

How to Receive the Blessings Part 2

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, February 2, 2020

The topic of our sermon this morning, like it was last week, is the topic of prayer because that's what our passage is about. And to see this, if you would open your Bibles with me to the book of Ephesians. That's the book we are in this morning. Please turn with me to the book of Ephesians.

And as you're doing that, if you're joining us for the first time today, we're in the middle of the series on the book of Ephesians called the "All of God" series, because that's what the book is about. Ephesians 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. Which means that you have to go to God to get them. That's the idea here. If you want to be blessed, if you want treasures in the Christian life, you have to go to heaven to receive them. They don't just fall on you from the sky, they don't just land in your lap - you go to Him in prayer.

I've told you before, the book of Ephesians has been called the "Believers Bank" for this reason, because it tells you where your treasures are. It tells you where your blessings are held - they're held by the Lord and you go to Him in prayer to receive them.

And just to show you this, just to do a quick review of the book, if you look in chapter 1:3, Paul writes there and he says, "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."

That's the key to the book, that's where it begins. Paul says, God wants to bless you with every spiritual blessing. It means He doesn't want to give you one or two blessings; He wants to give you every blessing. God doesn't want to give you just one or two treasures, just a few here or there. He wants to give you every one of them. Every blessing that you need.

And then Paul goes on to list them for you. If you follow along in the passage, he says in verses 5 and 7: God has adopted and redeemed you. Those are two of the blessings you receive in the Christian life. That's how he starts off. Then down in verse 9 and verse 11, He has made known to you the mystery and given you an inheritance. Those are the next two.

Verse 13 says, you've been sealed with the spirit, which means God has closed the deal with you. He sealed you off so that no one can touch you now. And then in verse 15, He makes a transition. Starting in verse 15 of chapter 1, Paul makes a change from talking about your blessings to talking about how you get them, and the way you get your blessings is through prayer. Which means the more you pray, the more you are blessed in the Christian life. The more you go to God with your requests and needs, the more He hears you and answers you.

And if you look at this in verses 15 through 23, this is how Paul says this - Cory just read this for you, but just so we can see this for ourselves. In verse 15, 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.”

As you read that, you can tell this is one long prayer from the Apostle Paul. This is one big request that he's making for the Ephesians. In verse 16, he says, “I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers.” Verse 18 he says, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” because this is one big prayer. And the prayer is that you might know your blessings. That's what Paul is praying for here. He prays that you would know all the riches God has given you in Christ.

Which is important because, as I mentioned last week, prayer is hard, isn't it? It doesn't come easy for us as Christians to pray. We all struggle with this. We all fight with it. When you ask a believer, “What do you struggle with?” they'll tell you two things; prayer and evangelism. I hear that all the time: “I don't pray enough and I don't witness enough.” It's one of the most difficult things to do in the Christian life.

The Puritan William Gurnall wrote over a thousand pages on the subject of prayer. It was a favourite topic of his. And he said this, he said, “A child does not have to be taught how to cry, it just cries. And in a similar way, a Christian does not have to be taught how to pray, he just prays. It comes naturally to us, but that doesn't make it easy.” Nobody likes to cry – or does anybody like to cry? We don't like to do that. And prayer can be just as hard for us, even for pastors, even for people in my profession.

My seminary had a prayer class that you had to take to graduate and we had the assignment to pray for one hour a day. That's what we had to do for the entire semester. We had to pray for one hour a day and journal what we prayed for, and I will tell you that was hard. My mind just went everywhere in that whole hour. And I have to confess, there were times I just kept looking at the clock. Prayer is not an easy thing to do.

In my study this week, I looked up some reasons why this was, why prayer is difficult for us. I found there's several reasons that were mentioned. One is laziness. One reason we don't pray like we should is because we're often too lazy. Don't get out of bed in the morning. Another reason is distraction. You guys know what it's like when you pray. Your mind is distracted by a million things. Another one is sin.

