

“Learning to Pray” - Part 4”

Text: Ephesians 1:15-23

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on October 27, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** In the 1982 film *Annie*, the mischievous orphan is rescued out of the vile clutches of Ms. Hannigan at the inner-city orphanage. Annie is saved out of her “hard knock life” of endless cleaning and menial tasks and brought to the mansion of the billionaire Mr. Warbucks. When Annie first arrives, she is mesmerized by all the wealth and the many cheerful servants.
 - Her hostess says, **“May I take your sweater, miss?”** Still thinking like an orphan, Annie says, **“Will I get it back?”** **“Of course, miss!”**
 - The hostess then asks her, **“What would you like to do first?”** Still not comprehending all that she now has, Annie replies, **“The windows, then the floors, that way if I drip...”** **“You don’t understand,”** the hostess says, cutting her off. **“You don’t have to do any cleaning here.”**
- The New Testament teaches that the reason Christians often struggle so much is because, like Annie, we are not taking hold of all the riches we possess in Christ. We act like beggars when in reality we are children of a very rich Father.
 - Paul spends the first 14 verses of Ephesians 1 recounting the astounding blessings God has given to believers. We were elected by God, predestined to adoption, forgiven, redeemed by his blood, given the Holy Spirit, and guaranteed a future inheritance. In verse 3 Paul we have been **“Blessed . . . with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”** Or as Scotiabank puts it, **“You’re richer than you think.”**
 - But like Annie, we have to learn to take hold of what we already possess. Our circumstances often overwhelm us, distort our thinking, and make us lose hope. It is for this reason that Paul says he offers his prayer for the Ephesians in verses 15-23.
- But what is most striking about this prayer, and really all of Paul’s prayers, is that he does not pray for their specific circumstances. He says nothing of their material needs, bodily needs, or political circumstances. Now hear this: it is not because Paul thinks it is wrong to pray for these things. No, it is right and good.
 - It is just that as you mature in prayer you learn that our greatest need is not always to get a change in circumstances but rather to get something that enables us to master our circumstances rather than be mastered by them.
 - That something that will enable us to overcome our circumstances is taking hold of what we already possess in Jesus. If we could but take hold of a fraction of what is already ours in Christ we could get through anything. But like Annie, we don’t really get it. That is why we need to pray that we would.
 - So, let’s learn from Paul what it means to pray that we would take hold of what we already possess. I see three ways that we pray like this.

THANKFUL WHEN BELIEVERS RIGHTLY LIVE OUT THEIR NEW LIFE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, **pray that we may take hold of what we already possess!** That’s the big point. What does that look like in practice? Answer: **(SHOW SLIDE 3) Do this by thanking God when you see other believers already doing it.**

- After 14 verses of showing the Ephesians that they are richer than they think, Paul says in verse 15. **READ 15-16** – ¹⁵*For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,* ¹⁶*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*
- Note once again that Paul has a disciplined prayer life. He remembers them in his prayers. In other words, Paul has set times of prayer that he regularly keeps. Did you take steps this week to begin this?
 - And notice also that before Paul talks about areas they need to take hold of he begins by thanking God for the progress they are already making. These Ephesian Christians love Jesus and are demonstrating this in their love for each other.
- We see again that we shouldn't rush into requests but to thank God for when we see other believers taking hold of what they already possess.
 - Thank you, Father, for those serving in our kids and youth ministry – they love you and the fact that they are volunteering shows their love for the kids. Thank you, Father, for many seniors in this church who love you and the way they pray for our church shows their love for the saints. Thank you, Father, for all the people who serve in Neighborhood Market, Street Teams, Guest Services, Finance, Tech Services, Outreach and Missions, Membership. They love the saints. Father we are thankful.
 - You know you are maturing in prayer when you see other believers rightly living out their Christian and your heart is quick to give thanks to God.

ASKING TO GROW DEEPER IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Second, **pray that we may take hold of what we already possess! Do this by asking that we may grow in our knowledge of God.**
 - **READ 17** – ¹⁷*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.*
- So what is Paul's first and greatest request? What does he think the Ephesian Christians need above everything else? He could have prayed for health and well-being. He could have prayed they would be able to get through what they were going through.
 - As important as these circumstantial prayers may be, Paul does not pray for these things. The chief thing he asks for these Christians is that they might know the Father of glory. What a fascinating request. The Ephesians are already Christians. They already possess knowledge of God. Yet Paul is not satisfied with their condition. He wants them to know God better.
 - This request is such a high priority to Paul that he says at the beginning of verse 16, ***"I do not cease to"*** thank God and ask that you grow in your knowledge of him.
- Many people believe God exists. They "know" him in the sense that we "know" the Queen of England. We know she exists and know she holds a high position. But none of us would say we know her in the sense of a personal relationship. She is there but she isn't involved in our lives at all.
 - Many people know God like this. They know him from a distance. They believe He exists, that he created the universe, that there is only one God, and that he is loving. But listen, this level of knowledge only puts you on the same level as the demons. The demons know a lot about God.

