

Sermon – Praying to Know God Better
Sunday March 30, 2025

Introduction

In 2014, LifeWay Research wanted to know what kind of things people pray for. So they did a survey and asked people, What do you pray about? What they found was interesting.

- 21% of people pray to win the lottery
- 20% of people pray for success in things they've put no effort in
- 15% of people pray that no one will find out about something bad they did.
- 13% of people pray for their sports team to win
- 7% of people pray for a good parking spot
- 5% of people pray that someone they don't like will get fired

We can chuckle about these findings, but they do highlight a deeper truth – **Our prayers are often shaped by our personal desires and circumstances.** In other words, it's easy to focus on ourselves and our needs when we pray.

Don't get me wrong - there's nothing wrong about praying for our needs. In fact, throughout the Bible, God invites us to pray for our needs because He cares about us and wants us to come to him with our concerns. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus even tells us to pray for our daily bread.

But we live in a culture that's extremely self-absorbed and self-centred. And it can be easy for our prayers to reflect these values and become too centred on ourselves.

But when we look at the prayers of the Apostle Paul, we see a different way to pray. Even though Paul experienced intense suffering and hardship...

- He never prays for better circumstances,
- He never prays to avoid suffering,
- He never prays for success in the way the world defines it.

What does Paul pray for? He prays that people would grow in their faith, he prays that God would transform hearts, he prays that the gospel of Jesus would advance and transform our broken world.

The focus of Paul's prayers is never on his own comfort. The focus of Paul's prayers is always on God's will being done.

What kind of things do you typically pray about? How can your prayers and mine reflect a deeper longing for God's priorities?

Sermon Series

We're in a series called *Praying with Paul*. In this series we're looking at the prayers of Paul in the Bible and how they reflect his deep commitment to God's purposes. Paul's prayers give us a model for how to pray more in line with God's priorities.

Our hope for this series is that as we study Paul's prayers, that we would be learn how to shift our focus from praying for our comfort to praying for God's priorities.

We're providing **sermon study guides** for small group and personal study. You can use these guides to help discuss the sermons with others. You can download these free guides on The Hub under the Resources tab. <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/thehub>

Sermon

Today, we're going to look at Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 1 or follow along on the screen.

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 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. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Today we're going to look at three prayer priorities in this prayer: Praying to know God better, Praying to know God's plan and Praying to know God's power.

First, **Praying to know God better.**

In verse 17, Paul says, **I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. (v. 17)**

When we think about knowledge, we often think about information. We think about intellectuals and academics with high IQ. People like Einstein, Bill Gates and Pastor Steve. These people have deep knowledge and expertise on various subject matters.

But in this passage, when Paul talks about knowing God, he's not talking about knowing information about God.

The Greek word he uses is *epignosis*. This is a compound word. It's made up of two Greek words: *epi* which means over and *gnosis* which means knowledge. *Epignosis* isn't about knowing God intellectually, it's about knowing God personally.

When Jo and I were first dating, for one of her birthdays I made her a set of Snatch questions. Snatch questions was something we came up with together. In the unlikely event that an alien abducts or snatches one of us, one person would ask the other person a snatch question to make sure they were who they're supposed to be and not an alien pretending to be them.

Because you can only correctly answer a Snatch question if you really know that person. You can't do it just by knowing *about* them; you need to truly know them. You need to know their thoughts, their preferences and their heart. And you can only learn these things when you spend time with them.

That's what Paul is praying for. He's praying that followers of Jesus wouldn't just know about God, but that they would know God and know him personally. That they would know his thoughts, his will and his heart. That they learn about him as they spend time with him.

Because When you truly know someone, that relationship will change you.

This year, Jo and I are celebrating 20 years of marriage. What I've come to learn is that when you've walked with someone and have loved them over time, that relationship will change you.

For example...

- When I go out with the kids and Jo's not there, I take a picture with them because I know how much Jo loves pictures.
- When I'm parking downtown, I'll go out of my way to find a free parking spot because I know how much Jo hates paying for parking.
- When I'm visiting with friends, I'll write a card or bring something because I know that Jo would want to bless someone with a gift.

