

## Prayer for Knowing God Better

Ephesians 1:15-23

Key Verse: 17, *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."*

This week, we're hearing the heartbreaking news about the war in Ukraine which is seriously affecting people there including our brothers and sisters. Many have cried with them in prayer. May God help us to lift them up and strengthen them through intercessory prayer.

Through a 6-week prayer series, we have been learning various prayers that please God. Through this we are encouraged and edified. I thank God for that. Certainly, prayer is not merely an item to check off in a to-do list for Christians. We don't want to be lukewarm in prayer or settle for less in our Christian lives. We are praying for a spiritual revival in our lives and community. How many of you are hungry for God? Are you excited to learn about prayer?

Today we're going to learn from the apostle Paul's prayer for the church. In many ways, Paul was a great example for us to emulate: He was a passionate missionary, effective Bible teacher, fruitful disciple-maker, and world-changer. Many of us aspire to be like him, don't we? But most of all, Paul was a man of prayer, and his prayer reveals the secret behind his ministry.

In Ephesians, we see Paul bound in prison for the sake of Jesus; yet he served many Christians more than ever through his powerful prayers. In today's passage, we can learn about the heart of the apostle's prayer: it is to know God better. What is your major prayer topic for yourself, for others and for our church? Often we are preoccupied with visible things and become blind to the magnitude of God's love and power. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit may open the eyes of our hearts so that we may know God better and pursue Him wholeheartedly.

In Ephesians 1:1-14, Paul praised God who blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. And starting from verse 15, his praise moves to intercessory prayer for the Ephesian Christians. His prayer opens with thanksgiving for their faith and love (15-16). I believe they were not perfect Christians. But Paul did not stop giving thanks for them and their faith and constantly prayed for them. We can learn to pray for others with thanksgiving, rather than complaints or worries. As we gain the spiritual eyes to see God's work among them, our prayer can be filled with thanks.

What is Paul's persistent prayer for the church? Look at verse 17. **"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."** Here, we can learn about the focus of the apostle's prayer for believers. We will meditate on the passage under four key points: God, knowledge, hope/inheritance and power.

### 1. Praying to God, the glorious Father

When we emphasize the importance of prayer, we don't mean to add one more religious duty to the checklist. It is helpful to ask whom you are praying to. (If you talk to a person, who loves you and understands you, you will enjoy the conversation.) Likewise, we will be excited to come to God in prayer if we truly know him. We don't pray to a vague aloof deity. We pray to **"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.** God made himself known to us supremely in his Son Jesus Christ (Jn 1:18). God is **"the glorious Father,"** to whom all glory belongs. He is the source of glory. All the power and majesty revealed in creation are his. His glory is revealed ultimately in his redeeming love when our Lord Jesus Christ died for us. In our Lord Jesus Christ, we meet the glorious Father who is our dear heavenly Father.

If your god is small like the faulty Greek gods, your prayer will feel like doing chores. But if we know how majestic and lavishly loving our God is, our prayer will be filled with excitement and sweetness. Like one hymn says, "Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer." Our prayer is precious to God. As a parent, I love when my children talk to me. In the beginning of my Christian life, I had difficulty praying. Often I was distracted by a wrong concept of God who looked aloof and harsh, or even controlling. But when I learned to focus on Jesus my Savior, his blood removed a fog of confusing thoughts about God from my mind. I thank God for being my heavenly Father. He is so glorious, personal and patient. We can ask him for anything. Knowing this strengthens us to confidently come to God any time.

## **2. Praying to know God better**

Look at verse 17. **"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."**

The apostle Paul prays to the glorious Father, to grant them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Why is this prayer necessary? On our own, we are blind, no matter how bright we are. The unseen reality is much bigger than what we can grasp. Even in the physical world, when you spot an iceberg, you are seeing only 1/10 of it above the surface of the ocean. God's ways are much higher than our own, and his thoughts are much higher as well. No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Only the Spirit enables us to grasp the things of God (Jn 14:26; 1Co 2:12). Only when the eyes of our hearts are enlightened, can we see everything from God's perspective.

Paul's constant prayer is that **"you may know God better,"** that is, to grow "in the knowledge of him" (ESV). This knowledge of God is personal and relational. As we study the Bible over the years, we grow in knowledge about the Bible and God. But knowing God is more than knowing about him. Like in a marriage relationship, what really matters is not information about one's spouse, but getting to know each other personally. The Bible is given to bring us to an intimate knowledge of God, that we may enter into him, taste his goodness and delight in his presence.

