

Text: Eph. 1:15-19a & 3:14-19/ Phil. 1:9-11

Target audience: Christians

Topic: Prayer

Theme: Praying for people's spiritual needs.

My purpose for this message: to urge Christians to pray for others' spiritual needs, not just physical needs.

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Praying for Others' Eyesight

PRAY.

My wife is at Keystone's women's retreat this weekend which handicaps me enormously. I got a t-shirt to wear for times like this: (READS "*Help, my wife's at the women's retreat and I don't know what to do!*")

I am in sorry shape when she's not here. For example, my cooking skills pretty much stop at scrambled eggs, hot dogs, French toast and leftovers. I haven't done laundry since 1998. And I don't sleep well when Betty's not home.

Besides the way they outperform most of us with domestic skills, men have you ever noticed God gives our wives abilities that He doesn't give us?

- Multi-tasking: talk on phone, cook, meal, write checks, and relocate furniture all at the same time.
- Time management. If I tried to do all my wife does, by Saturday I'd still be on last Tuesday's list.
- But especially, eyesight. "Honey, where's such-and-such shirt?" I stand in front of my closet, go back and forth through my clothes 3 times without finding it. She comes to the bedroom, moves me out of the way, and just with a glance, finds it.

She can find a lost check, a lost book, a lost tool. I wish I had her eyesight. But there's an eyesight that's more valuable than finding lost things.

Today is the last message on prayer and we're going to talk about intercession: praying for other people. What do *you* pray for when you pray for friends, family members—anyone: maybe health, safety, some aspect of happiness such as improved finances or a mate or a more enjoyable job or a friend for someone who needs one? We generally concentrate on material, on physical needs like this. We often pray about stuff that's tied to this world. Probably 90% of the requests that go across our Intercessor's Network are health related.

But what about others' spiritual needs? What about that which will matter not just *here*, but *there*? The intercessory prayers in the Bible probably look quite different from many of ours: instead of being absorbed with the physical and material, they are absorbed with the spiritual. In other words, instead of asking God to be good to Karen, many of the prayers ask God to help Karen be good to God. Many prayers in the Bible, ask for *spiritual* success rather than *financial* success, *academic* success, *marital* success, *career* success, or *medical* success.

This morning we're going to take a look at 3 prayers like that: that zero in on spiritual growth. And most of them say it comes as the result of improved spiritual eyesight: "God, let them see! Let them see *better!*"

1. READ Eph. 1:15-19a.

This prayer might be a little more flowery or wordy than you're accustomed to praying. For years I buzzed by passages like this because I'd get lost; the writer Paul was an educated man with a tendency to write endless sentences with too many dependent clauses.

But Paul was also a great man of prayer who *believed* God acted when he prayed. So he asked God to do very specific things for very specific outcomes.

a. **Desired outcome(s)**

- i. Know God better (not just about Him) (17)
- ii. Know these 3 realities better (18-19)
 1. the hope Christ brought you to (18)
 2. The privilege of being part of the church (18)
 3. The great power that's yours as a Christian (19)

b. **Means to the outcomes:**

- i. Know God better? Given a Spirit of wisdom and revelation (enhanced eyesight) (17)
- ii. Know these 3 realities better? Eyes of your heart become enlightened (spiritual eye surgery; enhanced eyesight) (18-19)

These things are all realities for each Christian, but not every Christian sees them. Paul wants his friends to see them, but even more, to grasp what a blessing they are. Spiritual eyesight.

2. READ Eph.3:14-19.

Again, Paul is not just trying to write an impressive prayer that will make the crowds Ooh and Aah at Appleby's over Sunday lunch. People aren't his audience, God is. Here too he is precise in what outcomes he wants, and precise in the means to those outcomes.

a. **Desired outcome(s)**

- i. Christ may dwell in your hearts (17).
- ii. Filled to the measure of God's fullness (19).

b. **Means to the outcomes:**

- i. Spirit strengthens your inner being (16).
- ii. Power to grasp (spiritual eyesight) extent of Christ's love and *know* it, not just know about it (18-19).

