

2.4.24 Prayer for Wisdom

Ephesians 1:15-23

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What do you think of when you hear the word, “saints.” For some people, the word “saints” conjures up an image of someone like Saint Francis of Assisi (photo), others think of someone like Mother Teresa (photo), other people think of someone like this (a New Orleans Saints football player). In the New Testament “saints” are simply the people who make up the church. The saints in Ephesus were common people with ordinary lives and jobs and everyday problems, just like us. Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians by telling them of all the spiritual blessings that God has given them **in Christ**. Then he offers a prayer commending the church for their **faith** in the Lord Jesus and their **love** toward all the saints, for which Paul gives thanks. Listen to Ephesians 1:15-23.

“15 I have heard of **your faith** in the Lord Jesus and **your love toward all the saints**, and for this reason 16 I do not cease to **give thanks** for you as I **remember you** in my prayers. 17 I pray that **the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory**, may give you **a spirit of wisdom and revelation** as you **come to know him**, 18 so that, **with the eyes of your heart enlightened**, you may know what is **the hope** to which he has called you, what are **the riches of his glorious inheritance** among **the saints**, 19 and what is **the immeasurable greatness of his power** for us **who believe**, according to the **working of his great power**. 20 God put **this power** to work in Christ when **he raised him from the dead** and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and **power** and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has **made him the head over all things for the church**, 23 **which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**”

This part of Ephesians begins with two things to look for in any church (**v 15**) **visible faith and tangible love**. Paul has heard of their faith since he had last been with them and he has heard of the church’s love toward all, not just some, of the saints. This is significant in a church that is bringing together Jews and Gentiles as one people in Christ. **Visible faith and tangible love** are a great way for a church to be known.

What a wonderful reputation to have – to be a church whose faith is evident to all and whose love is demonstrated in clear ways that make a difference. It's because of their faith and love, two of Paul's favorite virtues and topics for his letters, that Paul is so grateful to God for them. He says in verse 16 ***"I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers."*** **Paul was writing from prison yet still found reasons to give thanks, which is an inspiring example for all of us, and he is most thankful for their visible faith and tangible love.** How do you think the church feels knowing Paul, who they look up to with great respect, never stops giving thanks for them and remembers them constantly in prayer? How do you feel when you know someone is praying for you? How do you think that type of prayer impacted Paul as well as the Ephesians? I suspect it helped both Paul to have hope and to persevere in his difficult circumstances, and it gave even greater boldness and encouragement to the church. How can we do for others in prayer what Paul did for the Ephesians?

Not only is Paul praying for all the Ephesians, but the prayer he shares with the church is densely packed with things Paul wants people to know about God. It worked for God to give Moses Ten Commandments and in Ephesians 1:15-23 Paul lists **Ten Things to Know about God that give us confidence, significance, and competence as followers of Jesus.** If you want a list to help you understand who God is or to explain God to someone else, you may want to write down Paul's **Ten Things to Know About God** in his prayer for wisdom.

1. We worship and pray to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul begins, ***17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** We pray and communicate with the kind of God who would send a beloved Son to live among us full of grace and truth, to teach, love, heal, and forgive. A God who would express the greatest self-giving love, for the greatest amount of people – for the world; by giving the greatest gift – a Son, that anyone who believes in him may have the greatest reward – abundant, eternal, joyful life. We believe in a God who practices sacrificial love and calls us to do the same. Jesus is our **Lord** because he's our leader, the one we seek to follow. Joseph the earthly father of **Jesus** was told to give his son that name because *"he would save his people from their sins."* We pray to the God of self-giving love who saves us from our

sins and invites us to follow Jesus the Christ, a term meaning Anointed or Messiah. for the rest of our lives.

2. God is The Father of Glory. Glory has many definitions including great honor, praise, or distinction. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who has shown such great self-giving love, is worthy of honor and distinction. The Father of glory longs for our heart-felt praise and thanks when we're together in worship and throughout the week. We're to continually offer praise to God. God is characterized by majestic beauty and splendor. That's why we sing, *"Our God is greater, our God is stronger, Lord you are higher than any other..."* Or *"Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days."*

3. God gives us a Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Wisdom and revelation are different aspects of knowledge. **Wisdom** is knowledge and experience that are applied to life. People who are wise not only know what to do, how to behave, how to speak – they act and speak wisely. Wisdom enables us to learn not just from our own experience but also from the experience of others. **Revelation** is knowledge or insight that's given; it's not based on experience or education. Revelation can come in a flash. Paul is telling us that God gives us a spirit of wisdom and revelation – that the Holy Spirit assists us by helping us live wisely as followers of Jesus as well as by providing at times revelation through the Spirit, prayer, God's word, or the godly counsel of another believer. Paul frequently challenges us to live as wise people, making the most of the time we're given to live. God gives us a spirit of wisdom and revelation that we're to pay attention to, listen to, and follow.

4. God desires to be known by us. Paul prays *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him."* This is a simple but important point – God desires to be known by us, God *wants* to be known. God sent Jesus and gives us the Spirit so we can know God. We don't worship a God who makes us play hide and seek. Yes, there are mysteries about God that we'll never know or be able to understand or explain, but there is plenty *that we can know*. We believe in a God who knows us personally and who desires to be known by us personally. Our Creator wants us to invest time in a personal relationship

with the One who gave us life. The better we know God, the more we will love and seek to please God. We will never run out of things to discover about God.

