

How to Receive the Blessings Part 1

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 26, 2020

The topic of our sermon this morning is “prayer” because that's what our passage is about. And to see this, if you would turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. That's the book we're in this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians.

And as you're turning there, if you're joining us for the first time today, we're in a series that we started some time ago in the book of Ephesians called the “All of God” series because that's what this book is about. It tells us that our salvation is all of God. All the blessings and riches and treasures of the Christian life come from His hand and not from us.

Ephesians is actually the sixth book we've studied together in our time as a church. We've looked at the book of 1 Peter, the book of Romans, the Gospel of John, the book of Titus, did a short series on Jonah. And now we're in this book, and it says salvation is all of God. God saves us, we don't save ourselves. God brings us to heaven, we don't get there on our own.

Which is something we need to understand in the early years of our church. This is something we need to get our minds around, because several people have asked me recently, how are we going to build this church? How are we going to grow it? And the answer is always the same - we don't, God does. We don't grow anything. We don't have the power. We're not in the changing business - God is.

Several people have asked me, how do we help Chilliwack? How do we change the town with all the drugs and problems that we have here? What do we do? Well, the answer is the same there as well. We can't change it, God changes it. We bring people to God. Salvation is all of Him.

Just like a farmer scatters seed and waits because he can't make it grow, he can't change anything in the field. So we scatter the Word of God and we wait because the change is all up to Him, the power is His. Which is what the book of Ephesians is about. This is the theme of it.

And it starts off by saying that God has blessed you. If you look in chapter 1:3, this is how God grows the church, this is how He changes it. It says, verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

If you notice, the word “blessing” appears a couple of times in that verse because that's how the book begins, by saying God has blessed you. It's another way of saying God has blessed your spirit, He has blessed your soul. God doesn't bless you on the outside, He blesses you on the inside. When He saved you, you were no better off than anyone else in Chilliwack. You were no better off than the worst person you could think of. But He changed you.

And Paul mentioned several ways that he does this in chapter one. This is just a review. We've talked about this before, but in verse 5 and verse 7, if you notice, He adopts you and He redeems you. Those are two ways that He changes your soul. In verse 9 and verse 11, He reveals to you

the mystery and gives you an inheritance. Verse 13: He seals you with the spirit to say that He closes the deal with you so that nothing can touch you now.

And then starting in verse 15, Paul makes a transition in the book. This is what we'll talk about today. Now starting halfway down in the chapter in verse 15, he makes a shift from talking about our blessings to talking about how you get them. He begins to talk about how you receive these blessings, and the way you do it is through prayer. The way you lay hold of what God has done for you in Christ is to pray. You don't do it through works, you do it through faith. You don't do it through efforts, you do it through coming to the Lord in a spirit of prayer.

Just so you can see this for yourself, I've told you before, verses 3 to 14 form one long sentence in the original Greek. But it's the same way with verses 15 through 23 in the book. In fact, this is interesting, but there's only two sentences in Ephesians chapter 1. The only two big thoughts from the mind of Paul; the first is that you are blessed. The second is here is how you get it— and you get it through prayer.

If you read in verse 15, Paul writes these words. He says,

"15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

That's quite a passage. Like everything else in the book of Ephesians, it takes a lot of unpacking. But if you notice, the word "prayer" is the theme of this section because this is one long prayer from Paul. He mentions in verse 16, "Giving thanks and making mention of you in my prayers." Verse 18 says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened because this is a prayer that you would know your blessings."

Verse 15 starts off with the phrase "for this reason." That means, "For the reason that you are blessed, for the reason that you have been adopted and redeemed and sealed, I offer this prayer for you."

Church work is spiritual work, isn't it? It's not physical. It's unseen. And therefore, you need unseen resources to help you in it. You need spiritual tools, and the one at the top of the list is prayer. Prayer comes before everything. It comes before money. A lot of people think you can grow the church by pouring money into it; bigger buildings, bigger parking lots, bigger staff,

bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger. It doesn't work that way. You can build a business that way; you don't build a church that way.

And prayer comes before manpower as well. It comes before numbers. You can put a thousand people in a building, it doesn't make it a church. You can put a million people in a building and it doesn't make it a church. It takes more than that.

It takes more than technology. You see people trying to build a church today purely through Facebook and social media. Nothing wrong with those things, but that's not how you build it - you build it through this. You build it through prayer. God is the only one who can grow it, God is the only one who can change it, and so you have to go to God on your knees or you don't grow the church at all.

