

Bible Study • World Day of Prayer • March 3, 2023

Prepared by the WDP Committee of Taiwan

I Have Heard About Your Faith—Ephesians 1:15-19

Ice-breaker

Plan to sing a familiar song of praise and worship, or the ones suggested for the Worship Service. Choose a group exercise to help participants to get to know one another.

Bible reading

Ephesians 1:15–19 (NRSV)

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

Context of the letter to the Ephesians

During the first century, Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province in Asia and an important port city in the Aegean Sea. It was the fourth largest city of the Roman Empire, following Rome, Corinth, and Antioch, with an approximate population of 350,000~500,000.

Ephesians primarily worshipped Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt and fertility and protector of young girls. Idolatry and sorcery were prevalent at that time, and the manufacture of silver shrines was a thriving business. The livelihood of many depended on the Temple of Artemis, which became a religious and economic center.

Churches today commonly accept that Paul wrote this letter to the churches while he was imprisoned in Rome.

When Paul spread the gospel and truth to Ephesus, many local Jews and Greeks believed in Jesus Christ and followed Him wholeheartedly (Acts 19: 1-17). With firm determination, the ones who gave up their profession and livelihood (sorcery) openly burned their valuable scrolls. They not only lost wealth and status, but experienced pressure from family and friends (Acts 19:18-20). Despite these difficulties, they kept their faith, which made Paul extremely gratified. Paul demonstrated his genuine love for them. “Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus.... I have not stopped giving thanks for you” (Ephesians 1:15-16).

Paul taught the gentiles to live out their faith in Jesus in a time of religious adversities. He encouraged them to bond with one another in peace. The epistle of Ephesians wanted to equip the saints to build up the body of Christ, until they came to unity in faith.

Interpretation of the text

Paul gave thanks to God for the Ephesians living out their love and faith. He prayed that they would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation and would “come to know [God]” through the light and inspiration of the Holy Spirit! Paul asked God to enlighten the disciples, so that they could see these three truths:

The hope to which God has called the disciples

God’s calling has a meaning and a purpose. It calls us to turn to Christ and become holy, to put away our old selves and to put on our new selves, to live out a new life in abundance, and to glorify God’s name. This is a call that brings change to life. Furthermore, in Jesus Christ, we have been designated for adoption as God’s children and have been given the hope of our inheritance toward redemption. (Ephesians 1:5, 11, 14; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

Meditation: Often we are frustrated by difficulties and obstacles and may even lose our hope and faith or rely on our weak human nature. However, we are called to keep our “hope and faith” in God’s kingdom and promises. Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we come to see the faithful, loving, and gracious God. We regain our hope and faith to face the challenges and move forward. As it was written in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

The riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints

Believers have been designated for adoption as God’s children and have been given the hope of obtaining inheritance from Him. It is emphasized that God’s disciples are God’s inheritance.

God told the Israelites through Moses, “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples” (Exodus 19:5). Thankfully, this privilege is not limited to the Israelites in the Old Testament, it is also given to the followers of Jesus in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:9). Hebrews Chapter 11 enumerates several biblical figures who are examples of faith. Today, there are tens of thousands of God’s faithful servants that dedicate their lives to spreading the gospel and sharing the love of God to all nations. These are God’s glorious inheritance among the saints in history!

Meditation: Throughout the letter, the author shared his prayers that the saints would grasp how wide and long, and high and deep the love of Christ is (Ephesians 3:18). Should we be willing to respond to that love by living not for ourselves but for God? The love of Christ may be revealed through our actions, which will point to God’s glorious and abundant inheritance! What are the stories of faith that you have heard?

The immeasurable greatness of God’s power

Paul elaborated upon the greatness of God’s power in Ephesians 1:20–23:

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion! Jesus Christ is the head over all things for the church. The church and disciples will look to this great power to accomplish the Great Commission that Jesus Christ has bestowed upon us (Matthew 28:18–20).

Meditation: In the eyes of God, we are not pieces of confetti that go with the wind without specific direction, rather we are like irreplaceable pieces of a puzzle. Despite our different backgrounds and diverse cultures, we come to unity in Jesus Christ. Jesus helps us to commit to breaking these barriers that separate us. We should rely on our Lord’s mighty power and join together to share the gospel with the message entrusted to us.

Questions for group conversation

Please share how the Holy Spirit helps, guides, or shines upon you as you act under the love of God. What are the hopes that the Christian faith has brought to you?

Please share how you are encouraged by the testimonies of the saints.

In what way did the Ephesian church demonstrate their faith in Christ? (Please refer to the letter above). How do you live out your faith in Christ?

Application and Implementation

Write a card or a letter to someone you care about. Express your solicitude and encourage them to take care of others, to uphold faith in Christ, to be a testimony of the power of God, and to share the love of Jesus.

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