

## Paul's Prayer

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**MEETING AIM:** This session focuses on Paul's prayer to the Ephesians found in chapter 3: 14-20.

**BACKGROUND READING:** Make sure you read Ephesians! The NIV study Bible is helpful and John Stott's BST Commentary on Ephesians and Steve Motyer's Crossway Bible Guide on Ephesians are highly recommended.

**NOTES FOR ADAPTING:** There are a lot of ideas and possible areas for discussion in this study - you may want to consider running it over two sessions. In the discussion section below, depending on the group you're working with, you may want to change the emphasis of discussion from 'their church' to 'the church' in general. For those older or further in their faith journey, there are loads of opportunities to delve deeper into what the passage is saying (see GOING FURTHER section below).

### Portrait montage (15 mins)

Give each young person either a square of material or card and some fabric paints, pens, magazines, paints etc Ask each of them to draw, write, stick, paint an image or picture that sums themselves up - it could be just colours or words or pictures - it doesn't matter what it is. When everyone has finished their individual squares, join them together - either by laying them on a large piece of cloth or by attaching them to lining paper. Explain that this montage is a visual illustration of the different characters and personalities that make up the group.

### Setting the scene (2 mins)

The passage helps us to set the scene because it starts by Paul writing 'For this reason...' So the question needs to be asked, for what reason? He is referring to the previous chapters in which he has written about what Jesus has done for us and the fact that we are saved as individuals but joined together to form a new community of believers, a 'holy temple'. Paul is about to launch into a prayer for the Ephesians (v1), but then he breaks and writes something completely different (v2-13). He returns to his original intention and train of thought in (v14) when he again says 'For this reason...'

### Read it (5 mins)

Depending on the age of your group and their reading ability, consider giving a few minutes to simply read the passage, either to themselves or in pairs/small groups. Put some music on in the background, and get them to think through what the passage is saying, what questions it raises, what pictures come to their minds when they read it. See if anyone wants to feed back any thoughts or questions.

### Bible study one (10 mins)

Focus on chapter 3: 2-13. Paul started saying something in v1 and then suddenly changed direction, reminding the Ephesians of who he is and the role that he been given. Key things to draw out:

- Ø Paul had received a revelation (v3) that gave him an insight into the mystery of Christ (v4) which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit (v5)
- Ø This mystery is that the good news about Jesus is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews - both are to form one body, one community - the church (v6)
- Ø He was now been charged with communicating this revelation with the Gentiles (v2) - he was now a servant of this gospel (v7), even though he was less than the least of all God's people (v8), he received grace to preach to the gentiles (v8)

**KEY POINT:** Read v9-10. What was the mystery Paul refers to in v9? That God was creating a new community (the church) that included both Jew and Gentile and that his intention now was that through this community his manifold (meaning multi-faceted, varied, many coloured) wisdom be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Basically, the coming together and life of this new multi-racial community - the church - should reflect something unique that demonstrates God's power and wisdom at work in the world and in the heavenly realms. The church is not some old fashioned, irrelevant, out of date idea. But, as John Stott says, the church is central to history, central to the gospel and central to Christian living.

### Discussion (5 mins)

Refer back to the montage created at the beginning of the evening. Highlight the fact that their unique contribution is vital for the life of the church. Ask them to consider how they view the church that they are part of and what part they feel they have to play in its life.

## Slide show! (10 mins)

Depending on what resources you have available, this activity can work with a data projector and laptop, an OHP and acetates or simple picture cards. Put together a presentation of photos/images which depict things that are wide, high, long and deep. For example, the Eiffel Tower, mountains, view from a plane window (high); panoramic views, deserts, oceans (wide); depths of oceans, caves (deep); straight roads, signposts (long). Get the young people talking about the longest journey they've ever been on, the highest building or mountain they've ever climbed up, the most amazing view they've ever scene, the deepest depths they've gone either diving or pot-holing.

## Bible study two (10 mins)

Focus on chapter 3 v 14-21. Paul now returns to what he started in v1. For this reason.... for all that he said before in chapters 1-3 about what Jesus has done for us, who Jesus is, how we are saved, how we are built into a new community, God's intention for the church. For this reason he prays that:

- Ø that the Ephesians may be strengthened with power (v16), through his Spirit
- Ø that Christ may dwell in their hearts (v17)
- Ø that they may have power to grasp how wide, long, high and deep is the love of Jesus (v18)
- Ø that they may know this love that surpasses knowledge (v19)
- Ø that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (v19)

Wow! What incredible things to pray! Paul finishes this section with worship by focussing back on God - that he would be glorified in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever.

**KEY POINT:** Look at v20. Who is it that we pray to? We pray to our God who is able to do more that we could ask or even imagine! Take some time to think about that as a group. That whatever we pray, God is able to immeasurably more than we could ask or even dream up in our heads! How amazing is that? Paul has just prayed that the Ephesians would have inner strength and would be able to fully understand how awesome God's love is - he then says God is able to do even more that I can even ask or imagine!

## Response (10 mins)

Spend some time reflecting on the images shown earlier and the stories the young people shared about their longest journeys, highest climbs etc. Compare these images and stories with Paul's description of how high and wide and long and deep is the love of Jesus. Spend some time either in the whole group or in pairs/threes praying Paul's prayer for the Ephesians for one another: that they may fully understand how much God loves them, that they may know his power within them. Draw the time to a close by reading a Psalm that speaks of God's love - maybe Psalm 103 or Psalm 145.

## Going further (20 mins)

1. Read v10 - Paul refers to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms - where else does he mention these in Ephesians and what might they refer to? See 1 v 19b-23 and 6 v 12.
2. What is the power that Paul refers to in v 16 and 20? - Look back over chapter 1 v 15-23.

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