

YOU CAN KNOW GOD THROUGH JESUS**EPHESIANS 1:15-23**

How much is knowledge truly worth? There's a great old story about Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company, and a man named Charlie Steinmetz. Steinmetz was a dwarf. His physical appearance was ugly and deformed, but he had one of the greatest minds this world has ever known when it comes to electricity. Charlie Steinmetz built the great electrical generators for Henry Ford's first plant in Dearborn, Michigan. One day those generators broke down and the plant came to a complete halt. Ordinary mechanics and electricians were brought in first, but none of them could get the generators going again. Henry Ford started to lose money. So, he called Charlie Steinmetz. He arrived at the plant and started putting around the generators for a few hours. Then he threw a switch, the generators started to hum again and the great Ford plant was back in operation. A few days later Henry Ford received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000. Although Ford was already a very rich man, he returned the bill with a note that read, "Charlie, isn't this bill just a little high for a few hours of tinkering around on those generator motors?" Steinmetz returned the bill to Henry Ford with this message, "For tinkering around on the motors: \$10. For knowing where to tinker: \$9,990. Total bill: \$10,000." Henry Ford paid the bill.

How much is knowing God worth? That's a question the great Christian leader, Paul, addresses in Ephesians 1:15-23. We're in the midst of a three month study of his letter to the Christians living in and close to the city of Ephesus which was located then in the Roman province of Asia and is now just a ruin you can visit in the country of Turkey. I'm calling the series "Child Of The One True God: Discovering Who You Are In Christ." Let's read that portion of the letter just now and get familiar with it. Now notice a couple of things about these verses. First of all, it's a prayer. Second, what Paul doesn't pray for or about is almost as enlightening as what he does pray for and about! Paul doesn't ask God to give the Ephesians good health, escape from all the heartaches and difficulties in their lives, financial blessing, or even just general happiness in life. Isn't that how you and I tend to pray both for ourselves and others? "God, keep me healthy and save me from all problems. Please bless me financially and let life be happy for me today and everyday. And ditto for my family and friends. Amen." But Paul's prayer reveals what God really wants you and me to have on a daily, continual basis. It's life changing. Quite simply...

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND GOD.

"I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called.... I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him...." (Eph 1:18-19 NLT) Paul wants you and me to understand God better. There's nothing of more practical benefit to you on a daily basis than increasing your knowledge of who God is, what God has done, what God is doing, what God will yet do and what that means for you. It's more important than the knowledge you

gained in school. It's more important than the knowledge you gained in getting your degree. It's more important than all the knowledge you've picked up along the way in terms of your job or your career. It's more important than knowing the stock market inside and out or how to succeed in business. It's more important than having an encyclopedic knowledge of the latest technology. It's more important than knowing how to be the best spouse or the best parent out there. Jesus it like this when He prayed, "And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth." (John 17:3 NLT) Jesus equated understanding God with having eternal life itself.

A.W. Tozer, a Christian leader and author back in the 20th century, wrote something that I remember often: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." What you think about God – consciously or unconsciously - determines so much of how you live out your life every day. What you think about God determines how you answer questions like these: "What's my purpose in life? What's the value of my life? What kind of attitude do I bring to my workplace every day? Why did I marry who I did and how do I do marriage every day? How should I raise my kids? How do I spend money? Why do I go to church? How should I spend my leisure time? What people am I going to relate to and why? How will I view the heartaches and struggles in my life?" Think about that for a minute. Is there any aspect of life or living that is not influenced powerfully by what you think about God?

Now, here's a sad irony. Our common enemy, the Devil, has convinced many followers of Jesus that truly knowing and understanding God is very difficult; therefore, it's not worth the effort. He's also convinced many of us that trying to know and understand God has no practical value; therefore, it's not worth our time. It's amazing how many adult followers of Jesus, for instance, have decided that digging into the Bible either personally or in a group like a Sunday morning Bible class or a small group is not a good use of their time. Is more sleep on a Sunday morning or another episode of your favorite TV show on a weeknight really more important than the opportunity to know God better through the most accessible means possible – His Word? We now have vast amounts of knowledge about everything available to us just clicks away on the Internet. Is any of it more valuable than increasing your understanding of who God is?

How can you increase your understanding of God? Let me suggest three simple essentials if you are going to understand God better. First, there is time. You must set aside time to be with God where He is the center of your attention. God is a Person and to know any person you just have to spend and make time to be with that person. Your willingness to spend time is the big difference between truly knowing a person and just knowing about a person. It's the same with God. It's still early in 2014 and many of us like to make new resolutions. It's not too late to make up your mind to set aside some time each day or several days each week to simply be with God. Most importantly, read or listen to God's Word. Then, read Internet devotionals or get a hold of great books about God and read

them. Start small in terms of length of time and build from there. It's never too late to join an adult Sunday Bible class, a weeknight small group, or our Wednesday evening Bible discussion time and open yourself to just understanding God better along with other believers. There's no shortcuts to understanding God better. The first essential is time. The fact is we give our time to those things we deem important. You might give lip service to the importance of understanding God better, but your use of time tells the real story.

