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**A Prayer to Know God Better**  
Ephesians 1:15-23

Please take your Bible and join me in Ephesians 1. I'm excited to spend a few months, February and March, working through some of Paul's prayers in the New Testament. We won't be able to go through all of Paul's prayers but I hope the ones we get to go through are encouraging. The title for our lesson tonight is a prayer to know God better.

Most of us learned how to pray through someone else's example. When I was growing up in East Texas my parents would send me and my brother to our grandparents ranch close to Austin, Texas for a few weeks in the summer. Mammaw and Pappaw would try and countrify some city boys for a few weeks. Those were special times of fishing and hunting and riding four wheelers, but what I remember most about those times was my grandparents devotion to God's Word and prayer.

Every morning mammaw would get up early and make Maxwell House coffee and listen to John MacArthur preach on the radio. I remember my grandfather praying the same prayer every day before we ate. He prayed it so often I actually memorized it and when I got asked to pray I prayed it.

After the Lord saved me in college I got to visit my grandparents before the Lord took them to heaven. A highlight in my Christian life was getting to go with my grandfather to an early morning prayer meeting that he attended every Monday morning at his church. He and a small group of men would get together and pray through the prayer requests from the day before. My grandparents modeled devotion to the Word and prayer and that definitely made an impact on my life. Some of you can probably think back on your life and remember people who modeled devotion to prayer.

As you know, our Savior's life was devoted to prayer. God the Son often got away to be alone with God the Father. After a long day of ministry described by Mark in Mark 1 we read what Jesus did the next day in Mark 1:35, "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." After a strenuous day of ministry Jesus didn't sleep in. He got up early while it was still dark and got alone to spend time in prayer.

This obviously had an effect on the disciples. Luke 11:1 says, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" The disciples saw Jesus praying and wanted to follow his example.

Early on in my Christian life, before God called me to full time ministry, I studied Paul's letters a lot and I sort of made up my mind that I wanted to be like Paul. He seemed like a pretty good role model to

follow in the Christian life. He did tell the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

If you and I are going to be like Paul who imitated Christ we are going to live a life that is devoted to prayer. Paul not only taught the church to be devoted to prayer and to pray without ceasing, he modeled it.

**Paul modeled what he mandated. From Romans all the way to Philemon we have a record of what Paul prayed for to learn from.**

I said Sunday night in my brief announcement about this class that since we moved here I’ve been praying more than normal. I know that sounds interesting. Sometimes we tend to pray more when we sense our need for God to intervene more. When we are aware of our inadequacy is when we tend to pray the most.

I’ve been praying a lot for my girls as they start a new school and a new life in Indiana. After I dropped my kids off at school one day I was praying for them. **I don’t believe God speaks in an audible voice because I like my job here, but in the middle of my prayer I began thinking - Is what I want for my girls what God wants for my girls?** I know what I want for my girls. I know what they want. But am I really praying for what God says is best for their lives?

I was convicted that I was praying more about what I wanted for my girls or what they want than what God wants for them. I know God is a much better Father than me and His will is good, pleasing and perfectly. I also know sometimes that I think I know best. How foolish.

I'm not saying it is wrong to pray for whatever is on your heart. God wants us to bring all our troubles or whatever is on our heart to Him. Psalm 62:8 is an example, "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." The Psalmist encourages us to trust the Lord and part of trusting the Lord is pouring out your heart to Him. **A sign you trust the Lord is when you pour out your heart before Him.**

1 Peter was written to persecuted Christians who needed help and hope. In 1 Peter 5:6-7 Peter tells them where to take their anxieties, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." My daughter Molly has part of those verses on her wall as a reminder of where to take her anxieties. **She knows where to take her anxieties - to God first and then to her mommy. No, I'm there for her too.**

I don't want any of you to misunderstand me - It is God glorifying for you to pour out whatever is on your heart to him. My concern is that if we are not careful we spend more time praying for whatever is on our heart than anything else. We spend more time praying for ourselves and not enough time praying for other people and when we do pray for other people our prayers are not as biblically informed as they need to be.

This is where I think this class can help us. **Paul's prayers are primarily gospel focused.** Why? Because that's what Paul cares about the most - people coming to know Christ and growing in Christ is what consumed Paul's prayer life. Paul's prayers are more

centered on the heart and making sure the hearts of God's people are focused on knowing and growing in the Lord.

This is what we are going to be reminded tonight as we study Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23. Please follow along as I read this prayer:

### Ephesians 1:15-23

- 15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,
- 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,
- 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,
- 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
- 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might
- 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
- 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
- 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
- 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

I know what some of you are thinking right now. Who needs this class? I pray like this all the time. Paul's prayers humble us because they show us the kinds of things we should be praying for ourselves and for one another.