Which is important to mention because let's be honest, friends, Christians are usually bad at prayer, amen? You guys know what I'm talking about? You ask a believer, "What are the two things you struggle with?" They say evangelism and prayer, right? This is a hard thing for us. We wrestle with this.

The Puritan Thomas Shepard once said, "There are times when I would rather die than pray." I think we would all agree with that. But you have to do it. It's essential for the Christian life.

According to a recent survey, a couple of years ago, done by the Angus Reid Institute, only 20% of Canadians pray every day. Only 20% - one in five. And they said, of those, they found most of those only prayed daily when they need it real bad, when they're in trouble. And many of them are Christians.

In fact, I would argue that the number one reason why the church in Canada is not growing today is because of a lack of prayer. I would argue the number one reason why the church in Chilliwack, British Columbia is struggling as much as it is, is because people like you and me don't lift our request to God. God would answer us if we would pray. God would hear us if we would take the time to talk to Him, but we don't.

Listen friends, the blessings are in heaven and to get them, you have to go to heaven. The blessings are from God and to get them, you have to go to God. You have to pray. That's the point of Ephesians 1 - you have to prioritize this. The church won't make it without it.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said that a man is what he is on his knees before God and nothing more. And I would add the church is that way. We are what we are on our knees before God and nothing more. You will never rise above your prayer life as a church. You will never get beyond that. So go your prayers, so go this church. And I'm not saying any of this as a guilt trip. This is just a fact. We need your prayers here. We need all of our prayers.

In one of the commentaries that I read, the story is told of a US regiment in World War I that went into the Argonne Forest in France and it was decimated. It was wiped out because they lost contact with their headquarters. They became known as the lost regiment because everyone was killed or missing in action because they lost touch with the high command. And we could all argue that the church today is doing that. The church today is losing touch with the high command. And as a result, we're being decimated. And there's something we can do about that

this morning. There's a way to fix this problem, and that is to learn how to pray, which is what we're going to talk about today.

And to do that, if you're taking notes this morning, we're going to look at four principles of prayer from the Apostle Paul. So that's our outline for today. It's very simple. This is what we're talking about. In Ephesians 1:15-17, we're going to look at four principles of prayer from the Apostle Paul. And they're built around the idea of experiencing your blessings, because that's what Paul wants for you. This sermon or this passage is not intended to make you feel guilty. It's intended to motivate you to go to God to be blessed. So let's talk about it in that way.

By the way, it's no coincidence that the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." They didn't say, "Lord, teach us to preach or Lord, teach us to evangelize," although they could have done that. They didn't say, "Lord, teach us to counsel, Lord, teach us to raise money." They said, "Lord, teach us to pray." This is hard stuff. This is not easy. But the Bible gives us lots of instruction, and to help with that, let's talk about four principles of prayer.

The first one is that you should pray hopefully. That's the first principle you see in Ephesians chapter 1 - when you pray, you should pray hopefully. Which means you should go to God with a sense of victory, not a sense of defeat. You should go to Him with a sense of expectation because you know God will hear you.

A lot of the Roman gods and the Greek gods, you really never knew if they heard your prayers or not. You kind of just sort of offered them up and just sort of like tossing sand in the air. You know God will hear you if you're a Christian. And you can pray hopefully because of that.

If you look in verse 15, Paul writes this, he says, "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints."

Just to say a few words about this, I mentioned before, this is how Paul starts the second sentence in the book of Ephesians, the second big idea. It's kind of strange to think that we're down in verse 15 and we're now starting sentence number two. But he says, "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith. That phrase "having heard" is in the continuous tense in Greek, which means it's ongoing. In other words, Paul heard about their faith over and over and over again. He was told about the Ephesians continuously while he was in prison.

This is where the hope kicks in because this is where Paul was at when he heard this. This is his location when the reports were coming to him. Chapter 3:1 tells us that Paul was in jail. As he was sitting in a prison, as he was stuck in a dingy cell, chained to a Roman soldier without his freedoms, without his personal comforts, without any hope from the world, he did the only thing you could do in a place like that - he prayed. While he was there, reports kept coming in, either through letters or personal visits. Word kept coming to him about the Ephesian's faith. And as the word came in, Paul's prayers went out.

I don't know about you but I can't think of too many places that are more hopeless than a prison cell. I can't think of too many places more depressing than that. I haven't been to too many prisons, but I got to speak at a Bible conference at one in South Dakota many years ago. And I remember coming into the facility and they gave you what's called a squawk box, which was a box that you put on your belt and if something really bad happened, you pull the rope and it's

squawked. And I thought that is some introduction to this facility. Most people give you a name tag - they give you a squawk box.

