

Sermon Growth Guide

May 4, 2025 That Great Power



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That Great Power

Ephesians 1:15-23

Key Verse: Ephesians 1:18-19a

"I pray the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you many know...his incomparably great power

for us who believe."

Big Idea: When we pray, we connect ourselves with the

presence and power of God.

Foundations

Why do we pray? Most of us start praying because deep down we know we are small and we need cosmic help when we are in trouble or in grief. And that's a good thing. But when we know Christ, God wants us to grow in our life of prayer. God wants us to pray so that we can live in his presence, unite ourselves with him, and be given the power to know him and be part of his coming kingdom. Paul's prayers in the book of Ephesians are embedded in the story of the Gospel, the unity of the body of Christ under the authority of the one triune God, and the new life that enables us to live. This fuels the way Paul prays. First and foremost, Paul prays continually ("I keep asking..."). Secondly, he begins with thanks ("...giving thanks for you.."). Finally, the Gospel changes what Paul asks for. He prays that the Ephesians will know God deeply. He prays that they will understand the hope of new life and the inheritance they will have with Christ. He prays that they will know God's power - the same power that raised Jesus from the dead which is at work in and through both them and us. How unimaginable is that! This series is an opportunity. It's an opportunity to become a people who know God and his power, and who pray like Paul. We are the body of Jesus Christ, who is far above every power, rule, authority, and name on earth. God plans to change the world and we're part of the plan. It's time to become a people who pray. Amen!

Understanding God's Word

Read Ephesians 1:15-23. Please consider reading the whole book of Ephesians together and/or at home throughout the series. How is the Spirit connected to our prayers? What is the "hope" and "inheritance" Paul is talking about? How might it be connected to God putting all things under Jesus' feet and appointing him head of the church? (See also Psalm 8.)

Applying God's Word

How do you pray right now? In other words, what do you believe you are doing when you pray, and what kinds of things to do you pray about? How does Paul challenge you to grow in your life of prayer?

Witnessing God's Word

At the end of Ephesians, Paul says: "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions and with all kinds of prayers and requests." (Ephesians 6:18a) This series is an opportunity to become a people who pray in the power of the Spirit. Please join us for "40 Days in a Spirit of Prayer." You can pick up a flyer in the Welcome Center or find more information at firstprescos.org/prayer40.

In his song When we Pray, Tauren Wells says: "All the world starts changing, when the church starts praying." So let's pray!

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The question is, can I resist making a Star Wars joke today? What are the odds? Never tell me the odds. "Never tell me the odds" (Han Solo). No, we are not going to talk about the force on May the fourth. That would be heretical. So, let's talk about something else. Have you ever run out of gas? I did. On a date in high school, I put two dollars of gas in. That was enough! Enough to run out of gas on Lake Avenue right in front of the Broadmoor. Classy. How about your phone battery? Ever had a day when it didn't get charged and you were living on red? Running from outlet to outlet with your charger? We are not meant to live like that. Life feels like that sometimes. Running on fumes. Living on that last red line of battery. What if it could be different? I want us to live connected with the great power source.

We are starting a new series called In A Spirit of Prayer. We would all agree that God is powerful. We all know God asks us to pray to release His power among us. We probably all also agree that we do not pray as much as we wish we did. If you believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit of God is within you. The Holy Spirit is our connection to God. We can pray at all times and in all places filled with the power and energy of God by the Holy Spirit. We are going to study the letter to the Ephesians. I'd encourage you to read the whole letter each Sunday. It will only take you about twenty minutes. You'll read and understand that God has a different life for you. You were meant to live plugged in, to live charged up, to live united with That Great Power. That means prayer.

But we don't pray. Not as much as we think we should. According to Pew Research, 44% of Americans pray daily, but about a quarter of the population never or seldom prays. 72% of Evangelicals pray daily, and when you ask weekly, it jumps to 96%. But we don't pray as much as we think we ought to. We are too busy. There's no time. Or we don't feel like we get how it works. Is this changing the future? Changing God? Or changing me? Or we fear not getting the answer we want or just getting silence. What is prayer? Prayer is conversation with God. The most powerful part of prayer is not what you get; it's Who you get. It's time in the presence

of God. Prayer is not a trip to the divine vending machine or a secret trick to unlock the universe to serve your needs. It's not plugging into the power of God like plugging your refrigerator into the wall. Prayer is more like standing on the edge of a volcano. I have never been to a volcano myself, but I imagine it is pretty profound. All that power, All that heat. All that smell and smoke. You must feel awe-inspired. It's like standing on the top of a 14-er and feeling the strength of all that mountain underneath your feet, nothing higher than where you are. It's like walking beside the ocean; all that power, all that mystery. Prayer is like that. Drawing near to a great power, mightier than all of us.

