

# The Prison Letters...

## Ephesians 1:15-23 LIFE LESSON

Today we're finishing chapter one of Ephesians, and for those who are new, Paul was in a hard season of life, but knew it was God's calling. Therefore, he was willing to use his prison years as a time to serve God and others. For these same reasons, we all should consider our attitudes when experiencing something hard, especially when we know it's a part of God's calling, and try to serve God and others in the midst of it. So with that in mind, let's continue on with what Paul wrote from jail...

📖 **Ephesians 1:15-17 (NLT)** *Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.*

- ➔ **Clearly the people of Ephesus had a reputation for certain things. What were they?**
- ➔ **Do you think our church has this reputation? If not, what do you think our reputation is?**

Paul didn't have a lot of distractions while in prison, so the idea of him being in constant prayer isn't hard to imagine. And considering his religious past, it's not hard to imagine his dedication either. However, it's a pleasant surprise to see the dedication and reputation of the people of Ephesus. Clearly they were known for their strong faith in Christ and their love for God's people everywhere. But even so, the one thing Paul prayed for constantly, was that they would grow in their knowledge of God through spiritual wisdom and insight. So in other words, having amazing faith and love towards other believers wasn't all God wanted when it came to a demonstration of their lives. He also wanted to give them knowledge, and there are two ways for us to gain this knowledge. The first way is through reading and studying the Bible. In fact, look what Paul said to Timothy about this...

📖 **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)** *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.*

- ➔ **In your opinion, based on what you know of the Bible, what do you feel God has prepared you for in terms of "good works"? Or what is a "good work" you could do for God or others, based on what you already know of the Bible?**

We should always be learning the Bible. However, during the early days of the church, not everyone had access to the scriptures, so the only way to develop their relationship with God was through the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ. And if you remember what Paul said earlier in this chapter, the Holy Spirit is given to us when

we first believed in God (Ehp 1:13). But just because we've been given the Spirit of God, that doesn't mean we actually know God yet. In fact, let's look at what Peter wrote to all the churches (including Ephesus) about the importance of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives, but how we must also put in the work to grow in our knowledge of God...

➔ **2 Peter 1:3-8 (NLT)** *By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires. In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

➔ **Based on what Peter said, what specific thing do you need to grow in so that you'll be more productive and useful to God?**

When Paul was constantly praying for the people of the churches while in prison, his prayer wasn't just that their faith and love for others would remain strong, Paul was also praying for their knowledge of God to grow. Or praying that everyone in the church would see how their moral excellence, their patience endurance, or their self control, could impact their usefulness to God. And that's not all Paul was praying for...

📖 **Ephesians 1:18 (NCV)** *I pray also that you will have greater understanding in your heart so you will know the hope to which he has called us and that you will know how rich and glorious are the blessings God has promised his holy people.*

➔ **Would you say you're hopeful? Why or why not?**

With a greater understanding or knowledge of God, one of the things that should be present in our lives is a "recalibrated hope". Meaning, Paul wasn't promoting the hope that compels us to buy a lottery ticket, or to gamble. Paul was talking about our hope in the blessings God has planned for us in heaven, or to the things awaiting us in heaven. In fact, let's look at what the author of the book of Hebrews said about this hope...

📖 **Hebrews 6:18-20 (NLT)** *So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner*

*sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.*

➔ **When it comes to heaven, what are some of your hopes?**

God wants us to keep our focus on the hope that lies before us in heaven, and never to place our hope in the things of this world. That's what Paul and the author of Hebrews were trying to emphasize. Now, for those unfamiliar with the Old Testament references, the High Priest alone was allowed to enter into the Temple inner sanctuary (through a massive curtain) where God's presence dwelt. Or metaphorically, into Heaven. And furthermore, he was only allowed to enter through this curtain into the most Holy sanctuary once a year. And before doing so, he had to go through an extensive purification process to ensure he was cleansed of all sin. And according to Jewish commentaries, every High Priest had a rope tied around his ankle prior to passing through this curtain into the most Holy place so that if for some reason he was killed on the spot, his body could be removed without anyone being at risk of passing through the curtain to retrieve him. So what the author of Hebrews was essentially saying, was that Jesus had the power to walk through that curtain into God's presence, but that Jesus will lead us through that curtain into God's presence as well. Or metaphorically speaking, into heaven where all our hopes will be met. And speaking of God's mighty power, that is exactly what Paul went on to mention next...

📖 **Ephesians 1:19-20 (NLT)** *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.*

➔ **Describe what you would consider to be the most powerful way God has moved in your life?**

When our knowledge of God increases, our usefulness to God will begin to increase as well. And the way our knowledge of God increases is through the combination of spending time with the Holy Spirit, and by reading and studying the scriptures He inspired. As we do that, God will start to reveal how our moral excellence needs to change, or our patient endurance needs to grow, or how our self-control needs to be stronger. But there was one more thing Paul mentioned to the church about this power of God before the close of this first chapter...

