

THE NT EPISTLES

THE LESSON: EPHESIANS 3

Throughout scripture the image of shepherds and sheep holds special significance. God’s people, like sheep, need attentive care. God has provided shepherds who are meant to provide that care, but they have not always done a good job of it. In the New Testament (NT), Jesus is called “the good shepherd” and his care is characterized by such a deep concern for us that he “laid down his life for his sheep”.

We still find this shepherd image helpful when we talk about spiritual leadership. In fact, the term “pastor”, which is used for someone responsible for the spiritual care of others, originally comes from the Latin word for “shepherd”.

The Apostle Paul was one of the spiritual shepherds of the early Church and wrote many of the letters that can be found in the New Testament, including the letter to the Ephesians. We believe this letter was written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, yet in spite of his own circumstances, his concern for building up the Church remained his focus.

Paul’s letters are often sprinkled with thanksgivings and intercessions, which give us a window into how he prayed. His prayers are pastoral – they are concerned with the spiritual care and guidance of those in his charge, and they have a lot to teach us.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Select one prayer passage from Paul’s letters to pray with on each day of the coming week. You may wish to use the passage we read today or one of the other two written out below. Begin by asking God to teach and lead you through your prayer time. Pray slowly, considering the words and allowing them to direct your thoughts. You may wish to rewrite the prayer in your own words, perhaps praying for yourself, for people you care about or for the whole Church.

- *Philippians 1:9-11: And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*
- *Colossians 1:9-14a: And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

O God, our heavenly Father, who didst raise up faithful servants to be Bishops in thy Church and to feed thy flock: We beseech thee to send down upon all thy Bishops, the Pastors of thy Church, the abundant gift of thy Holy Spirit, that they, being endued with power from on high, and ever walking in the footsteps of thy holy Apostles, may minister before thee in thy household as true servants of Christ and stewards of thy divine mysteries; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. (COLLECT FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF A BISHOP OR ARCHBISHOP, BCP PAGE 312)

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EPHESIANS 3: **PRAYING LIKE A SHEPHERD**

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power... ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.