Why should we pray to know God better? It's because knowing God truly matters. It is life itself. This is eternal life that we know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent for us (Jn 17:3). It is God's desire for us to know him. We are created to seek after God and delight in him. As we taste his goodness, our souls seek after him more. Think about David who yearned for

God in the Psalms. Think about the apostle Paul who confessed, **“I want to know Christ”** (Php 3:10). He was an apostle with spiritual maturity and authority. What he cared about more than anything else was an intimate communion with Christ. He wanted to know Christ and be with him and hear from him. He longed to love him more and more each day. The more time Paul spent with the Lord, the more he was consumed by his love. And as a result of time spent with the Lord, Paul went out and changed the world. I pray that we may seek after Christ, experience him and love him more! Amen.

In verses 18-19a, Paul prays: **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”**

When the eyes of our hearts are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we can see the unseen reality, the true reality. Here, three things stand out: hope, inheritance, and power. The hope and the inheritance are closely related, and his power guarantees them.

### **3. Praying to know the hope and the riches of his glorious inheritance**

Paul prayed for Christians that they may know **“the hope to which he has called you.”** This hope is not a vague and wistful longing; but it is something assured and guaranteed by God who is faithful. It is a living hope (1Pe 1:3), laid up for us in heaven (Col 1:5). God called us to this hope. By the riches of his grace in Christ, we have become sons and daughters of God. Here on earth, we are still flawed. But we look forward to the time when God will fully redeem us. This hope is not only personal, but corporate and universal. We look to the time when all evil forces will be completely destroyed, and all things will be reconciled and united in Christ (v. 10).

This hope is closely related to the **riches of God’s glorious inheritance in his holy people**. People love inheritance and envy those who receive a lot of inheritance from their parents. (When I talked about writing my will, my children asked me whether I had any properties for them. I said, “Nope, but I have a better inheritance for you, which is faith in Jesus.”) Our God has everything. The whole universe (visible and invisible) belongs to him. What is good about this inheritance? It is imperishable, undefiled and all-satisfying. Its perfection and beauty is beyond our human imagination. It has everything our souls are longing for. (Does it sound abstract?) There will be no housing or job issues, no struggles for survival and success; no injustice or evil wars between nations we hear today: **“no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”** (Rev 21:4). Then, peace with God among peoples and the creation will be fully restored. There will be perfect harmony and righteousness in the whole creation. Now, what is the best part of this inheritance? It is God himself who is the source of life, love, joy and peace. He will wipe every tear from the eyes of his people. Then, we will see God our Savior face to face and enjoy loving communion with him forever. The riches of this inheritance for us is beyond comparison with any earthly wealth.

It is precisely God’s inheritance; yet it is freely given to us from him. Through his lavish grace in Christ, we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with his Son Jesus Christ (Ro 8:17). Wow!

This is not only in the future, but we have its foretaste even here and now. I still remember how glorious and overwhelming God's love was when I accepted his forgiving love on the cross. His infinite love was beyond my finite words; heaven simply came down. But this is just a small foretaste of God's inheritance. As our relationship with Jesus deepens, we experience more of the riches of his inheritance, bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, and peace in our lives.

As a pastor lamented, it is no small scandal in the kingdom to see God's children starving while seated at the Father's table. We are often blind to the riches of God and settle for far less in our life of faith. God has prepared a lavish table for us because we are sons and daughters of God. You may be struggling in spiritual poverty. Why should we starve like poor beggars, looking for some leftovers or even scraps? We are not made to live like beggars. We are children of the King of the universe. Our heavenly Father wants us to know his lavish love. May the Holy Spirit open the eyes of our hearts so that we may know the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people! Amen.

#### **4. Praying to know his incomparably great power**

In verse 19, Paul prays for us to know God's power for us who believe. Here, God's power is emphasized through two expressions: **"his incomparably great power"** and **"[his] mighty strength."** Nothing can compare with the power of God. His mighty strength is not a theory, but a reality for us who believe now.

It is the same power by which God **"raised Christ from the dead."** By the power of resurrection, he conquered the power of death. By the same power, God **"seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms"** (20). That is, God gave his Son the highest possible honor and position, **"far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come"** (21). Now Christ is **"head over everything for the church, which is his body"** (22-23).

