

EPHESIANS: GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY
EPHESIANS 1:15-23
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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It's good to be back together again this morning, to worship, to be with one another, to look into God's Word, and to invite God to look into us - and keep walking with us in consistency and intention toward becoming more like His Son Jesus Christ.

Art Linkletter died this week at 97 years old. Many years ago, Art Linkletter saw a small boy scrawling wildly on a sheet of paper. "What are you drawing?" Linkletter asked. "I'm drawing a picture of God." "You can't do that, because nobody knows what God looks like." "They will when I'm finished" the boy confidently replied.

And as crazy as that story might sound, many of us have based our lives, and our faith on foundations not much sturdier than that boy's drawing. And when life gets tough, we find out that the resources we've chosen to rely on to explain the reality of our faith and the meaning of our beliefs, have been found to be sorely lacking.

- *How can I find peace and become truly content?*
- *What's the purpose of my life?*
- *Why in the world am I here in the world?*
- *What will happen to me after I die?*
- *Is there a God, and if there is, what is He like?*
- *Can I really know God personally?*
- *Is there a source of ultimate truth that I can build my life on?*

And gang, this is why we come to the Bible every week ... and hopefully why each of us go to God's Word many times throughout the week. Because the Bible is the one place where we're find the answers we're looking for about life's hard questions. We're now in our fourth teaching from *The New Testament* book of **EPHESIANS**, and as we continue on our verse-by-verse study of this letter, written by the Apostle Paul while he was in prison in Rome between 62-64 A.D.

And so, as we open up God's Word this morning, we do so with an understanding that there's no study of God's Word, or understanding of God's Word without being led and instructed by the Holy Spirit. And in fact, this morning's journey through these nine verses can be described as theologically **MAJOR**, **CONTROVERSIAL**, and even kind of **DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND**. And so with this in mind, let's pray and ask God to walk through these verses with us and unpack them for us as we go.

In **EPHESIANS 1:15-23** Paul builds on the foundation he set for us in the previous verses, about what God the Father has done for us in the **PAST**, what God the Son, Jesus Christ is doing for us in the **PRESENT**, and what God the Holy Spirit will do for us in the **FUTURE** ... and Paul builds on this foundation by praying a beautiful and important prayer for the saints living in the church at Ephesus - and for you me as the seekers and followers of Jesus Christ who make up the church called 2nd Street.

What's your understanding of **PRAYER**? Can you relate to our drama this morning? I've said it before and I'll say it again ... **PRAY GENERALLY AND RECEIVE GENERAL RESULTS ... BUT PRAY SPECIFICALLY AND RECEIVE SPECIFIC RESULTS**. So why in the world would we choose to pray generally? I love the prayers of children for their honesty and candor ... here are just a few of my favorites ...

Dear God ... Thank You for my baby brother. But what I actually asked You for was a *puppy*. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up. Seriously. - Joyce

Dear God ... I wish You would not make it so easy for people to come apart. I had to have 3 stitches and a shot yesterday.
- Janet

Dear God ... I bet it's very hard for You to love everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.
- Nancy

Dear God ... Please send Dennis Clark to a different summer camp this year. - Peter

Dear God ... I do not think anybody could be a better God than You. Well, I just really wanted You to know that. And I'm not just saying that because You're already God. - Charles

Dear God ... I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset You made on Tuesday night. That was really cool. - Thomas

PRAYER is simply talking with God. God wants us to come to the place where **PRAYER** is like breathing, but with words. Or like author Richard Foster has written in *Prayer: Finding The Heart's True Home*, "**Real prayer isn't about gritting our teeth, it's about falling in love.**" Prayer is speaking to God and listening to God ... sharing with Him our gratitude, our needs and the needs of others, our sorrows, and our joys. And prayer is receiving from God His blessings, His presence, His answers, His instruction, His correction, and His heart and mind.

As followers of Jesus Christ who are growing up in Him, and taking on more and more of His character, prayer needs to be one of the spiritual disciplines we're consistently engaging and exercising. Throughout the Bible we see godly people actively praying **AND** we see ungodly people actively avoiding prayer ... trying instead to handle life and all it throws at them on their own. Which of course, will never, ever work.