5. God enlightens and transforms us. Paul's prayer continues "*so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened,*" this is an interesting image. In biblical terms the heart is not merely a blood pump – it's the source of our will, the seat of our emotions and identified with our character. We still use the phrase this way today when we say, someone "*has a good heart,*" or "*I love you with all my heart.*" You don't look at someone you love and say, "*I love you with all my blood pump.*" The word "heart" still signifies much more than that. We worship a God who can change our hearts, our will, our emotions, and character – a God who can help us to see ourselves, our family and friends, and the world in a whole new way. God enlightens and transforms us from the inside out.

6. God gives us hope and calls us to hope. "*so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has **called you**.*" **The fact that God has called, invited, or summoned us to hope gives us confidence.** The God Christians believe in is a God of hope. God reaches out to us in our moments of despair, discouragement, and grief to give us hope. Having a sense of hope is vital to our mental and emotional health. People who feel hopeless have a difficult time with motivation, energy, and focus. As Christians we have hope even in difficult circumstances. We believe that if there is life there is hope and that even after life is over God has more in store for us that we can look forward to with hope.

7. God gives us a rich and glorious inheritance. To inherit something means to come into possession or to possess it. When we inherit something, it means we receive it from someone who has gone before us, usually someone who loves us or cares about us. Have you ever inherited something? Years ago, when my father's sister Bettie died, her son, my cousin Chris, gave us her Honda Accord which was very generous and totally unexpected. The sad thing about an inheritance is that receiving it means that someone we love has died. I would've preferred that my aunt was still living than to have had her car. Yet every time we saw or used the car it was a reminder of my aunt and my cousin's generosity that made us feel good. As Christians we have a rich

and glorious inheritance in Christ which is generous and unexpected, but it's given to us because someone who loved us, Jesus, died for us on the cross. We don't earn or deserve an inheritance, it's a gift. Perhaps you've seen the bumper sticker, *"I'm spending my children's inheritance."* God gives us a rich and glorious inheritance – abundant, eternal life. Hope on earth and joy in heaven.

8. We believe in a God of great power for those who believe. Paul writes God is a God of great power not for everybody but ***"for us who believe;"*** so believing is important. **God's power gives us competence to live as God desires.** God's great power is available to even the weakest believer. If someone came into your home and had no idea why there were little holes located low on the wall of each room, they wouldn't know there was power available in the form of electricity that could run computers, lights, televisions, and refrigerators. Like electricity, God is a source of great power to those who believe that God exists and who plug into God for power for living. God wants to be and can be a source of great power for everybody, but the Lord's power can go untapped and unutilized by those who don't believe. While electrical power can be measured, the power of God is beyond calculation. Paul calls it **"the immeasurable greatness of his power."** Paul is so focused on power, he mentions it four times in this prayer, noting that ***"God put **this power** to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead,"*** which is the ninth thing we should know about God.

9. God raised Jesus from the dead. God's power and God's love are shown in the resurrection of Jesus. This is one of the defining things about God – that God not only creates life, but God can also bring something redeeming even out of death. We believe this because after his crucifixion, Jesus was seen by many of his followers who were transformed from frightened, fearful individuals at the time of his death to bold witnesses publicly proclaiming that God raised Jesus from the dead. They were willing to brave ridicule, imprisonment, riots, beatings, and risked dangerous journeys all to tell others about the power and hope that are available to those who believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Christians believe there is hope even in the worst circumstances, and that even death itself is not the end of our hope because God raised

Jesus from the dead. God can bring life to situations and people that seem hopeless. Finally, the tenth thing we learn about God in this prayer is that we worship the

10. God made Jesus head over all things for the church. God *“has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”* The church is to be the visible and working body of Christ in the world today. The church is not a building, the church is people. We don’t go to church; we *are* the church and Jesus is the head of the church. He’s in charge. What he wants, we will seek, what he asks, we will do, where he sends, we will go. It’s amazing how these ten things about God which are so important to know are all in Paul’s brief prayer. We believe in the God of Glory who sent Jesus Christ and gave us the Holy Spirit. We believe in a God who gives wisdom and revelation, who transforms, enlightens, and gives hope; a God of great power who gives a rich inheritance to all who believe. A God who raised Jesus from the dead to make him head over the church. Our God is an awesome God.

If you are willing to believe, tremendous power is available to you. I pray for God to be revealed to you and to empower you for living. I invite you to pray this prayer:

Prayer: God of our Lord Jesus Christ, reveal yourself to me and grant me wisdom so that the eyes of my heart may be opened and enlightened. By your Spirit, may I know the hope and inheritance which you have given me and may the greatness of your power that is at work in Christ, who is the head of the church, also be at work in me.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Why are visible faith and tangible love so important for the church as a whole?
2. How do you think the church feels knowing Paul never stops giving thanks for them and remembers them constantly in prayer? How can we do that for others? How does that type of prayer impact Paul as well as the Ephesians?

3. As we go through this series on Ephesians, we'll notice the repetition of certain themes, phrases, and words. What words or phrases are used numerous times in *Ephesians 1:1-23*? Consider underlining in your Bible.
4. Is there a distinction between wisdom and revelation? How are they different? How are they similar?
5. Make a list of all the things that are said about God in *Ephesians 1:15-23* (there's a lot). What does your list tell you about all God gives to us? How do God's gifts make a difference in your life?
6. What does it mean for us that Christ is the head of the church and that the church is the body of Christ? How does that shape our life as a community of faith?