When you truly know someone, that relationship changes you. It changes how you think, what you value and what you do. And you'll find yourself doing things you know will please them because of your love for them.

So praying to know God better is a prayer to have a transformative experience of him. It's praying to know what God thinks, values and desires so that over time, you will do the things that please him because you love him.

So how can you know God?

The answer is, you can't; at least not on your own. God is too great for our finite minds to comprehend. God is too holy for our sinful hearts to grasp. That's why Paul prays that God would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Because we can't know God on our own, we need him to reveal himself to us through his spirit.

How do we do that? Here are three ways you can know God better through his spirit.

First, **You pray**. Ask God to reveal himself to you. Ask him to open your eyes, soften your heart. Recognize that you can't truly know him unless he shows himself to you so you ask the Holy Spirit to reveal God.

Second, **You read God's word**. As Christians...

- We believe that the Holy Spirit directed human authors to write down what God wanted to say to us.
- We believe that when we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit gives us deeper understanding of his word.
- We believe that that Holy Spirit reminds us of God's truths when we need it.

But the only way to know God is to read his word. Which is why Christians need to make reading God's word a regular practice.

The third way of knowing God better is, **You obey**. As you ask God to reveal himself to you, as you make reading scripture a regular part of your life, you do these things not just to check them off your list or to feel like you're a good Christian. You do these things to obey God when he tells you to do something.

Is there something God is inviting you to do right now?

- Maybe he's inviting you to trust him with a person or situation.
- Maybe he's inviting you to embrace a difficult season.
- Maybe he's inviting you to take a step of faith.

If you truly desire to know God more intimately, you need to obey God when he invites you to do something.

Because **Obedience is the ultimate expression of our relationship with God.**

The Apostle John says If you love me, you will keep my commands. Obedience goes beyond simply praying or reading the Bible. In the words of Shania Twain, *that don't impress him much*. What He truly wants is your heart. He wants a relationship with you.

The first prayer priority is Praying to Know God Better.

The second prayer priority is **Praying to Know God's Plan.**

When we think about our lives, it's easy to focus on our own plans. Plans for successful careers, fulfilling relationships and impressive achievements.

But here's the problem. Planning around our ambitions will always leave us empty. Why? Because we were created to live a bigger story.

We just finished a sermon series on *The God Story* and we talked about how our lives only make sense when we see our story through the lens of God's grand story.

And that's what Paul prays for here.

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. (v. 18)

Paul is talking about knowing the hope to which God has called you. This isn't an abstract or distant hope. This is a personal hope. It's found in knowing your unique purpose and place in God's story. Paul elaborates on this in Ephesians 2:

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

This is an important reminder.

- Many of you right now are feeling overwhelmed by the challenges you're facing.
- Many of you are struggling with feelings of frustration and inadequacy.
- Many of you are wondering if your life even matters.

But here's what you need to know: In God's eyes, you are his handiwork.

- You are not an accident; God has created you with a specific purpose in mind.
- You're not here just to go through the motions; God has made you for something greater.
- You are not forgotten; God has prepared you to do good works and reflect his character in ways that only you can.

Some of you are still trying to figure this out. Some of you still aren't sure how you fit into God's plan. So Pray to Know God's Plan. Pray for clarity and understanding. Ask yourself questions like:

- What am I passionate about?
- What gifts has God given me
- What have my life experiences prepared me to do for Jesus?

As you pray and talk with others, God will show you your unique purpose and calling. But God doesn't just call us to live out our calling individually, he also calls us to live out our calling as a church.

Cornerstone is in a season of discerning God's longer-term direction for our church and the opportunities he's leading us to. To prepare our hearts to hear from God, we're having a **Prayer and Re-Envisioning Event** on Saturday May 24th. It's open to the entire congregation so please save the date and plan to attend. We hope to see many of you there!

Finally, we move on to our third prayer priority. **Praying to know the power of God.**

Paul knows all about how living out your calling will be hard. He faced immense suffering, persecution and opposition for the sake of the gospel. Yet in the midst of it, he knew that the only way to fulfill God's purposes is through God's power.