Paul prayed for his friends in the church in Ephesus. "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." (Ephesians 1:15-16) "For this reason," he says. What reason? You have to read above. He has outlined the entire story of salvation. How God, God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has blessed us from heavenly realms; how God created the whole world a blessing; how God always wanted relationship with us, and how, when we were disobedient and lost and made ourselves enemies of God, how God chose us and chased us and sent His Son Jesus to die for us, and, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding." (Ephesians 1:7-8) How God works out His purposes in us and in the world to bring all things to bear for His own glory: how Jesus died for us and rose for us. and how, when we heard this, we believed it and were sealed into it by the Holy Spirit of God, and how all of this will bring about the restoration of the whole world in time, to the praise of God's glory.

That's big! That's a big story. That's a cosmic story. In light of this, "for this reason," Paul says, I think of you and pray. Why? Because this cosmic story landed, it touched down, in the lives of these particular men and women in this particular port city called Ephesus. At such and such home at the crossroads of

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this street and this avenue, in the back room of the house, at 6:30 pm on a Friday night last week...do you see? The cosmic touches down on the particular. Has it happened for you? It has happened for many, for many right here on the corner of Bijou and Nevada, at an hour like Easter morning or Sunday afternoon, or at Alpha, or at Youth Group, it has happened, where God, over all things, over all the universe, intersects with a person, you, and your whole life changes. Paul saw it happen, and it is reason to give thanks and pray.

He knows it has happened, it is verified and validated in this fact: that the faith produces love: "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people." (Ephesians 1:15) I've been praying. The faith is certain and sure because it produces love, otherworldly love, love that comes from God Himself. And so, Paul says, so, I pray for you every day. I do not stop praying. Why? Because faith, faith will be tried and tested, attacked by every form of cynicism and skepticism, and love, love will be resisted, resented even, by dark forces that thrive on division and hatred and spite. So, I pray. Because if you are going to continue in faith and abound in love, you had better be connected to that great power which only God provides. "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." (Ephesians 1:16) When should we pray? Pray without ceasing.

What is that great power? Power is the Greek word dynamis, where we get "dynamite." "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." (Ephesians 1:17) Knowing God—that's power. Knowing Him better. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 1:18-20) That great power. That incomparably great power. Do you know

how powerful God is? That overwhelming, transcending power. That superseding, all-surpassing, all-encompassing, incomparable power. The power of God. The same power that made all things out of nothing. The same power that formed us into being itself. The same power that spoke to a lost and disobedient people, led them out of slavery, conquered Egypt, split the Red Sea, the same power that sent David up against Goliath, the same power that overshadowed Mary and entered the world as an infant, the same power that healed and walked on water and planted the seeds of the Kingdom of God, the same power, the same power, that raised Jesus from the dead. Resurrection power. The same power. That great power. Can you even imagine how powerful God is? That great power.

It lifted Jesus out of the grave and set Him back where He belongs at the right hand of God, "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." (Ephesians 1:21) Do you hear that? Jesus is far above. Not just above, but far above, every rule, every authority, every power, every dominion, every name. Far above. A Church Father named John Chrysostom preached long ago, "He says not merely 'above' but 'far above.' For God is higher than the powers on high. So he led him up there, the very one who shared our lowly humanity. He led him from the lowest depth to the highest sovereignty, beyond which there is no higher honor. 'Above every sovereignty,' he says: not merely compared with this or that... What gnats are compared to humans, so is the whole creation compared with God." That great power. And us with Him. Did you see it? "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Ephesians 1:22-23) The Head is above all things. All opposition is a footstool under His feet. The body is connected to the Head, is it not? That's us, church. That's us. Is that how you live your life? Connected to the great power above all?

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Jesus taught us to pray. He knew very well the power He was connecting us to. "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14) I'm not going to apologize for that statement or explain it away. Jesus is not a divine butler, but these are His words to you. I leave them as they sit. Do you pray as you ought? As we move through this series, we want to invite you on a journey of prayer for 40 days. Sign up to receive daily text prompts to pray. Connect with that great power. Join us on prayer walks. Join us on days of fasting from various things to make us hungry and thirsty for prayer and the things of God.

Before we go to the table, I want to end with a little exercise. Jesus said when you pray, go into your closet of prayer. "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:6) Sometimes we need a place to pray. I mean, it is good to have a physical space, a prayer chair, or prayer rock, or prayer place, and maybe you have that. But I want us to have that place inside our heart where we meet with God. I want you to think of the closet inside your heart, the inner sanctum inside your soul, where God resides if you have believed in Him. To begin with as we deepen our understanding and practice of prayer, I want us to take a minute to develop that inner space where we meet with God, that inner sanctum. So, today, I'm giving us a moment of silence. Sixty seconds. Silence. And in that silence, right now, walk spiritually, into that quiet place with the Lord in the inner parts of yourself. Amen.

If God, that great power, is inside of you, what do you fear from the outside?