

“KNOWING GOD BETTER”
(Ephesians 1:15-23)

Today I want to talk to you about knowing God better. I was thinking this week about the number of people we know throughout the course of life – starting with all the people you know growing up, all the people you know in high school and college and through work, all the people you know who live in your community and you go to church with – and depending on how many places you’ve lived in and what your line of work is, you know a lot of people. I actually googled the question: How many people do we know in a lifetime? And the answer is: Around 10,000.

But how many of those 10,000 people do you really “know?” Some years ago, Sharla and I were invited to dinner by a family here in church. There were quite a few people there, and after dinner I got talking to an older gentleman and he introduced himself to me as Duke Snider. Duke Snider? Should I know that name? In the course of conversation, I found out that he was Duke Snider, the Hall of Fame baseball player for the LA Dodgers.

Duke, as I like to call him, and I talked for several minutes had a great conversation, mostly about how he came to faith in Christ later in life. We chatted for 20 or 30 minutes and then went our separate ways. Afterwards, if someone asked me if I know Duke Snider, I could say, “Yeah, I know Duke – we met on such-and-such date and talked for a half-hour or so,” but of course I didn’t really know Duke Snider, and if anyone asked Duke Snider if he knew me, he would say, “Who?”

Many of the 10,000 people we meet are brief, casual acquaintances – you may know their name and a few things about them, but you can’t say that we really know them. To really know someone, you have to spend time with them and get to know them as a person. The people you can say you really know is quite small. The closest possible relationship we have on earth is with our spouse – you start getting to know them while you’re dating and you slowly learn more and more about them. Then you get married and learn all kinds of things that you didn’t see, or were blind to, while dating – you get to know their heart, you get to know how they tick, how they think, what motivates them, and what shows love to them – and you never stop getting to know them. I’ve heard couples who’ve been married for over 50 years say they are still learning things about each other.

But the primary relationship for which we are created, and the person we are designed to know above all else, is God. One of the most influential Christian books of the past century is *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer, and in his book Packer writes: “What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we have in life? To know God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? To know God. What is the best thing in life? To know God. What in humans gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of himself.”

Atheists say there is no God, and agnostics say we can’t know if there even is a God. Others think that if God does exist, He lives way up there somewhere and is not too concerned about having a relationship with those He has created. But the Bible reveals from the very beginning that God created us to be in relationship with Him, and our relationship with Him gives life meaning and purpose. Without God in our lives, we have no hope, no meaningful significance, and no power to make it through the hardships of life.

This morning we have before us another tremendous passage of scripture in our study of Ephesians, and we come to 1:15-23 where the Apostle Paul prays that we will come to know God better – not just know about God, but know God in a personal, intimate way, and experience all the benefits and blessings that come from knowing God.

Let’s begin by reading through Paul’s prayer and then learn how we can know God better...

“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, 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 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. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 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. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

As with all of chapter one, these verses are packed with deep theological thoughts, and it’s helpful to get an overall picture of the passage before we get into the details. In verses 15-16 Paul expresses his joy in hearing about the faith and love of the people in the church of Ephesus. In verse 17 he prays that they, as well as all believers, will grow in their relationship with God and get to know Him better. In verses 18-19a he prays that they will come to know three benefits or blessings from knowing God – the *hope* to which they’ve been called, the *value* God places on them as His inheritance, and the *power* of God that is available to us. Then in verses 19b-23 Paul gives three examples of God’s power and how this same power works in the life of every believer.

In verses 15-16 Paul says, “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.” In verses 3-14 Paul has just described all the spiritual blessings we have in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As believers we’ve been chosen and adopted into God’s family – we’ve been redeemed and forgiven by the Son, and sealed and kept secure by the Holy Spirit.

Now Paul is led to commend the Ephesian believers and pray for them. It’s been about six years since he’s been in Ephesus and many more believers had been added to the church. He says, “I’ve heard about you guys, and how you have placed your faith in Christ.” As their spiritual father he’s overjoyed to hear that they’ve become part of God’s family and begun a lifelong walk with God.

