

Ephesians 1:15-18 “Going deeper in prayer”

Proposition: why and how Paul prayed for Christians who were doing well continuously.

I wonder if you, like me, have a desire to go deeper in prayer and be more effective in your prayer life. The three verses we are looking at this morning invite us and show us how to do just that.

We are at the beginning of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. We are still on the mountain top being encouraged to see who we are 'in Christ Jesus' and see what He has achieved for us by His grace. Paul has been talking to the church about their position in Christ, their adoption by the Father and their being sealed by the Spirit. For fourteen verses, he has been talking to them about the Lord; now in these verses he begins to talk to the Lord about them.

Notice the pattern.

a) Paul talks to them about Him, then he talks to Him about them.

What Paul does here is a real key to living an effective Christian life. You and I every day are faced with children, spouses, pre-Christian friends, workmates who are facing a challenge or needing direction. Maybe it's a struggle with a teenager, maybe someone is experiencing problems in their marriage, and so we talk to them about the Lord, what God would have us all do in those situations. What you and I say to our grandkids or whoever it is we are talking to might be absolutely the wisest and the best direction they can get and yet if we just talk to them about the Lord and leave it there, often that is not enough to change the atmosphere at home or at work; it's not enough to change their behaviour or their attitudes, but ... if after we have talked to them we head off to the garden for two minutes or to a quiet place in the house and we talk to the Lord about them, everything changes. The peace of God comes and somehow something much more impacting has been released. I guess we often forget that the issues that divide families or cause trust to be lost in business are not just about personalities or different styles, often it's because we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and power.

Words of wisdom are good but somehow confusion and tension can still remain until you have taken them to the Lord in prayer.

Paul talked to them about the Lord then he talked to the Lord about them.

Notice what he says.

Ephesians 1:15-18 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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,

16a... Please note that Paul didn't just pray for people when there were tensions and problems and sickness. Paul prayed for this church because they were doing good. Their reputation as a church that loved the Lord, their reputation that he had heard of their love for each other was wide spread.

It was interesting to me before coming to Central that my dad, Murray Cottle and others spoke of this being a church of genuine solid Christians. Since coming to Whangarei I have heard stories of how pre-Christian people have been influenced, inspired by what they have seen in the lives of some of our medical professionals in this church. This church has a reputation for helping other churches, for having a strong youth ministry and for being very supportive of missions. I have heard many in the community speak of the enjoyment they got out of the Christmas productions. You have a reputation, mostly good. So why does Paul continually pray for this church that is doing good? Shouldn't

he be focusing his prayers mostly on the church at Corinth, which was failing in so many ways. The church at Ephesus, on the other hand, had such a good reputation for loving Jesus and loving each other.

Why does their good reputation make Paul want to pray for them? I believe we are to pray and act in support of what God is doing and we need to be wise. Normally the most effective churches in the world are the most criticized. Normally the most effective marriages are the ones Satan tries his best to disrupt so that he can destroy their good, God honouring testimony. I have heard of so many Pastors and evangelists, in particular, rise to such great heights in terms of kingdom effectiveness then fall to pride or immorality.

Paul says that he has heard about how well they are doing and it makes him pray continually.

So what does he pray for them?

b) Paul prays for wisdom, revelation and eyes to be opened.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened

Now I often pray that my granddaughter has happy dreams, that so and so has a good day, that someone else might be relieved of their physical pain. Those kinds of prayers are so shallow in comparison to how Paul prays here.

He prays that God would give them Wisdom and Revelation so that they might know Jesus better, so that they might know what Jesus would do in their situation and for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened.

This is something I have found with most forms of counselling, whether it is through a professional or it's a gifted parent directing their child. When you tell someone to be respectful or change this or that behaviour, to show love to their wives, to show respect to their husbands, if you try to address the behaviour and encourage them to change their behaviour it is rarely successful long-term. However, if that person gets a revelation, a personal insight, a eureka moment, if their eyes are opened to see that what you are saying is true, and the revelation they get is not just a head thing but a heart thing, they change and they change permanently.

