



Week 2: God's Wish For You

Ephesians 1:15-23

GOAL:

To desire to—and to actually come to—know God better.

CHECKLIST

- Reach out individually to anyone who did not attend last week. Let them know that you missed them and would love to see them this week.
- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Finalize the date for your Grow Group Prayer Night and send the date to Amy.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members (please include their names and contact info in the meeting notes section). Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Jesus, we praise you as the one who died and was raised for us, and now you are seated at God's right hand in all power and authority. And yet, we stand in awe that you desire for us to know you personally, experientially, and intimately. We thank you, Lord, that you are faithful to answer when we call, and that you desire to make yourself known to us. We confess the ways we have allowed distractions to pull us away from you. We ask that you would draw us closer to you. Help us to know you better—to experience more of your presence, to understand more deeply the richness of your love, and to walk in the fullness of your truth. Give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened to know you in a deeper way. Help us to grow in intimacy with you, not just in knowledge but in relationship, so that we may walk more faithfully with you each day. In the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE, & PRAY

Welcome and introduce anyone who is new this week. Try out this fun idea for getting to know your group better!

- Give each person a piece of paper and a pen.
- Ask them to write in each of the four corners their favorite snack, book, movie, and candy.
- Then ask them to add one fun fact about themselves in the center.
- Crumple the paper into a ball, close your eyes, and (gently) throw it across the room.
- Have everybody pick one up. Take turns reading them out loud and guessing whose it is.

Decide on a date in October or early November for your Grow Group Prayer Night. Be sure everyone marks this date on their calendars. Email Amy with your date also. (Thanks!)

Invite people to share praises and prayer requests. Open the group in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through God's Word, and asking God to transform our lives through our study and conversation together, and lifting up any requests that were shared.

DISCUSS

- Share about someone you've come to know better over time (friend, family member, mentor). How did knowing them more deeply change your relationship with them?

Read Ephesians 1:15-23.

- Paul asks that the Ephesian believers may know God better. What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God? What do you think it means to "know God better"?

Leaders: *Having just read through Paul's entire prayer, we are reminded of God's power and authority. With that in mind, Paul's claim here is remarkable – that the God of the universe desires that we know him – increasingly, personally, and experientially. This is intimate, transformative knowledge, not just head knowledge. Paul's prayer is not merely that we have more answers, but that we know God better.*

It's like the difference between being a baseball fanatic and a baseball player. You may know all the stats. You may know about all the greats like Jackie Robinson and Babe Ruth. But none of those things will do you a lot of good when you stand at home plate and the pitcher winds up a fastball. Knowing stats is very different from knowing the feel of holding a bat correctly and the power of a good swing.

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Many of us grew up thinking, or may still feel, that the goal of Bible study is to know more about God. We participated in Bible Drill; we learned all the Old Testament heroes; we memorized books of the Bible. These are worthwhile efforts, but not because they add to our wealth of knowledge ABOUT God. The true value does not lie in being able to articulately answer people's questions. The primary reason to know and study God's Word is because it reveals to us who God is. It invites us to know God better. It draws us into a personal relationship with him.

In the Old Testament, many times God seemed very distant from his people, and they were often afraid of him. But Jesus reveals to us a different story. Jesus gives us a deeper understanding of who God is, and how God truly desires for us to know him. Consider these Scriptures:

- *John 1:18 "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."*
- *Colossians 2:9 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."*
- *John 14:8-9a "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'"*
- *John 17:3 "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

So when Paul prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better," he is praying that we would see God the Father as revealed in Jesus Christ, and come to know him relationally and experientially.

- *Pastor John asked us a provocative question: "Is knowing Jesus better your highest ambition in life?" What would life look like if that were your #1 ambition? Of all the things we could have as our highest ambition, why should this be the one? How would that impact your work life? Your family life?*

Leaders: *If the previous question made us think, this question is designed to challenge us and move us closer to action (where we're headed in the next question). Allow your group to do some self-evaluation here. There are a lot of other things we might strive for: financial security, comfort, social status, and more. Knowing Jesus better doesn't guarantee any of those things. How might our lives be different if knowing Jesus were our highest priority?*

One impact we would see is deepening intimacy in our relationship with God. As we know God better, we become more aware of His presence and work in our lives. Think about a relationship with a close friend or spouse. The more time you spend together, the more you understand each other's heart, desires, and values.

Another impact is life transformation. Knowing God changes us. As we see more of his character—his love, holiness, justice, and mercy—we are transformed to reflect him in our lives. As 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his

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image..." Remember, spiritual growth is not just about external behavior modification but genuine internal transformation that comes from knowing God deeply.

And the benefits extend beyond our own personal lives. We know that a connection with Jesus deepens and enhances our connection with others. We see the way that Jesus has graciously dealt with us, and that gives us more patience, compassion, and generosity toward others as well. We truly desire for them to receive the abundant spiritual blessings that come from knowing Jesus, whether they experience those blessings through their interactions with us, or—even better—they come to better know Jesus personally themselves.

It reads like a sudden cascade of waterfalls!

