

The Book of Ephesians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

Ephesians 1:15–23

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal heart of this lesson is the present, exalted reign of Jesus Christ. Paul says plainly that God has already raised Christ, already seated Him at His right hand, already put all things under His feet, and already given Him as head over the church (vv. 20–23). The verbs are past and accomplished, not future and pending. This passage is one of the clearest correctives to the premillennial idea that Christ's kingdom is a future earthly political reign yet to be established. The kingdom came with Jesus and was established when the church began at Pentecost, and Christ reigns now from the right hand of the Father. The teacher should let the class feel the weight of those completed verbs.

Yet this lesson is also deeply formational, because it is, at its root, a prayer. Paul is teaching us not only what is true but how to long for our people to see it. He prays for opened eyes, for the knowledge of God, for hope, and for power. Many believers carry orthodox theology in their heads while living as the spiritually poor, the hopeless, and the powerless. The aim is to move these truths from the head to the heart so that students actually live as people who belong to a reigning King.

So teach for sight, not just information. Help students see the hope of their calling, see themselves as God's treasured inheritance, and see the resurrection power already at work in them. And let the towering vision of the exalted Christ at the end of the chapter steady them, because the One who holds all authority is the same One who is the head of the body to which they belong.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verse 17 Paul prays that God would give the Ephesians the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. What kind of knowing is Paul praying for, and how is truly knowing God different from merely collecting facts about Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul prays for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. The knowing he has in mind is not the accumulation of data but a deep, personal, relational knowledge of God Himself. The Greek word carries the sense of full or thorough knowledge, the kind that transforms the knower.

It is entirely possible to know a great deal about God and not know God. A person can pass a doctrine exam and remain a stranger to the Father's heart. Paul prays for the kind of knowledge that comes only as the Spirit illuminates the truth and makes it personal and warm.

Notice that even this knowing is a gift Paul asks God to give. We cannot manufacture intimacy with God by study alone. We open the Scriptures, we pray, we obey, and we ask the Spirit to make the living God real to us through His revealed Word. This guards against both dead intellectualism and ungrounded mysticism.

Help the class see that the goal of all Bible study, including this one, is not merely to be informed but to know God better and love Him more.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Knowing God personally versus knowing facts about God
- The Spirit's work in illuminating God's revealed Word
- The transforming nature of true knowledge of God
- The goal of study as love for God, not mere information

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between knowing about a person and truly knowing them?
- How can our Bible study become a means of knowing God rather than just learning facts?
- When have you sensed God become more real to you through His Word?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul prays that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened. In what area of your life do you most need God to open your eyes right now, and what keeps you from seeing clearly there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul prays that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened. In Scripture the heart is the center of the whole inner person, including the mind, the will, and the affections. Paul is praying for inner sight, the ability to perceive spiritual reality.

This question asks students to locate their own blind spots. We all have areas where we cannot see clearly: a sin we excuse, a fear that governs us, a truth about God we cannot quite believe. Often what blinds us is not lack of information but the dimming effects of busyness, pride, hurt, or unbelief.

Encourage honesty and dependence. The very fact that Paul prays for this shows that opened eyes are God's gift, not our achievement. Invite students to ask God specifically to open their eyes where they are stuck, trusting that He delights to answer such a prayer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual sight as a gift of God
- The heart as the center of perception, will, and affection
- Honest acknowledgment of our blind spots
- Dependence on God for inner clarity

Discussion Prompts

- What tends to cloud your spiritual vision most: busyness, pride, fear, or unbelief?
- What area of your life have you avoided looking at honestly?
- How might you invite God to open your eyes this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul prays that they would know the hope to which God has called them (v. 18). What is the Christian hope Paul has in mind, and how is biblical hope different from the way the world uses that word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The first thing Paul wants them to see is the hope to which God has called them. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking or crossed fingers. It is the confident expectation of a good future secured by God's own promise and power. It is as certain as God is faithful.

This hope is tied to God's calling. The believer's future is not a maybe; it rests on the God who chose, redeemed, and sealed them in chapter 1. The hope includes the resurrection, the inheritance, and eternal life with God, a future already guaranteed by the down payment of the Spirit.

The world uses hope for things it cannot guarantee (I hope it does not rain). Christian hope runs the opposite direction; it is most certain precisely because it rests on God and not on circumstances. Help the class feel the solidity of this word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Biblical hope as confident expectation, not wishful thinking
- Hope grounded in God's calling and faithfulness
- The content of Christian hope: resurrection, inheritance, eternal life
- The contrast between worldly hope and the sure hope of the gospel

Discussion Prompts

- How is biblical hope different from the way we usually use the word?

