Week 11: “The Power to Know” (Eph. 1:15-23)

 After a brief hiatus, we are back in the book of Ephesians. So if you have your Bibles, you can open them to Ephesians chapter 1. If you will recall, we ended off in 1:14, with Paul’s explanation that when a person puts their faith in Jesus, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We believe that every true believer actually has the Holy Spirit living inside of them. And we learned that this Holy Spirit living in us is God’s seal that guarantees that we will have everything we need to persevere to the end to receive the gift of eternal life.

 But we believe that the Spirit does more for us in this life than just preserve us for the next one. The Spirit of God is extremely powerful, according to the Bible. The Bible says that the Spirit was the divine force that created the universe. The Spirit was what made Samson the strong-man mighty. The Bible says that the Spirit inside of David was what gave him both the courage and the skill to fell Goliath. The Spirit was what allowed the Bible prophets to predict the future. And of utmost importance to us, the passage we are looking at today says that the Spirit is the power that enabled Jesus to raise himself from the dead. But according to today’s passage, Paul is praying for the Spirit to do something else for us. I will try to read the passage in a way that points out what. So let’s pray, and then we will pick up in v. 15…

(PRAY)

(READ Eph. 1:15-23)

 So Paul is praying with all his might that every Christian will have the Holy Spirit in them, which is the same mighty strength that raised Jesus from the dead. It is the same force that made Samson mighty, made prophets wise, and made order in the whole universe. Wow, that is awesome power. And why does he want us to have it? *(Give time for answers.)* So that we can know God better.

 *Really, Paul? You could be praying for us to have the power to heal diseases. You could be praying for us to have the power to conquer demons. You could be praying for us to have the power to stop natural disasters. And you are praying that the almighty power of God in us will enable us to know God better? Is this some kind of joke?* we might ask. And since this kind of power seems so wussy, we start to wonder if there is anything really special about having God living in us at all. But let’s try to hear him out. Maybe there is something about this power to know that is bigger than we think.

 You may have noticed that the word “know” occurs twice, once in v. 17, and once in v. 18. What you might not know is that these are two totally different words in Greek. Did you know that there are two different kinds of “knowing?” I’ll show you. By a show of hands, how many of you know who Justin Trudeau is? Okay, most of you. Now how many of you know Justin Trudeau? Ah, fewer hands. Many of you could tell me a lot about this guy – whose his daddy, where he grew up, his physical features, and some of the things he stands for. But somehow, no matter how faithfully you watch the national news, not a soul in here would claim to know him. So there is a kind of knowing that has to do with understanding things *about* something or someone. But there is also the knowing that comes with a relationship.

 When Paul prays for us in this passage, he prays for both kinds of knowing. In vv. 18-19, Paul is praying for the eyes of our hearts to be enlightened, so that we can comprehend some important things about God. Let’s look at them.

 He wants us to know the hope that we have been called to. Christians should be able to live with a lot of hope, because they know that the best is always yet to come. We know that God works all things to the good of those who love Him, and that should help us to cope with the struggles of life. Do you know this? Do you know that God is always with you, in this life and for eternity? I suspect most of us do.

 Then he prays that our hearts will comprehend the riches of his glorious inheritance. This means takes me back to the sermon from a month ago, when I kept saying, “You’re richer than you think.” There in Ephesians 3, Paul was again praying for us to have spiritual power to grasp how rich we are because of God’s love. Logically, you know that if you are a child of God, and God owns the whole world, you know that your inheritance is going to be awesome. Do you know that God is love, and that He loves you more than you or anyone else in your life can love you? I suspect that most of us *do* know this.

 And finally, he prays that our hearts will know his incomparably great power. And you know what? I think most of us know this, too. Many of us really and truly believe that Christ is in us, and since he has all authority in heaven and on earth, we can do whatever he wants us to do. When it comes to this kind of knowing, knowing ABOUT God, we got this.

