

Getting To Know God Better

Ephesians 1:15-23

The hero of my childhood was Mickey Mantle, star outfielder of the New York Yankees. I know and can read all about him as a baseball player: that he holds the record for the longest homerun, at 565 feet, which was the beginning of what we call now a “tape-measure homerun”; that he hit a total of 18 homeruns during World Series games and 536 homeruns during his career. I know that he was raised in Oklahoma, that he was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1974, and sadly, that he later became an alcoholic. He gave his life to Christ in 1995 after former teammate Bobby Richardson witnessed to him shortly before Mantle died. I can learn all of those things and much more *about* Mickey Mantle.

I never met him. I never shook his hand. I never even got to see him play, except on fuzzy television. The closest I ever came to Mickey Mantle was to serve as the pastor to a man who had been his roommate when Mantle was in the minor leagues. But I never knew Mickey Mantle himself. I never *knew him*. There’s a very big difference between knowing facts and statistics about a person’s life, even someone larger than life, and actually knowing the real person.

There are several levels in any relationship. First, we may know *about* someone. Second, we may be introduced *to* him, so we can say that we’ve met. Then as we spend time with that individual, we reach a point where we can say we *know* him. And even beyond that, there is so much more to know about any person on a deeply personal level. The same thing is true when we talk about our knowing God. Do we know Him personally, or do we only know facts about Him?

There’s a big difference! As simple as that sounds, we discover that it was a key point Paul was making as we continue our tour of the Grand Canyon of Scripture. Let’s review just a moment. Paul has been writing about our salvation, and he pens some of the loftiest words ever written on that subject. Here in chapter one, in verses 3-6, he tells us that the Father planned our salvation. In verses 7-12, we learn that the Son paid for our salvation, and in verses 13-14, the Holy Spirit sealed our salvation.

Because all of that is true, those of us who are in Christ are the recipients of some incredible blessings. These blessings come in spite of the fact that we are sinners and do not deserve them—part of which makes them so incredible! But because

this is our Heavenly Father who is arranging all of this for us, there is so much more than can be summarized in human language.

Let's say that over here is a room filled with all kinds of unimaginable treasures. I say to you that everything in that room belongs to you, that you have only to go in and possess the treasures that are there. What good would it do you to merely stand on the threshold and look inside? You know about the riches inside that room. You can see them and marvel at their beauty. And you might even say, "I'm rich beyond my wildest dreams!" But there has to be more to being rich than merely saying that you own those things, right? If you never take possession of them, if you never in fact enter the room and pick those items up, you never really own them.

Being saved is like that. When you and I surrender our lives to Christ, that is just the beginning. It's just getting us in the door to the treasure room when there are so many more blessings further in. Paul wrote in verse 17, *"I keep asking 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 God better."* He is saying to them, "I've just given you some facts about God. Now I want you to know Him better. I'm praying that the same Spirit Who has sealed your salvation will now pull the veil back and show you some pretty amazing things about God, and when you see those things, you will know Him better than ever."

Whether or not we know God is vitally important! Each of us was created to know Him, not just know about Him. God Himself emphasized the importance in these words to Jeremiah: *"This is what the Lord says: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: **that he understands and knows me**, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord"* (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Before we go further, let's look at one other verse of Scripture which will shed some major light on our passage today. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 13:12. Here is what we read there: *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*

Take a closer look at the phrase *"Now I know in part; then I shall know fully."* Paul uses two different words there for "know." When he says, *"I know in part,"* he used a word that simply means to know something—to have an intellectual

knowledge of it. But when he says, “*even as I am fully known,*” he used a word that means to know something completely, intimately, deeply. “Now I only understand it a little bit,” he says, “but then I will understand it completely.”

That second word is the one we find in Ephesians 1:17, where Paul says that he is praying that we will know God better. Do you see it now? Paul’s prayer is that once we have come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, that we move beyond basic, casual knowledge of Him, and know Him—really know Him—with a clear and precise knowledge. This is a deeper and more intimate knowledge. This is the idea of not only knowing something, but completely understanding what we know.

This is the kind of knowledge that just gets deeper and clearer as we get closer to Him. It is a kind of relationship that helps me to know God better today than I did yesterday.

Have you ever seen something from a distance, but you couldn’t quite make out what it was? As you got closer, you could see the details enough to finally know what it was. That is the concept behind this word where Paul says “*so that you may know him better.*” As we get closer and closer to God, we begin to see things and know things about Him that were previously hidden from our eyes.

Imagine that you have arrived before dawn for a tour of the Grand Canyon. Right now, everything is dark, and even though you can sense that something immense and grand and brilliantly beautiful is out there, you can’t see it. It’s too dark. If you were to walk away at that moment, you could tell all your friends, “I’ve been to the Grand Canyon!” And even though you’ve been there, your knowledge is very, very limited.

But as you stand there, gradually the sky begins to gray, and you begin to realize just how immense is this magnificence before you. As the sun continues to rise, the shadows move across the canyon, the sunlight hits the canyon walls in the distance, and it’s as if the veil has been lifted from your eyes. Now you see the Grand Canyon as you never have before, and certainly better than you did when you were standing in the dark. Now you can tell your friends, “I’ve seen the Grand Canyon!”

