

**MONDAY****READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23, ACTS 20:31+, 1 JOHN 3:10+, 4:7-8, GALATIANS 6:9**

Paul begins to pray that the readers of this letter (including us today) would come to experience and know their resources in Christ so that we might live in His power to the praise of the glory of God's grace!

Imagine how encouraging the news of their faith and love was to Paul. He was imprisoned, but the Word that he had shared with the saints at Ephesus for 3 years was not imprisoned, and it was clear that it was bearing spiritual fruit! Once again we see the power of the living and active Word, and this would buoy his faith in his affliction. How encouraging also to see that their faith was sincere, genuine, the "real deal," for it was bearing the fruit of brotherly love, without which it would be a fake faith. John emphasizes the importance of love as a marker of genuine faith writing *"By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."* and *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death."* and *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.."* So Paul was encouraged by this news that the Gospel he had sown for 3 years was bearing a "bumper crop!"

What have you been planting lately? We can get tired of trying if we think our efforts have not produced what we want. Are you planting the "right things"? Would people say that they see Jesus in how you live your life? That is what you are planting! The message of your priorities, your words, God's Word spoken and lived out in you is powerful! Don't be discouraged if you do not see a "harvest" right away. How is Paul an encouragement to you in this passage of scripture? If you're sending "mixed messages"? Maybe it's time to clarify in your own life what is really important. Is Jesus the reason for the choices you make, the way you live every day? Does your family, your friends know that? Keep living in His power "to the praise of His glorious grace!" The harvest will come...

**TUESDAY****READ GALATIANS 5:22, LUKE 8:15, JOHN 13:35, 1 PETER 1:22, 1 JOHN 3:17 & 4:7-12, 20+**

Love. It's a word that we talk about in a lot of ways. We mean something different every time we use it. Yet it's always with a positive feeling and action attached to it.

We love our dog. We love pizza. We love sunsets. We love our kids. We love our spouse.

The Greeks understood that love has many facets and meanings in different situations.

So they had four separate words to describe different kinds of "love":

*Storge* – empathy bond

*Philia* – friend bond

*Eros* – romantic love

*Agape* – unconditional "God" love.

Paul recounts to the readers of this letter of Ephesians that LOVE is a marker of one who loves God.

His emphasis is on "Philia, Storge, Agape" love.

*"Your love for all the saints"* - Their love was spiritual fruit testifying to the "authenticity" of the "tree", i.e., that they were genuine fruit bearing trees, genuine followers of Christ. The love of the Body of Christ is a powerful witnessing "tool" for Jesus said *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (Jn 13:35)

The Disciple's Study Bible says: "Love 'does' more than it 'feels.' God's people love one another! Others come to know about this love through the deeds of love we do for each other. Such loving action brings joy and thanksgiving to God's people.

Author/Pastor Warren Wiersbe writes: "The Christian life has two dimensions: faith toward God and love toward men, and you cannot separate the two. DON'T SAY YOU HAVE FAITH IN JESUS, IF YOU ARE NOT DEMONSTRATING THE LOVE OF JESUS TO YOUR BRETHREN!"

William Barclay writes: "Christian love is not an emotional thing. Agape is not only not of the emotions, but it is of the will. It is the ability to retain unconquerable goodwill to the unlovely and the unlovable, towards those who do not love us, and even towards those whom we do not like. Agape is that quality of mind and heart which compels a Christian never to feel any bitterness, never to feel any desire for revenge, but always to seek the highest good of every man no matter what he may be." It's Jesus' kind of love.

Whew! This is where the rubber meets the road...and it's hard for us to examine how we love others and then look at it in light of our connection to the Lord. It really is related, connected!

I cannot truly love and care for people if I'm not connected to the power of the Holy Spirit as I stay "in Him". That was a phrase that Clare asked us to focus on in the first sermon of this series. It is "in Christ" that we understand God's grace toward us. And it's "in Christ" that we can love others like He does. What can you do today to improve your closeness to God? Your power to love people better only comes "in Him".

If you find someone "a bit much today" and you just can't seem to "feel or do" love well - ask God to fill you with *His* power to love. He's the author of love...every kind of love. He is the vine, we are the branches, and the fruit results from us staying connected to Him.