 But do you KNOW God, personally? Call to your mind someone whom you don’t know very well. This could be a neighbour, or someone who works at a store you like to shop at. Got someone in mind. Now think of someone whom you DO know very well: a spouse, a child, a parent or a long time friend. What is the difference between those two relationships?

1. There is trust. You share everything with someone you really know, and they are the first person you run to.
2. You spend time together, not just because you have to (for work or something), but because you actually get some kind of benefit out of being with that person – even if you are just sitting silently in the same room watching the same movie.
3. You will take risks with that person, telling them the whole truth, even if it might hurt them, and not expecting the relationship will collapse when you do.
4. You connect often, not always for a long time, but a lot of times. It might be a text, or a phone call, nothing really intimate, but regular. And that time will often be private – one on one, not just in a group.
5. But then there are really up close and personal times, when you feel like there is no space between you. And I don’t mean this necessarily in a physical way. The Bible talks about friendship that is closer than family or spouse. And you are so connected at some moments that you can hardly imagine life without that person.

 Tell me truly, do you know God like this? Is He your first call? Is He the first one you think of to share a funny or sad situation? Do you spend a lot of time with just the two of you? When you do, do you experience joy, or is it something to check off a list? Can you make a bad day good just by pausing to acknowledge His presence in the room?

 Now let me be real with you: this has not been my experience for most of my life. Even now, it is not consistent, but my closeness to God has taken several steps forward in recent days. I would like to share a little bit of my journey with you about this. Maybe you will relate, and maybe you won’t, but I hope it might give hope to some here who might not feel very close to God right now.

 I spent my entire life active in church. We were there for almost every Sunday service, and lots of mid-week stuff, too. I went through Confirmation (which is something Lutheran kids do in their teens), and I took it very seriously. I knew the Truth about God, and I even started teaching Sunday School when I was still a kid myself. But no one tried to stop me, because most of the teachers knew that I knew the Bible better than they did. But I did not know God. I assumed that since God knows everything, He must know me, but I only knew ABOUT Him.

 I went through high school and university as a very hypocritical person. Amy will testify to that. I won’t name all my sins for fear of glorifying them. But in my fourth year of university, my Lutheran dad – you know, the guy who supposedly hooked me up with the Holy Spirit when I was baptized as a baby – saw my hypocrisy and my bouncing back and forth between self-worship and self-hatred, and he finally asked me, “Trevor, are you saved?”

 I wonder if I had ever really asked myself this question before. I had confirmed that I believed in whatever had been done to me as a baby, but had I ever really believed that Jesus’ death on the Cross would save me from my sins if I trusted him? I honestly don’t know, but a few nights later, I decided to stop pretending that I was a Christian. I gave God permission to do whatever He wanted with me, but if He didn’t intervene, I was going to just live for myself. I believe that in that moment, I was saved, and the Spirit of God entered into me permanently. This was a huge step forward, and I saw a lot of positive changes in my life. But even this was not enough to make me *want to* spend time with God.

 For times sake, I won’t mention all of the little events that led to me becoming a pastor. I will just say this: I am proof that a person can even be a **professional** Christian without *enjoying* the presence of God. But if you happen to bump up against Christians who do enjoy God’s presence, sooner or later your cover gets blown. Now I am not saying that I never prayed in my last church. In fact, I’m sure I prayed more than most people, but it was part of the job. My prayers were usually religious transactions on others’ behalf - unless I was really soulful about a situation; then I did experience God’s presence. But did I look forward to regular time with God? Was He my first call? No.

 A breakthrough happened for me about two years ago, in March of 2015, at a Promise Keeper’s Men’s conference. Men, if you have never been to one, there is one coming up in a few weeks. I have the brochure on my desk. At this time, things were already getting a little tense at our last church, and I was starting to wonder how long I would be there. I won’t say that I think the problems were all my fault, but I was myself questioning what right I had to call myself a pastor. After all, I could preach well about the God who is Love, but I did not feel loved, and without feeling loved, I could not love others very faithfully. You can’t give what you don’t have. Again, don’t get me wrong. I could do lots of loving things, and I helped lots of people, and lots of people loved ME. But most of the good I did was out of Christian duty – because it was good and right, not because I wanted to.

