



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Ephesians 1:15-18a

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“This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus & your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom & revelation in the knowledge of him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know...” (Eph. 1:15-18a CSB)

- “Paul’s Prayer of Thanksgiving. This section [Eph. 1:15-23], like Eph. 1:3-14, is a single sentence in the original Greek. Paul prays that the church will gain deep insight into the Lord’s powerful working & rich gifts in Christ.” [ESV Study Bible]

I. Give Thanks For God’s Work (Eph. 1:15-16)

- “This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus & your love for all the saints, 16 I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15-16)

A. Paul prays based on God’s work (1:3-14)

B. Based on evidence in the believers (v. 15)

– “...I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus & your love for all the saints” (Eph. 1:15)

1. Your faith in the Lord Jesus

– “...your faith in the Lord Jesus...” (1:15) The Gk. word for ‘faith,’ *pistis* can mean either belief or faithfulness; it’s likely that Paul refers to both his readers’ confidence in Jesus & their faithfulness to him.” [Peter S. Williamson, Eph., p. 46]

2. Your love for all God's people

C. Giving thanks to God the Father (v. 16)

- “I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:16)

1. When you see God at work in people's lives, give Him thanks

2. Make this your new habit as you pray

II. Prayer & the Trinity

A. To Whom should we pray? “*Whenever you pray, say, ‘Father...’*” (Luke 11:2)

- The topic Prayer & the Trinity raises the issue: “Whom do I pray to? The Father? The Son, The Spirit? God? The Trinity? All of the above? Here is the theologically correct answer: pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Most NT prayers follow that pattern. There are a few prayers to Jesus in the NT and...no recorded prayers to the Holy Spirit...[Consider] the way the Spirit & the Son [serve as] intercessor & mediator to bring us before the Father [Rom. 8:26-27; Heb. 8:1; 10:21]. There is a current that runs that direction... You can immerse yourself in that current...by praying habitually to the Father in Jesus' name... Of course you don't have to...But...why would you—deviate from the clear biblical pattern? The Bible is very clear: pray to the Father.” [Fred Sanders, *Deep Things of God*, p. 233]

B. Pray along with the ‘grain’ of the Trinity (Eph. 2:18)

- “Through him [the Son] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18)
- “We have an invitation to pray...to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. This is not just the ‘theologically correct’ to pray, but a way of praying that draws real spiritual power from being aligned with reality...It means praying ‘with the grain instead of against it.’ Wood has grain... [With] prayer this grain is [the Trinity], running from the Spirit through the Son to the Father...It is classically stated in Eph. 2:18: ‘through him [Christ, the Son] we both [Jewish & Gentile believers] have access in one Spirit to the Father’.” [Fred Sanders, *Deep Things of God*, pp. 219-221]

C. Prayer—joining the Trinity's conversation (Jn. 11:42; Rom. 8:15-16)

1. Within the Trinity—the Son's eternal ‘asking’ of the Father (Jn. 11:42)

– “Jesus...said, ‘Father, I thank you that you heard me. 42 I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd...I said this, so that they may believe you sent me’.” (Jn. 11:42)

Note: “Hear” present, active: “you are *always hearing*”

– An “intimate relation [exists] between the Father...and the Son...A continuous... *communion is ever going on* between heaven and earth in the heart of Jesus...[based on] his union with & association...with the Father.” [Pulpit Comment.]

– “In [the triune] God...are 3 Persons: Father & Son, [with] the Holy Spirit their living bond of unity & fellowship. When the Father gave the Son a place next to Himself...He opened a way for prayer...in...the very inmost life of [the Trinity]. There was in the very Being...of God an asking...Jesus said ‘I know that You always hear me.’...Just as the Sonship of Jesus on earth may not be separated from his Sonship in heaven, even so...his prayer on earth...is

the continuation & counterpart of his asking in heaven. The prayer of the man Jesus Christ is the link between the eternal asking of the only-begotten Son...& the prayer of men on earth.” [Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, p. 132]

2. We're invited to join the Trinity's eternal conversation (Rom. 8:15-16)

– “...You received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “*Abba*, Father!” 16 The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:15-16)

– “There is always already a conversation going on among Father, Son & Holy Spirit. When we pray, we are joining that conversation. We have been invited to call on God as Father, invited by the Spirit of sonship that cries out ‘*Abba*, Father, as the eternal Son does [Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6]...We are invited to *enter that eternal conversation* in an appropriately lower [octave].” [Fred Sanders, *Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, p. 223]