So often we try to change a person through reasoning or pressure or counselling and it just doesn't work until they get the revelation themselves; until their eyes are enlightened.

Jesus said in John 6 that no one can come to the Father unless He draws them. You can talk to the kids, your other half, the co-workers, etc, about a change in behaviour until you are blue in the face and it may not change them at all, but when the Father draws them in answer to our prayers their eyes will be enlightened.

Paul told the church at Corinth that Satan, the god of this age, had blinded the eyes of people.

JW example in Whangaparaoa..... (here Russell speaks about an example which he has not written down).

If you just try to change people through parental pressure or arguments or spousal threatening it's just not going to work long term.

If God helps them see things differently, if they get wisdom and revelation, anything is possible.

John 8:32 (NIV)

³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

When God gives you a personal revelation in your heart, when you see things differently, addictions are broken, lives are changed at the root cause of the problem.

There are so many times when you will speak faithfully and teach wisely and then you need to pull aside and pray, now Lord, would you open their eyes, would you give them a personal revelation?

Pray this way for your kids, pray this way for your spouse, pray this way for those you see whose decisions are hurting themselves and others around them.

Pray for wisdom and revelation, pray that the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened²⁸ ***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,***

c) The Hope of your calling is Heaven

Hope by definition is the expectation of coming good. I have been surprised by how often that word hope comes up in signage and church statements in the North. I guess many have perceived hope to be missing.

You and I know that if people have no hope they might fall into depression or anxiety or bizarre behaviours but I would suggest to you that there are many Christians in the world who are living without a revelation of heaven and so also their lives too are filled with disappointment, frustration and anxiety.

You see, it's one thing to know in your head that Christians will have a home in heaven but it's another to really have that revelation in your heart, to really believe it in the core of your being so that it changes your perspective on everything.

I think that people who work hard and save well will usually become wealthy, but there are people, both wealthy and non-wealthy, who are just not going to be happy until they get that next pay rise, or that new car, until they get that better home. So they strive and stress and over-work their bodies. And you know that you know, that when they get that new relationship or that new thing, they are not going to be happy then either. Christians and non-Christians who are focused on, stressed out about things that are very temporary, who have not realized that this life is but a vapour in the span of eternity, who do not have a revelation of heaven; those people are going to be prone to crying life is unfair, prone to anxiety and frustration.

But the person who focuses on heaven and storing up riches in heaven will also find great joy and fulfilment in this brief life. We have only a tiny, tiny period of time to serve the Lord and to speak about Him to other people.

If you don't have a personal revelation of heaven, of what is to come, you will be troubled often and stressed frequently!

What did Jesus say in John 14

14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

Some might say, "yeah, but Russell, what if I don't die for another 50 years, I mean heaven is such a long, long time away?"

Friends, is it? In my first three years of ministry I buried more children than adults.

I have been a student of Bible prophecy for many years and I am totally convinced that all pre-rapture prophecies have been fulfilled already.

You read Matthew 24 again at home this week and recognise the days in which we live.

1 John 3:2-4 (NIV)

²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

May God give us a revelation of our calling. May He help you and me see the big picture.

I think it is Ok for you and me to pray, "Lord help me find my keys," or, "Lord may my wife have a happy day." But in Paul's example here we have the opportunity to go much deeper.

Let's remember not just to talk to people about the Lord, but constantly pull aside and talk to the Lord about people.

Let's pray for the church continually, especially when we are doing well.

Let us pray for our kids and our spouses and our workmates and those we are sharing Christ with that the eyes of their hearts will be enlightened, that is, that the Father would draw them and give them revelation.

In this world that constantly says you need it now, you can't be happy until you get that or ditch him or gain this, let's pray that we will know the hope to which we are called, heaven. Heaven is our home and we need to pray that with heaven in mind we will make the best use of the brief time we are here on earth.

Closing prayer

Lord let us not stop giving thanks for each other, remembering each other in our prayers. ¹⁷ We will keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give everyone at WCBC the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ we pray that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which he has called us.

In the name of Jesus our saviour we pray. Amen.