

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 is one of my favorite passages/prayers in the Bible. It is a prayer that Paul prays to the Ephesian community. A community that he doesn't personally know, but he has heard of their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul didn't just pick up the morning newspaper and see headlines for the great faith of the Ephesian community. He wasn't surfing the web and stories of faithful life popped up in the most recent newsfeed. In fact, no one even called, emailed, or texted him to say, "Did you hear about the church in Ephesus?" No, for Paul – hundreds of miles away – to hear of the Ephesian community and their faith in God, someone would have traveled by foot all the way to Paul. Maybe it was someone intentionally going to visit Paul, maybe it was a guest of the Ephesian church, a passerby who was just passing through and who also happen to pass through Paul's neighborhood, maybe someone sent him a letter telling of the faith of the Ephesian church. However it happened, the stories of the faithful Ephesian community traveled a long way with much time and effort to reach Paul. Their stories were a living testimony for their love and faith in Christ. Paul writes expressing his thankfulness not just for the love of Christ they were sharing, but for the Ephesians' faith in Christ. He writes to the Ephesians

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.

Paul is not only thankful for the Ephesians, but he prays for them. Not just once, but always. "I do not cease to give thanks for you." That's pretty significant. What's something that you always thank God for? Your health, maybe your children or your family and friends? Whatever it is, it is something that is very important and close to your heart; something that you are deeply passionate about.

Paul prays for the Ephesian community and is very specific and intentional in his prayer. He prays:

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 God, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe, according to the working of God's great power.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesian community is timeless. While it took months for the news to travel to Paul and Paul's letter back to the Ephesian church, his prayer is timeless. It is a prayer that was prayed not only for the Ephesian church, but other first century churches, and I imagine it has been prayed for churches and faith communities from the time it was written all the way to the present time.

This morning I want to point out that this prayer gives encouragement and hope not only to the Ephesian church, but also to us, Emory Presbyterian Church.

To us it reads:

Emory Church, I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love toward all the saints,

I have heard about the energy and enthusiasm you possessed when you built the Mad Housers hut. You gave a shelter and a home to someone who was without.

Likewise, you have given up your past two Saturdays to help build a Habitat house for a family to live in. You have gotten them off the streets and into a home built with the love of Christ.

Emory Church, your care and compassion doesn't end there. You have been to great efforts to protect and sustain God's Creation. And while you remember Earth Day each year, it's not just Earth Sunday, but all year long that you keep an awareness and intentionality about conserving, recycling, and efficiently using God's creation.

Emory Church your love and faith in Christ can be seen in the way you love and support one another. You love and care for one another during both the hard times and good times. You reach out in times of sorrow and pain, in times of financial hardship, in the loss of loved ones. And you also celebrate together the birth and baptism of your children, you celebrate together graduations and marriages, and new jobs and life opportunities with which we have been blessed. Your love and support for one another models the love Christ has for us. For this, I always give thanks to God.

Emory Church, I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as you open your doors to your community. You reach out with embracing arms of love and acceptance. You celebrate this with the Fall Festival each year. A time that serves as both a bonding and renewing time amongst yourselves as well as a vibrant invitation for the surrounding community to come and get to know you and to see a glimpse of the God you love and serve. For this I am thankful.

Emory Church, and what is most admirable (at least in my opinion), is that even in the midst of everyone's busy and...well I should just say FULL lives, you stop and make time for fellowship and renewal. Wednesday Night Dinners and the Labor Day Retreat are prime examples. You have built into your life a time for rest and laughter. An intentional time to check in with yourself and your brothers and sisters in Christ, an intentional time to relax together, to be peaceful, to remember the days gone by and to dream about the days to come, and a time yet again to share the love of God with which we have been abundantly blessed.

I have heard of your faith in Christ and how you have shared God's love among yourselves and your community as you sing and worship God. The news and excitement of last year's Vivaldi's Gloria made it all around the country as we traveled to visit our families during the holidays and we told of what we had heard and seen.

