

Ephesians 1.15 - 23
Good Questions Have Groups Talking
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ACCOUNTABILITY

What three fellowships do we have scheduled for the next three months? Who will invite every member? Who will help invite every prospect? Who will help plan the party?

OPEN

Let's each share your name and one thing good that happened this week.

DIG

1. Verse 15. Paul knew the Ephesians well. What does he mean, "heard about. . ."

The phrase ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus could mean that Paul had heard a good report of the Ephesians' growth in the faith. It could also be a way of including the believers in the surrounding churches. Paul knew the Ephesian church well but not all the surrounding churches. Yet he may have heard a positive report of all the churches in the area, and thus he could thank God for their faith and remember them in his prayers. — Life Application New Testament Commentary.

2. Verse 16. Giving things is one of the hallmarks of Christian living. It is one of the quickest paths to joy in God. What are three things you are grateful for today?

The mind cannot actually think on two things at once. We think of what we are grateful for or we think about what we are grumpy about.

3. What are the benefits to us of developing an attitude of gratitude?

The late Cleon Lyles told of an experience that happened many years ago when he was holding a gospel meeting in a south Arkansas community. He drove out in the country to visit an elderly man. He found the man's tin-roofed shack. In the porch he could see through the window that the man was just finishing his meager meal of beans and salt pork. At that point the man bowed his head and prayed, "I thank Thee, Lawd, I have dined sufficient."

A couple of powerful lessons jump out of this story. First, that man was happy. Though I never met the gentleman, I am certain, based on his prayer, that his life was one of joy and peace. Thankfulness produces joy as surely as day follows night. It's been my observation that grateful people are giving people and giving people are happy people. Gratitude is a powerful attitude that beautifully colors all of life.

Secondly, gratitude is not based on the quantity of one's wealth. With a heart of gratitude a meal of beans and salt pork can become a royal feast. Blessings often follow gratitude rather than the reverse order. A person who is not thankful for his or her one hundred dollars most likely would not be thankful for ten million dollars. For the attitude of gratitude is a condition of heart. — Jim Howard / Bible Illustrations – Practical Bible Illustrations From Yesterday and Today.

4. How can we be grateful even when life is hard?

MATTHEW Henry, the famous Bible scholar wrote in his diary, "Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, let me be thankful that although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed." — Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking.

5. Is gratitude an emotion? When we speak of developing gratitude, are we saying we should feel a certain thing, think a certain thing, or do a certain thing?

When a little child on Christmas morning opens his first gift and finds his "most favoritest" rocket, which he has wanted for months, he does not think, Now to what end shall I feel happy and thankful? We call a person an ingrate when words of gratitude are dutifully forced instead of coming spontaneously from the heart.

When a five-year-old enters kindergarten and starts getting picked on by some second-graders and his big fourth-grade brother comes over and takes his side, he does not "decide" to feel confidence and love welling up in his little heart. He just does.

All genuine emotion is an end in itself. It is not consciously caused as a means to something else. This does not mean we cannot or should not seek to have certain feelings. We should and we can. We can put ourselves in situations where the feeling may more readily be kindled. We may indeed prize some of the results of these feelings as well as the feelings themselves. But in the moment of authentic emotion, the calculation vanishes. We are transported (perhaps only for seconds) above the reasoning work of the mind, and we experience feeling without reference to logical or practical implications.

This is what keeps worship from being "in vain." Worship is authentic when affections for God arise in the heart as an end in themselves. In worship, God is the dreaded voice on the phone. God is the island on the horizon. God is the bear and the setting sun and the "most favoritest" rocket and the mother who gave it and the big, strong fourth-grade brother.

If God's reality is displayed to us in His Word or His world and we do not then feel in our heart any grief or longing or hope or fear or awe or joy or gratitude or confidence, then we may dutifully sing and pray and recite and gesture as much as we like, but it will not be real worship. We cannot honor God if our "heart is far from him."

Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. This cannot be done by mere acts of duty. It can be done only when spontaneous affections arise in the heart. And these affections for God are an end in themselves. They are the essence of eternal worship. Saint Augustine said it like this: The highest good is "that which will leave us nothing further to seek in order to be happy, if only we make all our actions refer to it, and seek it not for the sake of something else, but for its own sake." [5] — John Piper. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*.

6. Suppose someone said he was grateful because that was his duty. It is our duty to be grateful. Is becoming grateful out of duty a good thing?

Consider the analogy of a wedding anniversary. Mine is on December 21. Suppose on this day I bring home a dozen long-stemmed roses for Noel. When she meets me at the door, I hold out the roses, and she says, "O Johnny, they're beautiful; thank you" and gives me a big hug. Then suppose I hold up my hand and say matter-of-factly, "Don't mention it; it's my duty."

What happens? Is not the exercise of duty a noble thing? Do not we honor those we dutifully serve? Not much. Not if there's no heart in it. Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms. If I am not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person, the roses do not honor her. In fact, they belittle her. They are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection. All I can muster is a calculated expression of marital duty.

Here is the way Edward John Carnell puts it:

Suppose a husband asks his wife if he must kiss her good night. Her answer is, "You must, but not that kind of a must." What she means is this: "Unless a spontaneous affection for my person motivates you, your overtures are stripped of all moral value."

The fact is, many of us have failed to see that duty toward God can never be restricted to outward action. Yes, we must worship Him. "But not that kind of must." What kind then? The kind C. S. Lewis described to Sheldon Vanauken: "It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can."

The real duty of worship is not the outward duty to say or do the liturgy. It is the inward duty, the command: "Delight yourself in the Lord"! (Psalm 37:4). "Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice!" (Psalm 32:11).

The reason this is the real duty of worship is that it honors God, while the empty performance of ritual does not. If I take my wife out for the evening on our anniversary and she asks me, "Why do you do this?" the answer that honors her most is "Because nothing makes me happier tonight than to be with you."

"It's my duty" is a dishonor to her.

"It's my joy" is an honor.

There it is! The feast of Christian Hedonism. How shall we honor God in worship? By saying, "It's my duty"? Or by saying, "It's my joy"?

Worship is a way of reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. Now we see that the mirror that catches the rays of His radiance and reflects them back in worship is the joyful heart. Another way of saying this is to say

The chief end of man is to glorify God

by

enjoying Him forever.

Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist.

7. What do we learn about the Christian life from verse 17? What is Christian living all about?

The believer must grow in his knowledge of God. To know God personally is salvation (John 17:3). To know Him increasingly is sanctification (Phil. 3:10). To know Him perfectly is glorification (1 Cor. 13:9-12). Since we are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), the better we know God, the better we know ourselves and each other. It is not enough to know God only as Saviour. We must get to know Him as Father, Friend, Guide, and the better we know Him, the more satisfying our spiritual lives will be.

A believer said to me one day after a Bible lesson, "I'm sure glad I came! You gave me two good verses to use on my wicked neighbor!" Surely there are times when we use God's Word as a sword to defeat the enemy, but that is not the primary purpose behind the writing of the Bible. As the familiar hymn puts it: "Beyond the sacred page / I seek Thee, Lord. / My spirit pants for Thee / O living Word." — The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 2.

8. How important is it that we think rightly about God? How common is it that we don't think rightly about God? How big of a deal is this?

Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.

Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, we might be able with some precision to foretell where the Church will stand tomorrow.

Lord, give Your Church and its leaders a spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we might indeed have an adequate appreciation of who You are. Amen. — Tozer on the Almighty God: A 366-Day Devotional.

9. Verse 18 speaks of the heart. What is the difference between the heart and the mind?

In most modern cultures, the **heart** is thought of as the seat of emotions and feelings. But most ancients—Hebrews, Greeks, and many others—considered the **heart** (Greek *kardia*) to be the center of knowledge, understanding, thinking, and wisdom. The New Testament also uses it in that way. The heart was considered to be the seat of the mind and will, and it could be taught what the brain could never know. Emotions and feelings were associated with the intestines, or bowels (Greek *splanchnon*; cf. [Acts 1:18](#), where the term clearly refers to physical organs, with [Col. 3:12](#); [Philem. 7, 12, 20](#); and [1 John 3:17](#), where it refers to affections and feelings). — MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Ephesians.

