

**Intro:** "Mary asked about you," my mother said with a smile when I saw her a few weeks ago. "You were always her favorite." I smiled, too.

I barely remember Mary. I don't think I have seen her since I was a boy, maybe even since I was a preschooler. She was the wife of a soldier stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso. She and her husband, Mack, befriended our family through the church we attended. Mary bought me a sailor suit when I was four or five. I have a picture of me in that suit. (SHOW PICTURE).

Mary left her fingerprints on my heart. I think they are pretty deep. She cared for me when I was one of five little boys, and I have not forgotten that care. She built a bridge out of her own heart to mine. And she remembers me even now, more than 50 years later, and wants to know how I am doing.

Who do you ask about? Who asks about you? Do you know the power of caring? Have you felt the Care Effect?

### **I. Give Thanks for Growing Friendships** v15-16: *I have not stopped giving thanks for you*

A. Opportunities to Connect: Paul heard about these Christians in some detail. Paul is using a letter to connect to these Christians who have been on his heart. This is powerful, relational way for him to express his love and concern for them.

We have similar opportunities to connect to people who may be somewhat distant from us now but for whom we have concern and admiration.

B. Non-stop thanksgiving for individuals: Paul is giving thanks for these believers in Christ who are now strangers to him but for whom he has high regard and deep love. Paul's initial response in the hearing of all news is to give thanks to God. He learned to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Giving thanks:

1. Helps them walk in God's confidence and faith
2. Encourages them in their self-understanding and their spiritual calling
3. Keeps you in the positive mental attitude that is the gift and calling of people of prayer.

### **II. Remember to Pray** v17: *Remembering you in my prayers*

A. Offer your prayers. Paul was a man of prayer.

1. His prayers were regular and extensive.
2. His prayer time was memorable. Do you have any prayer times that you remember vividly? I expect that you do. Any praying person develops a catalog of powerful prayer moments when God's grace was applied to your life.

B. Write down your prayers. I am sure Paul was a brilliant man. But I am also quite certain that he had help with his memory. I expect that he wrote, not only letters, but also personal reminders and notes.

Paul will actually record some powerful praying in these verses and in verses to come.

How good is your memory? Are you forgetting things?

\*\*\*Irene Hill was 92 when she died, but she still remembered to ask me about my children and Janet. She accomplished this because she deliberately wrote things down. Norman, her husband of 68 years, told me how she would write down the names of new people that she met at church.

We build relationships and community through simple things including memory. Memory is the backlog of contacts and information and feelings that enrich your meetings with people at church, surprise others when you talk to them, and indicate your personal concern and love. Let's work at knowing one another. Let's fight the temptation to give up on personal knowledge of one another. Let's continue to build bridges to one another with these strands of memory aided by intentional activities of prayer.

C. Keep asking the "glorious Father" for these things:

1. The Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Holy Spirit) so that you may know him (Father) better (Ephesians 1:17).
2. The eyes of your heart may be enlightened (Eph 1:18).
  - a. Did you know that your heart has eyes? Your heart is the inner you, the real you. You keep your deepest secrets in your heart, the things that nobody knows but you. Your heart is the center of your personality, the center of your spiritual and emotional balance in this world.
  - b. Your heart has to have input to give its readings, to send its pictures of your reality. That input comes through eyes, but not physical eyes so much as spiritual eyes. The eyes of your heart interpret circumstances around you as they send that information to your inner being—the real you. They are a kind of "filter" for the information in the world.

- c. Sometimes the eyes of your heart get really dark. All you can see is the black in the world. Your eyes have to be "enlightened" so that you can see the world for what it truly is: an amazing place to live out your faith, a wonderful opportunity to share life with others, and a marvelous journey in the care of God. How light are your eyes?
- 3. In order that you may know (Ephesians 1:18): Paul wants them to know something. This knowledge will come only spiritually for them. They are spiritual beings, and they need this spiritual understanding of their world:
  - a. The HOPE to which he has called you (Eph. 1:18). Paul wants them to live in hope. This hope is a calling from God, anchored in Christ. It is good for this life and the next.
  - b. the RICHES of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:18). Last week we noted the truth that Christ is the agent of our adoption. Our adoption into God's family makes available to us all the storehouses of riches in the Father's estate. These riches are available in heaven one day, that is true. But they are also available in the here and now for living life on this planet. They are the riches that sustain us in trouble and heartache, advise us in times of crisis, and make our lives abundant just as Jesus promised.
  - c. his incomparably GREAT POWER for us who believe (Ephesians 1:19). Paul wants them to know the great power we have available as believers. This power is connected to our believing, not our beliefs. I want you to make a distinction here between the truths to which you give mental assent and the activity of trusting God, expecting his intervention in your life, and literally seeing his activity in the world. We are not believers simply because we hold to the four spiritual laws. We are believers because this is the orientation and activity of our lives. You ONLY discover this power in the spiritual connection you have with the glorious Father.

**III. Expect Resurrection Power to Follow** v19-20: *That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead*

- A. The power that the Father unleashed in our lives is just like the power that raised Christ from the dead. It is the power that passes our ability to comprehend. It is a power like we have never seen in any other realm.
- B. Christ is the consolidation of all power. He has all power in this world and the next world.
  - \*\*\*I talked with the Saints players about how all power in this universe flows from God, that he is the source of strength, and we are accountable for the use of our strength to him.
    - 1. He has a formal position of power. He is seated at the Father's right hand in the heavenly realms. He is the designee of the Father in the distribution of power in this universe.
    - 2. His position is high above any authority which you know or can know.
    - 3. His title is greater than any title given to date, and any title that will ever be given. His position is secure in time and space for all ages.
- C. The church—followers of Jesus—is the body of Christ, "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph 1:23).
  - 1. God is displaying his full power in his church.
  - 2. The church herself is the fullness of Christ in the world.
  - 3. We are the called out assembly, the gathered congregation, the body of Christ. We have both the responsibility and the opportunity to live in the fullness of God's power on this planet. We are to be the life of Christ in the here and now. That is our calling, our privilege and our purpose.
- D. We must EXPECT God to unleash his power through us.

**CONCLUSION:** Jesus is the one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16).

Are you now experiencing this "power of an indestructible life"? This is the power available to you in Christ—the power of a life that never dies, that never quells before the enemy, that cannot be stopped by anything in this world.