The NIV translation covers up the word play a little bit in verse 3. Paul opens by saying, in a more literal sense, "Blessed be God for blessing us with spiritual blessings!" What are "spiritual blessings" anyway? Simply put, they are all the gifts that God has given to enable life with God. The phrase "in the heavenly realms" does not mean that we only experience these in heaven. Paul is not describing a location but a spiritual reality in the here and now – God's world in which believers have a share – a larger reality where Christ is already Lord and his followers receive their identity and resources from a higher or larger realm.

And don't forget to notice that these are all spiritual blessings IN CHRIST. Paul uses this phrase or related phrases MANY times. You will notice well over a dozen references to Christ in these verses. You might invite your group to notice how often this occurs.

- What sometimes stands in the way of that? What are some practical ways we can grow in knowing God beyond just intellectual knowledge? How might prayer, study, and Christian community help in this process? How does the Holy Spirit help us?

Leaders: The word for "know" (Greek: *epignosis*) implies a deep, intimate, and experiential knowledge, rather than superficial or theoretical understanding. So knowing God better involves growing in relationship with him, not merely gaining more information. In fact, Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18 that the "eyes of your heart may be enlightened." Whereas we think of knowledge centered in our heads, in the Hebrew Bible the heart was considered the source of knowledge. So while we think of knowledge as amassing facts and intellectual understanding, the biblical imagery here connotes inner spiritual development and growth.

In today's culture, there are so many barriers that keep us from knowing God better:

- *Distractions:* The busyness of life can hinder our relationship with God.
- *Self-Sufficiency:* Relying on our own wisdom or understanding, rather than seeking God's wisdom.
- *Sin and Distance:* Sin can obscure our view of God and make us less sensitive to his Spirit.

Encourage your group to share from their own personal experience what might be hindering them from knowing God more deeply. Invite them to reflect on personal obstacles in their lives.

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Next, move toward practical application. Knowing Jesus isn't a one-time thing that happens when we first give our lives to him. As Pastor John said in his sermon, "Coming to know Christ isn't an event, it's a process." So brainstorm with your group some practical steps to knowing God better. Here are a few ideas:

- *Pray for wisdom and revelation: Like Paul prayed, we should continually ask God for wisdom and revelation to know Him better. James 1:5: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."*
- *Study of Scripture: God reveals himself through his Word. Encourage the group to spend time regularly reading and meditating on Scripture. Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."*
- *Obedience and Application: Knowing God is not just about understanding but living out his truths in everyday life. John 14:21: "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me...and I too will love them and show myself to them."*

Encourage the group to commit to a specific action or habit that will help them grow in their knowledge of God—whether through prayer, study, or serving others. Remind them that they have the gift of the Holy Spirit to help, just like turning on a light for us so we see who God is and come to know him. And then, together as a group, as Hebrews 10:24 says, "consider how we may spur one another on..." Ask the group to commit to supporting and encouraging one another regularly as they take these specific actions to grow in knowing God better.

- How has your relationship with God deepened over time? Share a time when you felt like you grew in your understanding or experience of him.

Leaders: *This is an opportunity for group members to share personal testimony. At the beginning of your semester together, sharing personally will help your members deepen their trust and friendships with one another. It will also set the stage for greater transparency and openness with one another in future conversations this semester. So take the lead and be ready to "prime the pump" by sharing from your own experience first. As the leader goes, so the group will follow!*

- Pastor John used gymnastics to illustrate how the head and body are connected. If verse 22 says that Christ is the head and we, the church, are the body, what does that say about how we are to remain connected? How does this inform and impact our understanding of the church's role and purpose in the world today?

Leaders: *The first step in fulfilling the incredible purpose God has for us is knowing him better. It's how we become who we're meant to be. And it's how we learn to do the things we're meant to do.*

A gymnast learns through years of training how to have his/her body obey the mind and execute a flip or stunt. In the same way, as we come to know God more fully over time, the Spirit helps us to learn to do God's will.

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This takes regular, intentional work. Just as you grow a human relationship by spending time together, observing the other person, talking together, and listening well, knowing Jesus requires that same kind of investment.

Remember John's illustration from his September 8 sermon about soldiers needing to know how to fire their rifle before they find themselves on the battlefield in the heat of conflict? As we get to know God better over time, we become better prepared to do the things God desires. Then when we find ourselves in challenging times, we more naturally respond in the way of Jesus because it has become a part of who we are and what we do.

PRAY

- Begin your group's time of prayer with some time for silent reflection and confession about whether following Jesus is really your highest ambition. Ask the Lord to reveal where your highest ambition truly lies.
- Next, break into groups of three or four. Encourage them to share how the group can pray for them as they grow in knowing God better. Then invite them to pray for one another. If they'd like, they can pray the words of Ephesians 1:17-19 from The Message:

*I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—
to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally,
your eyes focused and clear,
so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do,
grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers,
oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—
endless energy, boundless strength!*

- Challenge them to pray that over themselves and each other each day this week.
- Then close by reading the rest of Ephesians 1 from The Message as a sort of benediction:

*All this energy issues from Christ:
God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven,
in charge of running the universe,
everything from galaxies to governments,
no name and no power exempt from his rule.
And not just for the time being, but forever.
He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything.
At the center of all this, Christ rules the church.
The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world;
the world is peripheral to the church.
The church is Christ's body,
in which he speaks and acts,
by which he fills everything with his presence.*

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