Second, there is talk. Prayer is just talking to God. Forget about the "thees and thous" and learning how to use flowery, impressive phrases. Just talk to Him. Yes, sometimes it means setting aside a specific time to be alone with God and to talk to Him. But I hope all of us are learning the wonderful benefit of having a running conversation with God all through the day. Talk to God when you get up in the morning. Talk to Him as you drive to work. Talk to Him as you get the kids ready for school. Talk to Him about where you work and who you work with. Whisper words of praise and worship, ask for help and guidance, listen for impressions from the Holy Spirit into your spirit or sometimes through another person. Yes, it seems strange at first – just to talk to someone throughout the day who you can't see and who doesn't talk back in the normal way. But it will seem less strange the more you make it a daily habit.

Third, there is trust. If you refuse to trust God, your understanding of Him is always going to be mediocre and juvenile at best. Opportunities to trust God come to you almost daily. They come disguised as problems you didn't ask for, situations you didn't plan on, circumstances you didn't foresee and people who enjoy being difficult. Please don't leave here today and look for ways to trust God! You never have to seek out opportunities to trust God; they will find you! Trusting the Lord is the way to find out what only He can do. As you trust Him for both the small, everyday stuff as well as the big things of life, you gradually understand how much you can rely upon, believe in and depend on this God. Year after year, your trust in God grows. You can look back in your life and see how He met every need, every situation and every problem with His grace and power. That deepens and enriches your understanding of God.

Ethel Herr, a writer, had a double mastectomy. Two months later doctors discovered that the cancer had spread. One of Herr's friends, shocked and fumbling for words, asked her, "And how do you feel about God now?" Reflecting on the moment the question was posed to her, Herr says: "God has been preparing me for this moment. He has undergirded me in ways I've never known before. He has made himself increasingly real and precious to me. He has given to me joy such as I've never known before—and I've no need to work at it, it just comes, even amidst the tears. He has taught me that no matter how good my genes are or how well I take care of my diet and myself, he will lead me on whatever journey he chooses and will never leave me for a moment of that journey. And he planned it all in such a way that step by step, he prepared me for the moment when the doctor dropped the last shoe. God is good, no matter what

the diagnosis or the prognosis..... *The key to knowing God is good is simply knowing him.*" That's trust. It's essential to knowing and understanding God.

Time, talk and trust. Each of them will help you understand God better. This is the most useful and usable kind of knowledge you can ever have. I doubt any human being has ever understood God better than Paul and yet in another letter to another group of Christians, he wrote, "Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead...." (Phil 3:8, 10 NLT) That's what Paul wanted for his Ephesian friends and you and me as well. You can be confident that's what God wants for you. The question is this: do you want it for yourself? Now, Paul's prayer takes it a step further and reveals something else God wants you to have.

YOU CAN EXPERIENCE GOD.

"I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms." (Eph 1:18-19 NLT) Paul might just as well have used the word "experience" as "understand" in that verse: "I also pray that you will experience the incredible greatness of God's power." That's really what he means there. He didn't want those Christians living in and around Ephesus to have just some great information about God, or have an intellectual appreciation for God or a kind of academic acquaintance with God. He wanted them – and us – to know and understand God on an every day, experiential level.

When Paul mentions power there in v. 18-19 – God's power – he's got in mind the present, the "right now" – whatever is happening in your life today. I'm very glad that God wants me to experience His power in my daily life! I already know more about God intellectually than I can ever put into practice. I've studied the Bible for years. I've read many books about God. I don't really need more information about God. But I very much need to experience more of His power in my life today, tomorrow and then the day after that! What about you? I need His forgiveness for my sin. I need His strength in my weakness. I need Him to give me an attitude adjustment several times a day. I need His perspective on my troubles and problems. More than anything else, I need God's power to live from His perspective every moment of every day. When you truly know God, you experience Him. And you experience God when for some reason you run into His power and you're forever changed by it and through it.