10. What is the difference between knowing God and knowing about God? How would you illustrate it?

Revival and blessing come to the church when we stop looking at a picture of God and look at God Himself! Revival comes when, no longer satisfied to know about a God in history, we meet the conditions of finding Him in living, personal experience.

Conversely, revival cannot come if we are far removed from God. It cannot come if, instead of hearing His voice, we are content with only an echo!

Put those deficiencies together and you have the reason why we are dissatisfied and empty. You have the reason why there is so little of vivid, vibrant joy in the things of God.

I hold fast to the opinion that our God is ever trying to reveal Himself to us. There is no way for sinful men and women to find their way into God's presence unless He reveals Himself and appears to us. I do not mean that God is trying to appear to our physical eyesight. Rather, He is trying to appear to the eye of our soul through an inner consciousness. Never apologize for your inner eyes! They are the real eyes for discerning the nature of issues important to God. — Mornings with Tozer.

11. How can we move from knowing about God to knowing God personally?

In contrast, for a Hebrew person—like Jesus—knowing something entailed experiencing it. In fact, you could not truly say you knew something unless you had dealt with it personally. The small child who had a father might not understand the various grammatical uses of the word “father,” but he would know a great deal about what it was like to have one. So it is significant that, when Jesus spoke about knowing God, He was speaking as a Hebrew. When Jesus said eternal life is knowing God—including God the Son, Jesus Christ—He did not mean that eternal life is knowing about God. He was not referring to someone who has read many books and attended numerous seminars about God. He was talking about a firsthand, experiential knowledge. We come to truly know God as we experience Him in and around our lives. Many people have grown up attending church and hearing about God all their lives, but they do not have a personal, dynamic, growing relationship with God. They never hear His voice. They have no idea what God's will is. They do not encounter His love firsthand. They have no sense of divine purpose for their lives. They may know a lot about God, but

they don't really know Him. Merely knowing about God will leave you unsatisfied. Truly knowing God only comes through experience as He reveals Himself to you through His word and as you relate to Him. Throughout the Bible, we can see that God took the initiative to disclose Himself to people through their life events. —Experiencing God by Richard Blackaby

12. What is the relationship between knowing God and knowing God's Word? Can you have one without the other?

Nikola Tesla is the scientist who invented the method of generating electricity in what we call alternating current. Many people regard him as a greater scientific genius than the better known Alexander Graham Bell.

Author Philip Yancey tells an interesting anecdote about Tesla. During storms Tesla would sit on a black mohair couch by a window. When lightning struck, he would applaud—one genius recognizing the work of another. Tesla could appreciate better than anyone the wonder of lightning because he had spent years researching electricity.

In a similar way, the more we know God and his Word, the more deeply we will applaud his mighty deeds. —750 Engaging Illustrations.

13. Who have you known that you would say of them, "They didn't just know about God; they knew God."

In *The Cure for a Troubled Heart* author and pastor Ron Mehl writes: I heard once about a dear, saintly old woman who was gradually losing her memory. Details began to blur.... Throughout her life, however, this woman had cherished and depended on the Word of God, committing to memory many verses from her worn King James Bible.

Her favorite verse had always been 2 Timothy 1:12: "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

She was finally confined to bed in a nursing home, and her family knew she would never leave alive. As they visited with her, she would still quote verses of Scripture on occasion—especially 2 Timothy 1:12. But with the passing of time, even parts of this well-loved verse began to slip away.

"I know whom I have believed," she would say. "He is able to keep... what I have committed... to him."

Her voice grew weaker. And the verse became even shorter. "What I have committed... to him."

As she was dying, her voice became so faint family members had to bend over to listen to the few whispered words on her lips. And at the end, there was only one word of her life verse left.

