

Introduction: I am certain that we can identify with the challenging words from Oswald Chamber:

We use prayer as a last resort; Jesus wants it to be our first line of defence. We pray when there's nothing else we can do; Jesus wants us to pray before we do anything at all.

### *Oswald Chambers*

We begin this year with the focus on God, with this sermon series on Paul's School of Prayer, learning about prayer priorities from the writings of the missionary-pastor-theologian *par excellence*. This is crucial posture for Cornerstone's mission and ministry development, especially in the light of Vision 2020.

God is love; we love because God first loved us; and we are created to love and be loved; to know and be known.

Essentially this is what prayer is all about: When we speak to our Father in prayer, it's first of all our grateful response to His love, to all that He has done for us, what He wants us to do, and how we should fulfill His will on earth as it is in heaven.

Prayer is an intimate dialogue between our loving Father in heaven and His child. It's an intimate conversation between two loved ones.

This morning we will continue to learn about Love-Grasping Prayer in Eph. 3:14-21, a great prayer written by the great Apostle Paul.

"Love" is structurally central in this one long sentence prayer:

Eph. 3:17 Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. <sup>18</sup> And may you have the power to understand ... how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. <sup>19</sup> May you experience the love of Christ ... Then you will be made complete ...

God's love or Christ's love appears three times at the centre of this prayer which is sandwiched by two bookends in reference to God's power generated by His/Christ's love with the enabling of the Holy Spirit:

<sup>16</sup> I pray [in order that] ...he will empower you with inner strength *through his Spirit*.<sup>17</sup> Then *Christ will make his home in your hearts* as you trust in him. *Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong*. <sup>18</sup> And [in order that you may] have the *power to understand ... how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is*. <sup>19</sup> May you experience the love of Christ ... [in order that] *you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God*.

While it is not noticeable in the English translation of this prayer, there are three purpose clauses and each purpose statement further clarifies what this prayer is about:

By the work of the Holy Spirit in the innermost core of our being [i.e., the command centre of our mind, emotion, and behaviour]

we receive and understand the all encompassing nature of God's love,

as Christ permeates [i.e., takes residence/makes his home, thus in complete ownership and control] our whole being and enable us to mature in love.

Here in Eph. 3:14-21 Paul encourages us to pray so we can experience God's love and in praying we get to know God better, thus not the other way around.

So how we pray, how often we pray, and the depths of our prayer reveal how much we know or experience God's love in our lives.

It's a love that empowers us to surrender all to Jesus with the enabling of the HS.

It's a love that helps us to understand the magnitude of God's sovereign goodness, i.e., He knows exactly what He is doing, and our faith is therefore strengthened in His good purposes and plans for this life and the life to come.

It's a love that nurtures and matures us so that others will see God's presence and power in our personal lives as well as in our corporate gatherings.

David Benner writes (*Surrender to Love*, p. 85):

"The point of God's love is to remake us in his image of love ... God wants us to make his life ours, his heart ours, his love ours. He wants us to be—like him—characterized by love ... Love is the acid test of Christian spirituality. If Christian conversion is authentic, we are in a process of becoming more loving. If we are not becoming more loving, something is seriously wrong."

Based on Paul's prayer here we learn how to enrich our prayer-dialogue with our heavenly Father and let love be the driving force in our faith journey. Paul here shows that love-grasping prayer begins with this first lesson:

### **Soak in the riches of God's grace.**

God's unlimited resources to empower His people is a consistent theme Paul has been saying since the beginning of the letter:

Eph. 1:3 All praise to God ... who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms ... <sup>7</sup> He is so rich in kindness and grace ... <sup>2:4</sup> But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much ... <sup>3:16</sup> I pray that from his glorious,

unlimited resources he will empower you ... through his Spirit.

“Riches” refers literally to God’s wealth, money, possessions; God’s the abundance and unlimited resources now made available to and poured into those who belong to His family.

We have a great, multi-gazillionaire heavenly Father who loves us, seeks what is best for us, and gives His greatest gifts to us in Jesus. God is a generous, loving Father who wants to lavishes His riches upon us.

He is not a misery God, but we are misery in our prayers!

In prayer, we acknowledge, appreciate, assert, and apply what is made available to us. Love-Grasping Prayer is coming to this Father, knowing that he desires to give us according to the riches of his glory.