In **EPHESIANS 1:15-23** Paul writes out a prayer for his fellow Christ-followers in the church in Ephesus. He's heard about the growth they've made in Jesus, how they've grown up in their faith, and how they loved one another in the flock.

EPHESIANS 1:15 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints,

We don't become "more saved" tomorrow than we were yesterday. When we come into a relationship with Jesus Christ we become as "saved" as we'll ever be. But God is expecting that we'll become more like His son Jesus Christ, and this happens as we become real disciples, as we get serious about getting into God's Word, and as our knowledge of Jesus Christ increases, and as we start living out this greater knowledge and this greater maturity towards the people God brings across our paths.

So many times we pray for people until they become Christians. And that's important and we need to keep on doing that. But notice Paul saying here in **v. 15** that it was **after he heard that they were already Believers** that he really started praying for them. Friends, when someone becomes a Christian, it isn't time for us to stop praying for them ... it just means that then we begin praying that they become a maturing, disciple of Jesus Christ who's helping grow the Kingdom of God, and not just choosing to remain stagnant, mediocre, and flat-lined in their life of faith.

Paul calls Jesus "Lord" in **v. 15**, and many people misunderstand the word "Lord" to mean "God," when in fact, the word is a respectful title meaning, "Master, Possessor, and Owner." Paul is saying that Jesus Christ has **supremacy, and ownership** over you, over me, and over the church. And in the end, Jesus Christ is either Lord **OF ALL**, or He isn't Lord **AT ALL**. Or as St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* ...

"Jesus Christ is not valued *at all* until He is valued *above all*." - St. Augustine's *Confessions*

To look at this another way, how would Teresa, my bride of 28 years feel if I were to say to her, "Honey, I know that you'll be proud of me, because I've been faithful to you 85% of the time. Isn't that awesome?!" It isn't about **SAYING** Jesus Christ is our Lord. And it's not about even about **TRYING HARD** to let Jesus Christ have ownership of our lives. It's about learning to faithfully surrender our lives, our wills, our passions, our hearts, our minds, our goals, our pasts, our presents, and our futures over to the Lord Jesus Christ ... 100% of the time. But a lot of people have trouble surrendering their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, because they're not sure that He was who He said He was. And I see our **FIRST FAITH LESSON** here this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

The more we grow in Jesus Christ and in the knowledge of God's Word, the more we grow in our love toward other people. Paul was confident the folks in this church were growing, maturing, and taking on more of the character of Jesus Christ because he could see the fruit of their increased love for one another. I wonder if Jesus sees this in our flock, in my life, in your life?

Paul is developing the important theology here that Jesus isn't just God's son, but that Jesus Christ is God. And this was an important theological foundation of Christianity for the Christians to understand in the 1st Century, and it's important for

you and me to understand today. In fact, it's the one key point of Christian theology that separates orthodox Christianity from cults like Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses - both of which deny that Jesus Christ is God.

In JOHN 20:28 and in JOHN 1:1 Jesus Christ is called God, and in TITUS 2:13 Paul testifies to the deity of Jesus Christ when referring to Him as "... our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." And in a whole host of other Scriptures, from *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament* **JESUS CHRIST IS SPOKEN OF AND TO AS GOD** (cf., SECOND PETER 1:1; JOHN 10:33; HEBREWS 1:8, 10; MARK 2:7; ISAIAH 44:6 and REVELATION 22:13). Who do you say Jesus Christ is?

MPEG VIDEO ... "WHO IS JESUS?" ... 1:48 IN LENGTH

Different people with different views. And yet God's Word clearly illustrates and teaches that while Jesus is God, that He is also different and distinct from God the Father (cf., JOHN 6:37-38; 8:26, 28-29; 14:23; 15:9-10; 20:17). And I see a **SECOND FAITH LESSON** here this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

Jesus Christ is the second member of the Triunity of God, and is fully man and fully God. This is a mystery, but it's also true. God will answer every one of our questions in one way and in one way only ... by showing us more of His Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Paul also says here in v. 16 that he isn't ceasing to give *thanks* for these Believers who made up the church at Ephesus.

EPHESIANS 1:16 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹⁶ [I too] do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; (*emphasis added*)

This reminds me of something Paul said to the people in the church at Philippi ...

PHILIPPIANS 4:4 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

⁴ Be full of joy in the Lord always. I will say again, be full of joy.