But the number one reason that was listed, that I could find, was priorities. The number one reason why we don't pray like we should is because we simply don't prioritize it enough. It's not important to us. We have other things that are. Which is so sad, because it's essential to the Christian life. You can't do anything without prayer. If you think about it, you can read the Bible without prayer, but you can't understand it, can you? You can't live it out without prayer. It's impossible.

And you can go to church without prayer. You can show up here week after week without prayer. But you can't be the church without prayer. You can't be a Christian without it. Churches across this country are full of non-praying people that are not Christians as a result. Prayer is everything for us.

Someone asked me the other day, he said, "How do you keep preaching every week when you know that people aren't listening to you?" I said, "Our people listen. We've got good people that listen." But I said, "But at the same time, the answer is prayer." I can't make anybody listen. I can't make anyone believe.

I could ask you guys the same question. I could say, "How do you keep teaching your children when you know they don't listen to you? How do you keep witnessing to your neighbor? How do you keep loving on people that are so mean to you?" The answer is prayer, right? You have to pray. That's the same way with everything we do as a church. In fact, this is so important that you can either pray as a church, or God will make you pray as a church. You can either pray as a Christian, as a believer, or God will break you and make you pray that way. But one way or the other, you're going to pray.

It's been said that every great movement of God started with a man on his knees. It started with prayer. And if you want God to move here, if you want God to do something in this place, this is what you have to do. It's also been said, prayer doesn't change God's mind, but it does catch His ear. And if you want to catch His ear, you have to pray.

Toward the end of his life, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a famous pastor from London, who had a popular radio ministry, lost his voice and he couldn't preach anymore, couldn't talk, hardly talk. And he was being interviewed by someone who asked him, "Are you going to miss that? Are you going to miss preaching and being on the radio?" To which Lloyd-Jones says, "I'm not sustained by preaching, I'm sustained by prayer." He said, "My relationship with God is everything to me. Preaching is just kind of a secondary thing." It should be that way for all of us in the church, which is what we're going to talk about this morning.

This morning, we're going to talk about the importance of prayer, and how it sustains us in everything we do. So if you're taking notes, in Ephesians 1:18-19, we're going to look at four more principles of prayer from the Apostle Paul. So that's our outline for today. This is what it's about. If you were here with us last week, you'll remember we gave four principles for prayer. This week, we're going to just continue that and give you four more. Look at the same topic again, because that's what Paul does. Because you can't say enough about prayer, can you? You can't say enough about this subject.

What was one of the last things the Lord Jesus did before He left the earth? Remember? He prayed: "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." That was a prayer. Son of God, second person of the Trinity, and He left this world praying. It's that important. And what is He doing right now with the right hand of God? What's the Lord Jesus doing with the Father? He's interceding on our behalf. He's praying now. And if it's that important for the Lord, it's that important for us. And we're going to talk about this with four more principles for prayer.

The first one is this: you need to pray for change. It's the first principle we see in our passage this morning from the Apostle Paul. But the first thing he says is you need to pray for change, which means that you shouldn't just go through the motions when you pray. You shouldn't do this as a ritual.

There are a lot of traditions and ceremonies that are good for the church. They're good for us. But you never want to turn prayer into a tradition and a ceremony. Cults do that. False religions do that. You want to know the mark of a false religion? They tell you prayers to just repeat mindlessly. That's false religion. You need to pray for change.

If you read in verse 15, just getting the context again, for this. Our verse is in verse 18, but let's just set the background here. Paul says in verse 15:

“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.”

Just to explain that to you, I mentioned before that verse 15 begins the second major sentence in the book of Ephesians. It's kind of strange, but we're this far into the book, we're this far into the letter, and we're only starting sentence number two. But that's how Paul writes it. And it starts off with the phrase “for this reason” which means, “for the reason I wrote about earlier, for the reason God has given you all these blessings; your adoption and redemption and ceiling.” Paul says, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give to you a spirit of wisdom and the knowledge of Him.”

