

## In Audience in the Throne Room of Heaven

It was my sophomore year in college. I had been raised in the church, but my faith was not personal for me, not a part of my everyday life. My roommate that year was a Christian and he asked me if his Bible study could meet in our room on the night I had band rehearsal. I agreed and then completely forgot about it, until one day when I forgot my music. Band practice was at the School of Music which was a 15 minute bus ride away, and the bus stop was a 10 minute walk from our dorm room. During the rehearsal, the other first trombone players and I were trying to fake it, since I had left our music at home. It wasn't going well. Finally, the band director asked to hear the trombones at measure such and such. I meekly raised my hand and confessed. He exploded. He yelled and told me to go get the music. I tried to explain it would take a long time. He didn't care and boomed, "Go get it now!" I rushed back across campus and burst into my dorm room, and there inside was a group of people praying! It was my roommate's Bible study. I would later come to understand that one of the people they were praying for was me. That year God came into my life in a powerful way. My faith came alive. I am thankful now for their prayers.



A couple of years later, I went to the Urbana conference and heard the Scottish Pastor, Eric Alexander preach to the 20,000 students gathered. To this day remember him speaking about the prayer in Ephesians chapter one, and the importance of praying for others to grow in Christ. He said that he was not a person of strong faith in his early years, but eventually came to Christ in a powerful way. It was only years later, after his brother's death, that Eric Alexander realized how his brother had been praying for him. He read in his journal, time and again, his brother's prayer for him, "Take him on in You, Lord." That prayer for Eric to grow in the Lord was powerfully answered.

Prayer is communication with God and it is a great privilege. We have been blessed with access to the "throne room of heaven." It is a high and holy calling to be able to bring requests before the Lord of All. And how do we communicate with the Lord? How do we pray?



Is it only like we are sending text messages, with short bursts now and again? Or do we perhaps pray more like the way we send

an email, longer prayers but sent impersonally from a distance? Or do we take the time for a prolonged phone conversation?

And when we do communicate with the Lord of Heaven, what do we ask for? Do we ask for only mundane needs, or do we also pray for people, like Eric Alexander's brother, asking for things of eternal consequence?

In the readings this week from Ephesians, we will be reading two eloquent prayers of Paul. These prayers are rich with praise, deeply profound, and they pray for matters of eternal consequence. I pray that you will be inspired as you seek the Lord this week and study these glorious prayers of the Apostle Paul.

## Day 17, Monday

Preparation: Paul prays that the "eyes of the heart" of the Ephesian Christians would be opened. The heart in the Bible was the core of the person, the place of thought, will and emotion. As you begin today, ask God to enlighten the depths of your soul and open the eyes of your heart to perceive what He wants to say to you.

Introduction: Paul is moved to prayer for the Ephesians. This prayer is yet another long sentence, with 169 words and multiple adverbial participles, relative clauses, and prepositional phrases. It builds on the mind-blowing blessings that God extends to us as described in verses 3-14. Allow this prayer to inspire you, and also to challenge your prayer life.

Reading: Ephesians 1:15-19 **Praying For Spiritual Depth**

Questions for Reflection:

1. What prompts Paul to prayer (note first half of the chapter and here in v. 15)?
2. How does Paul describe his prayer in verse 16? What would that look like?
3. What is Paul asking God to do (v. 17-19)? What does Paul pray that the Ephesians would know? How does he pray that they would come to know it?

*John R.W. Stott says this about Paul's request: "What is Paul's request? It is not that the Ephesians receive a 'second blessing', but rather that they may appreciate to the fullest possible extent the implications of the blessing they have already received...growth in knowledge is indispensable to growth in holiness."*

4. How well do you think you know, understand, and appreciate the blessings that God extends to you in Christ? What might be the impact on your life if you did appreciate God's blessings at work in you more fully?
5. When you pray for people, how does the content of your prayers compare to Paul's? Why might it be important to pray as Paul does for others?

You might close in prayer asking God to enlighten you and those are on your heart today.

## Day 18, Tuesday

Preparation: Come to God empty today. Try not to hold on to an agenda, the things that worry you, or hurry you, or upset you. Just put those aside and come empty. Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit for a few quiet moments. If a distraction comes to mind, pray about whatever it is, and visualize handing that over to God. Now visualize yourself as an empty vessel being filled to the brim with the fullness of God.

Introduction: Paul's long sentence prayer continues with an elaboration of Who Jesus Christ is and how God the Father is at work with Him. Today's reading is only a few verses. Try to savor each word and each phrase. Visualize what they are communicating about Christ and about your relation to Him.

Reading: Ephesians 1:20-23     **God's Power in Christ**

1. God's power was described in verse 19. Now in verses 20-23 Paul notes how that power is seen in Christ. What does he say about Christ in these verses?
2. What is the nature of God's power at work within us? (see v. 19-20)
3. How does it make you feel, knowing that you pray to such a God of power?
4. So often our prayers are merely asking God for things. How is Paul's prayer here different?
5. What affect would it have on our prayers and our faith to include such praise in our prayers? Do you?
6. What does it mean to you to be a part of the "body" of Christ? What does it mean about your relationship to the "head" Jesus Christ, but also to the other parts of the body? As you close, you might try to take a moment to visualize Christ filling all things, filling you, and then praise Him for the things you have observed about Him in this passage.

## Day 19, Wednesday

Preparation: Pray the simple words, "Come Holy Spirit". As you pray them, activate your will to embrace the Holy Spirit welling up within you. Welcome Him into your heart today. Ask Him to guide you.

