

## **Eyes of the Heart**

Good Morning!

Jesus loves you!

If you have your bibles with you this morning, turn with me to Ephesians 1:18

*Ephesians 1:18 Amplified Bible (AMP)*

*And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very center and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know and cherish the [a]hope [the divine guarantee, the confident expectation] to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (God's people),*

### **Footnotes:**

- a. **Ephesians 1:18** In the NT the word “hope” expresses a cherished desire along with the confident assurance of obtaining that which is longed for.

This morning, I would like to share with you that as a pastor; I get lots of questions, they are many and varied. In some instances other pastors share what they receive for discussion. Here is an example of just such a question:

“I have an adult daughter and a heavy weight upon my heart. I don't know if she is saved. I am growing frustrated because I have been praying for her for several years but I am not seeing her respond to God. I know God can help her but I feel so helpless as it seems as though all I can do is pray and I am not seeing the results I expect. I pray for her daily, I pray she comes to know Jesus and I am afraid that if she continues in her current lifestyle she will be spending eternity in hell. Am I praying for the wrong thing, what am I doing wrong?”

This is such a common problem that I and other pastors hear a variation on this theme on a fairly frequent basis. Can you think of a mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, sister etc. that are praying for a prodigal child today?

Have you heard them lament over their child? Have you heard of parents who pray for years and yet still continue with the hope that God will reach their prodigal child?

Have you ever prayed for a family member or a friend to discover the richness of life in the body of Christ and felt like giving up?

First let me cheat a bit and tell you that God doesn't work on our timing he works on his... We may see various sins during this time and the load seems to get heavier and heavier. Does it ever seem like the child, spouse etc. repeatedly makes bad

choices? Does it ever seem that they will never see the light of the good news of Jesus Christ?

I know of one woman, actually the woman who lead me personally to Christ Jesus when I was five years of age, pray for the return of her husband for 12 years. She never gave up, she kept petitioning the Father in prayer for her husbands return to their marriage.

I essentially grew up watching her struggle and yet faithfully pray for her husband and her marriage. This had a tremendous impact on my life. I could not understand why God was not answering her prayers. I did not understand why she did not give up and move on. As I grew older into my teen years I often wondered if she was delusional and just needed to move on...

He came home... They rebuilt their life together. In this God showed me something very profound. When we tie our faith to what we see instead of what we believe we struggle. God was working on that man's heart over the 12 years so that when he brought him home his faithful servant, who did not give up faith in his ability to deliver, would be rewarded with exactly what she asked for.

By now it should be obvious that when I use the word prodigal, I am not just talking about a prodigal son, but a prodigal daughter, a prodigal wife, a prodigal husband and so on. I am using this word to refer to anyone who has drifted away or run away or totally rejected their Christian heritage.

Do you need some examples?

- A student who has moved away from home and stopped attending church
- A person who has experience loss and blames God
- A person who doesn't see God's answer in their timeframe and so becomes an atheist.
- A person who pursues the pleasures of this life and places their commitment to Christ in second place or maybe further down the line in their priorities
- A person who walks away from their marriage
- A person who gets so busy in their career that they have no time for God

In short, a prodigal is one who knows the way. They may have come to God at some point or have been raised in a Christian home, but for some reason they no longer live for Christ but for themselves.

While not wishing to open a debate on the 5 points of Calvinism vs. Pentecostal belief. Many who find themselves praying for a prodigal, wonder whether the person was ever truly saved or in the other context, has backslidden from their faith.

Hear me clearly this morning... Only God knows. In short, we don't even need to address the question, because we do not know. It is a heart matter between the

person and God. Friends we can only see the outside, we can't see the work the God is doing in the life of the person.

There is a popular song lyric that says: "God bless the broken road that led me straight to you." Our knowledge is not complete. Only our God in omniscient, we aren't.

I can personally attest to witnessing several people who seemed to be hitting rock bottom, suddenly and inexplicably, (except for God,) turning around and running back to Jesus. What I am saying is even if a person appears totally lost, only God knows for sure.

So why do some people give up and count their loved ones as lost?

It is because we, those who love them, have invested our hearts in them. You might ask yeah, we know that so what? Well... it becomes a sacrifice; it can even become emotionally painful to pray for them when nothing seems to be happening on our timeframe.

This morning consider if you had a daughter who seems backslidden and has been living with a guy for the last four years.

Let's say she is out living an ungodly lifestyle. In fact, she used to sing in the church on Sunday mornings and is now singing in local nightclubs. Her boyfriend is abusive and she has stopped visiting or even calling her siblings or her parents. Her parents are frustrated and angry; after all they have raised her in the Church. They have read that God has said that if they raise up their child in the way they should go that that when she is older she won't depart from it and so are feeling conflicted.

