

## BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

### STUDY FOUR

## Praying Like We Mean It

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

*Some of the most soft-spoken, sweet-spirited of God's saints are like human dynamos beneath the surface. How did they get like that? Prayer.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**E**PHESIANS was written by someone who really knew how to pray—maybe because he spent so much time in desperate situations! When Paul wrote this letter, he was in Rome under house arrest awaiting trial before Caesar for crimes he didn't commit (Acts 25:6–12). Such a circumstance would drive all of us to our knees!

However, the strong pulse in Paul's prayers was linked more to his love for his Ephesian friends than concern for himself. Paul prayed like he meant it—from his heart. He prayed for others with genuine thanksgiving out of true connectedness to God, with power and purpose.

In this study, we'll examine one of Paul's prayers. It's not a long one, but it isn't the length of a prayer that makes it effective. The greatest prayers are those we voice from the depths of our souls, and we can't miss the sincerity in the tone of this prayer. Even more inspirational than the tone is what Paul prayed. His carefully phrased petitions form a memorable outline for us when we just can't find the words. As we look closer at Paul's prayer, let's join him on his knees and pray along with him for those we love.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## **Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

We begin our study of prayer by asking God to grow our prayer life. Many Christians find it hard to pray and daunting, so we need God’s Spirit to inspire a longing to connect with God as children crying out for their father.

*Because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:6)*

Call out now to your “Abba,” asking Him to guide your understanding, spark your enthusiasm, and strengthen your resolve to pray like Paul. Use this space to write your prayer.



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

This section of Ephesians is a doorway into Paul’s spiritual life, where we see elements of Paul’s walk with God on display. In the previous study, we sampled ten spiritual blessings for which Paul praised God. Great praise to God naturally leads to great prayer. In Paul’s intercession, he gives thanks for two qualities in his friends (Ephesians 1:15–16); and then, he makes two requests on their behalf (1:17–19). It’s a simple outline that anyone can use.



### **Observation: Thanksgiving and Intercession**

A helpful practice in the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures* is to mark key words in the passage.<sup>1</sup> Read Ephesians 1:15–19 below in the New American Standard Bible and then, by using your cursor or printing the page and using a pencil, mark the verbs, such as “giving thanks,” “making mention of you,” “may give,” “be enlightened,” and “will know.”



## **Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

*For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. (Ephesians 1:15–19)*

Of these verbs, two stand out as the frame on which the whole prayer hangs: “giving thanks for you” and “making mention of you” (1:16 NASB). In the New Living Translation, the phrases are “thanking God for you” and “I pray for you” (1:16). Let’s use these ideas as our main points: *giving thanks* and *interceding*.

### **Paul Gave Thanks for the Ephesians—Ephesians 1:15–16**

Paul could have noted many qualities for which to thank God, but he focused on the two most fundamental qualities for followers of Christ. What two qualities did Paul highlight (*Ephesians 1:15*)? If you’re marking your text, draw a line from “giving thanks for you” (1:16 NASB) to these two words to show their connection.

In *1:13*, Paul recalled when the Ephesians heard the gospel and “believed in Christ.” This step of faith indicated their *conversion*. In *1:15*, Paul mentioned what seems to be an ongoing walk of faith after their initial step. How do you think their conversion faith mentioned in *1:13* is different than their “strong faith” in *1:15*?



## **Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

The Ephesian believers endured persecution and likely strengthened their faith by walking with Christ day by day and trusting Him through rough storms. The most severe persecution could not break their loyalty to Christ. Such *faith in Christ* freed them to *love like Christ*, specifically, to love “God’s people everywhere” (Ephesians 1:15), not just people in their cultural or ethnic group. And for this, Paul was thankful!

*Our loyalty to Christ should work its way out in love for one another. A church that has truth but lacks love is not a church. It’s a big Bible class cultivating a clique, leading to a clan that becomes a cult. —Chuck Swindoll*

### **Paul Interceded for the Ephesians—Ephesians 1:17–19**

While the Ephesians’ cups of faith and love overflowed, their cupboard of knowledge was bare. And so Paul made two requests that God meet this need. How does Paul phrase the first request in *Ephesians 1:17*? Write down how different Bible versions translate this phrase.

If you’re marking the text, draw a line between “making mention of you” (Ephesians 1:16 NASB) and this first request. What is Paul’s second request in *Ephesians 1:18*? Write down the different translations of this phrase in parallel Bible versions. And then, draw a second line between “making mention of you” (1:16 NASB) and this second request to show the connection.



## **Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

Notice that Paul’s second request includes three purposes that Paul lists at the end of verse 18 and the beginning of verse 19. Each of them begins with the word, *what*, in the New American Standard Bible. As God enlightens the Ephesians’ hearts, they will know what three things (*Ephesians 1:18–19*)?