📖 **Ephesians 1:21-23 (NLT)** *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 and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.*

➔ ***In your opinion, what are some ways a church as a whole should benefit from Christ's power? Or what do you think a church that is operating with God's power should look like?***

Paul was clearly a leader in the church, but sat in a prison with very little freedom. Even so, he attempted to convince everyone that God's power was for their benefit, and for ours. So from this we can learn two very important things about Paul's theology concerning the church. The first being, Paul believed all of us together are the beneficiaries of God's unmatched power, but clearly that didn't mean personal freedoms from suffering, or from persecution, or from death. Which is consistent with what Jesus taught His followers...

📖 **Matthew 24:9-10 (NLT)** *"Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers. And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other."*

➔ ***Do you believe in our culture that hatred or persecution should be expected for all followers of Jesus? Or do you believe a person can be bold in their faith and still avoid those things? Why, or why not?***

The next thing we can learn about Paul's theology, is that this power of God is specifically reserved for the benefit of the church, or is spread out amongst all of us so that the power of the church is most felt when everyone joins together. Meaning, the more you and I attempt to work together in harmony, the more power God is able to unleash within us as a church. So to help us stay focused on harmony this week as the "body" of Christ, all of us should meditate as much as possible on what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth...

## **MEMORY PASSAGE FOR THE WEEK**

*Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.*

**1 Corinthians 12:20-27 (NLT)**

# EPHESIANS 1:15-23

**LESSON GOAL:** Introduce kids to Paul and his writings to the Ephesians from prison.

## **MEMORY VERSE:**

'By using Scripture, the servant of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing.' | **2 TIMOTHY 3:17 NIRV**

## **PAUL RECOGNIZES WHAT THE EPHESIANS ARE DOING WELL**

The next section of Ephesians Chapter 1 begins with Paul acknowledging the things he has heard that the Ephesians are doing well, and his ongoing prayers for them.

'I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus. I have also heard about your love for all God's people. That is why I have not stopped thanking God for you. I always remember you in my prayers. I pray to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the glorious Father. I keep asking him to give you the wisdom and understanding that come from the Holy Spirit. I want you to know God better.'  
| **EPHESIANS 1:15-17 NIRV**

Paul praises them for their faith in Jesus and their love for everyone. But Paul knows, maybe better than many others, how important it is to continue to study and learn from God's word. He asks God to give them more wisdom and understanding (through the Holy Spirit). Just because their doing well at following Jesus now, doesn't mean they've know all

there is to know and can just stop reading or learning. In fact, this isn't the only time that Paul encourages followers of Jesus to study and learn God's word. We should continue to study and refer to the Bible throughout our whole life - whether we're doing well or struggling.

'God has breathed life into all Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, the servant of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing.' | **2**

**TIMOTHY 3:16-17 NIRV**

## **PRAYERS FOR HOPE**

Paul didn't just want the believers to know God's word, his prayer for them was that they would understand it and apply it in their everyday lives, so they could experience the hope in every situation that can only come from God.

'I pray that you may understand more clearly. Then you will know the hope God has chosen you to receive. You will know that what God will give his holy people is rich and glorious.' | **EPHESIANS 1:18 NIRV**

Hope is one of God's gifts to us! When we study God's word, we get to know him better and understand his plans for us and we start to understand just how much he loves us and how much we have to look forward to when we get to heaven! No matter what trouble we experience before we get to heaven, we hope for the wonderful things God has waiting for us in heaven.

'When God made his promise, he gave his word. He did this so we would have good reason not to give up. Instead, we have run to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope is set before us in God's promise. So God made his promise and gave his word. These two things can't change. He couldn't lie about them.' | **HEBREWS 6:18 NIRV**

So, Paul started his letter to the Ephesians by recognizing what they were doing well, and explaining how he's been praying for them to continue to grow - in their knowledge and understanding, so they can experience the hope that God has given us, and finally that they would be able to grasp how incredibly powerful God is and because of our faith and believe in Jesus, we are now included in God's church, or "body," and we need to do our part to work together with the rest of God's "body" so we can let God's power shine.

'And you will know God's great power. It can't be compared with anything else. His power works for us who believe. It is the same mighty strength God showed. He showed this when he raised Christ from the dead. God seated him at his right hand in his heavenly kingdom. There Christ sits far above all who rule and have authority. He also sits far above all powers and kings. He is above every name that is appealed to in this world and in the world to come. God placed all things under Christ's rule. He appointed him to be ruler over everything for the church. The church is Christ's body and is filled by Christ. He fills everything in every way.' | **EPHESIANS 1:19-23 NIRV**

## **DISCUSSION | REVIEW**

- How do you feel when someone tells you "good job" or you get a good grade for something that you've worked really hard on?

- Does it make you want to keep working hard or keeping doing the thing that they complimented?
  - What do you think it will feel like to have the God who created the whole world, including you, say “good job”?
- Explain what “hope” means in your own words.
  - When do you feel most hopeful?
- What is one thing you learned today that you can share with a friend?