They fail to realize that God never promised their child wouldn't take a side trip he said when they are old they won't depart from it. So they are in fear that their child is selling their birthright in Christ for an abusive man. They fear that she has lost herself.

These situations test our faith. They put our trust in God to the test.

I remember when I was attending a youth group at a church that I won't name here; we were shocked that the youth pastor ran off with a married woman in the church. Soon after her husband committed suicide.

They stopped going to church, they disappeared from the healthy relationships that they had with others in the church. They ran from judgment and lost their friendships and relationship with God. They became trapped in their guilt.

Who prayed for them? Who reached out to them? Only our God knows the answers.

Very often we find that prodigals are people who started out as Godly people who having an incomplete understanding of God or his word, have been hurt by circumstances. Sometimes the circumstances are self-inflicted sometimes not, but they feel hurt and angry. They can't cope and so direct their anger, frustration and depression at God.

We need to bring our thoughts captive to the mind of Christ because this anger can close our eyes and make us prodigals.

The word of God tells us that we need to be diligent in how we live our lives as Christians. Pastors and leaders are not immune.

1 Corinthians 9:27

*I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*

So how do we bring prodigals home?

We... Don't...

They will come back when they are ready... We may not see it but when we pray and ask God, his Holy Spirit is working to restore.

Turn with me to Luke 15:11-32

*Jesus also told them another story:*

*Once a man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons.*

*<sup>13</sup> Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. <sup>14</sup> He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.*

*<sup>15</sup> He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>16</sup> He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating,<sup>[b]</sup> but no one gave him a thing.*

*<sup>17</sup> Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"*

*20 The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.*

*21 The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."*

*22 But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals<sup>[c]</sup> for his feet. 23 Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. 24 This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.*

*25 The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"*

*27 The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf." 28 The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.*

*His father came out and begged him to go in. 29 But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. 30 This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast."*

*31 His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."*

We have talked a lot about prodigals, but how do we pray for them? What is missing that can cause our faith to falter?

Let us not forget that we serve a real and powerful God. Jesus Christ who raised men from the dead and who himself died on the cross and rose again. If God can raise us from the dead, can he not do the same for our spiritual lives?

How can we as Christians raise our prodigal brothers and sisters back to life in the spirit? WE CAN'T... But God can. We need to bring it to God. We need to show God our heart. We need to be diligent and fervent in prayer and we need to be thankful KNOWING that God will do what he has promised.

It comes down to heart relationship with Christ.

Proverbs 4:23 AMP

*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.*

Ephesians 1:18

*<sup>18</sup> And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very center and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know and cherish the [a]hope [the divine guarantee, the confident expectation] to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (God's people),*

**Footnotes:**

- a. *Ephesians 1:18 In the NT the word "hope" expresses a cherished desire along with the confident assurance of obtaining that which is longed for.*

When the Apostle Paul speaks of "your heart" it is not the organ it is the deepest part of you where the decisions of your life are made. It is the core of your very being, it is the real you that you cannot hide from yourself. It is the place inside of you wherein you decide the values that you will live your life by. It is where you define who you as a person will be.

As we read in Ephesians 1:18, The word tells us that our heart has eyes.

Prodigals are born when we close the eyes of our heart and we stumble away from the light of God. We direct our own paths and stumble blindly through our lives. Sin happens, we break God's laws. We let the things of the world consume our vision.

How can we tell when the eyes of our hearts are closed?

- We keep making the same stupid mistakes over and over again.
- We keep falling into the same toxic relationships again and again.

Why?

It is because the eyes of our hearts are closed to the moral light of God.

We can counsel, coach, quote scripture and it seems to have no effect... and it won't until the eyes of the heart are once again opened.

Did you know that when rebellious actions are observed, or when Christians are unmotivated these are usually just symptoms.

It can happen when people do not read or pray. Yet, even when people decide to come to church, if it is only out of duty, obligation or expectation it is empty because no real personal commitment to get real about Jesus has been made. The eyes of their hearts are closed.

If they open the eyes of their hearts the light of God's truth will flood in and change their lives forever. Perspectives will shift.

It can happen if we do not guard our hearts and allow the world to dictate our lives.

So I said I would explain how we should pray. Well the heart of the problem is literally a problem of the heart.

The answer is trust God, have faith, claim the victory and "We need to pray that the eyes of their hearts are opened."

Open the eyes of their hearts Lord and let the light of your truth flood in.

We can't change people, they can only change themselves, but almighty God can lead them to opening the eyes of their heart. Have joy though and let it be your strength as just because a prodigal may seem lost to you, doesn't mean they are lost to Jesus.

***Prayer***