And I remember sitting in for the Bible study and when the inmates filed in, they all came in, they all had denim blue Jean jackets on and sweatpants that said, "Inmate down the side." And I thought, there is no freedom. They can't even wear what they want. It's a depressing place to be, in a prison. Especially for a guy like Paul, who was used to traveling and moving all the time. He never stayed put, he never stayed still for long, he was always in motion. So sitting in a cell would have driven him crazy, but Paul got through it with prayer. He talked to God because he knew God would hear him.

A lot of people can't hear you in jail, a lot of people can't visit you there because you're locked up. If he was in Rome, the Ephesians are a long way from Rome. They can't get to you, but God can get to you, and so he talked to God. He had hope.

To say it another way, if you can go to God in prison, you can go to God anywhere, amen? If you can pray to Him in a place like this, you can pray to Him anywhere. You can pray to Him at home, you can pray to Him at work. You can pray to Him in the hospital, on your death bed. You can do it in school, you can do it anywhere. And He'll hear you. You should always stay hopeful in your prayer life because God listens to you.

In Old Testament times, they couldn't do this because they had to go to the temple to pray. Under the old covenant, it was important for the Jews to go to Jerusalem as much as possible, to bring their request before God. And they had to offer lambs and goats and sheep and all that. All that ritual just went into prayer. You know how you pray if you're in Christ? You get on your knees and you talk to God.

In the Old Testament, His presence was in the temple. In the New Testament, His presence is in us, which means you can pray anywhere. And I think a lot of us struggle to pray because we don't quite get this. We're bad at this because we don't really believe that or we wrestle with the implications. Because let's be honest, we pray for a few minutes and then we give up, don't we? Or we pray once or twice, and when we don't get what we're asking for, we quit because we say, "What's the point?"

Especially around New Year's, we make a lot of New Year's resolutions. "You know, I'm going to pray more, I'm going to do this more, have more quiet times." And after a couple of weeks, we stop. And I think someone like Paul would've rebuked us for that. He kept praying while in prison. He kept praying in the most abysmal place imaginable. And when he didn't see an answer, he stayed hopeful.

I read somewhere recently that Joseph waited thirteen years to get out of prison, Abraham waited twenty-five years to get a son, and Moses waited forty years to get out of the wilderness - and all of them prayed. And when they didn't get what they want, they didn't quit. They stayed hopeful. This is the first principle of prayer. This is the first idea we have to get our minds around. You can't give up.

R.C. Sproul said that, “Hope is called the anchor of the soul because it gives stability to the Christian life and it gives stability to our prayers as well.” It helps us keep praying even when we can't see the answers right away.

And to give you an example of this, some of you have heard the name George Mueller before, but George Mueller is a man who is known for his great prayer life. And he was the founder of the Ashley Down orphanage in England in the 1800s. He cared for thousands of orphans, thousands of unwanted kids, and he kept a journal of what he would pray for. And one day, he started praying for five of his lost friends. That's what the journal says; he kept a record of this. Started praying for five of his lost friends, and after several months, none of them were saved. None of them came to faith in Christ. And he was discouraged. I mean, obviously. He wanted to quit, but he kept going. He stayed with it.

And ten years later, two of them were saved, ten years later. Twenty five years after that, another one came to the Lord. And then seven years later, at George Mueller's funeral, the last one was converted. Fifty two years after he started. It took him half a century of prayer to lead that man to the Lord. And when the man came to the Lord, Mueller wasn't even around anymore. He was in heaven. We just know about that because of his journals. And the point is you have to stay hopeful when you pray. You can't give up. You have to keep at it.

Which leads to the next principle for prayer that we see in this passage, the next point we're going to look at - and that is that you should pray continually. First, you should pray hopefully. Pray with a sense of victory, not a sense of defeat. And second, you should pray continually. These two things just go together, but you should never quit because you know God will hear you, and you should also never quit praying because you always need His help. Amen? Never a day when you don't need the help of God. So you should always be in prayer.

And if you read in verses 15 through 16, Paul goes on and gives us this one. He says, “For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers.”