What does this mean for us? It means that God's great power is available now for us who believe. Believers are united with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6). This is vital for us for two reasons. Firstly, it is the critical truth about God and ourselves. Secondly, it leads us to spiritual victory. Everybody is fighting on their own battlefield. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the devil's lies; against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:11-12). We can overcome all this by God's great power for us who believe.

During these pandemic times, there is an epidemic of anxiety sweeping over teens and college students. According to mental-health surveys of the American Psychological Association, over 80% of Gen Z have experienced more intense stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's teens and young adults are more anxious than ever. There's so much going on for them: uncertainties about their future, the pressure to fit in, the pressure to achieve at school and in their careers, the pressure to create a "good" image on social media. There are many things to be anxious about.

In terms of spiritual warfare, according to pastor Eugene Peterson, anxiety is a “Goliath-dominated imagination” vs. a “God-dominated imagination” (Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall; Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians*). When the shepherd boy David showed up at the battlefield, Goliath dominated the scene; his size and brutality completely intimidated and dominated the mind of Israel. Everyone was down with an epidemic of Goliath-terror. But anointed by God, David entered the battlefield with a “God-dominated,” not a “Goliath-dominated” imagination. For him, God was the true reality. He was immersed in the greatness and authority of God Almighty. As a result, he won the victory for God’s people.

For us personally and corporately, there are intimidating challenges in our lives and community. Now, this is the question for all of us: Are we going to be shaped by Goliath-terror or by Christ the Victor? We don’t need to live a life of defeat. Since Christ is Lord of all, the church is not fighting for victory, but from a position of victory. When we repent of our unbelief and believe in Jesus, we can experience the power of God. When our hearts are dominated by our Lord Jesus, we are more than conquerors, living in the heavenly realms with Christ (Col 2:3). When our minds are saturated by the truth of God, we live as sons and daughters of Almighty God.

Because of the power of Jesus’ resurrection, Apostle Paul overcame many challenges and lived an extraordinary life. Even when he was persecuted and stoned almost to death, his spirit was invincible. Especially in Ephesus, Paul experienced God’s extraordinary works that transformed many people’s lives including a number of magicians who repented and burned their magic arts books. The same power of Jesus’ resurrection works when we believe. Like the apostle Paul, may we pray to **“know Christ and the power of his resurrection”** (Php 3:10). May the Holy Spirit open the eyes of our hearts so that we may know his incomparably great power for us who believe! Amen.

### Pursuing God Himself

We have been praying for a spiritual revival in our church and nation. We want to see a revival in our ministry, serving many with God's word and love and raising disciples of Jesus; we desire to show genuine love at home, raising our children as disciples. We all want to live victoriously as Christians, don't we? How can we do so when we are limited in so many ways?

Here is an open secret. The apostle Paul prays for the church to know God more by the Spirit of revelation. He himself was consumed by his burning desire to know Christ. It is to focus on communion with God until His presence becomes the greatest reality in our lives. As pastor and author A.W. Tozer noted, *“A growing hunger after God himself is the only real harbinger of revival”* (*The Pursuit of God*). All great men and women of God in history testify about one simple truth: All our service, evangelism, and activities must flow out of communion with God. Listen to what the great Reformer Martin Luther said: “If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”

(Following God’s calling, I have been devoting myself to the HQ education ministry to support and equip ministry leaders for world mission; but I found my heart distracted with busyness and worries. Through Paul’s prayer for the church, I felt God’s heart’s aching for me and for our

church. I repented of my wrong preoccupation with visible things. I thank God for helping me to see more of his majesty and love. Now this prayer greatly encourages me to seek after God and experience Him more.)

As we wholeheartedly seek after God, we will see things from His perspective. Then, we will see with our hearts the wonder that is God Himself. The person who has God for their treasure has all things in one. When God becomes the biggest reality in our lives, we are overcomers; and we can live as world-changers. When Christ, the Lord of all, dominates our hearts, we can reject the devil's lies and overcome unbelief. So, we will see a revival in disciple-making here in Chicago and pray for all nations including Ukraine and Russia.

Let's remember. It is God who loved us first to the point of death that Jesus died for us. His heart aches for each of us. Do you feel God's heart's aching for his children? He wants us to respond to him and to know him better. He wants us to know the hope, his glorious inheritance and his incomparably great power for us. May we seek after God wholeheartedly until He becomes the greatest reality in our lives.