

“REMEMBERING YOU IN MY PRAYERS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

December 31, 2023, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Ephesians 1:15-20

Introduction.

This morning we are standing on the threshold of a new year. Every year at this time I have preached sermons urging, pleading, admonishing, encouraging us to renew our desire and commitment to pray and read God’s Word.

Last year we even made a prayer card based on Colossians 1:9-12 and used it as a part of many of our prayers throughout the year. This year we have done that again with a prayer card based on this morning’s text Ephesians 1:15-20.

I am committing to praying this prayer for each of you and for our whole church family.

Without ceasing.

Paul is saying there are some things for which we must never stop praying, some things for which we must pray over and over again. There are blessings from God we need constantly. If we only ask for them every six months we will not see fruit or change.

With Paul there is never a status quo, a good enough. We should all have a sort of holy dissatisfaction with our spiritual life, with our spiritual growth, with our prayer life. In fact it is spiritually dangerous to think where you are right now is good enough. It is also just plain foolish to not seek more of the riches of God’s blessings and benefits.

You cannot have too much faith, you cannot have too much love, you cannot know God too much. You cannot have too much of the fullness of the Holy Spirit or the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

I am calling us to pray for First CRC corporately and each other individually asking the Father in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit to answer this prayer.

It begins with two main petitions, followed by three sub-petitions.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

Paul is not asking for natural endowment of wisdom and knowledge, or of greater intelligence, to be smarter, less dumb. This is wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

That you may know.

This is the essence of Paul's prayer. That you may know.

Paul's wants more than anything for us to grow in a personal knowledge of God. God is an exhaustible fountain, there is more to know of Him than there is water in the Pacific Ocean. There is no better or greater knowledge you can seek or ask for.

This knowledge is not intellectual but personal, intimate, relational. It is knowledge of Him that is practical, bears fruit, leads to joyful obedience.

This knowledge is impossible without the revelation of God Himself, so this is why he prays for God to give us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation and that God would enlighten the eyes of our hearts.

Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

Just as knowledge is more than just knowledge, so the seeing is more than just seeing.

We are born spiritually blind. The eyes of our hearts are naturally blind and we remain blind until God opens the eyes of our hearts by the working of the Holy Spirit. But this is not a one and done experience. If it was Paul would not have prayed this prayer, since he has acknowledged they already have the Holy Spirit. This enlightening is progressive and lifelong.

Paul has three specific requests he asks the Holy Spirit to enlighten us to know.

The hope of God's call.

The glory of God's inheritance.

The greatness of God's power.

That you may know what is the hope to which He has called you.

The hope of God's call. God is the one who has called us from before the foundation of the world, and this is cause for hope.

And to what has God called us? To belong to Jesus Christ, to be part of the body of Christ. To be children of God. He has called us to be saints, to be set apart from the world, to be holy.

The prayer is that you would know what are the privileges and blessings of your calling and the expectations attached to it.

Your hope is in the God who has called you to be His, who holds out eternal life to you. To know God is to know the certainty and assurance of our hope for God is eternal and unchangeable. God never starts something He doesn't finish.

Romans 8:31 If God is for us, who can be against us?

This is a prayer to have such confident hope in God in 2024 making us increasingly free from fear, doubt, anxiety and worry.

That you may know what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.

This is similar to the prayer in Colossians 1:12, "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

As God's call points us back to the beginning of our Christian life, God's inheritance points us to the end of our Christian life and our final glorious inheritance which Peter describes as ...

I Peter 1:4 ... is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

What is it? We shall see God and His Christ, we shall be like Him, and have perfect fellowship with Him and each other.

But there is a present aspect to that glory, something we have in this life. Grace is glory in seed form. Grace is the beginning of glory here and now. It is grace that leads us to glory.

This prayer is to gain more knowledge of the glory of the riches are kept in heaven for us. In other words, to meditate on, contemplate, reflect on and seek to better understand the nature of what awaits us. It is good for the soul to think about and look forward to what is in heaven; and not just know it, but to know the riches of the glory of it.

This keeps our priorities straight, it keeps us untethered to the things of this earth, it gives us a hunger and thirst for what is eternal and not temporal. To remember we live in an open universe.

II Corinthians 4:16 For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

To know what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe.

In some ways this is the pinnacle petition.

If God's call points back to the beginning and God's inheritance points to the future, then God's power points to the present, to our living out our calling until God brings it to completion, until God brings us safely to the final consummation of our calling.

This is a prayer to know the power of God's grace. This is a prayer to know in truly practical, personal, daily ways the all-sufficiency and omnipotence of God's grace.

It is hard to be a Christian, it is hard to maintain faith and trust and hope. It is hard to persevere in the battles of life, it is hard to resist the Devil and all his

temptations and lies. It takes power, power for on high, and this is the power that is working for us.

God in an extraordinary manifestation of His infinite love worked His infinite power to raise Jesus from the dead and worked that same power again to raise us from the dead. Our salvation is an extraordinary, powerful work of God.

Paul piles up words to convince us how great this power is that is working for us who believe.

The *immeasurable greatness* of his *power* toward us who believe, according to the *working* of his *great might*.

God is exerting great energy on our behalf, He is literally working for us.

The power over sin and death is sitting right now at the right hand of God, the highest position of power and government and authority in heaven and on earth. And Christ is interceding for us.

The power and effects of sin and death are still in us. We are still under the power of death, the spiritual warfare wages on, but the power that raised Jesus from the dead is also available to us and at work in us giving us life. Sin and death are vanquished foes.

Implications and application.

Have you considered how staggering it is for Jesus to say to us, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (**Matthew 7:7**). And isn't it just as staggering to hear James say, “You do not have, because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

How many of you want to experience spiritual failure in 2024? Don't pray. Don't seek God, don't trust God, don't rely on God, don't ask God, don't depend on God.

You might succeed in the world's eyes, but you will fail in the only way that truly matters. A life without prayer is a failure and will lead to failure.

God intends to accomplish His saving purposes in our world and in our lives and families through prayer. God acts in response to prayer. In this way He is glorified and we are blessed.

We all need hope and grace and wisdom and strength going into 2024. I am praying this for you. Will you join me? Will you do the same for me?

When is the last time you prayed like this for yourself, for your family, for your church? What is holding you back? Is it because what little time we take for prayer is filled up with little requests? It's not that we ask for too much, it is that we ask for far too little.

Paul certainly wasn't afraid to ask for too much. This prayer is an ambitious prayer. Pray this prayer for your husband or wife, for your father and mother, for your children and grandchildren, for your boss, for your best friend, for your church and your church's leaders.

As your pastor, I ask you to pray this prayer, to live it and breath it, to expand upon it, but most of all, with heart-felt urgency, pray this prayer.

Pray earnestly, pray fervently, pray daily. In this is your life and hope and strength.

Prayer: God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.