

Prayer: Ephesians 3:14-21

This morning we continue our sermon series on the Spiritual Disciplines for the Purpose of Godliness. The past three weeks we have heard about the importance of Sabbath rest, reading the Word of God, and meditating upon God's Word. This morning we will be looking at the spiritual discipline of prayer. The biblical commands and references to prayer are plentiful..

- The Psalms are full of prayers
- In 1 Thessalonians Paul tells us to pray without ceasing,
- The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray
- Jesus used the phrase "when you pray" throughout the gospels
- And Jesus often withdrew by himself to go and pray...

I think most would agree that prayer is something that we should do and if you regularly attend Worship services at Rivermont you may realize that it is something we value as a church...In a typical one hour or so service we have...

- Silent Prayer of Preparation, Prayer of Adoration and Confession, Acclamation of Praise, Prayer of Illumination, Prayer For A Right Response to God's Word, Pastoral Prayer, Doxology, and an Offertory Prayer which are all in some form or fashion are types of prayer
- And you as a congregation have an opportunity to pray along in your mind or at times corporately with those prayers which is important and beneficial in your spiritual growth

But what about prayer outside of Sunday mornings...the words awkward, distracted, and distant may describe your thoughts or feelings about prayer. Also, you may ask what good does prayer really do or if God already knows why pray? If we do pray it is often out of desperation a last resort...we are in a mess or have a big problem usually of our own doing nothing else has worked let's try praying OR maybe, we need or want something...often a material blessing or a certain result in our life

- I am not immune to this....God in his grace has blessed me with what I asked for then I promptly forget to thank Him for His kindness or act like it was because of something I did

Perhaps our prayer life is limited to desperation and our own selfish desires because prayer ultimately reveals the heart and it scares us to know that the closer and more intimate, we become with God the more sin He will reveal to us and He will change us...and no one likes change. It's much safer and easier to view God as a vending machine who should give us something to reward our obedience So we become content with just asking God to help us or give us what we want when it is convenient for us

Yet deep down we know there is more to prayer and there are areas in our life that do need to change

So how DO we pray and what should our prayers include...In Paul's prayer from Ephesians 3:14-21 he gives us a good framework to use as we learn how to pray beyond our emergencies and desires READ Ephesians 3:14-21 and PRAY So four things we can pray for ourselves and for each other...

First, we should pray to be strengthened with His power or some translations may say His might...READ verse 16 When we think about being strengthened with power our thoughts most likely go to the external and physical That makes sense we live in a world that loves power...and a world that desires to lead and/or cause change by using power Or at least we can follow someone who has the power to make our desires a reality.

The power Paul has in mind for believers is not external but Paul desires and prays that we would be strengthened with power in our inner being...Paul is speaking of the strength of character that informs the actions and attitudes of believers. This strengthening is the work of the Spirit...it does not proceed from man's own ability. Scripture again humbly reminds us that the start of our salvation and any increase in spiritual growth comes from the Holy Spirit. Everything and anything good in us is always the work of God

This power is that Paul is referring to here is the same power that he refers to in Ephesians 1 when he explains how we become spiritually alive Then in Ephesians 2 we are told how we are brought from death to life It is the resurrection power of Christ that gives us new life

Why do we need to be strengthened with power in our inner being? Here are a few reasons?

- To help us through suffering...Peter reminded us many times in our study of 1 Peter that the Christian life is a life of suffering and all of Scripture confirms this
 - We do not choose suffering but instead we try to avoid it...Christ did the same in the Garden of Gethsemane...Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me...Jesus knew the pain and agony that was waiting for him on the cross...but not my will...your will be done
 - So, we pray that God would strengthen us with His power so that we will be prepared to face and endure suffering

- We also need to be strengthened with power so sin will no longer have a hold upon us...
 - In our relationships at work or in the home we face daily temptations to lust, gossip, steal, slander, and lie among other things
 - Some hear today may be struggling with pornography... just a little look with satisfy
 - or the temptation to bend the financial numbers at work just to make things look a little better than they really are
 - Or lying and slandering someone at work to make sure you get the promotion
 - As we pray to be strengthened with His power, we can be confident that real change is possible...that our inner being is being changed.
- And we need to be strengthened with His power to share the gospel...we often become timid and ashamed around unbelievers and feel like we don't know what to say or where to start
 - When we are strengthened with his power we can bold when we have opportunity to share the hope of Christ and the words of eternal life to a person who does not Jesus as Lord and Savior

The power source for toys are batteries...for appliances it is electricity... for cars it is gasoline...the Christian life is powered by the Spirit. The strength from the Spirit of God in the inner being that we pray for is the best and most desirable strength, it brings strength to our soul, and gives us strength to serve the Lord God Almighty
This is why we pray to be strengthened with is might

Secondly, we can pray that we will be rooted and grounded in love...READ Verse 17

Paul is using two metaphors to help us understand what this means , the first metaphor is from agriculture...rooted in love The idea of being rooted in love teaches us that love is something that nourishes us...love helps us become like a tree with deep roots. Yesterday I bought two trees and I will plant them in our front yard in the next couple days and want them to have strong and deep roots so they can thrive and flourish When we love we are firmly planted in our faith and reflecting the love of Christ to those around us we thrive as the people of God

The second metaphor is from architecture...established would probably be a better translation than grounded When a building is established or grounded it sits upon a solid foundation...so the picture for the believer is love being the foundation that our lives are established on Built upon the cornerstone the Lord Jesus Christ

So we pray that that we would be rooted and grounded in love Our roots of love grow deeper and our foundation built on love is so strong that whatever comes our way we are able to endure...we can trust God's sovereign hand and know that all things work together for good The more rooted and established we become by God's grace we begin to comprehend something....

