

An Exercise in Praying Scripture for Missionaries

Ephesians 1:17-19

By Tavi Rendon

Prayer is necessary for the sending and sustaining of missionaries. Jesus told His followers to pray for more missionaries (Matt. 9:38). Paul told the Corinthians that their prayers had helped to deliver him and Timothy (perhaps others) from great trouble (2 Cor. 1:11). So then, prayer is a vital part of establishing God's kingdom through the lives of men and women sent to communicate the gospel to others.

Using Scripture passages is an effective means for producing structured, sincere, and enthusiastic prayer. The Bible's ability to function in this way grows out of the relational nature of God's revelation through His written Word. Scripture is God's way of speaking to man, and so can be man's way of speaking to God. The context and vocabulary provide clues to appropriate structure for prayers. The inherent authority of Scripture and its truthful witness about reality cultivate

honest, hopeful, and faithful prayers. Repeated study of God's character and glorious plans quickens hearts to respond in thanksgiving and petition by prayer.

A couple of reminders may help clarify what is meant by using Scripture as prayer. First of all, prayer is not manipulat-

The entire letter of Ephesians provides ample resources for structured, sincere, and enthusiastic prayer.

ing God. Praying through a specific passage of Scripture does not give a man "power over God." Using biblical words, or even specific prayers, does not "force God" to respond favorably. Rather, the man or woman coming to God in prayer comes in submission to God's power. God

is the one having all power over creation, history, and daily events as revealed in the Bible. Man comes under the power of God by coming under the power of the grace and truth of the Word of God.

Prayer is not doing God a favor in order to gain His favor. Prayers do not provide God with needed information nor give Him a reason for doing good. Biblically or theologically accurate words are not an "offering" for appeasing God. God is always good and promises to respond to the contrite of heart. Scriptures provide form and content to heartfelt responses of contrition, thankfulness, and faith. Thus prayer is a response demonstrating that a man understands what God has said about Himself as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Ephesians 1:17-19

Many passages could be chosen for this exercise. By

choosing this particular passage it is hoped that readers will see how to make application using other Bible passages, especially from the New Testament. Most New Testament letters will lend themselves to giving form and meaning to prayers even for something as specific as missions. Ephesians was chosen because the author of this article had wanted to do such an exercise with the letter for some time.

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory..."

The opening of the prayer calls to mind the opening of the letter to the Ephesians (*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—1:3a*). Giving thanks to God for all He has done (vv.3-16) for missionaries is a good way to begin prayer time for the missionary. The blessing of verses 3-16 can even form prayers for the people to whom the mis-

sionary is sent. What God has done in the life of believers "back home" and in the missionary, He wants to do among the unconverted "on the field." In giving thanks to God it is also important to see Paul's theme of *"to the praise of His glory."* The goal of missions is to bring forth praise from every corner of the world on behalf of God who dwells in glory. God's greatest glory has been revealed in the person Jesus as God's choice for Lord and Christ over all things. Therefore, bringing men and women into right relationship with Jesus is central to bringing forth praise to God.

"... may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation..."

Paul stated in v.13 that the Ephesians had previously received the Holy Spirit. Thus, his first request is best understood as a request for *spiritual* wisdom and revelation resulting from the Holy Spirit in a

believer's life. A missionary is constantly in need of wisdom and understanding, particularly in regards to relating to the people to whom he is sent. Application may be made concerning the missionary's understanding the worldview of both his own culture and the culture in which he desires to communicate the gospel. The missionary needs spiritual discernment for communicating at the heart level. As applicable as all these may be, Paul's request for spiritual wisdom and understanding has a very specific application in a believer's life.

"... in the knowledge of Him..."

For Paul, the purpose of spiritual wisdom and revelation is to know God. Knowing God is the key for the missionary. Having an intimate knowledge of God and His kingdom as revealed in Jesus and made real by the Holy Spirit is at the core of the Christian life and therefore, at the core of missionary life. Something worse than not being able to communicate with a man dead in trespasses and sins is to be able to communicate with him but not have the reality of the gospel message flowing out of the heart. Thus, prayer for the missionary's relationship to God—a deep intimate relationship—is crucial. The missionary draws his life from his relationship to God and gives of his life to others out of his relationship to God. Knowing Jesus is what makes a man or woman a missionary. Knowing Jesus personally is the founda-



tion and goal of the Christian life, and the central message of the Gospel (Eph. 1:19-22).

