

## The Book of Ephesians

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Ephesians 1:15-20

We're coming off a heavy sermon series called Behind the Mask where we looked deeply at the struggles of mental health. Next week, we'll start our summer series on Deuteronomy that we've entitled, "With all your Heart." So, in between these two series, we are taking a look in the New Testament book of Ephesians. Paul made three separate missionary journeys, and he didn't make it to Ephesus until the third one. When he finally gets there, he camps out for about 3 years, and Ephesus becomes a regional hub from which practically the whole region of Asia Minor is evangelized. Later, Paul returns to Jerusalem, is arrested, sent to Rome, and imprisoned. From prison, he writes a letter to the believers in Ephesus (and the surrounding cities) to encourage them in their faith. At this point in his life, Paul is near the end of 25 years of ministry. He takes a figurative step back and wants to talk about the big picture. He wants to tie all of his ministry together, and he wants to show that Jesus Christ is in the absolute center of it all.

### **1. When you look at your own life, in what ways have you seen God working in your life—perhaps from the beginning, to point you to Jesus?**

In the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul outlines the scope of his message which covers the entire extent of time. Beginning to End. From the beginning, before the creation of the world, God was actively at work "in Christ." *For God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight*" (Ephesians 1:4). So, from the very beginning, God had a plan to save the world through Christ. God worked through Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the world.

Paul also points to the end of time in verse 10... "*when the times will have reached their fulfillment*" where God will work through Christ "*to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*" In the end, everything will be brought under submission to Jesus Christ.

Now, in between those times (the beginning and the end), we all have the chance to be included in God's plan. *"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13).*

And this brings us to a section where Paul writes to the new believers in Ephesus to tell them that he is praying for them.

*"For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. I pray also 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 the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."* **Ephesians 1:15-19**

**2. Do you notice the passion and sincerity in Paul's prayer for his brothers and sisters in Christ? Who is someone in your life that has really prayed for you?**

Perhaps you have not known someone who was praying for you. But you can know this, E91 Church is praying for you! The elders, the staff, the volunteers pray on a regular basis that God would work through us at E91 to show His love for you, and we pray for Him to work His will in this place, at this time, in your life! So, when you read what Paul prays for the Ephesians, these prayers are also for you.

But let's take a look at what Paul prays for and why he prays for that. The first thing Paul says is "... that God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation."

Now Peter's sermon on Pentecost in Acts 2:38 is clear that the Holy Spirit was given at baptism. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." So, Paul isn't praying for the Holy Spirit, in general, to be given. He is praying for specific attributes of the H.S. to come to the forefront and be felt. Paul prays for the Holy Spirit, as a guide, to give wisdom and revelation to the Ephesians.

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Do you notice that Paul did not pray for the Ephesian circumstances to change? He did not pray, “Lord, minimize the spiritual attacks on my brothers and sisters in Ephesus. Remove the physical hardships in their lives so they can live in comfort. Lord, make their businesses successful so they can show the unbelievers what the blessings of God look like.” No, that’s not what he prayed at all. He could have. They lived in a pagan city that was built around worship of the Greek Goddess Artemis, a worship cult with all female priestesses. It was a dark place that was not friendly to Christians. But Paul doesn’t pray for the social pressure around them to diminish. Instead, he prays that they would be filled with the most reliable guide you could ever have. And having the right guide to follow makes all the difference.

### **3. How might your prayer life be affected if the focus of your prayers are less on your circumstances and more on asking the Holy Spirit to guide you (or others)?**

The text says the Spirit gives wisdom and revelation. These are so important! Wisdom to know/discern right from wrong, but also to know the ways of God from the ways of the world. Godly wisdom has never been more important than it is today.

The Spirit also brings revelation. He points us to, and reveals to us, the Father. We cannot know God, unless He reveals himself to us. And he has done that in his Word. But it is the Spirit of God who brings it alive for us. You can have a Bible on your shelf at home, but the fact that it contains God’s self-revelation means nothing, unless you read it and the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to its Truth.

### **4. How have you been led by the Holy Spirit, through the revelation of God’s Word?**

To really know God, who is He, that needs to be revealed to you by his Spirit and through the agency of God’s Word. And ultimately, that is the purpose of this first prayer. Paul says, “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.***”

When Paul prays for the Ephesians “to know God better,” the word “better” suggests far more than a casual knowing like an acquaintance. Instead, Paul prays that the Ephesians would take the time, and have the desire, to make continual progress in knowing God more and more. There is no end to knowing God better.

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The second thing Paul prays for is “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” He wants them to start seeing with their hearts and not their physical eyes. Because the stuff we see with our physical eyes isn’t the important stuff. When we look with the eyes of our heart, we can see beyond the physical world, to the world that really matters. And Paul gives three examples of what really matters: **Hope, Eternity, and Power**.

- I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you “**may know** the hope to which he has called you.” This **HOPE** is the Christian Hope and is something we possess in the present no matter the circumstances. When we are “in Christ”—no matter where we are, or what we are facing—we have hope; we live in hope; we are surrounded by hope; and the real challenge is to “**know**” this hope which is more real than anything we could find on earth.
- The second thing: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you **may know** the riches of his **glorious inheritance (ETERNITY)** in the saints.” If Hope is for now, the second thing is about the future. And the future that awaits us is beyond anything we can imagine. It is guaranteed and it is wonderful. We inherit His glorious inheritance because we are in the will.

#### **5. It is good to be thankful to God for the hope we have in the here and now, but how does the hope of Christ change us in light of our eternal inheritance?**

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> thing: So, you **may know** “his incomparably great **POWER** for us who believe.” We see examples of **WORLDLY POWER** all around us, every day—governments and militaries, business leaders who have amassed great wealth and leverage their resources to get what they want. Even elected officials use their power and influence to shape society and legislation in a way that benefits their donors. That is worldly power, and you may have none of that. That’s ok, Jesus didn’t either. **AND YET**, he was the most powerful person who ever lived.
  - o He could touch a diseased person and make them well.
  - o He could speak to the wind and waves and they obeyed him.
  - o He could make the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead live and the blind see.

And if he could do all of that, he can also open your eyes to see the power that you have in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

- o You have the power to withstand the attacks of Satan. You do!

- o You have the power to say no to temptation, and to live in contentment.
- o You have the power to love your enemies in the face of retaliation and evil.
- o You have the power to put others above yourself, and to serve in true humility.
- o You have the power to say these words and mean them--not my will, but yours be done.
- o You have the power of Jesus inside you.

That power comes from God; that power raised Jesus from the dead; and that power will transform your life—every day of your life—from now until you receive your reward in heaven.

**6. What next step are you ready to take to live in the hope, future, and power that can only be found in Christ?**