 Anyway, at this Men’s Conference, I received this message: *Trevor, you know a lot about me, but you don’t know me. You don’t know me because you are trying to pay off your debts to me like a slave. You are like the prodigal son who returned to say that you were no longer fit to be called my son, and when I called for a ring for your finger and a robe for your back, you refused to put them on. When I called a feast for you, you refused to eat it. You have chosen to live as a slave, even when I have called you my son. You know so much about me, but you deny the most important thing there is for you to know about me: that I have called you my beloved son. You MUST let yourself be a son to me, or you will lose your connection with the ones I have called as your brothers and sisters.*

 I did take a critical step forward on that day, but for some people in our last church, it was too late, and I was dismissed anyway. But nonetheless, I left that event changed, really believing that I was a son of God. The next year and a half saw some personal growth and humility in me. But eventually, I forgot about God’s message at the conference. Well, I remembered half of it. Now, I came to see myself as the *grown-up* son of a great king, as if I was preparing myself to take over part of the family business. But every time I gave into some kind of temptation, either big or small, I counted myself to be a rebel son. And after hundreds of selfish thoughts and decisions, which only took a few weeks for me, I was really back where I was before: avoiding the presence of God. After all, what kind of Father will enjoy the company of a son who willfully defies His father?

 So God scheduled another moment, to clarify who I was to Him. It was at the Holy Spirit Encounter, about a month ago, where God corrected this half-truth I had been believing. A voice within me said something like this: *Trevor, you have accepted me as Saviour, and so I am. You have accepted me as Father, the one who has given you life, and so I have. But you only believe I love you because I am God and I have to. You believe that my love depends on your obedience, and you believe that I am ashamed to have you in my presence when you fail. But learn from yourself! You love and enjoy your OWN kids better than you think I love you. You are my KID, Trevor. You are a lot smaller than me than you think you are. Like your own children, there is nothing you can do that I can’t do better. You will never win my approval by obedience, but you don’t have to win my approval at all. I love you and delight in you right now, and always. I called you as a hopeless sinner. Your sin hurts you, certainly, but it never changes me. Why don’t you come as you are, and believe my Word when I say that I love you always? If you want to be good enough for me, all you have to do is be with me often enough to see that I am good enough for you.*

And this is where I’m at. I still have a discipline problem. I still make a lot of childish choices, and I am easily distracted. But I no longer second-guess going to God in prayer, because I know He is always happy when I come to Him. In fact, I think my entire purpose is to enjoy God’s presence. In fact, I believe that enjoying His presence is the ONLY thing I can do for God that He can’t do for me. But rest assured, this is all pretty new territory for me. I am just a kid – clumsy, whiny, and short-sighted. But I am God’s kid, and He is loving me into maturity.

 So what about the rest of you? Do you enjoy the presence of God? Do you look forward to reading your Bible and having one-on-one time with your spiritual dad? If not, maybe you can relate to my story. Maybe there is something in you, or in your living, that keeps you from knowing the goodness of the God you know is good? (repeat) If so, I can testify now that it can be so much better. Perhaps many of us have settled for a relationship with God that is so surface we consider it a burden more than a blessing. Well today’s passage tells us that God wants you to know Him so badly that He has dispatched the same power that raised Jesus from the dead: the limitless power of the Holy Spirit, and all so that you might know Him. He must think that your knowing Him is better than any other power He could give you. Maybe we should believe Him.

 Today, I am hoping that everyone wants to be closer to God. But I want to make our Invitation a little more specific. If the Spirit of God has revealed to you a *specific* thing – a sin, a habit, a broken relationship, un-forgiveness, or a lie you have been believing – which you now know has to be rejected before you will draw closer to God, I want you to come forward today. And certainly, if you are a person who has never accepted God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ ever before, and you know you need to confess something to God, I am inviting you out of your seat, out of your comfort zone, and into the grace of God your Father today! Let’s pray.