

Ephesians 1:15-19

Our lives are for beholding God.

For my birthday Stacy gave me a massive telescope. It is a wonderful gift... that sadly I don't use enough. Clouds ruined our plan for a journey to Julian on my birthday and the demands of life keep getting in the way of finding a dark sky to marvel at.

Now, Stacy gifted me the telescope because she knows I love the stars (most likely unrelated to my love for Science Fiction). The expansive beauty of the universe above and before us, the declaration of the power of God lighting the sky as a steady reminder of our place and the gifts of wonder he gives us.

Even so, while I have the tools necessary to see, I don't look up as often as I think I should, I don't give more than a passing glance to the majesty available to the naked eye.

I spend most of the time looking down. Seeing the circumstances on the ground. As if the banner above us doesn't exist.

This is a picture of our faith at times, an image of a spiritual reality that has some remedy in our text for today.

We know God, we believe in Jesus, but do we gaze upon his gifts, his call, his character. The things we are meant to behold, that shape how we behave, and be-hope!

Ephesians is re-aligning toward this end. Before it lays out practicalities, actions for living, Paul positions the church among what is essential for life in Christ, for the embrace of all we have in Jesus and the transformation that he brings.

A vision for the life that will follow the encounter with God. Paul prays that the church would increasingly look up and see, because in the seeing, life is found, hope is uncovered, salvation is savored.

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If this is true, let's turn the lens of our lives to focus on this prayer...

Giving thanks for their genuine lives of faith in Jesus (a trust in him alone for salvation and a future), and their love toward all believers (essential indicator of faith), Paul goes on praying for them.

Not circumstantial, not for daily needs, but for things more beautiful, more defining.

Prayer that will set the church on the right trajectory. The type of prayer I want to be praying for you, and for myself.

John Bunyan define prayer: "a sincere, sensible [fervent], affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to his Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God."

This is Paul's prayer for the church - that we would have knowledge and vision.

[These prayers aren't models for everything we're supposed to pray, but what is striking is that when Paul is praying passionately for his people, when he's going for the spiritual jugular, when he's going for the thing they most need, he ignores their economic circumstances, their political circumstances, and material circumstances, and he prays that they might know the riches, that they might have a heart understanding of what they already have in Christ.]

Knowledge

Paul could have prayed for finances to come in, for relationships to be mended, for health or protection against COVID.

But his prayer here helps us see what is more foundational, what is essential for those that call Jesus Lord.

Ephesians 1:16–17 “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, [17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,” (ESV)

The great need of any church, whether it is healthy or not, is knowing Christ—an *epignosis*—a better, deeper, fuller knowledge of Christ. And Paul’s prayer is that this would come by the Spirit.

For the second time in this chapter we see the Holy Spirit’s work in us.

Although all believers are already sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), there is still a need for them to be filled with the Spirit and walk according to him.

As we saw last week the vital ministry of the Spirit was as a guarantee of eternity, a down payment, and this is his unfolding ministry in our lives - more of God, knowing him, in wisdom and revelation.

“That’s what Paul always prays for as the primary thing he wants for the people he loves. Always. He ignores circumstances and goes after this. Why? Because if you have this thing he’s talking about, then no matter how bad your circumstances are, you’ll process those circumstances in a way that’ll make you great. If you don’t have this, no matter how good your circumstances, you will process those circumstances in a way that’ll make you shallow and weak.” - Timothy J. Keller

That we would know God. That we would know his character. That he formed us, chose us, saved us in Christ.

Intellectual pursuit for sure, but this is spiritual, wisdom given by God himself.

In relationships... I have been learning Stacy for close to 20 years. I could have done interviews with other people that have known her, read through all her school year books or old diaries. But if I did those things I would only have information on other people’s perceptions of her or thoughts not tied to the present.

Instead I have spent time with her. Discovering who she is. Learning her desires, penchants, her personality - all of which time with her uncovers, as she determines to make herself known to me. And God-willing I will go on learning.

In the same way, knowledge of God comes as over time he reveals himself to us, increasingly giving us understanding of his love, purpose, and what he desires.

The Spirit of wisdom refers to the Holy Spirit's secret working in Christians to give them insights into God's Word and the saving knowledge of him. God determining to make himself known to us.

“The knowledge for which Paul prays is more Hebrew than Greek in concept; it adds the knowledge of experience to the knowledge of understanding. More than this, it emphasizes the knowledge of him, of God himself personally... there is no higher knowledge than the knowledge of God himself... such knowledge is impossible with revelation work by the Spirit” John Stott

So we pray with Paul for the Spirit's illumination, that we would know God. That we would understand his word and behold him in it.