Let's consider this prayer under three basic headings:

1. The Report - Ephesians 1:15
2. The Response - Ephesians 1:16
3. The Request - Ephesians 1:17-23

The report is found in verse 15.

Ephesians 1:15

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,

Notice the word heard. This prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23 is prompted by Paul receiving a good report that people in Ephesus were coming to know the Lord and growing in Him. Remember how this church started. We read about the start of the church in Acts 18-20. Paul preached the gospel that God used to start the church and established elders in the church before moving on. Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years, which was a long time for Paul because his goal was to keep preaching the gospel where people had never heard of Christ.

It's been 5-6 years since Paul left this city. He is now in prison in Rome for preaching the gospel and calling people to repent and trust in Christ as Lord alone for salvation. People didn't like Paul's teaching that there was one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. Paul was either in prison for preaching the gospel or about to be in prison for preaching the gospel.

While Paul is in prison he receives a good report. More people in this city had come to know Christ. The gospel was doing its thing and more people were getting saved and evidencing their salvation by loving all the saints. This good report led Paul to praise God in Ephesians 1:3-14 and then pray for the church in Ephesians 1:15-23.

We all love getting good reports. Our daughter Cooper has a rare liver condition called Biliary Atresia. She had to have major surgery when she was 56 days old because the bile ducts in her liver shriveled up and stopped working. Her liver was already scarring over. The surgery was about a 7 hour surgery and there was no guarantee that it would help with the problem. The surgery worked well.

I remember taking her back for an office visit one time when she was still little. Her liver doctor in Kansas was named Jack Daniel. That's not a joke. A liver doctor named Jack Daniel...anyway let's keep moving. Dr. Daniel was an amazing doctor and a believer in Christ. We took Cooper in for a 6 month appointment after she was a few years old and they looked at her bloodwork and told us that all of her levels were in the normal range for liver function which is really rare for someone with biliary atresia. **The doctor was very pleased.** I remember walking back out to my car after the good report and

buckling Coop in her car seat and tears filling my eyes because I was so thankful for how she was doing. I was thankful for her good report on her health.

This good report on how things were going in Ephesus encouraged Paul. What did Paul do when he got good news like this? He didn't just act like it was no big deal and move on.

Look at Paul's response to the report in verse 16:

## 2. The Response - Ephesians 1:16

Ephesians 1:16

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers

This is interesting. Paul didn't know some of these recent converts but he still prayed for them. Verse 15 goes with verse 16. **The report and the response go together.** As the believers in Christ in Ephesus continue in faith and love Paul continues to thank God for them.

These folks showed up in his daily prayer list. Why? Faith in the Lord Jesus and a love for all the saints are evidences of grace. You know when you see these things God is at work. Whenever Paul saw God working he didn't do nothing - He immediately gave thanks and kept giving thanks.

How can this help our prayer life? I think sometimes we see people growing in the basics - they're faithful to come and sit under the



teaching of the Word and they are serving one another and we assume that's what Christians do automatically. As if these things are not that big of a deal - **Carson Wentz throws interceptions and Christians believe in Jesus and love one another.** That's just the way it is.

Hey, I had to get in the first punch since I'm a cowboys fan and I know there's a lot more coming my way. Bear with me folks. Love bears all things, right? What should you do if you see the same people showing up and growing in their faith and in their love for one another? Don't act like it's no big deal. It is a very big deal.

Remember who we were apart from Christ. Ephesians 2:1-3 says we were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, deceived by the devil and doing the desires of the flesh and the mind. It's a really big deal when people who hate God and hate the people of God turn from their sin and trust in the Lord Jesus and love the people Jesus loves the most. Don't take these things for granted in your prayer life. The basic things are a big deal to give thanks for.

Thank God for other people's faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints. It's also okay to point it out to them - That's what Paul does. Paul opens up his prayer journal and lets these people read what he prays for them. He wants them to know how thankful he is for their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints.

Identifying evidences of grace and then pointing them out to one another is one of the main ways we obey Hebrews 3:13, "But exhort

one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

The truth is that most believers are more aware of their struggle with sin than how God is sanctifying them. When you come alongside another Christian and point out evidences of grace in their lives it will glorify God and build them up in the faith.

I know that I’ve been saying this a lot lately but you guys excel at both of these things - a growing faith and a sincere love for all the saints. What would Paul do with where we are as a church family? Paul would thank God for what is happening here and he would exhort us to never take our foot off the gas.

Paul was like a good coach who was both encouraging and never satisfied with where the players were at the same time. Even though he thanks God for their faith in love he also writes this letter to help them keep growing in both of those things. They still had a long way to go in both of these areas like we all so. By God’s grace, we will be growing in faith and love until we die or Christ returns. **No-one here tonight ever graduates from the faith in Jesus and love department of the Christian life.**

This prayer moves from the report in verse 15 to the response in verse 16 to:

### 3. The Request - Ephesians 1:17-23

Ephesians 1:17-23 shows us what Paul prayed for people who were already saved.