In other words, Paul prays that the Ephesians may know Him. That's what he wants. He prays that these people would come to a knowledge of God and His blessings. That word “knowledge” is an interesting word in Greek. It's the word *epignosis*, which comes from the word *epi* which means “full,” and *gnosis* or knowledge. It means to have a full knowledge of something. To know all that there is to know.

In other words, Paul doesn't want the Ephesians to know a little about their blessings, he wants them to know all of it. He doesn't want them to know a few things about God, he wants them to know all that can be known. And some Christians are content with knowing just a very little bit about God. They pray a prayer, they check off a box, and they say that they're saved and then they go through the rest of the life not wanting to know anything about salvation in the Lord. Paul doesn't want that here. He wants the Ephesians to know everything.

And with that in mind, in verse 18, he prays, he says, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” That's a beautiful phrase. It means, “I pray that you may change. I pray that the blessings will make a difference in your heart.” Paul says, “I pray that this information will make the six inches or about one foot leap from your mind into your soul.”

I think we all understand God is not interested in your head only; He's interested in your heart. God doesn't want you to know him just academically and that's it. He wants you to know Him personally. It's what Paul is talking about here. It's one thing to know somebody out there, it's another thing to know them in here. It's one thing to know God from a distance, it's another thing to know Him close up. Paul wants you to know God close up.

And the phrase “the eyes of your heart” is another way of saying the eyes of your soul, or the eyes of your inner man, because the Greeks thought the heart was the center of your soul. Your soul rested within your heart. The Hebrew people thought it was your guts. That's kind

of gross. They said, “I love you with all my guts.” But the idea was that it was the center part of you.

And “the eyes of your heart” meant the part of your soul that sees, the part of your soul that thinks and makes decisions. And in fact the word “enlightened” here, it’s the word *photizo* from which we get the word photograph. So Paul prays that you would see the light and receive it like a photograph, like a picture so you can change. That’s the whole prayer here. He prays that you would see all of this stuff he’s written about in chapter 1 and be different as a result.

Light changes things, doesn’t it? I mean light always makes a difference. We had the lights go out in Chilliwack, you guys remember that? And if you’ve been in my office before - I love my office very much, but when the lights go out, it feels like a prison cell, because they just have these little windows at the top and they’re like that big, and I can’t see anything. And I remember I was in my office trying to do some work. I had my light from my phone that’s like, you know, that big, trying to shine on my notes, and the lights just clicked on and I could see. Light makes a difference. Paul says, “I pray that the light of God would shine on your heart and you would change.”

And if you think about it, this is an intimidating prayer because most of us don’t like change, do we? We don’t like to talk about becoming different. We like routines, we like ceremonies, because we don’t have to do anything.

I grew up in a denomination where we had a running joke that said, “How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb?” And the answer is change. Who said anything about change? But you don’t have to be Baptist for that joke, that’s for everybody. We all like to keep things the way they are.

They’ve done some research on this and found that if you do something for two months, it becomes a habit. It becomes a routine for you. And to change and break the habit, it could take as long as a year. And this is the point here in Paul’s prayer, is that God can change you immediately. God can change you right away. He can enlighten the eyes of your heart.

In fact, you could say it this way: God is the only one who can do this. God is the only one who can change your heart. If you’ve done ministry for any period of time, you’ll know that men will do anything for their sin. It’s impossible to change a man’s heart from the outside. Let me say it this way: I’ve seen men steal for sin. I’ve seen men lie for sin. I’ve seen men get violent over sin. I’ve seen them ruin their family, ruin their marriage, ruin their health, and nothing could stop them. Nothing could get their attention but God. It’s what Paul is saying. God is the only one who can make a man stop sinning. God is the only one who can change a person on the inside. So you have to go to God for this type of change. You have to pray.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” And the answer is that God can, God can understand the heart. So you have to go to God to change.

