

TEACH US TO PRAY

Week Four | November 5, 2017 | How to Pray for Others

PREPARATION

MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone in God's Word reading through Ephesians 1:15–19, 3:14–19. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in the guide this week. Many questions have been included in this lesson for discussion. Determine which questions will work well to encourage, push, and grow your group in the best way.

DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together as a group, that the Spirit would make effective your teaching and bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those who are present.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL REALITY

When praying for other believers, we should thank God for them and ask the Lord to give them wisdom, understanding, confidence, and strength.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

When we pray for believers like Paul did, we line up our desires with God's desires for them, and we help strengthen them to continue being fruitful.

MEDITATE

"I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:16.)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *What makes you feel most supported by other believers in your life?*

Q: *How often do you pray for other believers?*

Q: *When you intercede for other believers, for what do you specifically pray?*

In 1792, an organization known as the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in the home of Andrew Fuller, a famous minister, theologian, and promoter of missionary work. For twenty-one years after founding the organization, Fuller served as the leader. He raised funds, wrote periodicals, recruited missionaries, and strengthened the missionaries on the frontlines with personally written letters. The famous missionary, William Carey, was a part of the group and God called him to the unknown world of India for missionary work. With a small band of brothers huddled together in Fuller's home, William Carey looked around him and said, "Well, I will go down, if you will hold the rope." In Fuller's mind, he saw Carey descending into a deep mine no one had ever entered. Fuller knew that though Carey had much faith and great love for others, he would desperately need other believers giving him support along the way, whether that be through finances, visits, letters, or prayer. "Holding the rope" has become a famous Christian tagline in years since.

Every believer is called to descend to a certain calling or sphere of influence; but in order to thrive, surrounding believers must gather to "hold the rope." One of the ways that we "hold the rope" for fellow believers is by praying for them. As we will see in Ephesians, Paul knows that these flourishing Christians will desperately need continual prayers lifted up for them if they are to remain fruitful. In many ways, as these believers descend into their daily life, Paul "holds the rope" for them by praying, and he teaches us how to do the same for the brothers and sisters in our own lives.

Q: *Do you pray more for other Christians when things are going wrong in their life, or when they are doing well? Why?*

II UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

So far in this series, we've studied how to pray in good times, how to pray in bad times, and how Jesus prayed for us. Now, we will discuss how to pray for other believers based on Paul's example in Ephesians. Though Paul does not have much personal history with these believers, he has heard wonderful things about them. Though he is impressed by their spiritual state, he still writes to them about important matters and mentions throughout his letter how he prays for them often. Through his example, Paul teaches us to pray in this way for fellow Christians in our life:

1. THANK GOD FOR OTHER BELIEVERS
2. ASK GOD TO GIVE WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING, AND CONFIDENCE TO OTHER BELIEVERS
3. ASK GOD TO STRENGTHEN OTHER BELIEVERS

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

THANK GOD FOR OTHER BELIEVERS

II EPHESIANS 1:15-16

Q: *What makes Paul so thankful for these Ephesian believers? Who do you know in your own church that exhibits great faith in God and love toward others?*

Q: *Paul thanks God for fellow believers by doing what? How does this challenge the way you usually show gratitude for other believers in your life?*

As Paul writes this letter to the Ephesian believers, the first thing we notice is the apostle cannot contain his gratefulness for them. Planting and developing new churches is hard work, and Paul has seen the ups and the downs of ministry. Some churches have been slower to mature, causing him great distress and frustration, while

others have encouraged Paul by their spiritual growth, the Ephesian church being one of them. Paul is especially encouraged by two specific areas of fruitfulness that the believers in Ephesus display. First, they demonstrate “faith in the Lord.” These Ephesian Christians show strong belief that Jesus is exactly who he says He is, and Paul does not take this for granted. Second, Paul is thankful for these believers because of their great “love toward all the saints.” The strong relationship these believers have with Christ has overflowed into their loving actions toward one another, something that, unfortunately, can be rare in some churches. Paul’s awareness of and thankfulness for the spiritual maturity of these believers pushes us to take a look at our own community of faith, and look for those who exhibit great faith in Christ and love toward other believers. As we identify them, we should praise God for what He has accomplished in them and the gift they are to the church. If Paul makes note of such things, we should too.

Next, we see that Paul expresses his thankfulness through a specific practice: prayer. When Paul sees the fruit this church is bearing, he gives thanks by remembering them in his prayers. For Paul, prayer was a vehicle not just for requests, but for thankfulness. Additionally, the apostle does not only pray for believers who are having a hard time or who find themselves in a dark season. Instead, he also prays for those who have great faith and show remarkable love toward others. While Christians today often pray for other believers when something has gone wrong, Paul pushes us to pray in thanks for when things are going well.