Thanksgiving and joy need to be part of our prayer life. "My boss isn't noticing me enough." "Rejoice always." "The decisions my kids are making are making me insane!" "Rejoice always." "I don't feel like rejoicing." "Rejoice always." God, help us to know what Paul was writing about when he said in EPHESIANS 1:17 ...

EPHESIANS 1:17 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

Notice, the word translated **spirit** in v. 17 begins with a lower-case “s”, not an upper case “S”. Paul isn’t talking here about the **Holy Spirit** ... he’s talking about our **spirit**, that part of us as human beings where God’s **Holy Spirit** resides when we come into a relationship with God. And I see our **THIRD FAITH LESSON** here this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

God wants our spirits to be full of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Wisdom and revelation are the fruit of knowing God’s Word. There’s nowhere in God’s Word where you and I are instructed to ask God for knowledge. But over and over again we’re told to ask God for wisdom and revelation.

Remember from our PROVERBS study, that knowledge, understanding, and wisdom aren’t the same thing ...

- **knowledge** Taking God’s Word into our hearts and minds.
- **understanding** Chewing on, and internalizing God’s Word through seeking, prayer, study, and mediation.
- **wisdom** Living out and applying God’s Word in the day-to-day circumstances of our lives.

James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ tells us in JAMES 1:5 ... “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” Taking in knowledge and understanding takes **DISCIPLINE**, but once we do our part, God will do His part, and give us the **wisdom** we need to begin living out the Word of God we’ve taken in.

EPHESIANS 1:18-19 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

¹⁹ *and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might*

I’ve got eyes in my head, but not in my heart. So what’s Paul talking about here? True **understanding** and illumination of God’s truths happens in our **minds** ... and in using the word **heart** here, Paul is saying here in vv. 18-19 that **God wants to open the eyes of our minds**, and that when **the eyes of our mind** are opened, God will begin to reveal three important things to us. And then he goes on in vv. 20-23, to explain these three things in greater detail. Here’s the **FIRST** thing that will be revealed to us ...

1. We will know the hope of God’s calling on our life. We’ll know why God has wired us the way He has, and we’ll begin loving and serving God and others with purpose and consistency.

Gang, God doesn't keep our **calling** hidden from us. What a waste that would be! God wants us to know our **calling**. Take the *Compass Seminar* and invite God to **open the eyes of your mind to see your calling**. The **SECOND** thing that will be revealed to us as the eyes of our heart and mind are opened up, is that ...

2. We will experience the riches of the glory of God's inheritance to us as His saints; we'll begin to use the spiritual gifts and blessings God has given to us to grow the Kingdom of God, instead of for our own selfish ends.

Gang, God meets our needs according to "His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (cf., **PHILIPPIANS 4:19**). Our needs can never bankrupt God's supply. So often we think that "God's riches" means God's provision from heaven straight to us ... like some kind of Christian Western Union. But God usually meets our needs through the kindness, service, and resources of other Believers. This is what Paul means when he says, that when God is maturing our hearts and minds, and when we're growing up in our relationship in Jesus Christ, that **we will experience the riches of the glory of God's inheritance to us as His saints**. We will experience God's riches, both as **RECEIVERS**, and as **GIVERS**. And I see our **FOURTH FAITH LESSON** here this morning.

FAITH LESSON

God wants us to meet one another's needs, through the provision He's entrusted to us. And as we do this, then together, as the Body of Jesus Christ, we'll begin to live out our **MISSION** here on earth.

And remember our **MISSION** here at 2nd Street?

2nd Street Community Church: Becoming More Like Jesus Christ By Loving God, Loving People, And Serving Our World

So the **FIRST** thing that will be revealed to us as we begin to mature and become more like Jesus Christ, and as the eyes of our heart and mind are opened up, is that we'll know the hope of God's calling in our lives. And the **SECOND** thing that will be revealed to us is that we'll begin to experience the riches of the glory of God's inheritance to us as His saints. And the **THIRD** thing that will be revealed to us as we mature in our life with Jesus Christ is that ...

3. We will encounter the greatness of God's power, not just by hearing about it in the lives and experiences of others, but by connecting with it ourselves.

I love how J.B. Phillips translates **EPHESIANS 1:19-20** ...