- What makes Christian hope certain rather than uncertain?
- How does a sure hope change the way you endure hard seasons?

Question 4

Student Question:

A person who has lost hope and a person filled with hope face the same day very differently. Where have you let your hope grow dim, and how would living in the hope of God's calling change the way you face this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses hope into daily experience. Two people can face the identical hard day, and the one with hope can endure what crushes the one without it. Hope is not a luxury; it is fuel for faithfulness.

Ask students to name where their hope has dimmed. Perhaps a long disappointment, a chronic struggle, a prayer that seems unanswered. Discouragement often is not a failure of effort but a failure of hope, a loss of sight of the promised future.

Reconnect their hope to God's calling rather than to their circumstances. When hope rests on outcomes we can see, it rises and falls with the news. When it rests on the God who called us, it can steady us even when nothing has visibly changed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hope as fuel for endurance and faithfulness
- Discouragement as a loss of sight, not merely effort
- Anchoring hope in God rather than in circumstances
- The practical power of a future that is sure

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your hope grown dim lately?
- How does anchoring hope in God's calling differ from anchoring it in outcomes?
- What would change this week if you truly lived in the hope of your calling?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul prays that they would know the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints (v. 18). What does it mean that God speaks of His people as His own inheritance and treasure, and what does that reveal about how God regards the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul prays that they would know the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints. Read carefully: the inheritance here is God's, and the saints are the inheritance. God speaks of His own people as His treasure, His portion, His prized possession.

This is a staggering reversal. We are accustomed to thinking of God as our inheritance, which is gloriously true. But Paul wants us to grasp that God counts redeemed sinners as His inheritance. The church is not an afterthought to God; it is His treasured possession, purchased at the price of His Son's blood.

This theme runs through Scripture, where God calls Israel His treasured possession and Peter calls the church a people for God's own possession. Help the class feel the dignity this confers on the ordinary believer and on the gathered church.

Stress that this is glorious (His glorious inheritance). The worth of the church is not in its impressiveness but in how God regards it. He looks at His people and sees treasure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's people as His own treasured inheritance
- The dignity and worth God confers on the church
- The church purchased at the cost of Christ's blood
- How God's valuation differs from human valuation
- The glory God sees in His redeemed people

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change you to learn that God calls His people His treasure?
- Why do we so easily undervalue what God values highly?
- How might this truth change the way you view the church you belong to?

Question 6

Student Question:

It is one thing to believe God loves you and another to believe He treasures you, and treasures the believers around you. How would seeing yourself and your fellow Christians as God's prized inheritance change the way you treat them and yourself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the truth inward and outward at once. Many believers can affirm that God loves them in general while privately suspecting that He merely tolerates them. To learn that God treasures them is a different and healing thing.

It also reshapes how we treat fellow Christians. If the irritating brother and the difficult sister are God's prized inheritance, then contempt and division become unthinkable. We are handling God's treasure when we deal with one another.

Encourage students to apply this both ways. Let them receive their own worth in God's eyes, which frees them from striving and self-contempt, and let them extend that valuation to the people around them, which softens judgment into honor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Receiving one's worth in God's eyes
- Honoring fellow believers as God's treasure
- Freedom from self-contempt and from contempt of others
- The link between God's valuation and Christian unity

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend to believe God treasures you, or merely tolerates you? Why?
- How would honoring fellow believers as God's treasure change your relationships?
- Who is one person you find hard to value that God calls His own?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 19 and 20 Paul prays that they would know the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe, the same power that raised Christ from the dead. What is this power, and what does it mean that it is at work in ordinary believers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul piles up words to describe the power at work in believers: the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might. He is straining language to say that the power available to the Christian is beyond measure.

Then he identifies that power precisely. It is the same power that God exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavenly places. The greatest display of power in the history of the universe, the resurrection, is the measure of the power now at work in those who believe.

This is meant to dismantle the quiet despair that says, I can never change. The believer is not left to white-knuckle the Christian life with willpower. Resurrection power, God's own might, is at work within. Sanctification is finally God's work in us, even as we cooperate with effort.