- Remember when a demon said to Jesus, *“I know who you are – the Holy One of God.”* That is rock solid theology. James sums it up well when he says, *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.”*
- Now of course we must all begin at this level of knowing. But the knowing that Paul is talking about moves way beyond facts. It is a personal knowledge like when I say I know my wife. It is far more than bare facts. It is an experiential knowledge. This knowing begins when a person becomes a Christian and then increases as they mature.
 - Do you know the Father of glory like this? Do you know what it means to fall on your face in worship as the Spirit reveals some part of God to you? Do you know what it means to regularly encounter him? Does your heart yearn like the psalmist when he says, *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”*
 - I am not asking you if you believe certain things about God. I am asking if you have met him? One of the great signs that you are truly a Christian and not just a religious person is that you have experiential knowledge of the Father through Jesus Christ. As a Christian you already have all of God but you need to take greater hold of Him. Christian, can you say you know him more today than you did one year ago?
- Well, how can we know him better? **(SHOW SLIDE 5) we must keep asking to know him better.** This should be one of the highest priorities in our prayers for ourselves and for other believers.
 - *“Father, we want to know you.”*
- **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Next, **we must keep asking that the Father would give the Spirit to reveal God to us.** Really this request is a request for the Holy Spirit: *may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.*
 - It is the Holy Spirit who reveals God to us. So we are praying that the Father would give us more of the Spirit’s power reveal who God is.
 - *“Father, my children know you but give them the Spirit that they might know more of you and be able to live wisely before you.”*
- **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** And then notice that **we must devote ourselves to the Scriptures because they are the Holy Spirit’s revelation of God.** This is not a prayer from some mystical experience of the Holy Spirit that goes beyond the Scriptures. Remember Paul is praying this in light of all the blessings that we already have in Jesus. It is not a prayer for something more. It is prayer that we would go deeper into what we already have – what He has been talking about.
 - It is a prayer that as we consider God’s election of us we would be staggered by how gracious He is. As we consider what it means to be adopted we would experience assurance that we are his sons and daughters. As we consider how he redeemed us we would be stunned by the price He paid to win us back.
 - The Scriptures reveal God to us. They reveal all the riches that are ours in Christ.
- This is why am always dumbfounded to hear Christians say they don’t spend much time reading the Bible. They may even agree that the Bible reveals God to us but they say, *“I’m just not the reading type.”* Or *“I just don’t learn that way.”*
 - Jared Wilson writes, *“Imagine I showed you a tent across the yard. You can see a glow emanating from its zippered door. ‘Inside that tent,’ I said, ‘is God himself. He has something to say to you. You just have to go inside the tent, and the God of the Universe will reveal the mystery of the ages to you.’ And then imagine you were to say, ‘I’m not much of a walker. I prefer sitting to walking.’”*

- Do you want to know God better? Then live in this book.
- So maturing in prayer means thanking God when believers are rightly living out their new life. But secondly maturing in prayer means asking that we might know God better. We already know God but we want to know him better.
 - And so we keep asking for the Father to give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we might know him better.

ASKING THAT WE MIGHT GRASP CERTAIN CRUCIAL TRUTHS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 8) Third, pray that we may take hold of what we already possess! Do this by asking God to enable us to see our salvation more clearly.**
 - Paul has told us the supreme thing we need, namely to know God Himself. To know God is to know what he has done in saving us through Jesus Christ.
 - Again, it's not that we don't know about our salvation. We do know but we need to take hold of that which we already possess. We need to see it more clearly.
- So, what does that mean? Well, Paul prays that we would grasp a past truth about our salvation, a future truth about our salvation, and a present truth about our salvation. As you pray for people you can ask for these same things.

THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING

- **(SHOW SLIDE 9) Ask God to enable us to see our past calling more clearly.**
 - **READ 18a – ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.**
 - Here is an area where we need our eyes opened. Here is an area to know God better. Do you understand what is meant here by God's calling? May the Spirit reveal this to us as we look at it.
- To understand this, it is helpful to know that there are two types of callings in Scripture. First there is what we call the "general call" of God. In John 3:16 for instance we hear the general call that **"Whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life."** That is a general call for all people to believe in Jesus. Many will of course reject this call.
 - But there is a second kind of call in scripture, which we can call the "special" or "effectual" call of God. All who hear this call respond to it. It is an effectual call. It begins with God choosing particular sinners as Paul says in 1:4, **"he chose us in him before the creation of the world."** After he chooses them, He calls them to Himself. This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 8 when he says, **"And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."**
 - So, notice that all those whom God chooses or predestines to salvation will receive his call. And all who receive this special call will respond to it. As we saw a few weeks ago, God opened Lydia's heart to believe. He called her to himself. So yes, you sought God but it was only because God sought you. Yes, you called on God to rescue you but it is only because He called you.
- But note carefully that Paul does not just want us to intellectually know this. He wants us to know the hope of God's past calling in our lives. He does not mean hope as in future hope. That is the next crucial truth. Hope here means assurance and confidence. So, He wants us to know God's calling so