As Paul is going on to describe his prayer life here, it's interesting that after saying so much about what God has done for the Ephesians, Paul doesn't fold his hands here and say, “Now I can sit back and relax. Now I can just let go and let God.” Instead, he does something. He prays for the Ephesians. And not only does he pray for them, he says, “I do not cease giving thanks for you.” I mean, he didn't just pray once or twice for these people; he does it over and over and again, ongoing.

And he did this, it says, because of what he heard about them. If you back up a little bit and look in verse 15. It says, he prayed on account of having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus, which exists among you and your love for all the saints. That's very important because later in the book of Revelation, it says that Apostle John or the Lord Jesus talking to the church at Ephesus, he says, “I have this against you ...” You remember this? – “That you have left your first love.” Which means that fifty, sixty years later, they lost what they had here.

Church history even tells us that the church in Ephesus died in the second century. They didn't make it very long because they lost the love that they had. But here they have it, here they love one another. And Paul says, "I do not cease giving thanks for that."

It's not a small thing when you have a church that loves each other, right? It's not a small thing when you get a group of Christians that get along and care for one another. And this caused Paul to pray constantly for them. The idea here is not that he was on his knees all day. It's not like he walked around his jail cell muttering to himself. It just means that this was constantly on his mind. He went around in a spirit of prayer or a mindset of prayer, rejoicing over the Ephesians. He prayed every chance he got.

One commentator said, "No matter how high our achievements in the Christian life, we should always aim for something higher. No matter how great our blessings, we should always ask God for more and do so continually." That's what Paul did here. He kept praying for them because they needed it. I think we all understand the Christian life is a struggle, isn't it? It's a battleground, not a playground. It's war, it's not a party.

I remember a church in Georgia. They would advertise, "Come have a party with us every Sunday." And I remember thinking, "I don't know what planet you live on, but I don't live in a planet where I get to party all the time as a Christian." It's a fight, and as such, you have to pray. And you need to pray constantly for the fight. This life is serious, it's not a game. We're engaged in a struggle, we're engaged in war. At the end of Ephesians 6, Paul is going to say, "Put on the armor of God." Which means you have to pray and you need to pray for each other.

And I might add, you pray every day. It's been said that you need prayer like you need air. Or if the only time you pray is when you're in trouble, then you're in trouble. I mean, you're in bad shape. You got to do this all the time because we're so weak.

I saw a funny cartoon this week of a person saying, "I need God's help to go to heaven." And another one saying, "Yeah, well, I need God's help to go to Walmart." It's true, isn't it? You ever been to Walmart before? It's a scary place. American department stores are scary, and we need God's help to go there.

In fact, I've found the greatest struggles I have, just personally, in the Christian life come from going to places like that. They come from going to places like the grocery store or Walmart because I let my guard down there and I forget to pray. Come to church, I'm praying. Go evangelize someone, I'm praying. Counsel someone, I'm in prayer because I'm a helpless. Go to the grocery store, "I got this." You don't got this. Paul says we should pray continually. It's a major principle of prayer here. It's to be an ongoing thing in our lives.

You would think that a guy like Paul wouldn't have to do that. You would think that a man like Paul who was an Apostle, wrote most of the New Testament would come to the place in his life where he would say, "I don't need to pray anymore. I'm beyond that. I did that when I was a young Christian, a baby Christian, but now that I'm a mature Christian, I'm past prayer." It doesn't work that way.

This is not like filling up your gas tank where you pray so much on Monday and you don't have to pray Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. That's not the way the Christian life

is. This is a walk, which means you get there one step at a time and you pray every day. In fact, the stronger Paul got, the more he prayed. The godlier he got, the more Christ-like he got, the more he needed it.

I think it was Martin Luther who said, "I have so much to do today that I have to pray an extra hour." Imagine that mindset? That's the mindset here.

Which brings us to the next point in the passage, another principle for prayer that we see from the life of the Apostle Paul - and that is that you should pray selflessly. You should pray hopefully, with a sense of victory. Pray continually, do this every day. And then third, a third principle we see here, is that you should pray selflessly, which means you shouldn't just pray for yourselves, we pray for others as well. Yes, you need prayer. Pray for your own needs, absolutely. But also, pray for the needs of others.

Just so you can see this for yourself, if you read verses 15 through 17... I just want you to notice how many times Paul prays for others as we read this. Pay attention to that. He says,

"15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

If you count it all up, the word "you" is mentioned five times in that passage. It's shown more than once per verse because this is what this is about. This is the focus of Paul's prayer. It's all about you. It's all about the Ephesians.