### Ephesians 1:17-23

- that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,
- 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
- 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might
- 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
- 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
- 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
- 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Here is what I find interesting about this request. Paul is writing to people who are saved. Ephesians 1:3-14 traces their salvation. What does Paul pray for people who already know God? **Paul prays for them to know God better.** Imagine Paul sitting in prison in Rome writing this letter and he can pray for anything for people who know Christ and what does he pray for? I want you to know God better.

Isn't that the hot fudge on the sundae of salvation? Does it get any better than this for a believer? Hey, what's the best thing about being a Christian? I know God personally. Really? Yeah. I call Him Father.

The Father of glory is my Father through faith in Christ. He knows me and I know Him.

But friends, however much we know God there is always more to know. Paul's prayer request is a prayer for enlightenment. A prayer for the Holy Spirit who dwells permanently in every believer to give us the wisdom and revelation we need to know God better.

One of my favorite Bible teachers is a man who is now with the Lord named James Montgomery Boice. He was a pastor for a long time at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. One time he was asked by a college student in his church, "Dr. Boice, what do you think is the greatest lack among evangelical Christians in America today?"

Dr. Boice writes, "It was the first time I had been asked that question, but it was asked at a timely moment. I had been doing work on the attributes of God and had this in mind. So although at an earlier period in my ministry I might have said, "To be faithful to the teachings of Scripture, to show love for one another," or some such thing, in this case I replied, "I think that the greatest need of the evangelical church today is for professing Christians really to know God." My opinion has not changed in the years since. As I read a verse like Ephesians 1:17, I sense that from the beginning this has been the prayer of true pastors for God's people.

Paul wasn't the only one to pray this way. The night before the cross Jesus prayed this way.

## John 17:1-3

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,

- 2** since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.
- 3** And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I hope that it is still your number one focus in life. God I know you already because you knew me first. The fact that you know me makes me want to know you better and better.

Paul's prayer request for believers to know God better is followed by three what's in verses 18-23. I thought about titling this lesson what the what Paul prayed for, but I thought it wouldn't be a good idea but now I said it so I probably should have gone with it. Notice the three what's Paul prays for in the middle of verse 18-19.

That you may know:

What is the hope to which he has called you

What are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints

What is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward those who believe

What's the one request? For the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to help the people of God know God better. The three what's are how we know God better. We know God better as the Spirit helps us comprehend:

1. The Hope of Salvation — v. 18a
2. The Inheritance of Salvation - v. 18b
3. The Power of Salvation - v. 19-23

Let's start with the believer's hope.

The middle of Ephesians 1:18:

Ephesians 1:18

that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you

Here is what is interesting about Ephesians. Paul does something throughout this letter. He writes truth and then he stops and prays. He writes more truth and then he stops and prays. He writes more truth and then he stops and prays. Here is something important to getting the message of Ephesians right - Paul's prayers are based on what he has just written.

Our hope is connected to back to God's plan of salvation that Paul went back over with the Ephesians in verses 3-14. Paul is like a coach who draws up the plan of salvation and then takes the team back through it to make sure they get it.

Back in verse 9 Paul writes about the work of Christ and how God has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which he set forth in Christ. What do we know that gives us hope? **We know the plan of salvation and we are included in the plan.** God has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ. We know and are included in God's plan of salvation.

James Montgomery Boice, "In common speech we generally "hope" for uncertain things. In the Bible the word is used of that which is certain because it is grounded on what God has done for us in the work of Christ. That is why the Bible speaks of "a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3), a "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), and a hope which is "sure" (Heb. 6:11)."

What should this knowledge of God and the hope we have in Christ do for us? It should give us confidence. It gives us the assurance that we really are God's children and that His hand is on us and leading us to a certain and blessed eternal destiny. That's the believer's hope.

How can we use this prayer request to pray for one another? Do you see in verse 18 where it says you - just insert the name for a believer there. That you may know the hope to which He has called you. **Put the believers name in there and pray for them to know the hope to which they've been called.** Or pray Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you (Put the believers name in there) with all joy and peace

as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

IS IT TEMPTING FOR BELIEVERS IN CHRIST TO LOSE HOPE? It depends on what we are focusing on. If we focus only on what we can see we will lose hope, but we won't lose hope if we focus on spiritual realities that are equally true even though we can't see them. Hope is part of our calling in Christ. The God of Hope has made us part of His eternal plan of salvation.

To know God Better we need the Spirit's help to know the hope to which we've been called:

The second thing we need to know to know God better:

## 2. The Inheritance of Salvation - verse 18b

The end of Ephesians 1:18

what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

Notice this prayer request refers to His glorious inheritance, meaning God's glorious inheritance. What does this mean? One of my only original thoughts is that people can't apply what they can't understand. What do we need the Spirit's help to comprehend in this request at the end of verse 18? What Paul is praying for the Spirit to use the Word to help us comprehend is our new identity. We are God's possession. The church, the called out ones are God's glorious inheritance.