Introduction: There is so much in this prayer, that today we look at it once again. You will read the entire prayer and then consider some further points. Paul is praying that the truths would really sink in for the Ephesians. He is recognizing that merely teaching theology is not sufficient. The enlightening, illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the deep truths of God to take hold of our hearts and our lives.

Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23     **Illumination in Prayer**

1. As you review this entire prayer again today, notice how each member of the Trinity is mentioned. What is described as the role of each?
2. This prayer has a lot of content. How might it be important to pray in ways that fill the mind with thoughts of God?

*John Stott says: "Faith cannot grow without a firm basis of knowledge; knowledge is sterile if it does not bring forth faith."*

3. How balanced are you in this regard? Do you have equal amounts of knowledge about God and faith in God or is one greater than the other? What might be a next step for you?
4. The inheritance mentioned in verse 18 could be our heritage in the Kingdom of God, but many commentators believe this is actually referring to us as being God's inheritance. "God's people, His inheritance" is an Old Testament expression (Dt 9:29, and Isa 47:6 for example). *Clinton Arnold says: "The point here is that Paul wants his readers to know how deeply God values and cherishes them."* What does it mean to you to be considered God's cherished inheritance?
5. Paul talks about the work of the Spirit here. *Clinton Arnold says: "Paul is referring to...an illuminating work of the Spirit to impress already revealed truth about God into the conscious reflections and heartfelt convictions of the readers."* You might close asking the Holy Spirit to so illumine your heart, to allow what you know in your head to more fully take up residence in your heart, in the core of your being.

## **Day 20, Thursday**

Preparation: You are halfway through Lent! Take a moment as you come before God today to reflect on the first 20 days. What have you learned about yourself and about God? How has Lent been for you? Are you growing? Thank God for His working in your life in ways that you have seen, but also in ways that you have not been aware of. Ask Him to lead you today and through the next 20 days of Lent.

Introduction: Paul is moved to prayer once again. "For this reason" may refer to God's grace bringing us to fullness of life in Christ (2:1-10), how both Jews and Greeks have been brought near to God (2:11-22), or the mystery of God's rescue plan for humanity (3:1-13). It may be a combination of all of these which leads Paul to pray. At the heart of this prayer is a prayer for love and for power."

Reading: Ephesians 3:14-19 **Empowerment to Comprehend the Depth of God's Love**

1. It is more typical to stand to pray in the first century. What might Paul's kneeling indicate? How does it feel to you to kneel before another?  
*Stott says this indicates a special earnestness in prayer. Arnold says it signifies humility, submission, and respect.*
2. What posture do you typically take as you pray to God? What might it convey about your inner state as you pray?
3. One might trace 3 couplets of petition in this prayer. The first involves the "inner person" and the "heart". Those concepts are similar and speak to the core of the inner personality. What two things is Paul praying for the Ephesians regarding their inner selves?

*The verb used for Christ to dwell indicates not a temporary, but permanent residence.*

4. The next couplet involves prayer for them to be established in love? What two metaphors are used?
5. What would it mean for you to be “rooted” like a great tree in love? What would it mean for you to be built like the foundation of a building on love?
6. The next couplet involves praying for the strength to comprehend and know. Know what? How vast is this? How difficult is it to fully comprehend it that such an earnest prayer is required?

These prayers will result in the believers being filled with the fullness of God (v. 19). You might close in prayer asking God to strengthen you to comprehend His love and asking Him to do so for others.

### **Day 21, Friday**

Preparation: Reflect on ways you have understood and experienced God’s love in your life and in the lives of those around you. Enter His presence with a thankful heart today. Seek the God who does wonders for His people.

Introduction: This inspiring doxology closes the prayer and closes the first half of this epistle.

Reading: Ephesians 3:20-21 **The God of Infinite Possibilities**

1. What does Paul say about that which God can do?
  2. Try to imagine the grandest thing God could do in your life and in the lives of your loved ones. What is it? Now consider that He plans to do even more than you could possibly conceive.
  3. Glory means the revealed weightiness, grandeur, majesty and brilliance of God. Where does Paul pray that glory be revealed?
  4. How do you feel the church in our day is doing at revealing that glory?
  5. How often do you approach church looking to see it reveal the greatness of God verses how often are looking for what you can get out of church (that is approaching it like a consumer)?
  6. What is the time frame that Paul has in mind for God’s glory to be revealed?
- Close in prayer asking God to help you comprehend more of His unmeasurable capabilities.

### **Day 22, Saturday/Sunday**

Preparation: As you approach God today, consider your unworthiness of all His love and blessings extended to you through the love of Christ. Spend a few moments confessing your sins to Him. Then close thanking Him for His forgiveness.

Introduction: Today we re-read this prayer. As you do, listen carefully for fresh insights from the God of infinite love and unlimited possibilities.

Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21 **The Prayer for Power to Comprehend God's Love**

1. As you re-read the prayer today what stands out to you?
2. Who is this God described in this prayer?
3. What is the role of power and love in this prayer? What does Paul pray regarding God exerting His power in us?
4. Why do you think Paul prays for the believers to be "filled" and to have Christ "dwell" in them? Aren't those already true for those who have become Christians? What does this indicate?
5. It may not be your normal practice to kneel. Would you consider kneeling now before this God of infinite love, power, and unlimited potential? As you close in prayer what do you want to say to Him?