



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

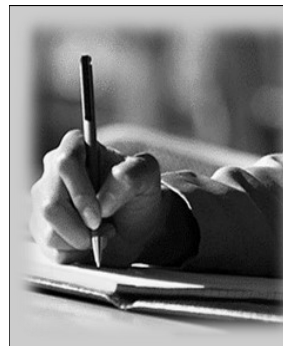


HG177 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul Praying For Knowledge

Colossians 1:3-12

Home Group Study Notes

27 January 2019 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

What is the longest word you know? What is a word or phrase that people might use to make them sound intelligent? (Remember, this is just for fun!).



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 E emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org

T @EmmanuelCM12 W emmanuel-church.info FB EmmanuelChurchBillericay

Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry



HG177 *Prayers Of The Apostle Paul*
Praying For Knowledge

Colossians 1:3-12

Home Group Sermon

27 January 2019 - James Van Cleeef

Introduction.

Prayer is as necessary to our life in Christ as breathing is to our physical life. It isn't an option for the Body of Christ, an activity for the dedicated alone. Indeed, to use a well-worn thought, prayer is so crucial that Jesus assumed it to be a part of everyday life: he says, *'When you pray...'* not *'if you pray'* (see Matthew 6.5).

We continue exploring the prayers of Paul the Apostle, and this week we delve into the importance of praying for knowledge. At the outset, the prayer of Paul and Timothy in Colossians gives us practical lessons, a short guide of how and for what we can pray.

Practical Lessons (Based on DA Carson's, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*)

Paul prays for people he had not met.

How 'far' do our prayers extend? Our family? Our group? Our church? Our town? Our prayers may be an index of how small and self-centred our world is' (DA Carson). What can we do to find out about Christians elsewhere?

Paul prays unceasingly.

Not incessant, but disciplined regularity (Jewish practice was three set times of prayer a day). If we can schedule regularly things like exercise, TV, and going out, how is it that praying or reading Scripture regularly is like pulling teeth?

Paul links prayers of thanksgiving with petition.

Do we pray only when there is something urgent, a crisis? What stops us from interceding when things are well? For example, when there was evidence of life and growth, Paul and Timothy intercede for more life and growth.

Praying for Knowledge. Praying for Transformation.

The practical lessons are important, and they can help us as we develop a healthy discipline of prayer. But we need to move from simple technique to Christlike character, and for that knowledge is crucial.

So, following Paul and Timothy's prayer, when we pray for *'knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding'* (v9), for what are we asking?

4. What is the best way to find out what God has called us to be or do?

5. What are the challenges of 'learning to live in God's world in God's way' (Scot McKnight), and how can we, as followers of Jesus, overcome them?

6. If you are able, please share when you realised that God truly loves you. What were the circumstances? How did you know? How did you change?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. 'Our prayers may be an index of how small and self-centred our world is' (DA Carson). Is that a fair comment? What can we do to find out about Christians elsewhere?

2. Jesus said, 'When you pray' not 'if you pray.' What are common hindrances to regular prayer and Bible reading? What can we do to remove those hindrances?

3. 'All authentic knowledge of God is *participatory knowledge*' (Richard Rohr). How would you explain that sentence? What do you think it may mean for Emmanuel?

Knowledge of God's Will.

Knowledge in Scripture includes personal acquaintance, insight, and perception that come from experience and encounter. Biblical knowledge is so much more than the sum total of objective and verifiable facts based on empirical research. In this light, consider the following thoughts:

All authentic knowledge of God is *participatory knowledge*.

—Richard Rohr

We are used to reading books that explain things, or tell us what to do, or inspire or entertain us. But [the Bible] is different. This is a world of revelation: God revealing to people just like us—men and women created in God's image—how God works and what is going on in this world.

—Eugene Peterson

God, from Genesis to Revelation, wants to be known, and communicates this desire so that we 'bend our world toward the glistening light of what God reveals in Christ' (Scot McKnight). God invites you to participate in his life! And in this invitation we see that the heart of all prayer is to be face to face with him.

The key source for our knowing God's will is Scripture. '*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*' (2 Timothy 4.16-17). It is Scripture that reveals his calling, covenant, promise, incarnation, salvation, Gentiles included as his people ('the mystery hidden,' Col 1.26-27), the reconciliation of all things in Christ, and an invitation for us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Romans 12.2).

This is what we mean when we speak of God's will. So, if we do not read Scripture, we are not likely able to discern God's will, for we are not filling our hearts and minds with the passion of God. The result is that God's will becomes about us: *God, what is your will for my life? God, what do you want me to do?* When we place ourselves at the centre, God becomes shaped in our image, rather than us being shaped into his.

We also have to be aware of the danger of letting the 'experts' know for us, for others cannot trust for us. 'Laity' or 'layperson' is an unbiblical concept that can lead us to rely on others to tell us what to think and do. 'Laity' disempowers and hinders the Body. We do need to learn *from* others, of course, but we also need to remember that we all have an obligation to build the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4.1-16). Therefore, the more we are immersed in Scripture, the deeper our understanding of God will be, and the greater our collective ability to nurture one another in love.