It's kind of an ironic thing, but as he's in prison, he's suffering and chained to a Roman soldier, and all he wants to talk about is somebody else. I don't know about you guys, but if I was in those circumstances, you'd be getting a prayer email from me every day. Maybe a few texts as well, you know? All he could think about was them. And this is important.

I've noticed throughout the years, that the happiest Christians I have known, are people who got this. They don't think about themselves all the time. They don't pray for themselves all the time. They don't come into church thinking, "What can this person do for me or what can that person do for me?" And the happiest churches are this way. The happiest churches are outward focused, not inward focused. In fact, if you want to know how to grow the church, this is it. You grow it by focusing on others - you kill it by focusing on yourself. You want a dead church, I'll tell you how to have a dead church; come in here and be selfish.

Nobody likes a church that only focuses on itself. You know the "us four and no more" mentality? The "frozen, chosen," baptized in vinegar. Everybody else stay away, stay out. We don't want to have anything to do with you. That is ugly in a church, amen? That is hideous. And therefore, you don't grow a church that way. You do it by focusing on others. You focus on others in this room, you focus on others in this world, you focus on others in this town. That's what Paul did.

In fact, let's pause here for a moment and kind of talk about how we can do this here. We don't want to develop this mindset in the church. We don't want to be a "frozen, chosen" kind of place.

We want to focus on others. So let me give you a few ways to do that. These are really simple. A few ways to apply what we're talking about here.

One is to pray for the person sitting next to you. We can all do that, right? That's easy. Before this service is over, you can ask the person sitting next to you, "How are you doing and can I pray for you?" Listen, friends, this is a church and if you can't pray in a church, you can't pray anywhere, amen? This is Sunday. If you can't pray on Sunday, you can't pray any day of the week. So one simple way to apply this is to find someone sitting around you in this room and just ask if you can pray for them. If they say no, come get me and I'll preach this sermon at them again. Okay? I've got my notes right here. If they say no, come get me and I'll intercede. But they will say yes, I promise you. It's one way to do this.

Another way you can do this: if you're not able to pray this morning right away, call someone up during the week and pray for them then. Go through our church directory, and pick any name in there, and if you call them and say, "Hi, I'm so and so from Grace Fellowship Chilliwack, can I pray for you?" They will thank you for it.

My family and I do that. I don't know if I've let you know this or not, but every night at supper time, we pray for you by name. We go through the church directory, go through the next person in the alphabet, and just pray for that family. My boys love it because they get to see your pictures. They think that's the coolest thing and they always ask about you. But we pray for you before dinner.

We also have a prayer email that goes out regularly from the church office. You can take advantage of that. We send those emails out because we want you praying for the needs there, and the things that come up. If you're not on that email, just contact our office, we'll get you involved. We have a prayer card in the visitor packet for any visitors that come. We have prayer meetings every Sunday before church at nine o'clock. Our elders meet regularly for prayer. We pray for you by name. Our care groups pray. But however you do it, I mean however you apply this, it doesn't matter so much. The point is that you need to pray for others. You need to be selfless in your prayer lives.

Charles Spurgeon used to say that, "The kindest thing anyone ever did for me was to pray for me." And I think we'd all agree with that. The kindest thing you can do is pray. In fact, just for a personal testimony of this, a time someone prayed for me that I'll never forget. I remember the time I was visiting a friend who was dying of brain cancer in the hospital. She'd gotten really sick and they thought she was about to die, so she was undergoing treatment and she had a - I remember, she had a tube coming out of her head and a bag of blood and fluid by her bedside. She just looked terrible and she was in such bad shape, I had brought a college student with me so we could pray for her together, and he almost passed out when he walked into the room. He dropped down on one knee because the scene was just horrific.

But the entire time we were in there with her, all she talked about was us. The entire time we visited her, all she wanted to know is how we were doing, and how she can pray for us. And she was so happy. I'll never forget that, stick with me as long as I live. She had a smile on her face. I had to beg her for information about how she was doing.

That's the mindset of a prayer warrior. That's the mindset we're talking about here, is to be focused on others. Which leads to one more thing that we learned from this passage, one more principle for prayer from the Apostle Paul. Just to review these other ones; first, Paul says you should pray hopefully. Don't give up quickly when you pray, stick to it, hang in there. Second, you should pray continually, pray every day because you need prayer every day. You need God's help moment by moments. Third, pray selflessly, pray for others as I know you do. You guys do a great job of this.