"Him."

She whispered it again and again as she stood on the threshold of heaven. "Him... Him... Him."

It was all that was left. It was all that was needed. — 750 Engaging Illustrations.

14. Practically speaking, what difference does knowing God personally make in our day to day lives?

Knowing God does not come through a program, a study, or a method. It is the result of a vibrant, growing, one-on-one relationship with God. Within this intimate connection, God will reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways so you can know Him in deeper and profound dimensions. As you relate to Him, God will invite you to join in His activity where He is already at work. When you obey what God tells you, He will accomplish through you things only He can do. As the Lord works in and through your life, you will come to know Him ever more closely. Experiencing God by Richard Blackaby

15. Is knowing God hard? Is it difficult to get to know God personally?

In his book *Connecting*, Larry Crabb writes:

A friend of mine was raised in an angry family. Mealtimes were either silent or sarcastically noisy. Down the street was an old-fashioned house with a big porch where a happy family lived. My friend told me that when he was about ten, he began excusing himself from his dinner table as soon as he could without being yelled at, and walking to the old-fashioned house down the street. If he arrived during dinnertime, he would crawl under the porch and just sit there, listening to the sounds of laughter.

When he told me this story, I asked him to imagine what it would have been like if the father in the house somehow knew he was huddled beneath the porch and sent his son to invite him in. I asked him to envision what it would have meant to him to accept the invitation, to sit at the table, to accidentally spill his glass of water, and hear the father roar with delight, "Get him more water! And a dry shirt! I want him to enjoy the meal!"

Crabb goes on to say, "We need to hear the Father laugh. Change depends on experiencing the character of God." — Citation: Source: Larry Crabb, *Connecting* (Word, 1997); submitted by David Slagle; Lawrenceville, Georgia /Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion - – Perfect Illustrations: For Every Topic and Occasion.

16. We speak of getting to know God. The real question is, does God want to get to know you? Does God want to be in relationship with you? How do you think most church-goers would answer this?

People do not seek God on their own initiative. God always takes the lead in pursuing a love relationship with you. This love relationship is real, personal, and extremely practical. More than anything else you might do, God wants you to love Him with your total being. He created you for that purpose. If your love relationship with Him is not close, everything else related to knowing and doing the will of God will be out of focus. When you find God is not working through your life to accomplish His purposes, focus on your love relationship with Him. God may be waiting until you respond to His loving invitation to a relationship before He works through your life to bless others. — Experiencing God by Richard Blackaby

17. What are the riches referred to in verse 18?

Paul also wants us to know our future riches. It is tempting to focus on our present need and poverty. Instead Paul challenges us to focus on what God has promised. These riches may refer to our present spiritual riches in Christ in being freed from sin and made ready for fellowship with God. They may also refer to our heavenly possession of the riches and glories of God. It's likely both aspects are meant. Such riches are part of our inheritance. — Holman New Testament Commentary – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians.

18. What is the power referred to in verse 19?

Finally, Paul prays that we might be enlightened to comprehend the magnitude of God's power which he exercised in bringing us our salvation. The power God demonstrated in raising Christ from the dead and placing him above all creation is the same power he is exercising toward us to bring about the blessings which he has promised us. Such power guarantees we will receive the hope and riches. That power is also available to us to make the hope and riches the focus of present life so that we live God's way and not the world's, seeking God's inheritance and not the world's. — Holman New Testament Commentary – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians.

19. Verse 22. Why did the Father appoint the Son to be head over all things?

By Christ's resurrection and exaltation, he is head over all things for the church. Christ fills the church and then uses the gifts he bestows to fulfill his mission—revealing himself to the world and drawing people to himself by that witness. The image of the body shows the church's unity. Each member is involved with all the others as they go about doing Christ's work on earth. We should not attempt to work, serve, or worship on our own. We need the entire body. — Life Application New Testament Commentary.

20. What do you want to take with you from today's study?

21. How can we support one another in prayer this week?