“I’ve also heard,” Paul says, “About your love for each other.” One of the birthmarks of being born again into God’s family is that you love the other members who are part of God’s family. The Apostle John says, “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” (1 John 4:7-8).

If God is love and love comes from God, then it makes sense that everyone who is born of God will love like He loves. Romans 5:5 says, “God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” If God is love and His love is in us by virtue of our relationship with Christ, then that love will naturally flow out to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s not because we are naturally loving, it’s because God’s supernatural love dwells in us.

It’s obvious to Paul that the Ephesian believers are born again and off and running in their Christian life, and as their spiritual father he can’t stop thanking God. But in verse 17 he’s led to pray that the good work God began in them will continue. He writes... “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.”

Before his dramatic conversion to Christ, Paul did not know God at all. He was raised in a devout religious family and knew a lot *about* God, but he did not have a relationship *with* God. It wasn’t until Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus that Paul began to know God in a real way.

Before coming to faith in Christ, Paul lived for personal glory and prestige, but once Christ came into his life Paul's entire focus shifted, and in Philippians 3:10 he said his primary goal was to "know Christ." Even though by this time he had walked with Christ for 25 years, he still yearned to know and grow close to His Savior. Just as you get to know your wife or husband better, so too there is more to be learned and experienced in our relationship with Christ.

In order to know God better, Paul prays that God will give us "*the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.*" This phrase implies that we can't know anything about God unless He reveals Himself to us. Before sin entered the world Adam and Eve enjoyed close, intimate fellowship with God in the garden, but sin severed that relationship – and the Bible says that every person since Adam and Eve is born into spiritual darkness – we are blinded to the reality of God and unable to know Him.

But God, in His love, reveals Himself to us in several ways. The first, and most obvious way, is through *creation*. The heavens declare the glory of God, the psalmist writes. Every person everywhere on the globe can look up at the sky at night and see evidence of God... every person can walk along the beach or look at a mountain or river and see the beauty and majesty of God's created world.

But creation alone is not enough for us to know God – it doesn't tell us how we can be made right with God. God's greatest revelation is *Jesus* – His Son – who He sent to earth to show us the way to God. Jesus said, "If you see me, you've seen the Father." Jesus is God come to earth in the flesh. God also reveals Himself to us in the *Bible* – God's written Word through which God communicates who He is and His plan and purpose for our lives.

Yet another way God reveals Himself specifically to believers is by the *Holy Spirit*. At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit of God comes to live inside us, and helps us understand the things of God more fully and completely. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." The Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom and ability to understand all that God reveals to us. Before coming to Christ, the only world we knew was the natural world that we could see with our eyes, but now that we're saved the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to see beyond this world and understand things from God's perspective.

Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 2:9-11... "However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' – the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (2:9-11).

Paul says that you and I would not have a clue about God or His plans unless the Holy Spirit inside us revealed it. Paul says the Spirit "searches all things, even the deep things of God." I watched a documentary not long ago called *Mysteries of the Deep* where underwater cameras were lowered thousands of feet down into the ocean to reveal to us a world, we would otherwise know nothing about. In the same way, the Holy Spirit plumbs the depths of God's thoughts and has complete, intimate knowledge of God, and reveals those thoughts to us.

Paul adds another phrase in verse 18 that highlights our need for revelation – He prays that "*the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened.*" What an interesting phrase... the eyes of our heart. Paul doesn't pray that our natural, physical eyes may be enlightened, but that the eyes of our *hearts* may be enlightened.

The Bible talks a lot about the heart, and the word “heart” is used almost 1000 times in scripture. When we think of the heart, we naturally think of the physical organ beating in our chest – but when the Bible speaks of the heart, it refers to the inner, spiritual part of us where our emotions and desires dwell. The heart is the control center of all we think and do.