That's why he prays: **...that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know... his incomparably great power for us who believe. (1:18-19)**

What Paul is praying here is that followers of Jesus like you and me would come to know the power of God that is available to us. Because if God calls you to do something, he will equip you to do it. God will never ask you to take on a challenge, without giving you the power to carry it out.

How does God equip you? He equips you with his power. The term Paul uses is the Greek word *dunamis*. Can you guess what English word we get from this? Dynamite.

What comes to mind when you think of dynamite? Power, explosion, impact. Dynamite doesn't just sit there, it changes things and makes an immediate impact.

But just how powerful is this power?

That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead... (1:19-20)

This is where it gets even more amazing. Because the power Paul is describing about isn't some superficial self-help, feel good power. No, this is resurrection power!

- This is the power that defeated death, conquered sin and raised Jesus from the dead.
- This is the power that transformed the entire course of history, gave us a new identity and can bring life into every challenging situation you're facing right now.

How many of you are facing a challenge beyond your ability to overcome? How many of you need this kind of power today?

Here's the good news. This power is available to you right now. But here's the thing. Paul doesn't tell us to pray for *more* of this power. Why not? If this power can change everything, why wouldn't we ask for more of it? Here's why. Because in Jesus, you already have this power.

The Apostle Peter says, **His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us... (2 Peter 1:3)**

In other words, God has already given you everything you need to do everything he's called you to do. You don't need more of it. You just need to know you already have it. Paul doesn't say, Pray for more of the power you need. Paul says, Pray that you would know the power you already have.

Turn to your neighbour and tell them, I've got the power!

Now if you grew up listening to hip hop music in the 90s, you know that it's getting, it's getting, it's getting kinda hectic. But it's true, you have the power.

Through Jesus,

- You have the power that breaks down strongholds
- You have the power that makes a way where there is no way
- You have the power that brings life where there is death.

This power will enable you to

- overcome temptation
- persevere through adversity
- deal with anxiety and depression,

This power will help you

- to love
- to heal
- And to forgive.

This power changes everything! Because when you no longer live your life in your own strength, but according to the resurrection power of Jesus within you, God will transform you from the inside out and use you as his instrument to bring his love and healing wherever you go.

So don't live another day like you have no power. You have everything you need to do everything God has called you to do. You've got the power – now live into it!

Let's pray.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for showing us today how we can pray more in line with your priorities.

We pray to know you better. We don't just want to know about you, we want to know you – personally and intimately. Not just in our heads but also in our hearts.

We pray to know your plan. Open the eyes of our hearts to your calling for us individually and as a church. Help us to see ourselves as your handiwork and give us the wisdom and courage to do the good works you've prepared in advance for us to do.

We pray to know your power. Help us to know this power that is already ours in Christ. Where we may be facing challenges and struggles beyond our ability to overcome, help us tap into your divine strength that breaks down strongholds, overcomes sin and brings life where there is death.

We surrender ourselves to you now and trust that as we pray according to your priorities, that you will reveal yourself to us, strengthen us, encourage us and use us to be a blessing in our schools, in our workplaces, in our community and wherever we go.

Amen

Benediction

May the Spirit of wisdom and revelation open the eyes of your heart, that you may know God better, not just as a concept, but as your loving Heavenly Father.

May your life be transformed as you seek to know God's plan for you, knowing that you are His handiwork, created for a purpose and to make a difference in the world.

And may you experience the incomparably great power of God, strengthening you to face every challenge with confidence, courage and faith.

Go into your week now with the knowledge of God's love for you and his purpose for your life, and may you shine as a light for Jesus wherever you go.

Prayer Ministry

At this time, we're going to have a time of prayer ministry. I'd like to invite the prayer ministers to come up.

- If you would like to come up to receive prayer for anything, our prayer ministers would be happy to pray for you.
- If you like, you can choose to remain where you are and pray on your own or with others.
- If you need to leave, we invite you to join us for refreshments in the café but ask that you leave quietly so as not to disturb those who are praying.