

Ephesians. The Identity of the Church that Overcomes.

Living the Message: Returning to our First Love

Houses of Light Church • November 17, 2024 • Ilse Marquez

Focus: Ephesians 1:15-23, Revelation 2:1-7

“ Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God’s people everywhere, 16 I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, 17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. 18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. 19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.”

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NLT)

What have we learned and what has changed?

In the last two weeks, we’ve gotten a glimpse of Paul’s prayer life, the way he prayed for the believers in Ephesus has shown us how we could pray and even inspired prayers we could take into our daily lives, my question today is: have these teachings changed how we approach prayer in our daily lives? Have our lives been transformed at all by what we’ve heard in church the last few weeks?

What was the church of Ephesus like?

The church of Ephesus started out radical, making bold and drastic decisions to follow Jesus even when it went completely against popular opinion and the socioeconomic systems of the city:

“The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. 18 Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. 19 A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. 20 So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.” **Acts 19:17-19**

They heard the gospel and it lead them to immediate, radical change. A lot of us can probably relate to how they felt, and even what they did. Do you remember the radical decisions you made when you first met Jesus? Maybe you left behind the music you once loved, or you gave up sarcasm, maybe you were radically saved from an addiction, or you realized what you needed to do to protect your walk with Jesus and made tough choices to do it because you really believed He was worth it! That’s what they did, they threw away what they knew in favor of a life of following Jesus even though their bold choice almost started a riot in the city.

Lessons from Paul’s Prayer

Paul was there when all of this happened, he helped preach the Gospel to them on this day, now in the letter to their church we see that since he heard of them, he never stopped praying for them. Though they have gotten a glimpse of Jesus and understood key aspects of his person — enough to change and launch a church from it — Paul is still praying that *“the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [will] give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.”* (Eph. 1:17)

What does this mean? — Our initial encounter with Jesus, though miraculous and beautiful does not necessarily encompass everything we need to know about Him nor the depths of His mercy, grace, and love. We cannot expect to keep growing in the Lord with just the memory of an encounter, even a really good one. We need to see Jesus more and more every day. *“I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. 19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms...”* **Ephesians 1:18-20**

They saw the hope, they understood it to an extent, but Paul is praying for more. We need more, and it doesn't really come by collecting information, it comes by the kind of revelation only God can bring. That's why prayer is crucial to our walk with the Lord.

What is prayer?

A group of theologians at an organization called Desiring God have defined prayer this way, "**Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing.** Prayer is an expression of faith in God's power, fueled by a desire for more of him. God has established prayer as the means by which we receive his supernatural help. And without supernatural help, we cannot live a life worthy of the gospel. **Everything that distinguishes Christians from the world in a Christ-exalting way is a work of God's supernatural grace. And God has ordained that this grace flows to us through prayer. That's why prayer must be central, not peripheral, in our lives and families and ministries.**"

A real danger...

Francis Chan once stated, "My biggest concern for this generation is your inability to focus, especially in prayer." If prayer is meant to be our fuel, the way we receive the grace of God, then our inability to focus on it actually robs us from the grace, mercy, peace, and glory Jesus died to give us access to. By refusing to pray we are refusing to depend on God, choosing instead to live and make things happen by our own strength resulting in what James describes in his letter:

"What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? 2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. 3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure." **James 4:1-3**

Can we really do life on our own? Maybe, but where has that lead us so far? Is it possible to follow Jesus without living a life devoted to prayer? No. Not even Jesus himself went without praying to the Father. Prayer cultivates dependence in us — we depend on God, when that falls out of our practice we start to follow Him based assumption as opposed to actual conversation. Assuming you know what someone wants or would say is not the best way to have a relationship, in fact that is often how you end up walking on eggshells and tiptoeing around the elephants in the room.

When we do Christian life out of assumption instead of conversation, we end up in religious legalism— we assume we know what God would say and want but we no longer have a relationship with Him because we are no longer on speaking terms.

At some point, it appears this is what happened to the church of Ephesus. They put in the work, did the right things, probably sang the right songs, but when Jesus sends letters to the churches through John in the book of Revelation, he has this to say to them:

"I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. (so far so good... but then...)
*4 "But I have this complaint against you. **You don't love me or each other as you did at first!** 5 **Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first.** If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches" **Revelation 2:2-5***

What happened? From radically turning to Jesus, to doing the right things but losing their love in the process — something went wrong along as time went on. Jesus does not bring this up to make them feel ashamed of themselves, He brings them up to tell them what they can do to restore their first love! He says, "**Turn back to me and do the works you did at first.**"

Do the works you did at first — The first thing they did was see Jesus and turn away from every idol no matter the cost.

Could this be an exhortation for us today?

Are we doing the right things disconnected from a vibrant love for Jesus? Do we love Him? Do we love each other? We reflect and ask so we can repent where we need to! Repentance is one of the gifts of Christianity! We can own our mistakes and weaknesses, confess them before the Lord and leadership, receive forgiveness, and walk in freedom by the blood of Jesus! This is glorious!

Perhaps today can be the day we repent and sign up again. I know I need to, so here are some keys to jump start our prayer lives again:

1. **Don't know what to pray? Pray the Bible.** Take Ephesians 1:15-23 and turn it into a prayer, or read the gospel of John and ask the Lord questions as you go. You don't have to be quick to move on, you can pause and wait for the Lord to give you understanding and revelation. We're not in a hurry.
2. **Don't know how to start? Give thanks.** Gratitude is a key to unlock the presence of the Lord. There is always something to be grateful for, and gratitude helps us gain a heavenly perspective of our lives and whatever circumstances we're facing.
3. **Forgot to pray? Repent and start again.** Remember that you have access to the grace of God, instead of running away in shame you can come to Him, ask for forgiveness and start over. Don't let the guilt of not doing it keep you from coming back, He's a Father, He loves to talk to His children no matter how much time has passed.
4. **Need help? Set reminders and phone a friend.** You can pray alone or you can pray with someone, if you know you want to grow in this consider finding a friend who has the same hunger and ask them to check in on your prayer life. Encourage one another and watch how your consistency grows!

Reflection Questions:

1. **How is your relationship with the Lord these days? Are you in love? Do you talk to Him often?**
2. **How is your prayer life? What practical changes can you implement today in order to cultivate more consistency?**

Announcements:

1. We have **parent-youth night this Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.** here in the sanctuary! we will have honest conversations, question and answer time, and an opportunity for you to get to know the team more!
2. **Young Adult Set (Y.A.S.) is every Wednesday at 8:00 pm** here in the prayer room.
3. Healing Ministry will be open on Thursday, November 21 at 7:00 p.m. If you or a family member or friend would like to come pray for healing in any area of your lives, you can register at the table outside or online. www.heartbeatprayerroom.la.
4. Next week we have a dessert night to celebrate Thanksgiving during this service featuring some fun desserts made by some of our leaders and opportunities to connect with the people in this room! See you here at 5PM, bring a friend!
5. We have a church-wide Thanksgiving service on Thanksgiving Day at 11 AM! Bring the whole family, it will be bilingual.