What is that something? Starting halfway through verse 17 that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ We will be able to comprehend one of the greatest mysteries known to manthe love of Christ

So next we pray that we would know the love of Christ...The love of Christ is the subject which ought to occupy our daily thoughts and nightly meditations and in which should be the driving force for all our wants and desires Do you want everything that God has for you, the full measure of his grace? You need to be filled with and know the love of Christ and this is why we pray that we would know this love The more we know the love of Christ love the more we will love those around us for His sake...the more we seek to serve others and advance His kingdom Why is the love of Christ so significant? It is the love of Christ that saved sinner like us and redeemed us and brought is back into relationship with a holy God

This love as Paul tells in verse 18 is broad, long, high, and deep John Stott says this about verse 18...

- the love of Christ is broad enough to encompass all mankind
- long enough to last for eternity
- deep enough to reach the most degraded sinner
- and high enough to exalt him to heaven

The unbeliever often measures God's love based on their circumstances...We do not measure God's love on the basis of our circumstances but rather on the character of God that is the revealed in the width, height, length, and depth of the love of Jesus Which was on full display as He hung on a cross for us and probably no accident that Paul chose those the words that he did This is the love of Christ and this is what we pray we would know

It is for very good reason that in 1 Corinthians 2:2 Paul writes...For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Paul got it! He understood that the cross is the full expression of the love of God and that is the only thing worth knowing. That is why we pray that we would know the love of Christ

John Calvin says in referring to the love of Christ, “He who is in possession of this alone has enough. Beyond it there is nothing solid, nothing useful, —nothing, in short, that is proper or sound.”

As if that is not enough...Paul tells us in verse 19 that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge...it is greater, bigger, and better than anything else we could ever know and most of us know a lot of useless things...Which only helps us at restaurant trivia nights or watching Jeopardy

This love of Christ which surpasses knowledge reminds us that we are finite creatures and have limits to our understanding...Like a child who stretches his arms as wide as he can and asks his mom or dad do you love me this much? The parent knows their love for their child love is much wider than the child’s arms could ever stretch. The child has limited understanding of how deeply loved he is by his parents... He can’t comprehend it and Paul tells we don’t get either! God loves us so so much more than we could ever imagine, so we pray and ask God that we know the love of Christ which surpasses understanding

Finally, we pray that we would be filled with the fullness of God

Many students have shared with me that they don’t know what to pray for and my answer is that they can always pray to be more like Jesus. Our goal as believers is to become like Christ The previous three things we pray for being strengthened with His might, rooted and grounded in love, and to know the love of Christ build on each other and lead to being filled with the fullness of God I mentioned earlier that we do not like change...if we consistently pray what Paul teaches us to pray change will happen AND it is a good change...we will be growing in godliness and becoming more like our Savior...so we pray to this end as well

In Ephesians 4 Paul also tells us that the measuring stick for the fullness of God is Jesus Christ. He writes in 4:13...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, Paul also tells us in Colossians 1 that the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ. As we pray to be filled with the fullness of God the things of this world will become less and less important. The things that lure us away, distract us, and preoccupy our thoughts and take up our time each day slowly fade away.

- Harry Ironside said this...” The secret to holiness is heart-occupation with Christ. As we gaze upon him, we become like him. Do you want to become like Christ? ... Let the loveliness of the risen Lord so fill the vision of your soul that all else is shut out. Then the

things of the flesh will shrivel up and disappear and the things of the Spirit will become supreme in your life”

And yes, we may struggle and there may be low points in life and we may walk through some deep dark valleys but we pray and ask that we may be filled with the fullness of God trusting this happening one degree at a time and knowing that He who began a good work in us will bring to completion at the day of Christ Jesus The true beauty of being filled with the fullness of God is that God is an eternal being and we will have all eternity to be filled with the fulness of God and there will never come a point where we are completely full because he has no beginning and no end and his wisdom, honor, love, and glory go on forever and ever....so we pray

I realize it is easy to think these are some lofty things to be praying...it's overwhelming...so why again even try. I would say this...We are a needy people and the One we need the most is the One who created us and He created us to be in relationship with Him and the means He gave us to communicate with Him is prayer...And yes these are lofty things but Paul reminds us what God is capable of...VERSE 20 says

Again, it's not based upon us but upon God and I don't know about you but that makes me feel much better about what would happen if we started to pray consistently as the people of God. So, I encourage you to start praying on your own, in your small groups and please come today at 4:00pm to the church pray service And may we as the Body of Christ start praying that

- We would be strengthened with His power
- We would be rooted and grounded in love
- We would know Christ's love
- We would be filled with the fullness of God

Trusting that he able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think To him be the glory forever and ever Amen!