It brings us to one more point that we see here, a fourth and final principle in the passage, and that is that you should pray specifically. I won't say too much about this one because we're going to talk about it next week. But a fourth principle here, is that you should pray specifically, which means you should ask God for specific things when you pray. General things are fine, but you have a detailed God so you should pray in a detailed manner.

And if you read on in the passage, Paul writes and he says:

"15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

If you notice, as Paul comes to the end of this passage, he goes from the general to the specific here. He starts off with the big picture, and he narrows it down from there. And he prays for a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. That's just prayer for the Ephesians. Everything's kind of a buildup to that. He prays that they would know the blessings he's been writing about in verses 3 to 14. The spirit of wisdom and revelation. It's kind of the same idea of just knowledge.

And the word "knowledge" here is interesting. In Greek, it's the word *epignosis*, which comes from *epi* - full, and *gnosis* - knowledge. It means "to have a full knowledge of something, to know everything there is to know about it." In other words, Paul prays that they would not just know a little bit about their blessings, but that they would know everything about them. He prays that they would not just know a few things about salvation, a few points here and there - he wants them to know all of it.

It always amazes me when I meet someone who doesn't want to know more in the Christian life. They're satisfied with where they are, they don't want to grow, they don't want to be challenged. God wants you to grow. God wants you to understand more of Him. Just like you can't love somebody without studying them. Men, if you love your wives, you study your wives. God wants you to do the same thing with Him.

And I might add, this is for every Christian. This isn't just for the smart ones, or the ones with all the books on the shelf. This is for all of us. He wants all of us to learn more about Him. And I'll say more about that next week because that's what the rest of this passage is about. In verses 18 through 23, that's just one long prayer for knowledge and we'll talk about that next time.

But for now, let me just say this, put it this way - this is how you grow as a Christian. This is how you grow as a church, by knowing God. You learn about Him by going to Him in prayer.

You don't do it by making money or technology or all that stuff. You do it by drawing close to Him in prayer.

The story is told of the time Wilbur Chapman became the pastor of a small church in Philadelphia. And after his first sermon, a man approached him and said, "You're a young man but you're not a very good preacher. But you preach the Gospel and I'm going to help you any way I can. I'm going to pray for you every Sunday." And the man did. And soon, they had two hundred people showing up every week to pray for Dr. Chapman, and the church grew. Thousands were saved. And reflecting back on that years later, Wilbur Chapman said this, he said, "You don't have to be the best preacher or be the best church to honour God, you simply have to pray."

Which leads me to ask, are you doing that this morning? Are you praying? Are you bringing your requests before God? Are you the 20% of Canadians that pray every day? Are you the one in five? Or are you struggling with this? And I don't ask you that to make you feel bad, this is not a guilt trip sermon. I'm asking you this because we need your help. We need your prayers. So are you praying?

To ask this another way, are you growing in your knowledge of Him? Are you growing in your understanding of God? Do you feel like you know enough of His blessings? Because if you want to know more, this is how you do it . You pray. It's as simple as that. You make this a priority and you do it hopefully, continually, selflessly, and you do it specifically praying for knowledge.

Listen friends, you could say it this way: this church moves forward on its knees or it doesn't move forward at all. We conquer the world in our prayer closet or we don't conquer it. The world conquers us. We have to pray.

E.M. Bounds said that, "What the church needs today is not more programs or methods, it needs more prayer. Men mighty in prayer. Men devoted to prayer. Men who are committed to it, who go to God every day and they take the church with them."

That's what we want here at Grace Fellowship. We want men and women who draw near to God in prayer. Let's pray for that now and ask for God's help in this, and ask for His blessings on the church.

Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning because even though this was not intended to be any kind of a guilt trip, it is a struggle for all of us, Lord. None of us pray like we should. But we are confident Lord. We know from Your Word that You do hear us, and so we have every reason to pray.

Lord, we thank you that even now in this prayer, You hear us. Through the blood of Christ, we can come straight to You in the power of the Holy Spirit and You hear what we ask. Lord, we do want to be people that please You in this area. So I pray for the saints in this room, Lord, that we would have this spirit in our church, that we would not be focused on the things outside of us, we would not be focused on all the external stuff. We would focus on You and You would be glorified and honoured in this.

And Father, I pray if there's any lost here this morning that can't come to You, that we're talking about prayer and there's a wall between them and You, Lord. Would You draw them to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ who died for sinners, and that they would be able to pray for the first time?

God be glorified in our prayer lives. Father, be glorified in this church. We pray that Lord, that's our heart - that You would be honoured in all we do. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.