Caution the class against two errors: a powerless Christianity that expects no real change, and a presumptuous triumphalism that ignores the ongoing struggle. Paul holds out genuine, God-given power for genuine, ongoing transformation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Resurrection power as the measure of God's power toward believers
- Sanctification as God's work in us, not mere willpower
- Hope for real change against the despair of I cannot change
- Cooperation with God's power rather than self-reliance or passivity

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the power that raised Jesus is at work in you?
- How does this truth confront the belief that you can never really change?
- Where do you tend to rely on willpower instead of God's power?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where in your life do you most need resurrection power right now, in a habit, a relationship, a fear, or a calling that feels beyond you? What would it look like to stop relying on your own strength there and lean on His?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes the power personal and specific. Vague talk of power changes little; naming the place we need it changes much. Invite students to identify one concrete arena: a stubborn habit, a strained relationship, a gripping fear, a calling that feels too large.

The pattern of the Christian life is not effort instead of grace, nor grace instead of effort, but effort that depends on grace. We act, but we act in reliance on a power that is not our own. The farmer plows, but only God gives the growth.

Help students take one practical step of dependence, perhaps beginning the day by surrendering that exact area to God and asking for His strength. The goal is to move from self-reliance, which exhausts, to God-reliance, which sustains.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming the specific place we need God's power
- Dependent effort rather than self-reliance or passivity
- Practical surrender of a particular struggle
- The sustaining nature of God-reliance

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most need resurrection power right now?
- What does dependent effort look like in that area, as opposed to white-knuckling?
- What is one step of dependence you could take this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

In verses 20 through 23 Paul says God raised Christ and seated Him at His right hand, far above all rule and authority, put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church. Where is Christ right now, and what is He doing? How does this picture of a King already reigning differ from the idea that Jesus is still waiting to set up an earthly kingdom in the future?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal summit of the lesson, and the teacher should dwell here. Paul describes what God has already done in Christ: He raised Him, seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, placed all rule and authority and power and dominion under Him, put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church (vv. 20–23). Every one of these is a completed action. Christ is not waiting to be enthroned; He is enthroned now.

To be seated at the right hand of God is the language of royal authority and rule. In the ancient world the right hand of the king was the place of highest power. Christ occupies it now. Peter preached exactly this on the day the church began: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ, and exalted Him to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33–36). The reign is present tense.

This is why the passage stands against premillennialism, the idea that Christ's kingdom is a future, earthly, thousand-year political reign He has not yet begun. Scripture teaches that the kingdom arrived with the ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:14–15), was established with power when the church began (Mark 9:1; Acts 2), and that believers have already been transferred into it (Colossians 1:13). Christ reigns now over all things from heaven. We are not waiting for His kingdom to be set up; we are living under His present rule and praying for its consummation.

Help the class see what this means for confidence and allegiance. The One who holds all authority, above every rival power, is the head of the church. No earthly power, no spiritual enemy, no political upheaval is outside His rule. He reigns now, and He will reign until the last enemy, death itself, is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24–26). The Christian's hope is not a postponed kingdom but a present King who will one day bring all things to their appointed end.

Let this steady the class. We do not follow a Savior who is biding His time. We belong to a King already seated in glory, with everything under His feet, who has chosen to be the head of His body, the church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's present, completed exaltation and reign at God's right hand
- The kingdom of God as established now, not a future earthly political reign
- The correction of premillennialism (Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13)
- Christ's authority over every rival power and the security it gives the church
- The church as the body of the reigning Head
- Hope as living under a present King, awaiting the consummation

Discussion Prompts

- Which words in verses 20 through 22 show that Christ is reigning now rather than later?
- How does the present reign of Christ change the way you face fearful headlines or hard times?
- What does it mean for your daily life that the One over all things is the head of the church?

Question 10

Student Question:

Paul says the reigning Christ has been given as head over all things to the church, which is His body. Looking back over this whole prayer, name one specific way the Lord is using these truths to form you, and how the reign of Christ over your life will shape one decision this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the prayer and the vision of the exalted Christ into one personal response. Paul ends by calling the church the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. The same Christ who reigns over the universe has bound Himself to ordinary believers as a head to a body.

Press for one specific way these truths are forming the student. Perhaps it is a steadier hope, a new sense of being treasured, a fresh reliance on resurrection power, or a deeper submission to Christ's reign in a particular decision.

Connect headship to daily obedience. If Christ is the head, then the body follows His direction. Ask students to name one decision this week that the reign of Christ should shape, so the lesson ends in surrender, not just admiration.

Close by returning to where Paul began, with prayer. The right response to seeing the exalted Christ is not merely to take notes but to bow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as the body of the reigning Christ
- Submitting daily decisions to the headship of Christ

- Transformation as the goal of seeing the exalted Lord
- Worship and surrender as the fitting response

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth in this prayer most needs to shape your heart this week?
- What decision should the reign of Christ shape in the coming days?
- How can admiration of the exalted Christ become daily surrender to Him?