



NG Study Guide: Ephesians 1:15-23 “In Christ You Are Enlightened” [4.21.24]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: Imagine trying to describe the most beautiful sunset that you have ever seen to a blind person. No matter how rich and nuanced your vocabulary is they could not see what you experience. Similarly, without God’s enlightenment you are unable to know and experience God, nor appreciate your identity in Christ. Today, I pray that we will know the goodness and greatness of God.

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him...

Subject: A Prayer for Spiritual Understanding

Object: Know The Goodness and Greatness of God

Context: Paul begins the letter giving praise to God for the spiritual blessings that believers have in Christ: adoption into God’s family, redemption through the blood of Christ, an inheritance as co-heirs with Christ, and all of these promises guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. Here, Paul prays for us to appropriate and appreciate these blessings (i.e. to understand our spiritual wealth).

A. Praise (15-16)

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers...

About four years had passed since Paul had been to Ephesus, but when he heard the report of their spiritual condition he responds with constant thanks to God for them (16). He commends them for two qualities that inspire gratitude:

1. Faith in the Lord (15)

You begin to know the goodness and greatness of God when you place your *faith in the Lord*. Paul was grateful that they responded to the gospel or good news. They chose to believe Jesus’ sacrifice for them upon the cross, as proven by His resurrection; and receive God’s forgiveness and spiritual life through faith as a gift from God (grace).

2. Love for all the saints (15)

Saints refers to all believers. All of Jesus’ followers are set-apart as saints. Their love for one another was exemplary and commendable. Jesus declared, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Loving others, as Christ loves, is evidence of real faith; and is praiseworthy. It also shows that you know the goodness and greatness of God.

B. Prayer (16-23)

1. Spiritual perception (16-18)

¹⁶making mention of you in my prayers ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened that you may know...

What is so important that Paul keeps *praying* (16) about it? The essence of the prayer is to understand God and experience God more fully. God is the source of spiritual understanding. So, Paul prays that *God, the Father of glory, may give* (17) or impart. The giving of the *spirit of wisdom* (17) is the proper application of knowledge of God, and *revelation* is the imparting of knowledge (17). The term translated *knowledge* of God (17) is the Greek *gnowskow* which refers to experiential understanding more than mere intellectual. The NIV translates as, "Know Him better" and J.B. Phillips translates, "To know more of Him." *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened* (18) refers to open eyes to keep receiving revelation and illumination from God. So that they would *know* (18). Here Paul uses a different Greek word, *eido* which relates to perception. When the prophet Elisha was surrounded by an Aramean army, he prayed that God would open his assistant's eyes. When God obliged, the assistant saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. The servant then perceived what the prophet knew that God was protecting them (2Kings 6:8-23). What does Paul pray that they would perceive?

2. Perceive the goodness and greatness of God (18-23)

that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

a. The hope of His calling (18)

The hope of Christ's calling is the present comfort and contentment that is available through knowing Christ in this life.

Paul described everything else as worthless compared to the infinite value of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8). Knowing the goodness and greatness of God provides hope in this life. Christ's calling also relates to the future hope of heaven. The reality of spending eternity in the presence of God, where there will be no more death, sorrow, crying nor pain for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4) provides hope in the midst of difficulties in this life.

b. Their value to God (18)

Paul prayed that they would *know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*. There are many verse references about our inheritance from God (Ephesians 1:11, Colossians 3:23-24, Acts 20:32, Romans 8:17). Here, the idea is that Jesus' followers are an inheritance to God. Believers are so precious and valuable to God that He has given His Son for you (Matthew 13:46). The Lord's portion is His people (Deuteronomy 32:8-9).

c. God's power for resurrection (19-20)

Paul wants them to know *the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe* (19). Note, it is not simply the greatness of His power, but exceeding greatness of His power toward believers. There is a sense that despite our weaknesses, God's power is transforming us to be more like Jesus in this life. But that is not the focus as revealed in v.20, this same power *God worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places* (20). In the Old Testament, God's power is displayed in the Creation, 10 Plagues, parting of the Red Sea and Jordan River, and the walls of Jericho. In the Gospels, Jesus' power is displayed in miraculous healings and restoration of physical life. Here, the focus is Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven in a glorified eternal body.

God has exceedingly great power to transform every believer and give a resurrected body perfectly created to enjoy heaven with Him forever. I personally, can't begin to fully appreciate how wonderful that will be. So, I greatly appreciate the prayer to perceive this wonderful truth.

d. Jesus' position (20-23)

seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. ²²And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all

Jesus is enthroned at the *right hand* of God the Father (20). The *right hand* is a reference to authority, honor, and proximity. Jesus is not only above, but *far above* (21). This relates to position not a place. *All principality and power and might and dominion* is a reference to angelic beings, remarkable created beings.

And He put all things under His feet (22, Psalm 8:6). Jesus shares absolute authority in heaven and on earth with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18). One of the great aspects of the Incarnation, the reality that God became man in Jesus, is the relatability of Jesus. Nevertheless, we must not minimize who Jesus is and the truth that He has all authority in the universe.

The Father *gave Him to be head over all things to the church* (22). Jesus' authority is for the benefit of His church. The church *is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all* (23). The church is His, and it is made by Jesus' work in and through His people and His presence.

When Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus affirmed that his perception was revealed from the Father. Jesus declared that He would build His church upon that rock (not Peter, but the truth that Jesus is the Christ), and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:13-18).

C. Practice (How to know the goodness and greatness of God)

1. Learn the Bible (Psalm 119:18,27,33-34, Matthew 11:29)

The best way to appreciate the goodness and greatness of God is to discover Him and His story through the word. It provides additional perspective that gives understanding to the paradoxical issue that if God is great and good, then why do "bad things" happen to "good people" and why is evil present, and allowed in His universe. We discover man's fault, and God's meta-redemptive plan to restore goodness and vanquish all evil from His Creation.

2. Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14, John 14:25-26)

You cannot know God apart from the Holy Spirit. Spiritual truth is revealed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to guide and teach us all about the goodness and greatness of God (as well as bringing conviction of sin, and empowering us to live for Jesus). Just like a photo album tells a story, but without narration lacks meaning.

3. Commune (Matthew 17)

Jesus' disciples experienced life, triumphs and tragedies with Him and with one another. The shared experience of believers with Christ and one another illuminates the goodness and greatness of God.

4. Prayer and contemplation (John 10:27-28, 1Kings 19:12-13)

Taking time to contemplate and communicate with God as a friend to recognize the sound of His still small voice.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some qualities of your local church that are praiseworthy?

Q2. Describe some lessons you've learned about the goodness and greatness of God?

Q3. How might a better understanding of the goodness and greatness of God impact believers?

Q4. Review the section "Practice (How to know the goodness and greatness of God). Where would you like to grow this year?"

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is a sermon worth reading (and rereading) about the goodness and greatness of God: <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-god-goodness-psalm-145-107>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Pray for God to open doors for you to talk about God's goodness and greatness with neighbors where you live, work, school, play and worship.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

Next week's passage:

Ephesians 2:1-10 :: "In Christ You Are Alive"