And let me just say it this way, to be honest, I think this is something churches in our circles need to get. Bible-teaching conservative churches, they need to understand this because we preach and preach and preach and nothing happens and we wonder why. And the answer is because we’re not praying. Or we teach and teach, we read sound doctrine, we love the

Scriptures, we love the scholarship and all that stuff, but we do all that, and we get no results, and we get frustrated. Well, the answer is because we're not praying. The reason is because we're not going to God and asking for help. We try to do it all on our own.

I mean, if you read Ephesians 1, this is an interesting chapter because you get some of the richest theology in the Bible in the first part. And what does Paul do in the second part? He prays. He can't even finish the chapter without praying. Friends, this is the way this works. You study the Bible, you study the Word of God, and you go to God with what you learn. Knowledge alone can't change a person. Doctrine alone can't do it, as important as doctrine is. You have to pray. God alone has the power to change a man.

Which brings us to the next point that we need to look at today, the next principle for prayer that we see from the life of Paul. And that is you need to pray for growth. First, you need to pray for change. Pray for God to do a work inside of you. Second, you need to pray for growth.

Let me say it this way, in that first point, if you're struggling with change today, let me just ask you, how is your prayer life? How's your prayer life? I wonder if half the counseling in our church would be cut down if people would go home and just pray. That's how change happens. If God's the only one that can reach inside of you and change what's going on there, then you have to go to God to do it. The resource is there for you. That should encourage you by the way, that should not discourage you. That should encourage you because that means anybody can pray, which means anybody can change.

You don't have to climb to the top of a mountain to do it. You don't have to go to a monastery. You don't have to go to the ocean. Just go home. Go sit in your car. You can do it right now. That should encourage you. You can't change. God can enlighten the eyes of your heart if you pray.

Which leads to the second point: you need to pray for growth. Which means you need to pray for change in a specific direction. You need to pray that God would make you more like Him and grow you. Nothing is more encouraging in the Christian life than growing. Nothing is more encouraging than making progress in the faith.

And if you read on in verse 18, this is what Paul prays for. He says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know the hope of His calling." This is a little hard to get in English, but in verses 18 through 19, there are three phrases in Greek that explain the word "know." Three things Paul wants you to understand. And you could translate it this way. He says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory, and the surpassing greatness of his power." Those are the three things that kind of follow the word "know" here.

And the first one is what we just read just now; the hope of His calling. That's the first thing Paul wants you to know. It's very touching that Paul would pray for the Ephesians' hope here, because he was in prison as he wrote this. It's very moving that he would think about them because chapter 3:1 says that he was a prisoner of Christ. He was in jail as he's writing this letter. And so you can just imagine if you were in jail, or if I was in jail, I would be asking them to pray for me for my hope. Right? I would want some encouragement. Paul prays for their hope.

And if you notice the way he writes this. It's not "a" hope but it's "the" hope that he prays for. "So that you will know what is the hope of His calling." That's not just any type of encouragement, that's a specific type of encouragement. This refers to what he's talked about earlier. "The hope of his calling" is everything he mentioned in chapter 1 already, in verses 3 to 14. The "adoption and redemption and ceiling," those are all part of this. That's what he wants them to grow into - into what Christ has already done for them.

We could explain it this way, the Bible says that when you were saved, you were called. Romans chapter 8 says that, several other passages. Which means that God reached out to you. God drew you in. There are 7 billion people on the planet, but He drew you. There are millions of lost souls, millions of people that don't know Christ, but He reached out to you and blessed you and gave you all of this because you were called.

And I might add that He did that instantly. He did it radically, He did it supernaturally, it happened right away, in a moment of time. But at the same time, the Bible says that for the rest of your life, you grow into that. That's known as the "Doctrine of Progressive Sanctification," which means you're progressively sanctified, progressively made holy for the rest of your life. You make progress in your calling. All the changes don't happen right away. It takes time, which is what Paul is referring to here. He's praying that the Ephesians would know what God has already done for them in Christ.