Emory Church, there is so much that you do for which I give thanks. There is much testimony to the fact that on Sunday Morning, parents hold their children's hands in the parking lot. Not so much out of fear of cars, but so that their children won't run through the parking lot, throw open the church doors, and make a mad dash to their Sunday School room. There is much testimony and love shared with the collecting, making, and distributing of the Santa Stockings that you give to the children at the Stephen's Pantry each Christmas. Your love and faith in Christ is seen in the fact that years after the hurricane and flood in Mississippi you are still going down with the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Team to provide relief and aid to the families in need.

Emory Church, I have heard of your faith in God. Your love and faith in God runs so deep that, well....I now know why Paul didn't list the ways in which he was thankful for the Ephesian church. The list goes on and on and on, and there's the inevitable fact that I can't name/don't have time this morning to name all the ways in which you have shared the love and faith of Christ among yourselves and with others. So with Paul's wisdom, I'm going to simply go back to saying:

Emory Church, 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

I do not cease to give thanks. I always remember you. Paul's not saying..."Oh look, they're doing good. That's nice." No! It's "what you are doing is so very important, you are making a difference, you are making an impact on your community. What you are doing is so significant, so important that I, Paul, and others who have heard thank God for you always. I remember you in my prayers." It's not just "Thank you, God, for Emory Church, please be with them." (By the way, there's nothing lacking in that prayer either.) But Paul goes further. He is more specific.

He prays

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 God, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe, according to the working of God's great power.

May God give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God: (2x)
This one little phrase is so chalked full of meaning and power. I always end up repeating the phrase over and over emphasizing different words trying to truly grasp the meaning of the prayer. And to some extent the meaning is hidden deep within God's immeasurable greatness.

But let's try for a moment to come to a better understanding. At first the prayer for "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" stands out – Wow. Now that's a prayer. How great would that be to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation? That would be awesome.

Then, I notice the second part ... As you come to know God. I pray that God **may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God,** ...As I come to know God?? How do I come to know God?

Or maybe for us the question is , How do we come to know God more? (In thinking about this question, many other questions arise. Questions like, when's the last time you've stopped to think about your relationship with God and how it is that you've come to know God?)

Our routine church answers should serve us well this time: We come to know God at church—through singing, praying, and worship God.

But what about outside of church. How do we come to know God in our everyday life—not just on a Sunday morning or Wednesday night? Do we acknowledge God when we are outside of our faith community? Do we do more than thank God for our food? Do we praise God outside of church? Do we praise and thank God when we are at home, at school or at work, do we thank God for his love and work in our everyday lives and activities?

Lots of good questions....I wish we had the time to stop and ponder each one. Maybe you will. Maybe you'll take at least one of those questions and think about it later.

The big question that I came to, that I hope and pray that you will continue to think and pray about is....Well, in the fast-paced, non-stop world that we live in, do we give ourselves time to come to know God? Do we schedule in church and an occasional Wednesday night dinner like we schedule in a football game, trivia night, poker night, dinner and a movie, etc.? Is church just another activity that we enjoy or another activity that we feel obligated to attend or contribute towards? Has going to church become going out of habit or maybe even going out of guilt? When's the last time we

went to church because we wanted to learn more about God, about the stories of Jesus, about how the Holy Spirit is working in and through us and in the world around us?

Hmmm....

What I realized from thinking about all these questions, what I learned from praying and pondering over Paul's prayer is that through Christ, God has given us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. The spirit that Paul is praying for us to have, we already have it. However, too many times we aren't aware that we have it. And even if we are aware of it, we don't use it well. You see the more we know God, the more we have and can use the spirit of wisdom and revelation that God's given us.