Paul prays that this inner part of us will be enlightened – in other words, that the light will come on – so that we can see and understand the things of God. This can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit inside us. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”

This is why some of the smartest Bible scholars in the world can read the same Bible you and I do and they don’t get it – they get the language it’s written in, they get the history and background of the Bible, but they don’t get that it’s a supernatural book – they don’t see that the God of heaven is speaking directly to them – and it’s because they have not been born again and received enlightenment from the Holy Spirit. At the same time a far less educated person can read the same Bible and it speaks deeply to their soul – they get it – they savor each word and their lives are transformed by its truths.

In verses 18b-19 Paul prays that as we get to know God better that it will change our lives in three specific ways... “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.” The three things Paul prays we come to know speak to the deepest needs we have – the need for hope, the need for value and significance, and the need for power. Paul wants us to experience all of these qualities as our knowledge of God increases.

First, he prays that you may know the **hope** to which He has called you. It’s impossible to live life without hope. When we use the word hope we usually means we wish for something to happen but are not sure it if will... “I hope the gas prices will go down, I hope it doesn’t rain, I hope I catch a fish.” But when the Bible speaks about hope it has the idea of certainty, of confidence, of an eager anticipation and expectation about the future.

We live in a world of increasing hopelessness. A recent poll reveals that only one in four Americans are hopeful about the future of our country – people are worried about the economy, about crime, about security, about the rapid shift in morality. As Christians we should be the most confident and optimistic people in the world, because our hope is placed completely in God and what He has revealed about our future. We know how it all turns out. As believers we do not place our hope in this world, in politics, or in the stock market – as the hymn says, “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand... my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

The longer we walk with the Lord and come to know Him the stronger our hope grows. Peter calls our hope as Christian a “living hope” – a hope that is alive and active – a hope that energizes and motivates us – a hope that anticipates and lives in expectation of all that awaits us in the future. Knowing our future gives us perspective on this life and its troubles. We don’t put too much stock in the world and we don’t despair at the most recent headline. Instead, we enjoy the abundant life we have now in Christ and look forward to the full manifestation of that life when we are with Christ.

In verse 18 Paul goes on to pray, secondly, our **value and significance** to God... he prays that we may know *“the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.”* The Bible says that a fabulous inheritance of spiritual riches awaits believers in the future when we see Christ face to face, but here Paul highlights the fact that God also has an inheritance... us! Of all the things God created in the universe, humans are the only creatures God made to be like Him.

That is why we celebrate and respect the sanctity of life, because every human being is made in God's image, and God desires to be in a relationship with every person. To be in a relationship with God we must be saved by grace through faith in Christ. This adds even more value to our lives – we are not only created, but we are born again and recreated in the likeness of Christ.

One of our driving needs as humans is to feel significant – to feel like our lives matter – to feel like we have value and worth. This need drives people to find value and significance in what others think and say about them – and to find it in performance or achievement or status or education or in money and possessions – all of which they hope will fill them with some sense of value. But finding our value in these things is sinking sand because they have no lasting substance and change over time.

Paul wants us to know that our value and significance comes not from how people view us but how God views us – he wants us to realize and appreciate the incredible reality that God chose us before the creation of the world to be saved and adopted us into His eternal family. The temporary things of this life may come and go, but you and I are valued and treasured by God – He likes us and wants to spend eternity with us!

Some people do not feel valued or treasured – they feel like God could never love them because they're not worthy of His love – but everything changes when we realize that our value is not based on anything we have done or will do, but is entirely based on what God has done for us through Christ. While we were still sinners, Romans 5:8 says, Christ died for us. He gave His life for us not because we were innately lovable or worthy – He did so because He loved us – He sought us out and drew us to Himself. What a truth! Our worth, our value comes from the fact we belong to God – we are His holy possession – bought and redeemed by the blood of Christ. Paul prays that this truth will sink into our souls and affect how we view ourselves.