Q: *Why is it easy to forget to pray for the believers in our life who are doing well?*

Q: *Are you thankful for believers around you who are doing well? Or do you resent their fruitful seasons?*

Q: *How often does Paul thank God for the Ephesian believers?*

In these verses, Paul not only thanks God for the Ephesian believers, he also does not cease in giving thanks for them. In other words, a prayer of gratitude is always on his lips for the believers in his life who are doing well! He is bubbling up in thankfulness, unable to contain it. This challenges us to evaluate our own prayer habits when it comes to other believers in our life. Whether they are doing well or not, we must examine if our prayers are characterized by unceasing thankfulness for them. While we sometimes pray here and there for other believers in our life, we must ask if prayers of thankfulness for them are always on our lips. If not, we may have to change some of our inward-focused prayer habits.

Q: *Evaluate the prayers you have lifted up this week. How much of them were prayers of thanks for other believers in your life? What does your answer reveal about your view of prayer?*

ASK GOD TO GIVE WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING, AND CONFIDENCE TO OTHER BELIEVERS

■ ■ EPHESIANS 1:17-19

Q: *What particular prayer requests do you see in these verses? Why do you think Paul prays for these specifically?*

Q: *What do you think Paul means by “God’s inheritance?”*

While these Ephesian believers have already impressed Paul with their great faith and love, the apostle does not consider this grounds for ceasing to pray for them. While a prayer of thanks for them begins his conversation with God, he does not stop there. After giving thanks, Paul then prays for other specific things. First, he asks God to give them a spirit of wisdom. The city of Ephesus is famously known for its obsession with magic and the occult, and Paul knows that these believers need discernment and insight to remain true to Christ and navigate the culture around them. Though they might be showing faith and love now, they will need prayer and wisdom to remain fruitful. Being in a healthy season as a believer is not a given, but a gift that requires wisdom. The “spirit of wisdom” here is a reference to the internal work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers as they read God’s Word and obtain valuable insights on how they should live. With this guide, Paul is confident these believers will be able to remain steadfast in such a demonic culture, and he makes sure to pray for it specifically.

Next, Paul prays that the Ephesian believers would grow in their understanding of God. He desires that they grow in the knowledge of the gospel, which is all God has done for them in Christ on the cross, as well as the gifts that come from being in Christ. While Paul prays boldly, he is also realistic. He knows that growing in our understanding of the gospel is not something we can produce on our own. He prays that God increase their understanding and grow them in wisdom.

Q: *How often do you pray for believers around you to grow in godly wisdom from the Holy Spirit and God's Word?*

Q: *Are your prayers filled with requests for your church to grow in its understanding of God and the gospel?*

Next, Paul prays for these believers to experience strong confidence in several truths: their future hope, God's inheritance in the saints, and Christ's incredible power. The apostle wants these believers to not only have faith in Christ, but to be sure that their faith will one day become sight. He wants them to be confident that their future hope is real. They will be with Christ and will reign with him. He also wants them to understand the significance of the inheritance. While many assume this verse speaks of our inheritance as believers, it's actually referring to God's inheritance. Of course, some would wonder, what will God inherit that He does not already have? The answer lies in the next phrase, "in the saints." God will inherit all His gathered believers one day. Believers throughout history are, so to speak, what God looks forward to enjoying forever! Here, Paul wants the Ephesian Christians to have great confidence in just how important they are to God. Furthermore, Paul wants these Christians to understand the immeasurable greatness of Christ's power toward all those who believe. These believers need to be certain that Christ's power is mighty in their lives, and that He is able to accomplish anything He wants in the Ephesian church.

Paul's specific prayers in this section should lead us to reflect on our own prayers for fellow believers. We must ask ourselves if our prayers for others are filled with requests for God to give them a spirit of wisdom, an increased gospel-understanding, and greater confidence in both their future hope and the current power available to them.

Q: *What encourages you about understanding "God's inheritance?"*

Q: *What parts and trends in our own culture are dark, demanding that we pray constantly for God to help us in the ways Paul listed? How is our current society similar to Ephesus?*

ASK GOD TO STRENGTHEN OTHER BELIEVERS

■ EPHESIANS 3:14-19

Q: *Do you ever ask God to strengthen already-strong believers? Why or why not?*

Q: *What does Paul say he wants the Ephesians to be filled with? How does this change the way you pray for other believers?*

In this section of Ephesians, Paul first offers a final request to God, that the Ephesian believers would be strengthened in their inner spirit. Paul knows that God has glorious, unlimited resources, and he begs God to pour them out on the believers in Ephesus. Though they reside in the midst of an earthly culture, the apostle wants these Christians to remain rooted in the great love of heaven, which is only possible through the Spirit's work to powerfully strengthen them from the inside out. Though these believers showed faith and love, they still had needs and ways they could grow and be more firmly rooted. In response, Paul prays for them to be strengthened.

