

# "What Does God Want For You?"

Ephesians 1:15-23

Series: Ephesians [#4]

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## Introduction

Question: "*What Does God Want For You?*" I've never tried this question out on the streets, but I'm sure if I did there would be a host of different answers. We know from surveys that many people would say, "To be happy. God wants me to be happy." Others would tell us, "I don't know," while some would say, "I don't believe in God." Then there are those who would say, "God wants to take away my fun and freedom and replace it with a long list of dull, stupid rules."

If we ask Christians, or people who go to church, we might hear things such as,

- "to receive Christ and eternal life;"
- "to become more like Christ;"
- "to be more faithful, serve Him more faithfully."
- And there are always some who say, "To send me to some African jungle with bugs, snakes, diseases, no TV, no internet, no electricity."

"*What does God want for you?*" The Bible shows us many things God wants for us. We see some of them in the verses before us this morning. We are looking at the first of Paul's two prayers in this letter. Both of them express what God wants for believers. So, let's get going and explore what God wants for us.

## Who Is Included?

Every child of God—based on true faith in Jesus Christ—is included.

"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." (15-16)

The opening phrase, "For this reason," tells us this prayer flows from the great blessings believers have received in Christ that we saw in verses 3-14. It is because we have all these spiritual blessings, that Paul prays this prayer.

"Who is he praying for?" "Who is included?" Everyone with "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." First of all, of course, those at Ephesus. Even though he had ministered there for three years, Paul had not been there for some time. The news he received from them undoubtedly included reports of new believers. And, then, it extends to all believers—those in the rest of the churches in Asia Minor who also read this letter, and down to us here today.

The faith Paul speaks of is more than knowing and agreeing that something is true. You can know the Bible backwards and forwards. You can agree that it is all true. You can go to church, go through all the services and ceremonies, and be involved. You can know you are a sinner and that you can't save yourself. All of this, and still not *truly believe*, still not have *true faith*.

True faith means ...

- coming to the point of making a conscious decision to put yourself in Jesus' hands;
- to let go of trusting in yourself, your best intentions and motives;
- to let go of trusting in religion and the church;
- to let go of trusting in anything else but Jesus;
- to trust all that you are and hope to be, all that you have and hope to have to Jesus—Jesus, the One who took your sin upon Himself. Jesus, the only way to life with God now and forever.

If you have made that forever–life–changing decision and know Christ, this prayer and its truth expresses what God wants for you.

Paul doesn't stop there, he includes something else. It includes every child of God—demonstrated by true love for other believers.

“For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints.” (15)

While true faith is the *basis* for being a child of God, true love for other believers is a key, essential *evidence* of true faith. This love is not a requirement for entering a saving relationship with God, but an evidence of having entered it.

The term “*love*” has the idea of giving rather than getting; of seeking God's best, God's will for the other person. The New Testament repeatedly identifies this kind of love for other believers as a key evidence of true faith.

- Jesus, John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
- The apostle John, 1 John 4:7-8, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”
- Earlier in that same letter he wrote, “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” (3:18)

In spite of this clear, consistent truth, all too often this love is “*missing in action*” among believers. Sadly, Christians sometimes are known more for their inability to get along rather than their love for each other.

Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) was not known for faith. In his later years after financial and family losses, his writing moved from charming humor to pessimism, bitter sarcasm and scepticism for any kind of religious faith. For example, he wrote, “I built a cage and in it I put a dog and a cat. After a little training I got the dog and cat to the point where they lived peaceably together. Then I introduced a pig, goat, a kangaroo, some birds, and a monkey. And after a few adjustments, they learned to live in harmony together.

“So encouraged was I by such successes that I added an Irish Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Jew, a Muslim from Turkestan, and a Buddhist from China, along with a Baptist missionary that I captured on the same trip. And in a very short while there wasn’t a single living thing left in the cage!”

Being committed to giving, to God’s best for other believers in word, actions and truth is an *evidence* of true faith. That does not mean agreeing with every believer on all points of doctrine and practice. Nor does it mean compromising the truth. Nor yet that every Christian you meet is someone who will or should become a close friend. It *does* mean being committed to giving in word and action, to speaking and working for God’s best in and for all other believers.

Paul’s prayer, these desires of God, are for every person who has true faith in God evidenced by love for other believers.

### **What Is Included?**

First, A rich *personal* knowledge of God.

“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

(17)

There are two basic words for *knowledge* in the New Testament. One emphasizes knowledge gained by personal interaction, by experience. That is the one here in verse 17. God wants you to have a very personal and practical knowledge or understanding of Him gained through your daily experiences.

Most of us have learned how to ride a bike. I doubt that any of us took a course that explained the theory and importance of balance, the role and mechanics of peddling, steering and braking, complete with an interactive video. We may have had help and instruction, but we learned by getting on a bike and trying to balance, peddle, steer and brake. This *knowledge* of riding a bike is personal, practical, *hands-on*, and sometimes comes with a few falls, scratches and even tears.

God wants everyone of His children to have a practical and personal knowledge of who He is and what He is like.

While our English versions do not reflect it, the word *knowledge* appears in an intensive form here. That is, to know exactly, completely, thoroughly. God wants us to have a *full, rich* knowledge of Himself. The same word and the same idea is found in Colossians. 1:9-10,

“... we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the *knowledge* of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the *knowledge* of God.”

