

When You Haven't Got a Prayer, Borrow One from Paul
The Purpose of Every Prayer
Ephesians 3:14-21
July 10, 2011

Today we begin a new sermon series on prayer. People pray for a variety of reasons and expectations.

We pray to gain something we need or want from God.

We pray to get answers to questions.

We pray to resolve guilt and consequences for our mistakes.

We pray to get comfort for our hurts.

We pray to see circumstances altered such as sickness to be healed etc.

On top of all that at times we can question whether our prayers are being offered correctly. All of us, ministers included can always grow in our comprehension and abilities about prayer. Pastor Francis Chan was addressing a group of ministers and said, **“I fear that many of you focus so much on the work of God that you neglect the person of God.”** (2011 Desiring God Pastors Conference) He is right, no matter who we are our prayer our time spent speaking and listening to God can wander off course.

So today we are going to begin a new sermon series that looks at the prayers of biblical heroes in a variety of situations. **The purpose is to borrow a prayer** for those times when we find ourselves in situations and we don't know what or how to pray. We can borrow a prayer from a hero from the Bible.

We'll also see what their prayers can teach us about God and prayer for our lives. Today we are going to borrow a prayer from the Apostle Paul. Let's stand for the reading of scripture.

Ephesians 3:14-21

Expectations of Prayer: v.14

Paul had a certain expectation for praying the way he did and for what he prayed.

V.14 Paul said he prayed for a particular reason. He said, **“for this reason I bow my knees before the Father.”** But to really know the reason Paul was praying is found in verse 13. Paul prayed that the church would “not loose heart over his sufferings.”

I would say one important thing this prayer of Paul reminds us to pray with true purpose. What is the reason we're pray? Why are we bothering to talk with God? Are we really seeking to hear from God? Paul didn't pray because he had to pray, he wanted to pray. It wasn't because he was suppose to pray. His prayer wasn't to throw a little respect God's way and make God and Paul feel good. Paul really knew why he was praying.

Secondly, Paul said that when he prayed, **“he bowed his knees before the Father.”** Bowing on your knees was to communicate submission, humility and reverence for God. Whatever our expectations are about prayer, one thing Paul communicates to us is that prayer is a time to come humbly before the Lord. Someone has said that **“Many people pray as if God were a big aspirin pill; they come only when they hurt.”** (quote garden.com, B. Graham Dienert) That's not a prayer of humility; that is using God.

Francis Chan has said to a group of ministers, **“If I read a transcript of your prayers, what would I see is the one thing you keep asking for? (Ibid)** Would the transcripts of our prayers demonstrate humility, desire for God, or treating God more like the genie in the bottle or Santa Claus?

The heart is the spiritual intersection for prayer: vs.16-18

The second thing we can borrow from Paul's prayer is how our spiritual heart is the intersection for prayer. Our hearts are where God really does His best work, his best stuff.

V.16 Paul prayed that the believers be strengthened in their inner being (hearts) with power from the spirit.

V.17 He prays that Christ dwells in their hearts through faith so they could be rooted and grounded in love.

V.18 Paul prays that the believers have the "power to comprehend" the breadth and length and height and depth ...and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge"

Notice, what Paul didn't say was essential to prayer. Paul said nothing about...

Intelligence...

The degrees we have or lack...

The life experiences we have encountered...

The influences enjoyed...

The money we possess...

The age we have reach...

Paul points repeatedly to the heart of the individual and the church as a whole where God is going to make the difference.

The heart is the point at which God strengthens us.

The heart is the point in which the love of Christ grows in us.

The heart is where God speaks so we can comprehend what God is seeking to do through us.

Christian philosopher Soren Kirkegard once said, "**Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.**"

(quotegarden.com)

What God wants to change most in this world is our hearts. If the hearts of people are right with the Lord we would see a revolution around the world. What God wants to see most in any church are hearts in tune with His.

Some one once prayed - **“O God, I know that if I do not love thee with my whole heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and all my strength, I shall love something else with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength.”** (The Oxford Book of Prayer, p.81, 1985)

No matter what we are praying for or about - what is the change or impact upon our heart toward God?

The highest purposes of prayer: vs.19-20

But the need to comprehend the love of God is crucial for one single solitary purpose and that purpose is found in verse 19. The Apostle Paul said, the purpose is that **“you may be filled with the fullness of God.** The heart needs to be tender, open however we want to describe it so our hearts can be filled with God himself.

The **ultimate aim of every prayer is to be filled with God.** The purpose for every word of scripture is that we be filled with the presence of God.

The problem is our sinfulness seeks for us to be filled with substitutes for God. The other morning I was reading in the book of Hosea, 11:1, God says to his people, **“The more I called them the more they went from me.”** You know and I know what takes each us away from time with God, I don't need to get preachy and tell you, so I won't.

The issue is the difference of whether our hearts long for something we want from God or do we long for God?

Do we know and pursue God because we know there is a gap that only he can fill?

The highest purpose and experience of any prayer is to come into what Paul called the fullness of God.

Maybe the best way to illustrate how to conceive of what that fullness is like is through this video clip. Take a look.

Play youtube video - [youtube.com/watch?v=uSMIIM9zLio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSMIIM9zLio)

I think those reunions of especially children to their fathers is symbolic of the fulfillment God wants to give us. Those kids were separated from their fathers; yet they knew their fathers loved them even though they were far away. But there was nothing that compared to being completely in the presence of the love of their fathers. Prayer is bring in the presence of our Heavenly Father.

And did you see how those kids wrapped their arms around their dads. There was nothing getting in between them and their dads.

That is really what Paul had in mind when he talked about our being filled with the fullness of God. Prayer helps us to not have anything take us away from closeness to Him.

Every miracle of God's intervention in this life whether it is healing of sickness, altering of circumstances, inspiration to guide and do is so that we come into the fullness of God.

The purpose of the burning bush was so Moses could trust in the fullness of God's presence.

Genesis 32 tells of Jacob who by a river one night wrestled with an angel or was it God and it changed Jacob. That crazy WWF match by a river was about the fullness of God showing up.

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane being ministered to by angels

points to coming into the God's presence and being filled by him.

Listen when we pray only for things we want and not the fullness of God that's kindergarten Christianity.

Paul said I pray you have hearts, spirit desiring hearts to be filled with God's his presence.

Evidence of the fullness of God in our lives

Our lives will show the evidence if we are experiencing the fullness of God. God is too awesome not to make a difference. God is too powerful for our lives to be lived no differently than the unbeliever, or the uncommitted.

When we are filled with the presence of God, we have something to giveaway. The reason some may not share Christ and have no passion to share Christ is because there is a lack of the fullness of God. July 24th, is our church festival. It will be a success if we are excited to prepare and to use that as a way to share Christ through our hospitality. It will fail, and it should fail if we are only doing to fill our pews. The festival is to share the fullness of God.

We have contentment when we are filled with God presence. We define significance based on life of Jesus and what he says is good, and we stand against the false substitutes that get marketed to us in a 100 directions.

When we are connecting with God through prayer our lives are in tune with God.

- Denying our selves or dying to seeking to please just ourselves becomes a path to more closely following Jesus.
- Being practical doesn't mean do anything that works, being practical is to accept this life is temporary, the real stuff of life is

- not what we can see and buy but is the spiritual the unseen.
- Death is only the doorway to walk into eternity with God.

No wonder Paul ended his prayer with praise for what God could
beyond all that we imagine when our highest ambition is to
experience God and His fullness.