are to pray for God's power for West Valley Church, and it should be evident in our lives! Dynamite is an explosive power that can only be directed; it can't be contained. You think about how dynamite is used – it is incredible power that can be harnessed for purposes, but once you set it off, you no longer can contain it. God has a power for your life that, for his purposes, that you can direct, but you can't contain!

Paul then goes on to explain what this power is that you and I can have, and that we are to pray missionally for our church. The ultimate proof and example of God's power was demonstrated when God raised Jesus Christ from the grave. The proof of God's love is when Christ died on the cross for you and me. The Bible says that God demonstrates his love for us in this – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). According to that verse, then, the proof of God's power is when he raised Christ from the grave. Paul will later say in chapter three that this resurrection power is the *same* power of love that works in us so that others might know Christ's resurrection through us.

Then Paul gets so excited that he starts building a list, one thing on top of another, of things about Jesus' power, and it becomes this long, run-on sentence. Paul's grammar goes out the window because he can't stop piling on this list of great things about Jesus' power. Listen to it again:

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:19-21, niv)

When Paul says that God seated Jesus at his right hand, that was a phrase his readers understood. A king would reserve the seat immediately on his right for his prime minister or his first officer. It was a place of dignity and honor, but more than that it was a seat of designated and delegated power. The person on his right had all the power of the throne. Paul is pointing out the fact that the throne is in heavenly places, which makes it a place of ultimate power. Paul reveals to us that Jesus is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and then he says that Jesus has power over every title that can be given. Basically, Paul is saying, "Whatever anyone else wants to call any and every authority, Christ is greater." Listen, there is no name that can eclipse the name of Jesus; no name can surpass his authority. Listen to me saints: God has all power, and God has given you all his power in Christ to accomplish his purposes here. We pray for us to have all of Christ's power in order to carry out his mission. *Missional prayer*. So if God wants us to be a multi-ethnic church – at least two cultures worshiping and serving together in unity, *we will be* by his power. If Christ wants us to be a multi-generational church, many different ages and generational cultures worshiping and serving together in unity, *we will be* by his power. If God wants us to have an impact beyond this campus, having sites in other areas of our valley and beyond, worshiping and serving together in those areas in unity, *we will* by his power. If God wants us to meet the goal he's given us so we can renovate this space to reach new generations so they can worship and serve together with us in unity, *we will* by his power. If God wants to reach the multitude of people in this community who do not know him personally through this church alone, *we will* by his power. Who are you or anyone else to say it can't be done? If God wants to do it, I sure don't want to be the one to get in his way; I want to be the one he can use to do it. And that's our missional prayer for West Valley Church. He wants to do it through you and me and he's given us his power to do it! So what's keeping us?

Most of us know about the overwhelming beauty and power of Niagara Falls. It is one of the most spectacular displays of the force of nature. More than 5.9 million cubic feet of water goes over the crest every minute with a drop of over 160 feet. There is a visitor's center located immediately beside the falls. I read a story once that, apparently the visitor's center was having a problem with the plumbing. They discovered it when a visitor went into the men's room and when he turned on the faucet, only a trickle of water emerged. Imagine the irony – all that waterpower literally a few feet away, while inside the building there was not enough water pressure to wash your hands!

Listen saints: there is all kinds of power that is available to West Valley Church. Why in the world do we rely on our "little trickle" of human ability?



*Pray: WVC would know the person of Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit, live in the promise of Christ, and display the power of Christ.*

One last thing that Paul prays, and that we need to pray for West Valley Church, and that is...

#### **4. The *primacy* of Christ.**

This is very important for us to know, experience, and live in. Paul is making the point that the “crown rights” of Christ extend not only to principalities and powers, but also to us – the new community that has been called into existence by Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. He has the primacy – the first place; he is the head of the church. It’s difficult wording to understand, but Paul is really saying that Jesus is the gift of God to the church to preside over the community of believers in all things. Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Colossians:

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.  
(Colossians 1:18, niv)

This means that as we move forward carrying out the mission of Christ, we will get all our cues from Christ. If there is ever any question, we will follow Christ. If we need something, we go to Christ. Christ will always have first place in our lives and in our church.

Pastor April is coming to send us out with a benediction. Please stand:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)