This knowledge comes as we receive and grow in what Paul describes here as “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation...” First, if you are reading in the NIV, it’s reading is different than most English versions with that “God ... may give you *the Spirit* [capital “S”] of wisdom and revelation...” The NIV editors took “spirit” as referring to the Holy Spirit rather than to us.

Now we know that all believers receive the Holy Spirit at the time they believe. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:9, “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [i.e., the Holy Spirit], he does not belong to Him.” The question here is whether Paul is referring to *the Holy Spirit* performing a specific ministry, or a “*spirit*,” a “spiritual sense” or ability we have from God.

The New Testament speaks of ...

- “the spirit of slavery” and “of adoption” (Romans 8:15);
- “a spirit of gentleness” (1 Corinthians 4:21; Galatians 6:1) and the “spirit of faith” (2 Corinthians 4:13); and,
- “a spirit of [fear]” (2 Timothy 1:7).

It is that sense we find here—“a spirit of wisdom and revelation.” “A spirit of wisdom.” Wisdom, remember, is the ability to see things as they really are; to put the pieces together correctly. God promises us the wisdom we need for life, and to give it to us generously. This applies not only to the questions and problems, tragedies and triumphs of life, but also to *knowing God* Himself.

“A spirit of revelation.” The word “*revelation*” simply means to uncover, disclose, reveal something we have not known. Here it refers to God giving us a *spirit*, a basic *spiritual sense and ability* so that we can receive His truth, which is foreign to our natural ability. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:14,

“...a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

The idea then is that God will remove our “*spiritual blinders*,” or remove our “*spiritual cataracts*” so we can see Him clearly, see what He is like, see how He is working.

This is what God wants for you, “*A rich personal knowledge of Himself.*”

Then there is also a rich *certain* knowledge of God.

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” (18-19a)

Paul uses the second major N.T. word for *knowledge* here in verse 18. It emphasises knowledge that is established and certain. Knowledge that is objective, rather than subjective. The kind of knowledge that God gives us in the Bible.

He prays that we are to be enlightened in three things. First, the hope of God’s calling of us. What God’s calling means for our future, for eternity. Peter wrote,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to *a living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

1 Peter 1:3-5

Jude 24 tells us God “... is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you *stand* in the presence of His glory *blameless with great joy*...”

There is a practical benefit for here and now. 1 John 3:3 tells us, is that “everyone who has this *hope* fixed on Him [Christ] purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Purity here and now as well as certainty for all of life and eternity!

Secondly, Paul prays that we will be enlightened in the riches of the glory to God in us. Admittedly, this can be difficult for us to see. After all, we know God is sovereign and perfect. He needs nothing, He needs no one outside of Himself. Yet, through being redeemed by Jesus Christ, we are God’s inheritance and bring an immeasurable wealth of glory to Him.

In practical terms, to do our part in this, Peter tells us,

“Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in *all things* God may be *glorified* through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.” (1 Peter 4:11)

Or, as Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, "...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Thirdly, Paul prays that we will be enlightened in the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us—i.e., in and through us. Paul reminds us how great it is in the last, largest section of this brief prayer,

"These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (19b-23)

God wants us to be open to this same miraculous, unlimited power, to work in us and through us!

This is what God wants for you and me. A rich *certain* knowledge of Him in our *hope*, in the *riches of the glory to God in us*, and in *God's great power* in and through us. It's great! But, you may ask ...

### **How Is This Possible?**

First, note that the means is God's grace.

" that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..." (17-18a)

Note two phrases:

- Verse 17, God "may give you."
- And, verse 18, the eyes of your heart "*may be* enlightened"

Both phrases point out that all of this is God's gift — given as He continues to freely, lavishly pour out His grace to us. It is possible for you and me, for every believer, because it does not depend on our performance, but on God's marvelous grace.

Then, note that the guarantee is God's all-powerful strength. We read 19-23 just a few moments ago. In God's infinite power, He ...

- raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to heaven;
- in this power Jesus stands far above all others;
- by this power Jesus rules over His church, over all.

By this *same power*, God is not only willing and able, but *will* give you all these things. *His power guarantees it.*

Our personal responsibility is to ask God. Just as Paul asked God for these things in his prayers for the Ephesian believers, we are to ask God in faith. It sounds so simple ... and it is. To some it is too simple. So they add lists of requirements and duties, responsibilities and accomplishments; and so build ladders that are taller than they or anyone else can climb.

For all of us, it is so basic that at times we can lose our focus, and forget to ask God. The concept is so “*simple*” that it is easy to overlook. *So it is* with our responsibility — “*ask God!*”

## **Conclusion.**

“*What does God want for you?*”

- A rich *personal* knowledge of Him;
- A rich *certain* knowledge of Him.

This is God’s desire which can be your reality because ...

- it is provided by God’s grace;
- it is guaranteed by God’s all-powerful strength;
- it is received by those who ask in faith.

There are some things we pray for that God, in His perfect wisdom and love, does not give us. But this full, rich personal and certain knowledge of God is *not* one of those things!

As you come to God in these next moments,

- Thank Him that His plans for you are for “welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)
- Pray the words of verses 17-19, personalizing them, as your prayer (and, yes, it is okay to look at and read them as you pray).
- Determine to make the substance of this prayer part of your regular prayer life.

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