deeply in our hearts that we are filled with assurance of our salvation. Isn't this what we need to deal with the circumstances of life?

- You may face rejection from friends and family but your heart soars with assurance that God has chosen and called you to Himself. You may fear that your sins will ultimately keep you from heaven but then you find hope for Jesus says, ***“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away...I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”***
 - We have received this calling. We already possess it. But we need to pray that we and other believers would be able to see more clearly what we already possess. ***“Father, we praise you for calling us to yourself. Father, open our eyes further that we might be filled with the confidence and assurance that comes from knowing you have called us to yourself.”***
- So pray that God would give us the Spirit to know God more. To know him more means see our past calling more clearly.

GLORIOUS RICHES IN THE SAINTS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** Next, **ask God to enable us to see our future inheritance more clearly.**
 - Look at verse 18. ***READ 18b - having the eyes of your hearts enlightened . . . what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.***
- Paul is now asking that we would be able to grasp the glorious inheritance that awaits us in the future. Again, every Christian already knows they have a future inheritance. The inheritance that awaits every Christians is beyond calculation. We already possess it because we are in Christ. But so often we fail to take hold of what we possess.
 - It is for this reason that our circumstances often cause us to fall into discouragement and despair. But the Christian cannot live like this. A prime mark of the Christian mind is that it is continually meditating on our future hope—on the riches that are waiting for us.
 - When you can even catch a glimpse of how glorious that future inheritance will be it fills you with comfort and confidence in the difficult circumstances of this life.
- Victor Frankl was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp in World War II. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* he writes about how important future hope is to having strength in present circumstances.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** ***“The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay...He simply gave up.”***¹
- He tells about a friend who dreamed that the war would be over on March 30, 1945. When that day drew near his friend got really sick. When the war did not end his friend died the very next day. Frankl writes,
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** ***Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man—his courage and hope, or lack of them—and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect. The ultimate cause of my friend's death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was severely disappointed. This suddenly lowered his body's resistance against the latent***

¹ Victor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, Kindle Edition Location 981.

typhus infection. His faith in the future and his will to live had become paralyzed and his body fell victim to illness.²

- And then he writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 13) “Any attempt to restore a man’s inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal.”**³

- This is the power of future hope. If we could but take hold of the future riches that are already ours in Jesus, we could get through any circumstances.
 - **“Father, may you open our minds to know how wealthy we are and will be when we finish our few short years here. Father, capture our hearts with this that we might have the strength to get through today.”**
 - Ask God to enable us to see our future inheritance more clearly.

KNOWING HIS INCOMPARABLY GREAT POWER FOR US WHO BELIEVE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 14) ask God to enable us to see His present power in our lives.**
 - **READ 18-19a - ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened . . . ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.**
 - Pay attention to what Paul is asking for. Paul is not asking that we would get power to deal with our circumstances. No. He is praying that we would know more deeply the power of God that is already at work in us. We already possess it.
- My brothers and sisters, this entire prayer should fill you with utter confidence. There is a power at work within you. What power is it? Read on.
 - **READ 20-23 - That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him 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 title that can be given, 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.”**
- Are you struggling with circumstance sin your life right now? Then pray to know this power that is already at work in you. The power at work in your life is the power that defeated all your most powerful enemies. God’s power defeated death in raising Jesus from the dead, defeated sin at the cross, and defeated all the evil powers. You possess this power.
 - **“Father, forgive us for not taking hold of that power in us. Father, open our eyes to know this incomparably great power at work in us.”**

CONCLUSION

- Bring it all together now. Christian, you are richer than you think. Because of what Jesus did at Calvary you possess immense wealth. Since we often fail to take hold of what we already possess we must pray that we can.
 - **“Father, we thank you for those areas where we are living out our new life. But Father, we want more. Father, grant us your Spirit that He might reveal you to us. We want to know you more. Father, open our eyes that we might be awestruck by the fact that you have called poor weak sinners like us. Open our eyes to know how great is the inheritance that awaits us. And open our eyes to see your great power at work in our lives.”**
 - Pray to take hold of what you already possess.

² Ibid. Location 999.

³ Ibid. Location 1009.