You guys meet lots of Christians that kind of are confused on this. They think that when they're saved, they have arrived. When they believe that's it, life will be easy now, I can just sit back and relax. And a couple of weeks or months go by and it's a cold dose of reality, right? Because they need to grow. They need to make progress in their calling. It doesn't mean they're not saved, it just means they have to grow into what God has done for them.

J.C. Ryle said it this way, he said, "Gradual growth in grace, growth in knowledge, growth in faith, growth in love, growth in holiness, growth in humility, growth in spiritual mindedness - all this I see clearly taught in Scripture and clearly exemplified in the lives of the saints. But sudden instantaneous leaps of faith are not there. I simply do not see those in the Bible."

I think he's right. I mean there are times when men have changed right away like we talked about, but that growth process is different. It's gradual. Which is why you have to pray because prayer sustains you in that process. This is why prayer is important, because prayer keeps you going when you're discouraged in the growth.

The story is told at the time Phillip Henry, Matthew Henry's father, was courting a young lady and her parents didn't like him. They weren't impressed with him because he was poor and uneducated. And in response, the young lady said, "Well, I don't care where he comes from, I only care where he's going. I don't care about his past, I only care about his future."

Friends, the Christian life is that way. The spiritual life is that way. It doesn't matter where you come from, it matters where you're going. It doesn't matter what your past is, it matters what your future is. That's what Paul is praying for here. These Ephesians had a dirty past. Everybody in the ancient world did, every Gentile did. The Jews were a kind of moral people. The Gentiles were just an abysmal dark hole. Paul says, "I'm praying that you will know what your calling is, what your future is, and what God has in store for you and you'll find hope."

Just to flesh this out a little bit, I talk with people who tell me that they don't have assurance and they don't have hope because they don't know when they were saved. I don't know if some of you can relate to that, but they don't know when it happened. It just happened like we talked about. It just kind of snuck up on them. And I have to tell them, it doesn't matter when you're saved, but only that you're saved. It doesn't matter when it happened to you, but only that it has happened to you now. That's what God cares about. That's what matters to Him.

I've talked to other Christians who say they don't have hope, they struggle with assurance, because they still struggle with the same sins that they struggled with when they first got saved. Anybody relate to that? Know what that's like? Struggle with the same sins, fight the same temptations. And so I have to say to them, "Yes, but do you struggle with them in the same way? Yes, but have you made progress? Have you grown in that fight?" That's what matters to God. You can struggle with the same sins, but if you're getting victory over that, that's the work of God in you.

One person said it this way, he said, "I don't know when the sun came up, but I know that it's shining. I don't know when the light began to dawn on me, but I know it's there now." That's what you need to know. God has called me by His mercy and grace and I'm growing into that calling. This is some deep stuff here, friends, but this is good stuff for us. This is the kind of stuff that gets inside of your heart.

Which brings us to the next point that we need to consider. A third principle for prayer from the Apostle Paul. And that is that you need to pray for confidence. Just going right along with what he's been saying here; you pray for change, you pray for God to do a work inside of you. You pray for growth so that you can have – thirdly, so that you can have confidence. We don't pray as much as we should simply because we don't have confidence like we should. We don't believe our prayers are going to be heard, but Paul says they will be heard.

And if you read in verse 18, it says, "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."

As Paul is describing his prayer requests for the Ephesians here, he gives us another phrase to describe the word "know." He tells us another thing that he wants the Ephesians to understand, and it is "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." In other words, Paul doesn't just pray that they would know their calling, but that they would know the riches of it. You see that word here. He doesn't just pray that they would have hope or have an inheritance, he prays that they would understand the glory of it, the abundance of it. It's one thing to have an inheritance, it's another thing to have a rich one. It's another thing to have something left over for you, it's another thing to have a glorious, glorious one.