Okay, here's a crude analogy. Let's compare the spirit of wisdom and revelation to volleyball. When you talk about playing volleyball and when I talk about playing volleyball we are probably talking about two different things all together. You see growing up I loved to play volleyball (although I haven't played in quite while). I played what you could call year-round volleyball, which is every day; 5-6 hours on most days. I love it! What I came to realize is that there are different types of volleyball. For simplicities sake I'm going to put them into three categories:

1. Jungle Ball. This is when I show up to play and the net is about nose-level and people are swatting and punching at the ball in some attempt to get it back over the net. Although usually the ball ends up nowhere near the court on the other side. This involves much laughter and a lot of standing around.
2. Recreational Volleyball. You have a proper net, at the right height, and usually even an actual volleyball and not some sort of dodgeball or kickball. When I see this I get real excited and I'm so psyched to play. But then I realize that no one really knows what they are doing. Often, in order for everyone to play and no one's feelings to get hurt, you end up with more than 6 players on the court. Which, in my opinion, is way too many. When the ball comes over the net everyone either stares at the other person saying, "Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you were going to get that." Or they are way too aggressive and everyone is diving for the same ball. Rarely is there team play or cooperation, rather it is just a bunch of people telling each other how to play, but no actual playing go on.
3. Competitive Volleyball. This is where you actually play volleyball. You serve...bump, set, spike...what a great dig, set it up again, hit..yeah! You keep doing this until someone messes up. And when they do, you don't talk for 5 minutes before resuming play. But you immediately do it again, inwardly hoping that the other team will miss a play before your team does. ..Ah...now that's volleyball.. (smile)

Oh wait...Wisdom and revelation....volleyball....Yes, yes...everyone can play volleyball in some form or manner. The more you play, the more time you spend practicing the skills and the game, The MORE you come to know what volleyball is all about. You've seen the T-shirts. Eat, breathe, Play – Volleyball... When you do that you are...(haha you just thought...obsessed).. maybe, but you are coming to know the game better and better everyday. Your skill is improving dramatically, you can watch

someone hit or serve and know where the ball is going before they finish their swing. You know your teammates, their strengths and weaknesses, and they know yours. You know how to work together to reach your common goal—the best game of volleyball you’ve ever played.

Likewise, through Christ, God has given each of us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. There are different ways we can use the spirit of wisdom and revelation. We can sit down and refuse to play, we can play jungle ball, we can play recreationally, and we can play competitively. We all start by sitting and watching. We must intentionally choose to stand and begin to learn how to play. We must play through all the various stages, some more painful than the others. But in each game we learn something more about ourselves and our relationship with God. As we ask ourselves these questions of how we know God, of how we spend time with God, how we come to know God better not just at church, but in all areas of our life. ... as we ask ourselves these questions we are beginning to stand, we are no longer sitting and watching the game. When we respond we are putting ourselves into the game. We are coming to know God more. We are learning how to use the spirit of wisdom and revelation that God has given us.

“But why should I?” you may ask. I hate volleyball, there is nothing about the game of volleyball that would make me want to play. I am just fine sitting and watching. You know I think I have a good relationship with God. We are fine just the way we are. I’m happy playing jungle ball for the rest of my life. So, why should I be more intentional about coming to know God? Why do I want to use or understand this spirit of wisdom and revelation God’s given me?

Paul’s prays:

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 God, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe, according to the working of God’s great power.

Repeat v.18

Name Do you know the hope to which God has called you? (x3) Emory Presbyterian Church, do you know the hope to which God has called you? Do you know the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints? Do you know the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for those who believe?

Do you know the love of God, the power, the peace, the beauty, the desire, the **hope** to which God has called us? You may think you know, but God has more. The more we come to know God. The more we know and understand the love of God, the MORE we desire to truly know God and to know the hope to which we have been called. The point here is that God has already given us a spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, through Christ

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Ephesians 1:15-23

in the Holy Spirit. As we come to know God, we better realize this gift. As we come to know God more we better learn how to discern and use the spirit of wisdom and revelation we possess

Emory Church, what is the hope to which you are called?