In trying to communicate to us what he means by God's power, Paul uses about every available Greek word he can in v. 19-20. I like the Amplified Version of those verses which say, "And [so that you can know and understand] what is the immeasurable *and* unlimited *and* surpassing greatness of His power in *and* for us who believe, as demonstrated in the working of His mighty strength, which He

exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead....” (Eph 1:19-20 AV) It’s as if Paul pulled a Greek thesaurus off the shelf in the prison library where he was being kept at this time and looked up every word associated with power so he could stick it in these verses. He uses the word “dunamis” which is the power to accomplish something that’s just gotten started. He uses “energia” which means just sheer, brute strength or power. He uses “kratos” which is the power to overcome any obstacle. He uses “ischus” which refers to the actual use of power. They’re all tumbled together! Bible scholars are at a loss to explain exactly how Paul intended all those words about power to fit together.

What is clear is that Paul wants you and me to understand the incredible power that belongs to God and His longing that we experience it. It’s the very same power that God the Father used to raise Jesus from the dead. In other words, God wants to give you that kind of power to live out your life today. And the fact that the risen Jesus is now enthroned as the supreme authority in the universe is proof that God has that kind of power. “... This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ” (Eph 1:19-22 NLT) Do you see Paul’s line of thought there? Truly knowing God is experiencing God. Experiencing God is experiencing His power in your daily life. What kind of power does God have? Enough power to raise Jesus from the dead and put Him in charge of the entire universe. Now, that power is available to you and me.

So what? Well, here’s one “so what”? Painful experiences in our past have an incredible and lingering power over us in the present. We hear and read so much these days about dysfunctional families, for instance – families where parents were alcoholic or wives and kids suffered abuse of some kind – physical, sexual, emotional abuse. Or perhaps there was emotional deprivation of some kind or terrible domination/control issues. The wounds in your past and mine can involve other kinds of unresolved pain: divorce, the death of a child, infidelity in your marriage, a health scare, or some close brush with death yourself – just any kind of traumatic, overwhelming hurt, loss or defeat. We are discovering the incredible power of these negative events in our past to disrupt our lives today and tomorrow. Many of us here today could readily admit to the reality of these experience and events in our past and their continuing power in our lives today.

Doesn’t godly counseling help? Yes. What about support groups and recovering groups? Sure, they can help, too. But, ultimately, it’s the power of God experienced that can heal best the emotional and spiritual scars in your past and mine. How do I know that? The Bible tells me so! It says here, “Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ....” (Eph 1:21-22 NLT) Yes, there are many things in this world that have great evil power and influence, but they are nothing before the power of Almighty

God. The Bible tells me that when Jesus died on the cross, I died with Him spiritually. When He was buried, I was buried with Him spiritually. And when He rose from the dead, I rose with Him spiritually. Therefore, there is nothing in this life – past, present or future – that must control me, define me, or dominate me. I have died and risen again with Jesus and God's power is at my disposal.

If all things have been put under Jesus' feet and you are in Christ, then all things have been placed under your feet as well: any addiction, any emotional wound from your past, the pain from any kind of loss, and the damage from any kind of defeat. Of course, you will have some hard work to do to see those evil powers completely defeated in your own life. That's where godly counseling, support groups and recovery groups can be of tremendous help. But just remember where real and final victory is found. God has put all things under Jesus' feet – under His control and authority. Because you are in Christ, everything has been put under your feet as well. At the end of the day, that simply means you can live every day confidently not fearfully, joyfully not despairingly. You can acknowledge the wounds and scars in your life, but not be controlled and dominated by them. You and I can learn how to access and experience God's mighty power each and every day. That's one way you can both know and experience God. And it happens because of Jesus, in Jesus and through Jesus.

There's a story about a man who lived in Italy centuries ago who was an unbeliever and completely against Christianity, but a little afraid of it too. Of course, he eventually died and was buried. Before he died, however, he made arrangements to have a huge stone slab put over his grave so he could not be raised from the dead in case there is a resurrection from the dead as the Bible says there surely will be one day. He had inscriptions put all over this stone slab saying, "I do not want to be raised from the dead. I don't believe in it." Evidently, when he was buried, an acorn must have fallen into the grave. Why? Because many years later now the acorn had grown up through the grave and split that stone slab into pieces. If you visit that grave in Italy today, it now has a tall towering oak tree growing right up through the middle of it. Amazing! Now let me ask you a question. If an acorn, which has the power of biological life in it, can split open a solid stone slab of that magnitude, what can the resurrection power of God do in your life and mine? Is anything too big or impossible for the God who has that kind of power at His disposal?

The minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life. It's the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead. What are the solid, immovable stone slabs in your life? Is it a bitterness you won't let go of, a resentment you refuse to resolve, an insecurity you tolerate, a fear you allow to dominate you, a self-doubt that has you by the throat, a loss that you allow to defeat you? Those things can be split and rolled off. The more you know and understand God through Jesus, the more you experience the power of the resurrection. You can understand God. You can experience God. You are a child of the one true King.