If you just stand there, your experience will be one you’ll never forget. But if you join one of the tours that actually go down into the Canyon, you would be able to tell your friends, “I’ve *been* to the Grand Canyon, I’ve *seen* the Grand Canyon, I’ve even been *down inside* the Grand Canyon!” Before you knew in part, but now you know fully. And yet, there is so much more to know!

That is what Paul was talking about in verse 18 when he added to his prayer: “*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.*” The word “enlightened” means just about what you would expect. It means to shed light on something that was not very clear before, like the sun coming up over the Grand Canyon. So Paul has expressed the burden of his prayer two different ways: to know God better, and to have the eyes of our hearts illuminated. The idea is that we would have the veil lifted, so we could understand the things of God better, and enter into a deeper, more personal, more intimate relationship with Him.

Do you want to know God better? Do you really? After hearing Paul’s heart cry, and after discovering that God really does what us to know Him, is that what you desire for yourself?

Don’t be too quick to respond, because knowing God better than we do right now can be uncomfortable. When Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne and when he realized the awesome holiness of God, his response to that deeper understanding of God was to say “*Woe to me! I am ruined!*” (Isaiah 6:5). This is a God Who is high and lifted up, a God Who is holy and in Whose presence no sin can exist. But He is also a God of righteousness, a God Who is faithful and just. There has never been any like Him, none beside Him, none above Him. But because He is a God of love and compassion and grace, ***He is also a God Who can be known.***

Knowing God in a deeper, richer way will mean that our lives will be changed. Our sins will be exposed and will need to be confessed and repented of. Our attitudes and bitterness and unforgiving spirits will be challenged so much it may even hurt. We cannot come to a deeper relationship with Almighty God and stay the way we are. Just being in His presence would require a fundamental, sweeping transformation at the core of who we are.

So are you ***sure*** you want to know God better?

I sure hope so! Jesus prayed this way just before His crucifixion: “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*” (John 17:3). So knowing God is a matter of salvation. It’s a matter of where you will spend eternity. It is certainly not something to take lightly.

But what that means is that we can know God because He wants to be known! He has revealed Himself to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus told the disciples

once, *“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well”* (John 14:7). So it is clear that if we want to know God better, we should get to know Jesus better.

It means that you and I must be closer to Him than we are right now. It means that we must deliberately take the appropriate steps to see that it happens. Getting closer to God will not happen by accident, or just because we grow older. It doesn't happen just because we come to church. It means that we have the same thirst for God that the psalmist did when he cried out, *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God”* (Psalm 42:1). It means that we invest the time and energy to get to know Him, the way we would if we wanted to get to know another person better.

It means that we adopt the attitude that we read in Philippians 3:7-8—*“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.”*

There are three specific things that Paul was praying that we might know. He told us that when we know these three things, we will know God better. They are found in the words *“hope,” “riches”* and *“power.”* We see the first of them in verse 18: *“...in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you...”* This hope is not just wishful thinking. The hope we read about in the Bible has to do with something that is going to happen in the future. The Scripture tells us here that we should understand that we have been called to a glorious future with our Heavenly Father, and that should make a big difference in the way we conduct our lives here in the meantime.

The second thing we need to know in order to know God better is also in verse 18: *“...the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”* Paul says that he wants us know what we already have, that we don't have to scratch and scrape our way through life, that we have some pretty amazing resources already at our disposal.

In 2007, a white bowl was bought at a tag sale for a mere \$3. It found a place in a family's living room, until finally, they became curious about its origin. They had it appraised, and discovered that this 5-inch bowl was 1,000 years old! There is only one like it in the world. It was appraised at between \$200,000 and \$300,000 but when it went to auction in March 2013, it sold for \$2.2 million! They had an exceptional treasure and didn't know what they had.

I don't know if we fully realize just what we have, either. We believers in Christ have some amazing treasures available for us as we face life with its difficulties and challenges.

The third thing we need to know in order to know God better is in verse 19:

"...and his incomparably great power for us who believe." This is power that cannot adequately be described. This is such an important truth that Paul used four different words for "power" in this one verse. It's not so important to what we're talking about today that we know what those words are and how different they are from one another. What is vitally important is that we understand that this power Paul is talking about is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead! The sentence in verse 19 continues into verse 20: *"...That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."*

Those are beautiful words, but what do they mean? They mean that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available for us today, every day, every second of the day—not just at Eastertime! That power saved us from our sin and gave us status in the family of God. It is power that enables us to live an abundant life, to live a life of forgiveness and joy and peace and hope and comfort—even when life hands us very unpleasant surprises. It gives us power over sin, over temptation, over distress, over difficulty, and yes, ultimately, even over death.

If we know these three things—the hope to which He has called us, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and the power at work within us—we can know God better. He has expressed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ, and has made those things available to us. They tell us what we need to know in order to know God better.

Is that what you want for yourself? You can have it, but you must take the next steps. You must make some definite decisions about what you're going to do to get to know God better. What changes will you make in your daily schedule, in your habits, in the way you think, in your social circles, in your speech?

God said through the prophet Jeremiah, *"I will give them a heart to **know** me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart"* (Jeremiah 24:7).