The concept of an inheritance, it's a very common one in the ancient world because they didn't have banks like we do today or savings accounts. If they did, they weren't really trustworthy. So your future was tied up in your inheritance. Your future was tied up in things like land or property that your parents left behind for you. You actually see this in modern countries like China who are buying up land all over the world. I've been told they're doing that because the banks aren't very good there. So they're buying a property in Vancouver and places like that because that is their inheritance. That's what they're leaving behind for their family.

And with this in mind, Paul says here that we have an inheritance as Christians. God has left something behind for us and it is rich, and it is glorious. And that should give you confidence in the Christian life. It should give you boldness in your prayers. You shouldn't pray for little things because God has given you a lot. And you shouldn't pray for small things because God has given you huge blessings.

I think we don't pray as much as we should because we don't get this. The great missionary William Carey, he said, "Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God." And he went on to explain you should do that because God is great. And because God is great, your prayers should be great. It doesn't make sense to offer small prayers to a big God. We should pray for big things.

Just to make this practical, if you think about it, our prayer lives, if you think about some of the things we pray for - they can be really small. God does care for the small things, but we pray, "God, please help my stubbed toe or please help me find a better job." Well, if you think about it, He created the heavens and the earth and is that the greatest thing you can ask? Or "God, please help me not be so anxious about the weather. Please help the sun to come out." Well, He created the sun.

And listen, you can pray for those things, that's fine. You should pray for those things, but you don't need to stop at the small things, that's my point. Your prayer should go higher because your God is higher. You should have confidence in Him. I just want to stop here for a moment and kind of flesh this out since this is something we need to work on. Take a few minutes to talk about how we can pray according to the riches of His inheritance.

So, for example, going back to the first point there, we need to pray for change. That doesn't mean our toes and our jobs. You need to pray for God to change something greater. So, for instance, ask Him to change your marriage, ask Him to change your home, ask Him to change your heart. Listen, there are believers among us who are struggling with sin, and I mean struggling with it, battling with it, wrestling with it because they can't change. They don't know how. They want to be different like we talked about, they want to grow but they don't know what to do. You know what you can do? You need to pray for them. You may not know who they are, you may not know their names, but you don't have to - just pray through the directory like we talked about last time.

I did the math this week: our church is small enough that if you can pray for three people a day and pray for the entire church in one month; do that. Go through the list and pray for them. And you'll get to them. There are other people in our church who are not even Christians yet. They're not saved, but they come every week because they're interested. They're here because there's something about our church that draws them in. Pray for them. You don't have to know their names either. You can pray for everyone. That's one way to apply this. One way to pray according to His riches.

A second way to do this here, speaking of growth, you need to pray for the church to grow. And I don't mean numerically. I mean spiritually. Pray for people to grow in their relationship with God. I've met several young men recently who have said that, "I want to grow as a husband and I want to grow as a father." And I will tell you that is directly the result of someone in this room praying for them. That is directly a result of your prayers for their life. The devil didn't tell him to do that. Satan didn't encourage them to say that. God did, because you're praying for them. Keep it up.

Talked with young ladies who have said, "I want to grow as a wife, I want to grow as a mother, I want to grow as a woman of God." That is a result of someone praying for them. And the question is, will you keep doing that? Friends, I think we have a praying church, but we can grow in these areas and we need to.

And all this leads to one more point Paul mentions here. Just a fourth and final principle for prayer from the life of the Apostle Paul. Just to review these other ones, first, he says, you need to pray for change. Pray for the Lord to change you and make a difference on the inside. Second, pray for growth, pray for the Lord to grow you and make progress. Third, pray for confidence.

And that leads to one more point to consider this morning, one more principle for prayer that kind of sums all this up; and that is you need to pray for power. The fourth and final principle for prayer from Paul, is that you need to pray for God's power. Which is what he's really getting at the end of the day. This is the point of the passage. The only way you can change and grow and have confidence is through the power of God. So that's how he sums it all up.

If you read on in verses 18 through 19, he says, "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."

That's the third, the last of the three phrases that Paul gives us here, the last thing that he wants us to know. He wants us to know the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. Paul doesn't want you to just know His power, but the surpassing greatness of it.