But here is a fine line: the Scriptures give us a lot of information about God, so, isn't it enough to know the information? Can't we simply buy some good books on doctrine, on teachings of the church in order to say we know God? No, for this is the difference between knowledge as the retention of facts, and knowledge as the experience of and insight into God. The former leads to self-sufficiency, and the objectification of God; the latter to obedience and walking in the light of Christ—being shaped in God's image.

When I was training for ministry, I had a number of exams to take. One of my first exams was Christian Doctrine. Doctrine is about the things we believe about God, Jesus, the Spirit, the Church, and so on, and how these beliefs were developed and accepted as authoritative. I entered the room, looked at the paper, and suffered complete brain freeze. I couldn't remember a single doctrinal thing, let alone write about a single doctrinal thing. I failed the exam.

One time, I found myself to be in a negative place, and if I carried on in that mindset I likely would have sinned significantly. In fact, that was my intention. But as I was wrestling with this darkness, I had an encounter with God: The light of his radiant love overwhelmed me, and I sensed him say, 'My son, why are you doing this? You are mine.' Immediately, the darkness was gone, and I knew the security of his love. I knew God, and in knowing him, I had a renewed desire to walk in his light.

Imagine if God required that we simply had to acquire facts about him to answer questions correctly in order to have a relationship with him. What if we freeze, and our mind goes blank for the exam? Does that mean we cannot know God?

But also imagine if God never revealed his love, his nature, or his longing for relationship? How would we change? How *could* we change, and make real the image of God in which we are created? Knowing God's will exposes us to his plans and purposes, his ways of acting, his promises, and his love. And as we know these 'things' we begin to see that really they are 'him'. This is 'the glistening light of what God reveals in Christ' (Scot McKnight).

Spiritual Wisdom and Understanding.

Our knowledge of God's will comes with spiritual wisdom, which is 'learning to live in God's world in God's way' (Scot McKnight). Proverbs 1.7 says, *'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.'* As we encounter the truth of God, we begin to see that 'this is my Father's world,' and that the whole of life is his idea, so we pay attention to what he says.

The chaos we see today in the world is because there is mass rejection of God and a de-meaning of humans created in his image. We live in a time when people *'exchange the truth about God for a lie'* (Romans 1.25), with an increase in the promotion and celebration of Godlessness and depravity. In this environment, it is no wonder the spirit of this age rejects the Christ of the Cross and Resurrection—the wisdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 1.18-2.16).

Nevertheless, because we have knowledge of Jesus, because we have encountered his truth and experience his presence with us, we are able to receive spiritual wisdom: we see with the eyes of God, for we have been given God's Spirit. *'We have the mind of Christ'* (1 Cor 2.16).

Knowledge with Benefits.

As we continually pray for knowledge of God's will, we receive the grace of the Spirit to discern and walk in his ways. This is to *'walk in a manner worthy of the Lord'* (Col 1.10). In other words, we determine and decide that in all things our lives will honour the Lord.

'In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths' (Proverbs 3.6). Is he not worthy of our honour? Should we not aim to be *'fully pleasing to him,'* and *'bear fruit in every good work'?*

Furthermore, if we know God, not only do we bear fruit, we also are spiritually strengthened so that we can endure faithfully with patience and joy—confident, constant trust, for God is good!

When our son, Adam, was living with many unknowns, and many questions, he was involved with a nurturing discipleship group in his church. They were discussing the difficult topic of suffering and faith, and he shared these words, revealing his experiential knowledge of God, as his testimony:

'It is vital that hope comes from a solid foundation of faith in God. Hope not built on our trust in God is not sustainable...Faith and hope working together are so powerful. They protect us from utter despair in the face of terrible misery, and yet give us the necessary room to lament, to cry out to God...But above all, they keep us in communion with God, they maintain our relationship with him, and remind us constantly that no matter the storm around us, he is piloting the ship back to the harbour.'

Praying for Knowledge: An Ever Increasing Circle

As we explore several of Paul's prayers, we will discover a man with an incredible pastoral heart, a follower of Jesus who was passionate in doing whatever he could to help others grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. His prayers are grounded in the reality of his encounter and knowledge of God.

I imagine that Paul would be confused by our often over technical approach to understanding what he wrote: dissecting his letters and analysing verb tense and choice of words to bolster our expertise. I think he would prefer that, like him, we immerse ourselves in the realities of God: we witness God's goodness, his faithfulness, the growth of the kingdom, and give thanks. As we engage with God's mission, we become aware of needs, of difficulties, of hardships, and suffering, and these form the substance of our life of prayer. Thus, as we do this, we are drawn into the full extent of God who is at work in this world, we are drawn into the reality of God himself.

Praying for knowledge becomes the circular movement that deepens our dependency on God with the result of ever increasing Christlikeness. It is the door through which we join in the eternal life and movement of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ***Amen.***

Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another and the blood
of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7