Why is this important? How we think about ourselves affects what we do. We live in an identify infatuated world right now. Everyone wants to be known through an identity. Their identity is all that matters. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and that's all that matters. How does Paul pray for the church to think about itself? We are God's inheritance. His very own purchases possession, co-heirs with Christ.

John MacArthur, "Until we comprehend who we truly are in Jesus Christ, it is impossible to live an obedient fulfilling life. Only when we know who we really are can we live like who we are. Paul's supreme desire was for the Ephesian believers to fully realize what their new identity meant. "You were no afterthought of God" he says. God not only chose to save you, but He chose to save you eons before you existed, eons before you would have opportunity by His grace to choose Him. That is who you are!"

According to John 17:6 believers are a gift from the Father to the Son who purchases our redemption and every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places to be enjoyed both now and in the future. None of us are worthy to be God's inheritance, but the cross of Christ makes us worthy.

I think this truth is expressed well in a hymn called My Worth Is Not in What I own:

Two wonders here that I confess  
My worth and my unworthiness

My value fixed, my ransom paid  
At the cross

John MacArthur says again concerning the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, “It is truth too magnificent for words to describe, which is why even God’s own revelation requires the illumination of His Spirit in order for believers even to begin to understand the marvelous magnitude of the blessings of salvation that exist in the sphere of the saints.”

The final truth we need the Spirit’s help to comprehend to know God better is:

### 3. The Power of Salvation - Ephesians 1:19-23

Paul spends more time on this particular need for knowing God better than the others. We need to know the power that is at work in us and for us. Why? One reason is because it wasn’t easy to identify yourself with Christ and His church in Ephesus. Paul’s original audience lived in a sin saturated culture. People in Ephesus excelled in sinning. Go back and read Acts 18-20 this week and you see how wicked this city was. It wasn’t easy to identify yourself as a Christ follower in Ephesus. These people needed encouragement. So Paul prays for the Spirit to help them know God better by zooming in on His power.

What part of God’s power does Paul zoom in on?

## Ephesians 1:19-23

- 19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might
- 20** that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
- 21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
- 22** And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
- 23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

I know Dr. Bookman used to attend church here and has been here to speak at conferences. One thing I remember Dr. Bookman saying is that wherever you are in the Bible God expects you to bring with you everything God has already revealed about Himself. Think about where we are in Scripture in Ephesians. There is a lot of room in the left of our Bible's for Paul to choose from in his prayer for believers to know the immeasurable greatness of God's power.

Paul could have chosen the power of God in creation or in rescuing His people out of Egypt or bringing His people back to the promised land after they were exiled in 586 B.C. If you were looking at a menu describing ways God reveals His power in the Bible it would be a long menu. Like The Cheesecake Factory. I haven't been there in a long time but that menu is like a book. Paul could have prayed for believers to know God's power in lots of different ways but Paul chooses God raising Christ from the dead and seating Him at His right hand where Jesus rules and reigns over all rule and all authority and

power and dominion and every name as the prime example of God's power.

To know God better we have to spend time thinking about the resurrection of Christ, James Montgomery Boice, "When Paul thinks of the greatness of the display of God's mighty power in Christ, he looks first at the resurrection. On the third day God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, as he said he would. God thus vindicated Jesus' claims, declared that Christ's atonement for sin was accepted, and revealed that all who are united to Christ by faith can live triumphantly through that power."

Kenneth Barker explains it this way, "Christ in his exaltation over the universe is God's gift bestowed on the church. In other words, the head of the church is also the head of all things. The church can thus overcome all opposition because of the absolute Lordship of Christ."

I know what some of you are thinking as we get to the end of this first lesson. Who needs this class? I pray like this all the time. Ha! Yeah I know you do. I really hope as we go through these prayers we are convicted and comforted at the same time. Convicted that we can pray a little better for the glory of God and comforted that what Paul prays for is what God is able to do in our lives.

Just a summary and I will close in prayer:

After demonstrating that believers have all spiritual blessings (1:3–14), Paul prayed that believers would come to know God intimately (v. 17)

in order that they might know three facts: (1) the *past* call of salvation that produced hope (v. 18), (2) the *future* inheritance that God has in His saints (v. 18), and (3) the *present* power of God that is available to believers, which (a) was manifested in the past in Christ's resurrection and Ascension, (b) will be manifested in the future in Christ's headship over Creation, and (c) is presently manifested in Christ's headship over the church.

What a prayer for the church. I hope you'll come back next week as we continue in our study of prayer that pleases God. Let's pray.