

Prayer that puts us to shame

Ephesians 1:1-14

How can this study help me

Do you want to know how to praise God? Well, these verses are an example of “praise” (1:3, 6, 12, 14) at its best. They are an outpouring of rich praise that is perhaps unsurpassed in the Bible. We would do well to consider how the prayer mixes profound understanding of the “plan” of God (1:11) with the development of that plan in time and space.

Remember this is real praise, prayer with passion that is driven by a vision of God in all his majesty and mysterious love for rebellious sons and daughters of Adam. Look at what might be called the chorus (“to the praise of his glory” verses 12, 14 cf., also verse 6) and ask yourself, Have I ever fully been convicted that this is what I praise God for?

What is going on in this section

How do we get a handle on this profusion of praise? Perhaps if we can visualise it like the parts of an idealised flower we will never forget it. A simple flower gets all the attention because of the scent and colour. But supporting the flower is a stem and below the ground are the roots. The flower would not exist and quickly withers when it is separated from these other parts. So, if it helps. Think of the praise prayer like the three parts of a flowering plant.

The roots

The roots of the flower are hidden in the ground but from them it develops and ultimately depends.

- Paul says “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is to be praised because he _____ us in Jesus (verse 4,11). In order to understand the roots of our “salvation” (verse 13) we have to fully appreciate the answer to these questions:
- When did God choose his people? Verse 4
- For what reason did he chose them? Verse 4
- On what basis did he chose them? Verse 4

Now this profound understanding of God the Father’s vision is what Paul praises him for and is the root of all history, all he experienced and all the expected.

- How often do you think of God’s election of you as you begin to praise him?

The stem

The stem of a flower transfers what the roots provide and supports the flower. God's choice of his people, before the foundation of the world, shows itself in the plan for Jesus to die and rise again. The love of God gets transferred to his people through all that Jesus experienced. If you quickly scan this prayer of praise "in him" is the constant refrain (eg., verse 4, 7, 11). "In him" means in Jesus and we struggle to appreciate these two words fully. If we are "in him" then we are on Jesus' team and as such he is our coach, captain and friend. We once were on the other team, but now we have been chosen to play for Jesus and nothing we do will ever be the same.

Paul praises God the Father in his prayer because "in Jesus"

- Verse 4, 5 we gain a status as _____
- Verse 7 our record with God is _____

What one word in verses 6, 7 captures all this preparation and achievement for us?

What does Paul know about the Ephesians past that makes him say their present status is only and all a matter of God's grace? (Read the story of the background of the Ephesians in Acts 19:17-20 and Paul's summary in Eph. 2:1-2.)

The flower

The flower is what develops from the roots and stem and is the focus of attention. Paul praises God in his prayer because his plan to _____ (verse 10) "flowered."

The amazing fact ("the mystery" (cf., 3:6)) is that not only some of the original people of God, Jews like Paul, but Gentiles, like the Ephesians, were made part of Jesus' team. This is a way of explaining to modern people what it means to be "included in Christ" (verse 13). What are the significant stages in being part of Jesus' team

- They heard _____ (verse 13)
- They were marked with _____ (verse 13).

What about us here and now?

Have you learnt anything about praising God in prayer from this section of Ephesians?

If this is "benchmark" or "best practice" praise, what does it mean for us here and now?

What do I do now?

- Have a go at writing your own prayer of praise that models itself on Paul's words.