How can we “soak” ourselves in the riches of God’s glorious grace and mercy when we pray?

*Take time to process “every spiritual blessing” received in Jesus.*

Do you know what spiritual blessings God has poured into the lives of His people, bestowed upon you and me? Paul gives us the answer:

### **Eph. 1:3-14**

- ✓ *Chosen & adopted into God’s family*
- ✓ *Forgiveness*
- ✓ *Redemption/Liberty*
- ✓ *Wisdom*
- ✓ *Eternal Inheritance/Hope*
- ✓ *Resurrection Power*
- ✓ *Holy Spirit*

We might know in our heads all these truths/blessings we have in the spiritual realm but do we spend time to let these riches enrich our soul, consider how they can deepen our faith and enable us to live with purpose and on mission?

Let me share with you one significant time of my faith journey when I fully grasped the profound nature of the truth about being chosen with a purpose in God’s love.

Every post-grad who went to Aberdeen was because every one wanted to study under the feet of this world renowned NT scholar; but not everyone got him as supervisor. I was fortunate to have Howard to be my research supervisor: have direct access to his “brain”/wisdom and guidance. I

felt a sense of being someone special, with a purpose and a calling to fulfill.

In a similar manner we can consider God choosing His people – you and me – to have complete access to Him and have all the necessary resources to live out His purpose in His love on a daily basis and how that’s experienced in a personal way (Ditto with the rest of the list of spiritual blessing. Or we could consider other lists such as God’s attributes/character or Jesus’ parables, etc.)

Paul teaches here yet another practical lesson of love-grasping prayer:

### **Enlarging our prayer circle.**

<sup>18</sup> And may you have the power to understand, [together with the saints/God’s people], how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

Paul’s message is clear: No one individual will ever be able to fully comprehend the width, length, height, and depth of God’s love. If we just depend on ourselves, our knowledge of God will be very limited, weak and poor.

But when we share our prayer concerns and collectively experience answered prayers with others, we witness together the multi-dimension of God’s love and our eyes are open to see God’s sovereign, creative and attentive ways in working with each individual.

As an example, I receive great encouragement from one couple’s daily prayer for my ministry and family; they always ask prayer items about Zach, Kay, Libby and me.

When we build into each other’s life, God’s love grows deeper and shines brighter in our midst.

So, don’t just keep your burdens and challenges to yourself; discipleship is not for lone ranger and in private journey.

*Share your prayer concerns with a team of 70+ prayer warriors at Cornerstone.*

Whether God answers our prayers according to what we asked or not, God’s love manifests in and through the prayer journey of his people: we celebrate when our prayers were answered; we hold on to our Father’s goodness and lean on continuous community prayer support as we wait upon the Lord.

As Paul concludes his prayer with a doxology, we learn that we practise love-grasping prayer when we ...

**Expect great things from God.**

**Attempt great things for God.**

***William Carey***

<sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. <sup>21</sup> Glory to him in the church and in

Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever!  
Amen.

God's capability to empower His people with love to fulfill His world restoring purpose far exceeds human capacity for asking or imagining.

Our individual and corporate experiences of the Spirit-infused power of God's love

to effect life changes,

to transform lives from the inside out,

to mend whatever is broken

and to make all things right in the new heaven and new earth,

serve as pointers or signs of His future glory brought to the present.

The manifestation of God's life and community changing power happens in the midst of corporate prayer-worship, as we can see in Acts 13:

<sup>Acts 13:1</sup> Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon ... Lucius ... Manaen ... and Saul. <sup>2</sup> One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called

them." <sup>3</sup> So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

The practical application of this lesson is this:

*Participate in corporate listening & envisioning.*

Here I want to reiterate Pastor Jeremy's announcement about our first Prayer Visioning Meeting on Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>. It's not just for those who are interested to join the Plant Launch Team or the development of the Leader's Institute – it's for the whole church to pray together and seek God's guidance, to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God. So mark it on your calendar and come join us to worship and pray together and see how God is going to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or imagine!

Conclusion: Let me close with the following words from Nicky Gumble:

Prayer is the acid-test of love. Coming into the light of God's presence reveals the true feelings in the depths of our hearts.

If prayer is the acid-test of love – our love for God and others – let us spur each other on to keep praying and celebrate what God can accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think in our midst.