D. Pray—Ask the Father in the Son's name (Jn. 16:23)

- “...*Truly I tell you, anything you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.*” (Jn. 16:23)
- “Christian prayer has a...structure...a grain. We [Christians] always pray through the mediation of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, whether we know it or not. Knowing it...is better. Praying to the Father as a...son in the name of the eternal Son aligns our praying with the Father-Son relation [and will] deep[en]...your prayer life.” [Fred Sanders, *Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, p. 281]

III. Paul's Request: For the Believers “To Know God Better” (Eph. 1:17-18a)

A. Prayer is addressed to God the Father (Eph. 1:17; 3:14; Mt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-2)

- “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious *Father*...” (Eph. 1:17)
- “For this reason I kneel before the *Father*...I pray that he may grant you...” (Eph. 3:14-16)
- “You should pray like this: ‘Our *Father* in heaven, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’” (Matt. 6:9-13)

1. We acknowledge & affirm that we are God's children (Eph. 1:5; Jn. 1:12)

2. “To all who...receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name.” (Jn. 1:12)

3. We align with God's mission—God's sending of the Son & the Spirit (Gal. 4:4-6)

– “God sent his Son...to redeem [us]...so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘*Abba*, Father!’” (Gal. 4:4-6)

– Praying this way “we have an opportunity to bring [ourselves] into alignment with the structure of...God's salvation...into alignment with...the eternal being of God...We are coming to God the Father in a way that retraces the path of [God's mission in] sending the Son & the Spirit to reveal himself & redeem us.” [F. Sanders, *Deep Things*..., pp. 222-3]

B. Prayer is not merely about crisis management

1. Jesus' general instructions on how to pray—the 'Lord's Prayer' (Luke 11:2-4)

2. We often just focus our prayer on our concerns

C. Pray to know God better—"so that you may know" (1:18a)

- "Whereas in Greek thought the term ['to know'] characteristically denotes a rational perception, the Hebrew [& Paul's] concept also embraced the knowing of personal relationship." [James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of the Apostle Paul*, p. 46] "Dunn considers Paul to be an example of this 'Hebrew' approach"... 'for Paul, knowledge is expressed as relationship.' (Mary Healy)" [Chris Tilling, "*Paul, the Trinity...*" *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* pp. 31-32]

D. Prayer for new insight (v. 17b-18a)

- "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom & revelation in the knowledge of him...that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know..." (Eph. 1:17-18a)

1. Pray for spiritual wisdom & for deeper understanding of God (vv. 17b-18a)

– "The *Spirit of wisdom* [Eph. 1:17] refers to the Holy Spirit's secret working in Christians to give them insights into God's Word & the saving knowledge of him (1 Cor. 2:6-12)." [ESV Study Bible]

– "The first part of the prayer (Eph. 1:17) invokes the triune God as the source of the believers' spiritual experience, which is summarized here as 'know[ing] him [God].' Mention of God the Father & of Jesus suggests that the 'spirit of wisdom & revelation' is the Holy Spirit named in Eph. 1:13..." [M. J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, p. 587]

2. Pray that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened (v. 18a)

– "To be 'enlightened'...is *not merely to have access to information, but to participate fully...* in the 'biblical' sense of first-hand experience. Specifically, this means an experience of hope (Eph. 1:18; cf. 1:12), of lavish inheritance...both now & later (Eph. 1:18...) & immeasurable power (Eph. 1:19). ...These dimensions of knowing God are all interconnected as blessings of God the father, in Christ, via the Spirit." [M. J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, p. 587]

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you know anybody who prays better than you do? What is it about their prayer that you consider 'better'? Is it wrong to think of some prayers as 'better' than others? Do you wish you could pray better?

2. Think about the way you habitually (typically) pray in your own personal prayer:

a. If you compare your typical prayer with the 'Lord's prayer' –"Our Father in heaven..." (Mt. 6:9) what are the major differences?

b. If you compare your typical prayer with Paul's prayer in Eph. 1:17-19a — what are the major differences?

c. Is your typically prayer centered on [i.] yourself, your personal needs, [ii.] others & their needs, or [iii.] is it centered on God & God's mission? What might a prayer centered on God & God's mission sound like?

3. How does the Trinity—God the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit—enter your prayer? What does it mean “to pray with the grain’ of the triune God & His mission?