



OUR MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP

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Introduction

I'm going to share about something very personal to me today. Our text is Ephesians 1:15-23, the first part of Paul's prayer for the believers at Ephesus. This introduces a topic that means everything to me: KNOWING GOD

Ephesians 1:17 AMPC

[For I always pray to] the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, that He may grant you a spirit of wisdom and revelation [of insight into mysteries and secrets] in the [deep and intimate] knowledge of Him,

Paul is praying for them, that they would come to know God in a deeply personal way. In 10 days time I will have been saved 30 years. My life has changed in many ways; it has been a journey with God.

When I came to Him back then, I was timid and quite lost and broken. I had very low self-image and very little confidence. I looked fine on the outside. I was a young professional preparing to write my Board exam. But I was injured **on the inside**. **It has been a journey and I'm still transforming into God's true intention for my life, but I've come far from that timid 23 year old.**

There is one thing that has changed me; that is a close personal relationship with God.

When I got saved I was fortunate to be in a Bible believing church that was like a family. It was really good. I quickly joined the weekly prayer meetings, attended the youth meeting and every other church meeting I could find. I led teams on outreaches. I even had the opportunity to go to Bible school. I learned how to pray and how to be a Christian – you know, talk the talk and walk the walk, and it was good. I learned a lot and grew in my faith, **but I didn't know Him. That only came later...**

What does the Bible say about knowing God?

1. God wants us to KNOW HIM, not just know about Him.

In the Old Testament, God spoke this through the prophet Jeremiah,

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches; but let him who boasts, boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

He wants us to understand and KNOW Him.

Illustration:

The way the Home Affairs department knows my husband Deon is very different to how I know Deon. They may have all his personal information, know where he was born, who his wife and children are, have a photo to show what he looks like, but do they KNOW HIM? Deon and I are ONE. We have grown so close that we often know each other's thoughts.

In the same way, we can know all about God. Even the devil knows about Him, but do we know Him? Do we have a relationship with Him? I used to say I did, but I didn't really. I didn't understand that it was possible or how to do it...

2. Eternal life is knowing Him

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

Eternal life is not about getting into a place called heaven, but about having a RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ONE TRUE GOD and spending eternity with Him. True life, real life is knowing God.

3. Knowing God was **Paul's** primary goal

Philippians 3:7-14

(7) But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— (10) that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (11) that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

(12) Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (13) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The upward call of God is a call to Him. Knowledge, understanding, other specific callings and obedience will flow from there.

God said to Abram (later called Abraham) that He was his reward, his exceedingly great reward.

Genesis 15:1 NKJV *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."*

God himself is our goal and reward.

So we can see from the Scriptures that it is not only possible to come to know God, it is **God's desire** for us to know Him and it should be our greatest goal. Knowing Him should be our prize!

How can we come to know God?

We need God's help!

1. Through Jesus Christ

John 14:6 ESV *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

You must be born again.

John 6:44 ESV No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:47 ESV Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

2. Through His Word

The Bible is God's love letter to us in which He progressively reveals Himself to us.

2 Timothy 3:16 ESV *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*

John 16:13-14 ESV (13) *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

3. You can pray for it

Ephesians 1:15-18

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 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, 18 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,

As you heard in the last two messages, Paul started this letter by praising God for everything Jesus has done for us. He tells them how **He's blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places. He has redeemed us out of darkness; purchased us for Himself and sealed us with the promised Holy Spirit.

Now his praise turns to prayer as he wants them to really get it!

The hope to which he has called us is our relationship with Him.

His glorious inheritance in us (the saints) is His relationship with us.

There were undoubtedly some new believers among them as they were a growing church, however he was writing to a fairly mature group who had received much gospel training from him in their early years (he spent about 3 years with them). In v1 he calls them faithful and in v15 he commends them for their faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints. Yet he felt the need to pray this for them.