## WEDNESDAY

**READ 2 CORINTHIANS 13:7; PHILIPPIANS 1:4; COLOSSIANS 1:3; 2:1; 1 THESSALONIANS 1:2; 2 THESSALONIANS 1:11**

Paul prays without ceasing for these believers!

Pastor Mark Holmes gives an excellent introduction to this section on prayer: "*Paul's prayer speaks to the heart of a Christian's need. Most people desire a better understanding of God. When asked why we read our Bibles and attend church services, we often reply, 'To learn more about God.' But knowledge is not the same as knowing. What we often seek is breadth rather than depth. We errantly assume that the more facts we know, the closer we grow. But Paul's prayer is for depth, not breadth. His concern is not that the people know of God, but to actually know God.*"

Wow! Do I know more "about God" than deeply, actually know Him?

Do I pray for others to do know Him that way?

Sometimes we forget that we should pray as earnestly for people *after* they choose Jesus and are saved, as we do for their salvation! Paul continues to show his great concern for the churches and their growing faith in Christ as he prays for them fervently.

**Pastor Jon Courson** asks: "*Who do you pray for? I have a tendency to pray for those who are hurting, for those who are going through tragedies and difficulties, for those who are backsliding and failing - and that's fine. But here Paul is saying something very different when he says, 'When I heard how well you're doing, I was moved to pray for you.'*"

Identify three specific people today who are believers you know that are growing and serving the Lord. Pray for them: Give thanks for their deep faith, their ministries, their growth in the Lord. Ask the Lord to continue to fill them with His Spirit as they seek Him.

Now: let those three folks know that you prayed for them today and thanked God for their faith.

## THURSDAY

**READ LUKE 11:13, ROMANS 8:7-9, 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14, JOHN 14:16-17**

"*We discovered that we were "born rich" when we trusted Christ. But this is not enough, for we must grow in our understanding of our riches if we are ever going to use them to the glory of God. Too*

many Christians have never "read the bank book" to find out the vast spiritual wealth that God has put to their account through Jesus Christ.

They are like the late newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst, who invested a fortune collecting art treasures from around the world. One day Mr. Hearst found a description of some valuable items that he felt he must own, so he sent his agent abroad to find them. After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasures. They were in Mr. Hearst's warehouse. Hearst had been searching frantically for treasures he already owned! Had he read the catalog of his treasures, he would have saved himself a great deal of money and trouble. Paul desired the Ephesian Christians to understand what great wealth they had in Christ." (Warren Wiersbe)

There are times when we are frustrated that maybe we somehow have missed some part of being "spiritual" and that there is a magic formula, or something we haven't "done yet" that will instantly make God more real to us. That our salvation is just "partial" and is missing something. We want to say like others do that "God told me..." but we worry we have not heard an audible voice. We behave like there is some inside track to really being filled with His Spirit. Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit indwells us when we accept Christ as Lord and Savior and are baptized into Him. It is complete, even though we are still growing. The New Testament Scriptures clearly teach that no one has the Holy Spirit until he or she turns to God and asks to receive His indwelling presence through faith in Jesus Christ. This indwelling is the mechanism whereby the Christian's salvation is accomplished and sealed. The anointing of the Spirit is *the single most important mark distinguishing believers from non-believers*. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Elsewhere the same apostle says to the believers in Corinth, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned". And Jesus Himself tells His disciples, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" .

While we are challenged to grow in our walk with the Lord by "knowing Him" and being "in Him... trusting and knowing His Word...if we are not careful, we start to believe that our faith and trust in our salvation in Christ is not enough. That He will short-change us unless we do certain things. That His Spirit will leave us unaware.