(16-17) "God, from your riches, distribute more power to these people." Interesting prayer. I had a conversation about revival with a pastor friend this week, who said "we have all of God we'll ever need, what's in question is how much of *us* God has." Then I read this. And I wondered, if it's true that Paul's friends in Ephesus already had all of God (including all of the power He ever meant to entrust them with), why ask God to *strengthen* them with power? Every Christian acquires power at salvation when the HS moves in. But Paul's asking for an *increase*. So it appears that power levels vary. Perhaps determined at least partly by faith for as Paul explains, his desired outcome is "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts THROUGH FAITH.

(18-19): Paul continues pushing for power, specifically, power to see; power to mentally, spiritually, emotionally grasp the extent of Christ's love, *and* to *know* the love. Not just intellectually understand love because (19) says that it *surpasses* knowledge. God, I don't just want these people to know *about* Christ's

love, I want them to *know* the love. To experience it. To have encounters that move them beyond just having the correct answers.

“God, fill them to the brim with all your fullness.” Do you ever pray prayers like this? This is the Ph.D world of praying. Getting beyond issues of health, safety, money, jobs. In this kind of praying for other people, we are taking on issues that will not only make a difference in this life but in the next; *and* that will not only make a difference in the next, but in this life.

3. READ Phil.1:9-11.

Again, Paul’s prayer asks God for a specific outcome, and a specific means of achieving that outcome.

- a. **Desired outcome(s)**
 - i. You’re able to discern what’s best (10).
 - ii. May live godly until Jesus returns (10-11).
- b. **Means to the outcomes:**
 - i. Love increases through knowledge and depth of insight (spiritual eyesight) (9).

“God, by increasing their knowledge and depth of insight (i.e., sharpen their spiritual eyesight), make their love grow and grow for each other.” Intercession for other people like this improves the health of their church. Why do churches that split, split? Occasionally over doctrine; but more often over things that don’t really matter. So why split? Because people no longer love each others. In a church that once was “we, us, ours,” it became “me, my, mine.” Spiritual blindness. But God, when you sharpen their spiritual eyesight, as they increasingly see who you are, who you call them to be, love will grow out of that rich soil.

“And God, my purpose for this increase in love, is that these Christians would be *able to discern what is best*, that is to better and better be able to distinguish between what matters and what doesn’t.” Oh, well-intentioned though we are, isn’t it easy to get preoccupied with details—and stuff that really doesn’t matter, and neglect what *does*?

Paul continues, saying another outcome he’s asking God for, is these believers might be godly people, typically growing good fruit in their lives until Jesus returns.

Concl:

The Bible has a lot to say about spiritual eyesight. Unbelievers are “blinded by the god of this age so that they can’t see the light of the gospel...” (2 Cor.4:4). Christians without qualities like goodness, perseverance and self-control, are nearsighted and blind, having forgotten that Christ cleansed them of their sins. (2 Peter1:9)

So, pray for others’ spiritual eyesight. By all means, keep praying for material, medical, physical, occupational, and safety blessings. But could you use some balance in your intercession? We need to intercede for Mary’s and Jim’s and Barbara’s and Fred’s spiritual vitals as well as their physical vitals. For only the spiritual matters for eternity.

Spiritual eyesight sample prayers:

- Father, help them grasp the majesty of the gospel—not just intellectually, but what it did to and for them.
- Father, have them taste and see that you are good. That even in bad circumstances, they can rejoice for their good God is in charge.
- Father, teach them to grasp the power you have placed in their lives through the HS residence, and then use it for...
 - Speaking about Jesus
 - Overcoming sinful habits and tendencies
 - Defeating despair, discouragement, fear and anxiety
 - To follow your leading despite innumerable obstacles
- Father, elevate their discernment of what You're saying
- Father, train them to subordinate their desires to Your's
- Father, help them know You, not just about You.
- Father, help her grasp what she reads in the Bible.
- Father, increase his faith.
- Father, replace her anxiety with a supernatural peace.