We can pray this prayer for ourselves, that God would grant us a spirit of wisdom and revelation *[of insight into mysteries and secrets] in the [deep and intimate] knowledge of Him.* (Amplified version)

I used to pray this prayer and the other prayer of Ephesians and Colossians over myself for years. You can personalise these Spirit inspired prayers by putting your name or someone **else's name there**.

4. Train yourself to listen

A relationship is two-way communication and interaction.

Testimony:

I came to a point in my life where there was a tremendous attack against us and I withdrew into God. I spent about two years intensively seeking Him. I already had a good Bible knowledge, but I now spent much intentional time in prayer and LISTENING. That was the key for me that I had missed for many years.

Look at what the prophet Samuel said to King Saul after he disobeyed God's instruction:

1 Samuel 15:22-23 ESV *22 And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."*

I became quiet and started listening. Then I would write down what I felt the Lord was saying **to me. At first I really wasn't sure. It** often sounded too good to be true. God is always so encouraging, even when he has to correct you. But I continued and started to recognise his voice more clearly. If you are born again, the Holy Spirit lives in you. You hear His voice on the inside. I never heard an audible voice. His voice can sound like your own thoughts; **it's familiar** to you. He will not contradict His Word or His character that is revealed in the Bible.

If you are new to the faith, I strongly suggest you ask someone more mature to walk with you and help you with this.

5. Enjoy regular time together

I have a regular set aside time with God every day. I like early mornings when no one else is up. Give God time and space. He so desires intimacy with you.

Discipline will soon turn to delight!

Read the Word, meditate, listen and write.

Apply it in your day – **obey His leading and share what you've learned with someone else** – pay it forward. It requires faith to be added to believe and act on what He is saying to you.

Enjoy your time with Him – **get a cup of tea or coffee, spend time in worship if that's your thing**. This is the BEST thing in the world! It is my absolute favourite; the PUDDING of my Christian walk. I love pudding! For you, it might be the meat and potatoes ☺

Enjoy God.

Closing:

- If you feel like you're not good enough for a relationship with Him, because you're not perfect or holy -

That's exactly why Jesus came! He died for our sins so that imperfect people can come into His presence. He desires to show you his goodness and glory and to restore you to **His intention for your life, the same as He did for me. It doesn't matter what mistakes you've made or how many times you've blown it; God is a God of mercy and many chances.** His love is from everlasting to everlasting. The blood of Jesus has covered and removed EVERY sin. Your sin is not unique or special. Let go of the guilt and shame and receive His **forgiveness and pardon. It's grace – His free gift of love to you. I know you've messed up, but your only hope is Him. Come to Him, call on Him, receive His forgiveness and grace and He will restore you. Walk with Him.**

- Maybe you feel like you've made it and know it all, but He has so much more for you. These believers at Ephesus were quite mature in the Lord. They were walking the walk and talking the talk, yet Paul prayed like this for them – to know God more intimately.
- Finally, you may be doing all the good things, but you've **lost** your love for God. You're not passionate like you once were, just like the church at Ephesus that Jesus warned in Revelation 2:4.

Is your quiet time a drag? Do you not find delight in reading your Bible anymore? Has your Christian life become more of a ritual than a living breathing relationship with God? Repent and return to your first love (Revelation 2:5)

This is the last part of Paul's prayer in chapter 1. He prayed for them to know God ...

Ephesians 1:15-18

19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked 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 one to come. 22 And he put all things 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.

We will learn more about this power and authority in the weeks to come.

This great God who has all power and authority desires an intimate personal relationship with you. If you want this, or want it in a deeper way, respond to God today. Pray the prayer from Ephesians 1:15-23 over your life and do what you need to do to draw closer to Him.

To receive Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, pray this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Saviour.

If you prayed this prayer, tell someone. Contact us on 072 986 4368 or tell one of our pastors or community group leaders. We'd love to connect with you and help you on your journey.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you rate your current relationship with God?
2. Is there anything hindering you from getting closer to Him?
3. What steps can you take to get to know God more?
4. What would a church (community of Jesus followers) look like if every person enjoyed a deep personal relationship with God?