"...[I pray that] the eyes of your understanding being enlightened..."

Paul's second request echoes the first. He uses the metaphor of "eyes of understanding" ("eyes of your heart") to emphasize his concern for the deep, inner reality he desires for believers. Those "eyes" become the organs for receiving spiritual wisdom and are thus "enlightened" by the revelation of God in Jesus by the Spirit. Missionaries need this kind of enlightenment at the heart level. So often a missionary must focus on external behavior of a new culture as he attempts to learn how best to communicate within a different worldview. Many times the strain of concentration and the constant strangeness of a different culture can be overwhelming to the senses, thoughts, and emotions of a missionary. To lose sight of God at such a time will sap a missionary's strength and motivation. Then too, there is the temptation to rely on man's wisdom and to deal with outward behaviors at a superficial level. Just as the first request had knowing God as its application, so also the second request has knowledge of God as its goal. Paul describes such knowledge by three phrases:

"...that ye may know what is the hope of His calling..."

Paul's phrase underscores two things he mentioned earli-

er in the chapter in verses 3-16. God calls people to be His people. Because it is God who calls, men and women can have sure hope in truly becoming His people as evidenced in all that God has done for His people through Jesus. God's purposes for creation are going forward as planned and will find their culmination in Jesus as planned. The missionary's call grows out of this general call to be *holy and without blame*. The missionary needs to "see" the sure hope of what God is doing through his or her life

Prayer can "raise the volume" of God's calling in the hearts of missionaries to give them hope in times of stressful busyness or discouragement.

on the field, especially in the less "glamorous" duties of mission work. Prayer can "raise the volume" of God's calling in the hearts of missionaries to give them hope in times of stressful busyness or discouragement.

"... and what [are] the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints..."

At first glance, Paul's phrase seems to refer to the inheritance the believers receive; after all, what could be of richer glory than eternal life with Jesus? However, the

phrase is probably best understood as a reference to God's inheritance among the saints. That is to say, the saints are a gloriously rich inheritance for God, specifically Jesus (consider Ps. 2:8). A missionary may find great motivation in the thought of his or her life being an inheritance for Jesus. (May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward.) Also, those who receive and believe in Jesus by the Spirit's work through the missionary add to His inheritance! In the midst of busy days, strange language, and discouraging diseases, the missionary needs reminding of what all this effort is about. Prayer can help to shed light on what God has planned for the future for Jesus and His people.

"...and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe..."

If inheritance is something in the future, power is a reality here and now. Paul goes on to describe the power in detail. In fact, his explanation of this "power to us-ward" is the underlying theme of chapter two which then culminates in another prayer in 3:14-21. (Compare 3:1 with 3:14 to follow Paul's thinking.) The power Paul describes is nothing less than the power which raised Jesus from the dead and set Him in the position of Christ over all creation. Remember that this last phrase is the third facet of having "eyes enlightened." A missionary's power of service and

sacrifice is drawn from nothing less than the power of the resurrection. According to Paul, that which brings a person into contact with such power is belief. Thus, prayer for a deepening faith is really the crux of Paul's prayer. The missionary is confronting cultural values opposed to God's kingdom, evil spiritual influences behind cultural behavior, and his own weaknesses of flesh in the midst of demanding situations. All these can loom large in the everyday experience of a missionary unless he can see God's purposes in Jesus Christ by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

Pray that the missionary would see his need for resurrection power. Pray that as he seeks to have his need met he

would come to know God more fully in the person of Jesus by the power of the Spirit. Pray that as he knows God more fully he would have more faith in God's ability to meet his and other's needs. Pray that as he has more faith he would be able to reveal the gospel more clearly in word and deed.

Out of spiritual wisdom comes a spiritual life. As Paul continues his letter he gives specific applications of what spiritual life looks like. For example, chapter five gives a command to understand what the will of the Lord is by being filled with the Spirit. Out of this flows Paul's teaching on family relationships. Thus,

spiritual understanding of God's will for spiritual life concerns husbands loving their wives, wives respecting their husbands and so on. So then, any of these applications of spiritual life make good resources for prayer on behalf of missionaries as well as those coming to Christ. The entire letter of Ephesians provides ample resources for structured, sincere, and enthusiastic prayer.



Prayer for a deepening faith is really the crux of Paul's prayer.