

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶**I have not stopped** giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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**. ¹⁸I 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, ¹⁹**and his incomparably great power for us who believe**. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹*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. ²²And God placed *all things under his feet* and appointed him to be *head over everything* for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

I don't usually include the text of the passage, but it's relatively short, and I can add emphasis (see bold, underline, and italicized portions).

You may be wondering why Paul would say "*ever since I heard about your faith...*" (verse 15) when he started the church in Ephesus. The reality is that this letter that we know as "Ephesians" was actually a letter that was meant to be circulated to a number of churches in a geographical region...with the city of Ephesus being the main urban center in that area. So while Paul did know the Ephesian church personally, he did not know all the readers/recipients in various towns and churches personally.

Notice the consistency and persistency in which Paul thought of them and prayed for them: "*I have not stopped...*" and "*I keep asking...*".

Q. Who or what are you most consistent and persistent about in prayer?

Q. Are "consistent" and "persistent" words that you would use to describe your prayer life? Explain

Notice what, specifically, Paul prays on behalf of his readers...that they would know God better. Paul understands that's the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer...to reveal truth (revelation) and guide in applying truth (wisdom is rightly applying truth). The goal of the Christian faith is to know God, which is an ongoing, growing, progressing process. And we should always keep in mind that there is a difference between knowing ABOUT God and actually knowing God. I can tell you a lot about Peyton Manning, but I have never actually met him...I don't know him (and he certainly has no clue who I am).

How can we even know if we know God better, as opposed to just know more about Him? I think a good indicator is given to us in I John 4:7-8, "*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and KNOWS God. Whoever does not love does not KNOW God, because God is love.*" (emphasis added). Verse 15 would seem to concur with this idea...Paul had heard about their faith, but also their love for all God's people. Our love for other people is truly our gauge for how well we know and love God.

Q. Do you know God better today than you did a year ago? 2 years ago? 5 years ago? 10 years ago? Explain. How so? Describe how that happened, what the process of getting to know Him better was/is like.

Q. Do you love people better today than you did a year ago? 2 years ago? 5 years ago? Explain.

Something any student of Scripture will want to be aware of is the Biblical writers' extensive use of parallelism. At the risk of oversimplifying, parallelism is basically saying the same thing in a different way. The parallelism we see in this passage/prayer is, "...*may[the Father] give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation*" (verse 17) and "*that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened*" (verse 18). Parallelism is probably the most frequently used literary device in Scripture. It is important to know when it's being employed so we don't end up thinking that Scripture is saying more than it actually is. These two lines are picturesque and poetic ways of saying the same thing. It is the Spirit who brings wisdom, revelation, and enlightenment. Continuing with Paul's prayer we see again that he prays that they would KNOW something—actually 2 things—first, "*the HOPE to which He has called you*" (verse 18)—and now another parallelism, "*the riches of His glorious inheritance*" (picturesque/poetic way of describing hope); secondly, "*His incomparably great POWER for us who believe.*" (verse 19).

The idea of "inheritance" ties back to the previous passage from last week. 1:5 states that we are "*adopted*", and 1:14 mentions how the Holy Spirit is the "*deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*". As children of God we have hope for an extravagant inheritance...not because anything we have done, but due to our extravagantly gracious and generous Father. Paul wanted his readers to KNOW this.

Now a word about "power"; commentator Klyne Snodgrass says, "*In fact, statistically Ephesians focuses on words for power more than any other New Testament letter.*" Both of the prayers in this letter—here in 1:15-23, and then in 3:14-21—have power as a main theme. What is God's power like? It overcomes something as strong and certain as death.

Paul does a little play on words here in that after describing God's inherent power (the Greek word "dunamis", from which we get words like dynamo and dynamite) which He exerted (the Greek word "energeia"...I'm sure you can figure out what word we get from that) to raise Jesus from the dead, God placed Jesus "far above" (denoting superiority) all/every other power. Whatever other rule, authority/principality, power, dominion, name/title that we can even think of, Jesus is above/over.

Now we get to what it is that people actually take issue with when it comes to the Christian faith. This is our primary truth claim. Jesus is Lord! Jesus is above all! All things are under Him! Christianity isn't just some moral, ethical teaching; just some philosophy of life; just some religious propositions to agree to. Rather, the Christian faith claims who the rightful Ruler of this world is. And the church is called to faithfully, joyfully, gratefully live under the reign and rule of the rightful King, as a testimony to the world of who their true Sovereign is.

