

## WEEK 5

### Prayer of Encouragement

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Ephesians 1:15-17

I don't know about you, but I struggle to be away from loved ones. My first winter alone is branded into my memory as one of the loneliest seasons of my life. Maybe that's why I firmly planted lifelong roots in my native state. I never wanted to be very far from family and friends. Their physical nearness was my comfort and security.

But God had other plans. He removed those I clung to, one by one, until my hard heart was tenderized. By the time my husband mentioned relocating across the country (*all the way across*), I was willing. Not happy, but not resisting. Ever felt that way?

I don't know if the apostle Paul enjoyed being moved around, or if he, like me, was merely willing. I do know his heart was also hard towards God's plans. God softened him, too (at least I escaped blindness). And once Paul belonged to Jesus, we know he kept God's people in his heart and God's purpose in his mind. He writes, "For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation into the true knowledge of Him." I notice in this passage, Paul encourages his far-removed brethren in two ways:

- He thanks God for them.
- He prays to God on their behalf.

Thanking God for someone acknowledges God's creatorship of that person. Praying to God for someone acknowledges God's continual sovereignty over that person. Both acts facilitate a triangle of connection between Paul, the church, and God, despite any physical distance.

This encourages me when I consider my cross country loved ones. I remember that it isn't close proximity that truly connects us. Like Paul and the Ephesians, it's our "faith in the Lord Jesus and our love for all God's people" that keep us spiritually together.

I still experience loneliness and relational grief, but I'm also encouraged to shift my focus away from the temporary comfort of physical closeness and towards the lasting comfort of the future hope I share with Paul, his church, and my own believing brethren of eternal life together with Christ, one day. I hope this encourages you, too.

QUESTION: Why would Paul include a prayer in his letter? How would it feel to know someone prayed for you in the way Paul prayed for the Ephesians?

WALK IT OUT: Consider who you can encourage through prayer today and take time to pray for him/her.

PRAYER: Gracious God, thank You for inspiring Paul to write this letter. Remind me that this message was meant even for me, today. Grant me a spirit of wisdom and of revelation into the true knowledge of You, so I may always seek comfort in Your nearness and boldness to share that blessed connection with others.