

Sermon / Bible Reflection Outline

This sermon / Bible reflection outline can be used at the beginning of the SU International Week of Prayer in local churches or other gatherings, meetings, or events to introduce the theme and encourage people to participate.

Praying with Purpose

Theme verse

I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
(Eph 3:14 – NIV)

Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21

We admire those for whom prayer is natural:

- People like George Mueller;
- Others we know who are great pray-ers;
- People of prayer in the Old Testament like Nehemiah (e.g. Nehemiah 1:5, 2:4; 4:4-5); and
- People of prayer in the New Testament - Apart from Jesus, Paul is an obvious example as he begins most of his letters with prayers.

We can contrast these great people of prayer with our personal struggle to develop a natural, regular and satisfying practice of prayer. Perhaps help is at hand! Let's consider one of Paul's great examples of prayer.

Ephesians 3:14-21

After several references to praise and prayer, and outlining his understanding of God's call and purpose, even through suffering, he turns his attention to what he longs for them....and so he prays for them.

We discover that:

1. In prayer we speak the language of the family

vv14-15: Just as the Lord's prayer begins 'Our Father', Paul kneels before the Father from whom His whole family has gained its identity.

Paul's words demonstrate: what is normal for God's people; humility; being resolute; the character of community; dependence on God; and trust.

2. In prayer we open the gate to growing

vv16-19: Paul's words give a rich, superlative description of a life that is growing and effective.

This life involves:

- His Spirit;
- His power;
- strength at the core of our being;
- Christ at home in our hearts;
- a transformed life characterised by faith and love;
- the ability to comprehend in ever-growing measure the incomprehensible; and
- knowing in experience, to the extent of its dimensions, that which is beyond knowing.

Paul is describing the indescribable. The inexhaustible wealth of power, experience and knowledge that leaves you satisfied - but longing for more! Like a good marriage.

3. In prayer we maintain our focus

vv20-21: To the one and only, all sufficient and mind-blowing God, whose will and capability is beyond anything we can begin to imagine – be all the glory!

As we discover the richness within the family we now belong to, and the richness of the possibilities open before us, our prayers centre on the only One through whom it is all possible.

There is nowhere else to go. We are to seek His glory in the assembly (Church) of His family and in the growing revelation of His Son - for all generations, now and throughout eternity.

Conclusion

Pray Paul's prayer, pausing after every phrase. Personalise his prayer by changing the words referring to God to the second person singular (replace 'he' with 'you') and the words referring to people to the first person plural ('you' to 'we'/'us' etc.).

Sing an appropriate hymn of praise.

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