This is the heart of Paul's prayer, that we would KNOW—personally, communally, and intimately—our powerful King better. The sheer fact that that is even possible is mind blowing. This powerful King is our Father who loves us and desires to give us an inheritance. WOW!!!

Paul's emphasis on his readers KNOWING all this implies the utilization of our mental faculties. To close, allow me to share a (rather lengthy) excerpt from commentator Klyne Snodgrass:

The church is a thinking community. The focus on the enlightenment of the mind in verse 18 introduces an important, but too frequently ignored, part of Paul's thinking. Too many Christians are passive in their thinking and learning or have an anti-intellectual bias. Part of this is understandable, for "intellectualism" has often been destructive and arrogant, but Christians have recoiled with an anti-intellectualism that leads to ignorance. We do not ward off intellectual attack by being less thoughtful!

Christians are not the only ones guilty of anti-intellectualism. We live in a society that has largely stopped thinking. The complexity of life and the overload of information available today has driven us to trite television shows and spectator sports as our main areas of mental stimulation. This text does not suggest we should all be academics or that the solutions to life are all academic. But Christians must always grow in wisdom and in their understanding of life, God, and the relevance of their faith. Wisdom is practical knowledge for right living. *The church should first of all be a community of thinkers—not thinking in distinction from action, but thinking as the basis for action. Ignorance is an ethical issue.*

Historically, Christianity has led the way in promoting education and in starting colleges and universities. Now most of those previously Christian institutions have lost their attachment to the faith and are little different from secular schools. Pastors used to be

respected as the intellectual and moral leaders in society. Now the intellectually gifted tend to go into business or science, and pastors are less and less competent leaders in any area. In the past, when the church has made significant progress—for example, at the Reformation or the great revivals—the best thinkers of the day provided the direction and force for the movement. People like Martin Luther, John Wesley, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer were *thinking* pioneers who would not accept the status quo, but applied their minds to understanding the implications of the gospel. This kind of inquiring, analytical devotion to the gospel and life still is needed from *all* of us.

Unfortunately, much of modern Christianity is guilty of a drippy sentimentality, or worse, of sensationalism. With the latter, preachers sound more like religious professional wrestlers hyping an audience. We seem more interested in trying to create emotional feeling than in providing an understanding of God and wisdom for living. As a result, many of the world say to Christians, “Your thinking is too superficial for the complexity of the world in which we live.” Christians have reacted against the extremes of this world without thinking through the implications of their choices. This needs to change. A church should be a place for analysis, reflection, and reasoned discussion about the significance of the gospel. Christians should have a reputation as people who think.

This text focuses on the gift of insight that the Spirit brings to enlighten our hearts, but he does not usually just zap people with understanding. Openness to the work of the Spirit is surely required, but so is investment in thinking and learning. Nowhere is the adage “garbage in, garbage out” more true than when dealing with our own minds. If we invest our minds in pornography, sitcoms, and movies, we will not end up with knowledge of God. This is not to suggest a narrow focus on certain “spiritual” ideas. Rather, we should focus on the broadest and most complex subjects known—God, human life, and what God has done for humanity in

Christ. From that foundation every other subject needs investigation, and Christians should be at the forefront of an analysis of every subject important for human life—medical ethics and medical research, theology and business, enjoyment and suffering, to name a few. We need to have the “eyes of [our] heart” enlightened to drive out the darkness and to energize us for the task.

We must remember two important facts here. The thinking called for is based on *revelation* and leads to *knowledge of God*. The goal of reflection on Scripture is not theological academics—knowing about God—but knowing God, being in relation to him, and understanding his purposes and desire for his people. From that all other knowledge derives. While no human can know God fully, we can know God really—we can relate to God and experience his presence and work in our lives.

- Q. What does God’s power working in our lives look like? How have you experienced God’s power in your life?**
- Q. In your experience of being part of the Church, to what degree would you say the Church KNOWS what Paul wants us to know? Explain.**
- Q. What activities, practices, habits, disciplines do you utilize to help you know God better?**
- Q. How does/can this prayer of Paul’s affect your/our day to day living? What’s the practical relevance?**
- Q. As an example of prayer, how Paul’s prayer similar or different to your prayers?**

****Note to HG Leaders: Paul’s prayer would be a good prayer to adopt as your own for your Home Group.****