In verse 19 the third thing Paul prays that we will come to know God's **power** working in our lives... he prays that we would come to know "*his incomparably great power for us who believe.*" One of the humbling aspects of life is realizing how little power you have over your circumstances. Especially as a man you feel like it's your responsibility to fix whatever problems your family faces, and oftentimes there's nothing you can do. Over and over in the Bible we read stories of men and women who lacked power – Moses felt inadequate to confront Pharaoh, Joshua stood helpless before the walls of Jericho, Gideon lacked courage to take on the Midianites – in the gospels multitudes of people came to Jesus with diseases, with leprosy, with blindness, with demon possession – all things they were helpless to overcome on their own.

Paul himself felt this sense of powerlessness in suffering with a physical ailment. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 he writes, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." Part of knowing God is realizing the immense power He possesses – a power that is available to every believer.

How powerful is God? In verses 19b-23 Paul gives three examples of God's power – the same power available to you and me... "That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 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. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

All of these thoughts will be further developed in Ephesians, and we don't have time to go into great detail about them now, but the first example of God's power is **raising Jesus from the dead**. No human being has ever raised themselves from the dead, and when Jesus did it, it changed the course of history. After Jesus died on Friday, His disciples were despondent and fearful – they were whipped puppies with no hope for the future. But after Jesus rose again and they received the Holy Spirit, they marched triumphantly in victory, scared of no man or obstacle.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead was the same power working in them to spread the gospel throughout the earth. God's power didn't keep them from suffering or hardship, but gave them the spiritual strength to endure whatever was thrown at them. And because Jesus rose from the dead, it assures us of our future resurrection – because of Jesus death need no longer be feared.

The second example of God's power is **seating Christ at His right hand in the heavenly realms**. After Jesus' suffering and death on earth, He ascended back to heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. In ancient times to sit at the right hand of the throne meant that you were equal in honor and authority as the one sitting on the throne. God's power is demonstrated in exalting Jesus, after His mission on earth was completed, to the highest position of authority.

Paul then piles up one word upon another in describing Christ's power over all powers of evil and darkness in verse 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. And God placed all things under his feet." In the ancient world when one king conquered another king, they put their feet on the neck of their conquered foe as a sign of victory. Oftentimes this would be done as the victorious king was sitting elevated on his throne, while everyone else was at his feet.

Since the fall, when Adam and Eve sinned, creation has been under a curse and under the rule of Satan, who is called the "ruler of this present world." At the cross Jesus broke the power of sin and the power of Satan and placed all demonic powers under His feet. When He returns, He will once-and-for-all vanquish the evil powers of this world and reign forever on His throne.

Paul will talk much more about this in chapter 6, but whatever power you can think of that might threaten you as a believer, Christ's rules supreme over them and you have nothing to fear.

The third example of God's power is **appointing Jesus as the head of the church** in verse 22-23... "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Again, Paul will talk much more about the church in the chapters to come, and here He uses the imagery of Christ as the head – stressing that he is Lord – over his body – stressing His unity with believers and our unity with each other.

Just as nothing in our physical body can function apart from the head, so can the church do anything apart from Christ. Whereas God's presence and power filled the Old Testament temple, he now fills the church with the presence and power of Christ. It's assuring to know that no matter what powers come against the church in the last days, the ultimate power belongs to Christ and the church body over whom He rules.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is his prayer for us today – that having come to know Christ through faith, that we would desire to know Him better, and to experience the full benefits of our salvation. And with that in mind, I would like to pray the same prayer for you right now...

Lord, may the dear folks of First Baptist church, who have expressed their faith in you and their love for one another, would continue to know you better.

- May the Holy Spirit reveal to them the fullness of who you are and all the blessings they have in you.
- May they know the hope to which you have called them, and eagerly anticipate your glorious coming.
- May they know their value and significance to you.
- May they know and experience the power that works in them – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, the power that Christ has by being seated at the right hand of your throne, the power that works in and through the church and the power that will one day vanquish all enemies and rule over all the earth.