“All my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me.” – J.I. Packer, Knowing God

I have to be honest, I struggled through writing this sermon because my inclination was to explain how you could know God more. To give you some practical steps... as a reformed pastor I want to give you a list of books to read; or think through some classes we can host to inform and educate you on who God is.

All really good things we most assuredly should do.

But what Paul is exposing here is that what he prays for is not something to be earned or labored toward, it is a request, a posture of need before God - asking that his Spirit reveal more of who he is to us.

Lifting our heads and putting our eyes on the telescope asking to be shown who he is.

Think of when the gospel came alive to you for the first time. If you are like me, you likely knew the metrics of the gospel, sin, forgiveness, the players, God and humanity, you knew facts. But when the Spirit moved and enlightened your heart to the reality of God's grace - it was something wholly different than facts.

Lance and realizing what we need is not a lecture but the presence of God. Because his presence, knowing Him, changes everything. Forms us, empowers us, sends us.

Masters of the Air - "I could recognize that aftershave anywhere!" It is this type of knowing, catching the smell of Jesus.

Protection against counterfeits, recognition of his heart, gives us a picture of what we become as we become more like him.

This knowledge is eternal living for us.

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (ESV)

More of Jesus. Not merely factual, but intimate, knowing. A little mystical, maybe unsettling, but exactly what Paul prays for the church to have.

"Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord... "There is no peace like the peace of those whose minds are possessed with full assurance that they have known God, and God has known them, and that this relationship guarantees God's favor to them in life, through death and on for ever." – J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Knowledge leads to seeing more of him, to vision.

Vision

Paul helps us by praying toward that which we will come to know of God.

Ephesians 1:18–19 "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his

glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might” (ESV)

From knowledge we move into soul vision. *Eyes of our heart...*

“The word “heart” is used in the Bible not to describe the organ pumping blood around our limbs, but the center of our physical and spiritual being, combining our intellectual understanding and our personal affections. So Paul prays that the “eyes of [their] heart[s]” will be enlightened by God to love the things that God loves, so that these Christians will see the world the way God does, which is the way it really is.”

Bends toward maturity. Like Peter says, we’re newborn babes in the beginning. What Paul and Peter are saying is when you first meet God through Jesus Christ, you really are only looking for love and forgiveness, and generally speaking, you’re usually looking for some strength to meet your immediate crisis. Paul is saying here your biggest problem is not that you need to try harder, or you need some secret to a new kind of power. You don’t know what you have.

He prays for the church to see it.

This is what this vision entails:

“Know the hope to which he has called you.”

Salvation, new life, mission, eternity.

The word hope means confidence, means assurance, means buoyancy, and it means boldness.

“See the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”

This is us. See our value in him, how he sees us and others.

“First of all, the most astounding thing here is Paul is saying there is something that God, the Maker and Owner of the universe, considers his special treasure,

considers his inheritance, considers his dowry, considers his jewels. There is something. That's amazing enough. Then he tells you what it is. What is it? It's us. If you're a Christian, it's you. His glorious inheritance in the saints." Timothy J. Keller

"The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe."

Supernatural power that keeps us, equips us, surrounds us.

When we recall that all of this power is for us, it is no wonder that we should pray that our eyes might be opened to see it, marvel, and believe (1:18).

Power "What we must see is that the power that raised Jesus from the dead can bear directly on our lives now and at his appearing. This stupendous power changes us from children of Hell to children of God and gives us practical victory over sin in our lives. We will see it visibly someday in the resurrection of our bodies, for no created power in the universe can do that. Only through the "greatness of his power"—"his great might"—is it possible! Yet this same power is operating in and for those of us who believe right now!" Kent Hughes

All of this according to what he has already done in Christ. Forgiveness. Redemption. Righteousness. Identity. Community.

These are the riches he has for us, and they are glorious.

Vision compels action. We see as God sees, his image-bearers, the least, those in need, brothers and sisters. We set the table for the feast and compel others to come in.

I want more of it, more of him. I don't want to settle, but move further up and further in.

Shall we go there together? Shall we look up together?

Our lives are for beholding God.

See Jesus. *Have faith in him.* It's a wild ride.

Pray this way. Knowledge and vision, of Jesus.

Take the lens cap off the telescope of your heart, that the Spirit of wisdom would give you knowledge of Him.

Life is meant for this knowledge. God can be known, revealed in his word and by his Spirit, for all of life. May we behold him.