Well-known Pastor John McArthur writes in his New Testament Commentary on Ephesians, these words: "They talk of getting more of Jesus Christ, more of the Holy Spirit, more power, more blessings, a higher life, a deeper life - as if the resources of God were divinely doled out one at a time like so many pharmaceutical prescriptions or were unlocked by some spiritual combination that only an initiated few can know. To say, "I want to get all of Jesus there is," implies that when we were saved Christ did not give us all of Himself, that He held some blessings in reserve to be parceled out to those who meet certain extra requirements.....The New Testament teaching of salvation is that the new birth grants every believer everything in Christ. There is consequently no need and no justification in searching for anything more. Though it does not do so intentionally, such searching undermines the essence of God's revealed truth about salvation. Yet today many Christians spend a great deal of time and effort vainly looking for blessings already available to them. They pray for God's light, although He has already supplied light in abundance through His Word. Their need is to follow the light they already have. They pray for strength, although His Word tells them they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them (Phil. 4:13). They pray for more love, although Paul says that God's own love is already poured out within their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). They pray for more grace, although the Lord says the grace He has already given is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9). They pray for peace, although the Lord has given them His own peace, which surpasses all comprehension" (Phil. 4:7). **It is expected that we pray for such blessings**

*if the tone of the prayer is one of seeking the grace to appropriate what is already given, rather than one of pleading for something we think is scarcely available or is reluctantly shared by God. The Christian's primary need is for wisdom and obedience to appropriate the abundance of blessings the Lord has already given. Our problem is not lack of blessings, but lack of insight and wisdom to understand and use them properly and faithfully. Our blessings are so vast that the human mind cannot comprehend them. In our own minds we cannot fathom the riches we have in our position in Jesus Christ. Such things are totally beyond the human mind to grasp.....But no Christian needs, or can have, more of the Lord or of His blessing and inheritance than he already has. That is why Paul tells us, as he told the Ephesian believers, not to seek more spiritual resources but to understand and use those we were given in absolute completeness the moment we received Christ."*

When you have "chosen to be chosen"....wisdom and obedience are the key to your deeper walk with Jesus. God's blessings for you are rich and abundant. We may not see the initial value nor the truth of some of those blessings, but they are gifts that are there for us right now. Pray today that God will give you eyes to see clearly the truth of the scriptures and wisdom to follow Him. May you know recognize the richness of His love and grace given to you, and may you be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love others in greater ways today and every day!

## **FRIDAY**

### **READ JOHN 4:16-17, 6:35, 7:37, PSALM 63.**

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."*

In a Judean wilderness, David cried out, *"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water"*.

At the time, David was being hunted by Saul, who felt that he was a threat to his kingdom, and at times David became weary in body, wondering if he would ever find peace. No doubt he wondered if he would ever be able to go back home to Bethlehem and sleep without concern for his safety. Yet David did not say that he longed for the comforts of home and a taste of his mother's cooking. No, he cries out that his soul is thirsty for the Almighty in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Question: Do you have times in your life when you grow weary of the battle and your soul cries out to God? You long to know Him in a deeper and more intimate way, stripping away the layers of misunderstanding and perhaps fear which has kept you at a comfortable distance? David said that his body, his innermost being, longed for God—something intense and deeply personal.

Have you ever considered the possibility that it was God who placed that yearning, that deep longing in your heart so that He Himself could fill it? God not only created the thirst but knew that He was the only thing which could satisfy the deep longing within.

How does God satisfy that longing within your heart? Or what should we do to know Him more intimately and personally? Have you discovered when you are really thirsty, sugary products just don't satisfy? You don't want coke or syrupy juices which are half sugar. What you want is water—crystal clear, pure, and cool. Nothing satisfies like a refreshing drink of water on a hot day.

If you want to satisfy the deep longing in your heart for God, get rid of the sugary substitutes - the claptrap of religion, the trappings of ceremony, and the tinsel of pseudo-spiritual experiences. Paul spoke of the washing of water by the Word. He was talking of the purity of the Word which lets you know and experience God as He is.

To know God intimately, get off media and strive to insulate yourself from the noise that keeps you from hearing His voice. Limit your phone time. Turn off YouTube. Stay away from endless hours online. Linger longer in the scriptures. Stay up praying instead of watching t.v. or movies online, or playing video games.

Let the "living water" fill you up. Feast on Jesus. Feast on His Word. He is the bread of life. He is the

living water. Drink deeply. Acknowledge that He's the only thing that can satisfy your soul. You'll be amazed at what happens. His Spirit in you will satisfy you.  
Rest in Him. Wait on Him. Trust Him. Obey Him. Thank Him.  
HE is all you need. His vast love, grace, and riches are yours.