

Ephesians 3:14-21

Theme: Let's pray this way

When you go to the doctor for a check-up, they check your reflexes usually by taking out a small rubber mallet and giving the tendon below your knee a lil tap-tap. When that happens, your leg, in automatic response, reflexively, kicks out in front, if the reflex is functional that is. When a bad thing happens, less often when a good thing happens, "Oh, I'll pray for you!" Let's not allow that to simply be a reflex, a knee-jerk reaction, a nice thing to say said without much thought or actual intent to pray for the person. That's kind of a smack in the face, although they'll never know it, but God who pleads with us to pray literally all the time will. Sometimes we say we'll pray simply as a nice thing to say, a mindless reflex, rather than having it be the genuine, sincere, and intentional reaction to just about anything we hear in this life.

However, when we pray for each other for everything as the automatic faith produced response, well, that's really beautiful not just because entreaty was selflessly made on behalf of someone else in love before the Almighty who answers prayer, but because knowledge of that person's life, joys and struggles, must be there for a specific prayer to happen. In your life, there's a lot to pray about, isn't there? What are you thankful for? What scares you or fills you with uncertainty when you look toward the future? What sources of joy do have? How are your relationships going, health, work, school? There's a lot just in your life! Now, think about your immediate and extended family, your friends and all that's happening in their current stage of life and the others to come. There's a lot to pray for when you think about your loved ones!

There's a lot to pray for when you look around the room at people in here. Because of my relationships with you and some conversations we've had, I know a bit of what's going on in some of your lives. I hope that we know specific things to pray about for each other because that means we're doing life together and doing what God says Christians just do of sharing joy so it's magnified among us and grief so it's mitigated by mutual support. Take an interest in one another's lives because that's what love looks like and so that you know how to pray for each other. This is the reflex that God gives to our new selves as his redeemed children; it's what we were made in Jesus to do!

But we don't always, do we? It's often not the first thing I think of when another believer pops into my mind to quickly say, "I'm so happy this person believes in Jesus! Thanks for that, Lord! Bless them in the grandest ways exactly as they need to be blessed." Nah. I forget that and am far less intentional with it than I know I could be. Sometimes even, we're birds of a feather in this aspect, we wish ill on each other. I hope we don't ask God to help us in that ill intended wish. Curse is another name for that! Attaching God's name to evil intent is to toss out the Second Commandment! To try and be coy and like ask God to not do full on evil to someone, just inconvenience them is a perversion of God's righteousness and insults the intelligence of the All-Knowing. We don't fool God.

Let's repent of our failure to be mindful of others, love them as we ought, and pray for them. Let's, instead, pray this way. Let's pray like Paul. Paul was a guy who wore his heart on his sleeve. He said things like, "*For I wrote out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you, but to let you know the depth of my love for you.*" (**II Cor. 2:4**) and, "*Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*" (**I Thess. 2:8**) Do you think Paul loved his sisters and brothers in the Lord? Those sections and our verses from Ephesians 3 make it crystal clear he does! What a prayer! So heartfelt, sincere, and unafraid to ask for enormous things because Paul knows to whom he's praying. Paul prays to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ for whose name he was in prison. That was nothing to be ashamed of since the gospel was advancing *because* he was in chains, they had every reason to rejoice!

Paul prays, “*For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.*” (**Eph. 3:14-15**) His body language matches his earnestness as he prays to the Father for them. Who better? God created all people, loves all, wants all people to be saved, and calls those who believe in his only Son his children. In faith born confidence, Paul prays, “*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*” (**Eph. 3:16-17a**) To the very core, the essence of what makes each of us our true selves, the request is that God would graciously use his almighty power through the Spirit to strengthen us entirely with the continued peace that comes from Christ living in our hearts by faith. Jesus says, “*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*” (**John 14:23**) This is something we want never to change, we want Christ to dwell in us and be rooted in him always! The prayer goes on, “*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know his love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*” (**Eph. 3:17b-19**)

What a prayer! What do you lack? What makes you feel empty? Paul’s prayer is for those feelings to immediately cease and for the reality of the gospel to replace them. The joyous faith-filled knowledge of the way too impossibly large for us to understand love of Christ, our savior, who suffered in our place, who was crucified and died and triumphantly took up glorious life again so we would be alive, fully so forever – this gospel knowledge more than supplies for our lacks and emptinesses. In Christ, we lack nothing but have everything and pray to better know that, to better know the immensity of Christ’s love. This is a team effort. God uses his Word and us to build each other up in this incredible knowledge by giving each one of us an insight of the Spirit. Always grow, always learn. Adopt the mindset that we’ll never know and understand everything in the Good Book, but that we want to strive to by being in it intently and regularly, as a foundational part of life and routine, not only to know it better for your own benefit, but so you can better build others up having seasoned your speech with the living Word of God.

There was a man at my vicar church, Beautiful Savior in Grove City, OH, named Hutch. Hutch is in heaven now, but he used to take care of all kinds of stuff at church and was always running around town helping people. He knew seemingly everybody and how to help them. We were talking about prayer one time and he said, “My momma always told me, ‘Hutch, always wrap your prayers in praise.’ ” Thanks, Hutch, for that awesome insight and many others.

Let’s close this sermon with the words of praise to our awesome God Paul uses to close his prayer for his beloved Ephesians trusting that because of the great width, length, height, and depth of love Christ has for us, our Father will do far more and better than we can imagine, “*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*”