What's most interesting is that Paul does not ask for any specific circumstances to be changed. Instead, he asks for God to fortify their deep understanding of His love for them, a love that cannot be fully contained or understood. Imagine praying for someone to grow in their understanding of a love that can't be fully understood! Paul knows that when these believers are strengthened by this kind of love, they can face any circumstance, good or bad, and they can remain fruitful.

Q: *Do you think praying this way can change you, the person praying? Why or why not?*

Q: *How does Paul's prayer change your prayers for fellow believers?*

In the end, Paul wants them to be filled with the "fullness of God" himself as He dwells within their hearts, meeting their deepest needs and strengthening their hearts. When praying for other believers, we should likewise pray for our brothers and sisters to be strengthened on the inside through Christ's incredible presence and power. As we lift one another up in prayer, and seek to serve one another for practical needs along the way, we should ultimately

ask God to fill us with the fullness of Himself. We, like Paul, should pray for our fellow brothers and sisters to keep growing in the knowledge of a love that can't fully be known, to be strengthened by a power that is immeasurable, and to be filled by a God who is uncontainable. As we pray for God to accomplish these purposes in His people, we must also be willing to be the vessel He uses to do it, whether through continuing in steadfast intercession for them, or meeting their needs in tangible ways.

Q: *What's a practical way you can help strengthen other believers using your own gifts and resources?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

Q: *What believers in your life are doing well in their spiritual walk? What about their walk with God right now encourages you? Take some time this week to thank God for the fruit that He is bearing in the lives of these believers.*

Q: *What various spheres of influence do your fellow brothers and sisters engage in on a weekly basis [work, school, neighborhoods, the gym, etc.]? Pray that God would give them a spirit of wisdom in these arenas, and that they would remain fruitful instead of falling into sin or temptation in the culture around them.*

Q: *Who in your life needs to be reminded of the great confidence they can have as a believer? Plan a time to meet with this person [or people] to discuss all the ways God wants them to be rooted in great confidence about their future as a believer, the way God feels about them, and the power that is theirs in Christ. End your time together in prayer for these things.*

Q: *How can you start modeling your prayers for other believers according to Paul's prayer here in Ephesians? What about your prayers need to change in order to make this happen?*

PRAY

+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.


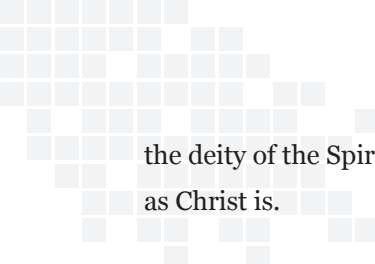
- God, thank you for the fellow believers in my life who encourage me in the example of their faith and love.
- God, please give the other Christians in my life a spirit of wisdom to help them navigate through the culture around them. Use your Spirit and your Word to give them discernment.
- God, please equip my church with great confidence in your love and in the future we will one day have with you.
- God, I pray you'd change my prayer habits. Instead of only focusing on myself, give me the compassion and urgency to pray for my fellow believers, regardless of the season they are in. Also, lay on my heart ways I can be a vessel to help strengthen the believers around me in a practical way.

COMMENTARY

EPHESIANS 1:18–19 Paul heaps up “power words” to express the immeasurable greatness of God’s power, working, and great might toward believers. Power over supernatural forces using magic and the occult was a great concern in ancient Ephesus (Acts 19:19), but Paul wants these believers to see that the power of the living God in Christ trumps all competing authorities (Acts 19:20). There is no need to get caught up in what seems powerful in the occult world, because these believers know the most powerful being in existence.

EPHESIANS 3:14 To be named in biblical usage refers to the definition of one’s identity. God the Father, the creator of all things, is also the one who “names” (i.e., defines the identity of) all creatures, even to the extent of “naming” every family in heaven and on earth. God’s present action in the naming of “every family” is a further affirmation of his sovereignty over all creation. Here Paul is again showing how much more powerful God is than any other rival.

EPHESIANS 3:17–18 When Paul asks for Christ to dwell in these believers, he’s not saying that Jesus does not already dwell there. Instead, he is simply asking for an indwelling with further power and growth. When pairing this passage with verse 16, it’s clear that the indwelling “Spirit” is equivalent to the indwelling “Christ,” indicating



the deity of the Spirit as well as the Son. Here we see evidence of the Trinity—that the Holy Spirit is fully God, just as Christ is.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes.*