EPHESIANS 1:19-20 (J.B. PHILLIPS / THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN ENGLISH)

¹⁹⁻²⁰ How tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God. When we make firm our connection with God, His life and power flow through us.

ILLUSTRATION ... Years ago I read a story that really clearly illustrates the greatness of God's power and our sometimes-fumbling attempts at connecting with it and living into it. Dr. Herbert Jackson was a Christian missionary who, when he got to the mission field, was assigned a car that could start only with a running push.

After thinking about what to do, Herbert went to a nearby school and got permission from the principle to take several students out of class momentarily each morning to push-start his car. And so, for two years, after getting his car going each morning, Herbert would either park his car on a slope or leave the engine running. Great mileage!

Bad health caused Herbert to leave the mission, and a new missionary was sent to replace him. While introducing the new missionary to the area and its customs, Herbert explained his clever technique of using the mission car. The new man, who had some experience with cars, looked under the hood, and before Herbert could get to his "park the car on a slope" step, the man said, "Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable!"

After twisting the cable into its proper place, the man turned the ignition switch, and VRRROMMM, the car was off and running - much to Herbert's shock! Dr. Jackson had become so comfortable with his car-starting technique that he failed to realize that it was actually just a loose connection that was preventing him from putting the vehicle's true power to use! But the power was there all the time.

Oh friends, how God longs to have you and I connected to His power and His resources. Throughout his writings the Apostle Paul primarily uses four different words to describe and illustrate power, and he uses all four of them in v. 19 ... and so to say that it's a **POWERFUL VERSE** is a major under-statement.

1. power [dunamis / dynamite] inherent power, power stored up inside, but not yet released.
2. working [energia / energy], the production, display, or manifestation of power.
3. immense [kratos / demo-kratos / democracy], ruling power.
4. strength [ischus], endowed power ... a child taking the throne from their parent.

EPHESIANS 1:19 (NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

¹⁹ and what is the incomparable greatness of God's *power* [dunamis] toward us who believe, as displayed in the *exercise* [energia] of His *immense* [kratos] *strength* [ischus]. (*emphasis added*)

- PSALM 8:3 God created the universe and the stars with His fingers.
- HEBREWS 1:10 God made the earth with His hands.
- ISAIAH 53:1 God brought us salvation with His arm.

Gang, there was a time, and I mean, an exact moment in time, a day, when God used all His power to raise Jesus Christ from the dead. And on that day, more of God's power was used than ever been used or displayed before. God didn't have any opposition when He created the heavens, the stars, and the earth ... so He just used His **fingers** and His **hands**.

But when God **redeemed the world**, when He **redeemed you and me at the cross**, all hell came against Him. God made the universe, the stars, and the earth for His own benefit, but He redeemed us from Satan's power for our benefit. And when we come into relationship with God through His Son, and our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, we receive the benefits of God's power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

It took all that **power [dunamis]** to raise Jesus from the dead, because God didn't just raise Jesus from the dead. Next Sunday morning, in **EPHESIANS 2**, we'll see that yes, on that first Easter morning the **power** of God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, but it also raised everyone who would ever believe in the LORD Jesus Christ from death. Over 1.5 billion people since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No wonder it took God's **arm** and not just His **fingers** and His **hands**! And gang, this is where our **victory**, and our **power**, our **inheritance**, and the **hope of our calling** finds its birth and their beginning. Do you see it?

So the **hope of God's calling** in our lives, and **experiencing the riches of the glory of God's inheritance** to us as His saints, and **being filled with the greatness of His power** ... all three of these realities are the fruit in us of the truth that Jesus Christ is God, and that He came, and died, and rose again from the dead so that you and I can come into a personal relationship with God the Father ... Paul goes on in **vv. 19b-20** to explain this to us in more detail ...

EPHESIANS 1:19b-20 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

^{19b} *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His
might
²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the
dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,

If you're here this morning and you haven't yet put your trust in Jesus Christ, the opposite of what the Apostle Paul is telling us here is true in your life: You **don't have the hope of heaven** ... you're **not experiencing the rich inheritance of being united with Jesus Christ**, and you **don't have God's power working in your life**.

