

8. Learning Why God Does More Than We Can Imagine

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that God has made all of us equal in the body of Christ. That is true whether we are strong or weak. It is true whether we are Jews or Gentiles. God kept this plan a secret so that it was a mystery until He revealed His plan for the church through Christ. As a result, even the angels were able to give glory to God for the way that He has chosen to bring the Jews and Gentiles together and make them one in Christ. In our topic today, we are going to see that Paul prayed that the Ephesians would understand why God is able to do more in their lives and in the lives of all Christians than we can ever imagine.

Paul had told the Ephesians how the Lord had allowed him to suffer and also spend at least four years in prison in order to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. However, he did not want them to become discouraged because of his suffering. Ephesians 3:13 says, “Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” Paul realized and understood that the Lord had used his sufferings to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles and so he wanted them to give glory to God for what He had done.

Paul also wanted the Ephesian Christians to know that he prayed for them. In Ephesians 3:14-15, we read the introduction to this prayer when those verses say, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Paul had last talked to the leaders in Ephesus more than four years earlier as recorded in Acts 20:17-38. He had just spent almost four years in prison for sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles at the time that he wrote this letter to the Ephesians. However, Paul did not waste this time. He used these years in prison to pray for the churches that he had established in the region stretching from Jerusalem almost to Rome. Acts 28:30-31 says he was sharing the Gospel with all who came to him. His prayer was to God because He is the One who gives life to all who believe.

As Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus, we see that he prayed for five things. These are also five key things for us to include as we pray for our physical and spiritual children. Ephesians 3:16-19 says that Paul prayed to God, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Here, we see that the focus of his prayer was their spiritual development.

First, Paul prayed that they would be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. Christ told the disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” As Christians today, we now receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of our salvation. At each moment that we are yielding to (filled with) the Holy Spirit, we have the power to obey the Word of God. Evidence that we are being strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit is that we will speak the Word of God with boldness. Acts 4:8a and 4:13 say, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...Now when

they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” The more we learn to yield, the more we will speak the Word of God with boldness.

Second, Paul prayed that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith. Christ told the disciples in John 14:23, “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’” In this verse, we see that Christ promised that in addition to sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in the lives of all Christians, the disciples would also be assured that the Father and Christ were also dwelling in their lives as they loved Christ and were obedient to Him. Although the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in the life of every Christian, a Christian may not experience the peace that comes from their presence if that Christian is not loving Christ and obeying Him. As a result, Paul prayed that they might experience that presence through faith.

Third, Paul prayed that they would be rooted and grounded in love. There are two negative roots mentioned in the New Testament. Hebrews 12:15 says, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” Then, 1 Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” A root of bitterness will defile many and a root of the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. A positive root is mentioned in Colossians 2:7 where we read, “Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” The word translated “rooted” means *to strengthen or establish*. We need to follow the example of Paul and pray that our physical and spiritual children will be established and strengthened in the love of Christ.

Fourth, Paul prayed that they would be able to comprehend or understand four dimensions of the love of Christ which passes knowledge. Paul told the Romans in Romans 5:5, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Then, Paul told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” In these verses, we see that first the love of God is poured out in our hearts. Then, God teaches us how to love one another with that love. A very large tree has four dimensions. We can see the length and width of the tree. We can also see the height of the tree. However, we cannot see the depth of the tree because the roots are underground. That is why it is important to understand all four dimensions of the love of Christ. The Father pours out His love in our hearts where that love is unseen. That is what makes it possible for God to teach us how to love one another with a love than can be seen.

Fifth, Paul prayed that they would be filled with all of the fullness of God. The same word for filled is used in Ephesians 5:18 where we read, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Since we saw that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all dwell in our lives and that we experience His presence as we love God and are obedient to Him, we see here that Paul prayed that we would be filled with all the fullness of God. We are either

self-centered or God-centered. As we confess our sins and yield our selfish desires to God, we empty our human spirit of self which makes it possible for our human spirit to be filled with all of the fullness of God. Here, we see that Paul prayed that this would become a pattern of life for the Ephesians and not just an occasional event. In the same way, we want to be an example to our children of what it means to empty our human spirit of self so that more and more of the time we are also filled with all of the fullness of God as we pray for that to happen in their lives.

After praying these five things for the Ephesian Christians, Paul reminded them of what the Lord was able to do as they allowed the prayer of Paul to be answered in their lives. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” The word that is translated “who is able” means *to have the power to do something*. We realize that God has the power to do whatever He chooses in our lives and through our lives as we yield to Him.

Then, we have a whole series of words that tell how much the Lord is able to do as we yield to Him. The word translated “exceedingly” means *beyond what we can imagine*. This word is then followed by the words “abundantly” and “above all”. As a result, these words are like saying much, much, much, more than we can imagine. The word translated “ask” talks about our prayers as we make our requests to God. In Matthew 7:7-8, Christ said, ““Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”” Here, we see that Christ promised to answer our prayers as we pray for His will and His work in the world. The word that is translated “think” means what we are *able to understand or perceive with the mind*. When all of these words in this verse are put together, we see that God is able to do far beyond what we could ever imagine as we allow His power to work through our lives.

Since it is God who will do all these things in and through our lives, He is the One who deserves all of the glory for whatever He chooses to accomplish through our lives. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” We want to show our children that our goal is to bring glory to the Lord by all that we do. This glory will be seen in the church as the Lord works through the church. What God chooses to do will be by Christ Jesus. It will have an impact to all generations. In fact, it will have an eternal impact.

God wants to do more through our lives and the lives of our physical and spiritual children than we could ever imagine. That can happen as we show our children how to empty their lives of self so that both ours and their lives are filled with all of the fullness of God because we are yielding to God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand what God wants to do through their lives.