Finally, in your text, show the relationship between “be enlightened” (1:18 NASB) and these three outcomes by connecting them with a line. Here’s the completed outline of Paul’s prayer:

- I. “I . . . do not cease **giving thanks**” (1:15, 16 NASB)
  - A. for “the **faith** in the Lord Jesus which exists among you” (1:15 NASB)
  - B. for “your **love** for all the saints” (1:15 NASB)
- II. “**making mention** of you in my prayers” (1:16 NASB)
  - A. that God “may give to you a spirit of **wisdom** and of **revelation** in the **knowledge** of Him” (1:17 NASB)
  - B. that “the eyes of your heart may **be enlightened** so that you will know” (1:18 NASB)
    - 1. “the hope of **His calling**” (1:18 NASB)
    - 2. “the riches of the glory of **His inheritance**” (1:18 NASB)
    - 3. “the surpassing greatness of **His power**” (1:19 NASB)

This is a masterful prayer! Now, let’s define some key words.



## **Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*



### **Interpretation: The Meaning of Paul’s Words**

Build on Paul’s framework by looking closer at six key nouns: *wisdom*, *revelation* (or *insight*), *knowledge*, *calling*, *inheritance*, and *power*. In the interpretation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we can consult commentaries and lexicons to arrive at the meaning Paul intended for his original audience.

Read the following excerpt from Chuck’s commentary and write down your understanding of these words and how they contribute to grow our faith.

“Wisdom” refers to the ability to take profound theological truths *about* God and apply them to everyday situations of life. . . . A spirit of revelation, then, indicates an unveiling of insight—that is, the ability to grasp the meaning of God’s truths so that we comprehend His perspective on life and circumstances. . . . Through both wisdom and revelation, we enjoy a fuller understanding of our heavenly Father. When that happens, we’re no longer “clueless,” walking around life as senseless victims of circumstances. Instead, we see through things. We begin to grasp God’s perspective on the world. The result? With great eagerness, we submit to His authority and trust in His promises.<sup>2</sup>

Can you see that the concepts build on each other? Wisdom from God’s Word leads to insight into God’s point of view, which leads to fuller, more intimate knowledge of God—not merely factual knowledge about God. Knowing God in this sense implies a maturing, interactive relationship with God built on trust, commitment, and security.

As we know God more intimately, He floods our hearts, that is, our mind, will, and emotions with His light! Sin may cloud our mind, bind our will, and cast a gloom over our emotions. But God’s light replaces the darkness with God’s truth, which reveals:

- “The hope of His calling”
- “The riches of the glory of His inheritance”
- “The surpassing greatness of His power” (Ephesians 1:18–19 NASB)



**Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

Use your sources to explain the meaning of these phrases. For a free online commentary, consult *Constable's Notes at NetBible.org*.

The next step after interpreting the author's meaning for his original audience is to formulate principles that we can apply today. What are some principles that emerge from your study of these key words and concepts?

*Our inheritance is seeing the Savior in all His glory. It is being rewarded for every act done with a pure motive. It is being eternally delivered from the adversary and his dark, evil ways. —Chuck Swindoll*



**Correlation: The Many Ways God Calls Us**

Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they would know the “hope of His calling” (Ephesians 1:18 NASB). Look up the following verses and write down the other ways in which God calls His people.

*Galatians 5:13*



**Praying Like We Mean It**  
*Ephesians 1:15–19*

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*Colossians 3:15*

*1 Peter 2:9*

Can you find other references to God's calling in your concordance or by searching on an online Bible website, such as [Biblegateway.com](http://Biblegateway.com)? Write down what you discover here.





**Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

Write a concluding principle that wraps up what you've learned about God's calling based on your word study.

*When the eyes of our hearts are enlightened, we realize that we're not victims any longer; we're victors. We're not helpless; we're hopeful. We're not at the enemy's mercy; "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." —Chuck Swindoll*



**Application: Praying for Those You Love**

Try praying Paul's prayer for a loved one. What qualities does this person display that you can thank God for?

Now, can you name the needs in this person's life? Intercede on his or her behalf by making the same requests that Paul made for wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and pray for God to enlighten his or her heart. Refer to the outline above to remind you of the specifics.



## **Praying Like We Mean It**

*Ephesians 1:15–19*

Conclude your prayer by asking God to make clear His calling and then fill this person's heart with a desire to follow Him.

When we pray for someone we love, we sometimes don't know what to say. Keep Paul's prayer handy, and then you'll not only pray from the heart, you'll have just the right words.



### **A FINAL PRAYER**

*Father, give me the faith and love that Paul admired in the Ephesians. Help me to rest in You when I endure stormy seas. Be my anchor so that I don't panic when hardship strikes or fears haunt me. I desire to love others, but first I must feel confident in Your love for me. Give me that reassurance today and fill my heart with the light of Your presence and truth. Settle my soul with Your Spirit, so I can pray for others from a place of peace and complete confidence that You will hear me when I call. Amen.*

### **ENDNOTES**

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 178.