This is an interesting phrase in the Greek because Paul actually gives four words that describe God's power in verse 19. This isn't in the English, but four different words for power. There's the word *dunamis* from which we get the word "dynamite." He says, God's power is like dynamite because it's explosive. There's the word *energeia* from which we get the word energy. God's power is energetic. Sometimes we can't change like we should because we don't have the energy. God has that, Paul says. Anybody need energy this morning?

There's a word *kratos* which means "dominion power, sovereign power" - God has that. *Ischus* which simply means "strength." But the point is that God has given you power, power, power. You have strength, strength, strength, and you need to pray like that.

Paul says, stop asking for small things when you can have big things. In fact, the rest of this passage talks about that. Verses 20 through 23 describes the power of God seen in the resurrection. The most powerful thing that ever happened in human history was the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. And Paul says, when you pray, you have that type of power. When you pray, you have the same type of strength coming to you from the hand of God. And we'll get into that - verses 20 through 23, next time.

But for now, let me just ask, do you believe that today? Do you believe you have this type of power offered to you? If you do, it will change your prayer life. If you do, it'll change everything. Another way to ask that; are you wrestling with change today? Are you wrestling with this idea of growth? Do you feel like you're stuck in the same place all the time? Do you feel like your marriage is in the same place? Your home is in the same place? Your fight with

sin is the same? Because if you feel that way, let me tell you what you can do about it - you can pray. Because in prayer, you have the power of God, and the power of God can break the hold of all of that.

The price of sin is death. Jesus died to pay for sin, and God raised Him from the dead to show that He can defeat sin and He can defeat sin now in your prayer life. You just ask him and He will give you the strength. This phrase is surpassingly great strength, Paul says. If you have the English Standard Version; immeasurably great strength, which means you can have all the strength you need.

Friends, I can't say this enough, but the greatest thing you can do for this church is pray. You guys are wonderful servants. We have a church full of servants and you guys do a great job serving one another. But the greatest service of all is to pray for each other. Because the greatest power you have is in prayer. All the other things are important as well, but prayer is what sustains us.

The story is told of two women who were doing laundry in a laundromat and talking about life and they were talking about their marriage. When the first woman said, "My husband is miserable. Nothing goes right at home and he always complains all the time, and he hates going to church. I can't stand that place." To which the other woman replied, "Well, not my husband. My husband's great. He's so positive at home and he loves going to church. He can't wait to see the people there every Sunday." And as they said that, they got real quiet in the laundry room because they noticed that the first woman was sewing her husband's seat of his pants and the other woman was sewing her husband's knees.

Friends, your life is changed on your knees. Your life is changed through prayer, and so will you pray today. That's the greatest thing you can do for us. It's the greatest thing you can do for our church. Let me close us in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for this study this morning and just for Your Word. Lord, thank you for the reminder that Paul has, the reminder that he always had to us that of the greatness of our God. And as a result of the greatness of our God, our prayer life should reflect that. Lord, help us to grow in this area.

Lord, I thank you for all the servants we have here at Grace Fellowship. I thank you for the privilege we're going to have in a moment, to nominate our first deacons and all the different things we've been able to do in the last couple of years together. But in light of all of those, Father, we never want to lose sight of the greatest resource we have, and that is the power of prayer. Lord, everyone who is a Christian in this room was saved because someone prayed for the Gospel to go out. Some of them probably even prayed for them to be saved. And anyone who's made progress in the faith has made that progress because someone's praying for them. Father, help us to never forget this.

Lord, we thank you for hearing us, thank you that through Christ we can talk to You at all. Many religions, the people can't talk to their gods. We go straight to You through the blood of the Son Jesus Christ. Thank you for the privilege of that, Lord.

May we go out today and enjoy Soup Sunday together, enjoy one another's fellowship, and may Christ speak glorified in everything that happens in this church, especially the ministry of prayer. We pray this in Jesus name, amen.