But if that describes you, the good news is that you don't have to stay that way. All you need to do to receive these precious promises and blessings from God is to recognize that your sin has separated you from God, and believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead to pay for your forgiveness ... and then begin learning what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And I'm going to give you the opportunity to come into a relationship with God at the end of our service this morning. But as Paul ends this prayer, he tells us a bit more about Jesus Christ, where He is now, and where His authority comes from ...

EPHESIANS 1:21 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Every king who ever ascended the throne, every president ever elected, and every boss you've ever had ... regardless of what they've thought, are all below Jesus Christ in authority. In fact throughout the Bible, we see examples of many kings, rulers, and bosses **WHO DIDN'T SERVE GOD**, but who **SERVED GOD'S PURPOSES**.

PROVERBS 21:1 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

¹ The king's heart is like a stream of water directed by the Lord; He guides it wherever He pleases.

ILLUSTRATION ... In *The Old Testament*, God was going to bring judgment on the Persian Empire. But He wanted the Jews, living in their midst for 70 years as slaves, to be spared. So He stirred the heart of Cyrus, the king of Persia and gave him the idea that the temple in Jerusalem needed to be rebuilt. So Cyrus sent a proclamation saying, "All Jews are free to return to Israel and rebuild the temple. And I'll even pay for your moving expenses!" And in doing so, a ruler who didn't serve God, **SERVED GOD'S PURPOSES**.

In *The New Testament*, a decree went out from the Roman ruler Caesar Augustus that not only would the government tax its citizens and take a census of them, but for accuracy, everyone had to travel to their city of origin to do it. God's Word had prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but Mary was up in Nazareth. And so Caesar Augustus' decree caused Joseph and Mary to have to travel to Bethlehem. The decree was just what was needed to accomplish God's purpose. Do you see it? Caesar neither loved God or knowingly served God, but he **SERVED GOD'S PURPOSES**.

Gang, this is still happening, and it brings me a lot of comfort, because much of my adult life I've felt like I've been stuck in subjection to a godless government and to a God-denying authority. But we don't need to fear the decisions of our leaders, because like the Apostle Paul goes on to write in **EPHESIANS 1:22-23 ...**

EPHESIANS 1:22-23 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

²² And He [God] put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,
²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. [*emphasis added ... cf., COLOSSIANS 1:16-17*]

Since God knows the plans He has for us, to give us a future and a hope (cf., **JEREMIAHS 29:11**), then those authorities don't have to be feared. If Jesus is far above Satan's kingdom, and Satan is below Jesus' feet, then **SOMETHING** has to be in between. And that **SOMETHING** between Jesus and Satan is you and me as we make

up the church. The Bible doesn't tell us "Jesus is the head of Satan" ... it says, "Jesus is the head of the church." Jesus Christ conquered Satan through the work on the cross, and Satan doesn't have authority over Jesus Christ, you and I have authority over Satan!

JAMES 4:7 says that Jesus Christ has given us the authority to **use His name to resist the devil, and we'll see the devil run from us.** Oh glory to God for the name of Jesus! Satan hates the name of Jesus - but all of heaven loves to hear us speak the name of Jesus. In fact, every time the name of Jesus is used, all of heaven and all of hell remember what happened on the cross and then three days later when God's **almighty arm** ... that same power that is at work inside of us ... raised Jesus Christ from the dead. **HELL TREMBLES AND HEAVEN REJOICES!**

Gang, you and I have been born into this earth with a holy assignment given to us by the God of the universe ... to stand in the place of Jesus Christ on this earth, and to help see other people come into relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let's be people of prayer. Let's invite God to open the eyes of our hearts. Let's accept God's invitation to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as our knowledge of Him increases. Let's understand and claim our inheritance as the adopted sons and daughters of God. Let's embrace our callings, accept and give out God's riches, and experience first-hand the power of God working in us and through us. God is in charge of all, and Jesus Christ is our Lord. Let's surrender fully to Him and learn what it means to serve Him, obey Him, and become more like Him, each day of our lives. Jesus Christ is the head of all things ... may "all things" include you and me.

EPHESIANS 2:1-7 ... SPIRITUAL WARFARE IS REAL AND IF WE DON'T BELIEVE THAT IT IS, WE'RE SETTING OURSELVES UP FOR ENTRAPMENT AND DEFEAT. COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!