

**The Ephesians Series**  
**Praying for the Person Who Has Everything (Part 3)**  
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When Sheila and I lived in Los Angeles, we often enjoyed going up the California coast, the beautiful coast there, to one of our favorite towns, a small town called San Luis Obispo. Nearby was a smaller town yet, called San Simeon. And there in San Simeon was the palatial home of William Randolph Hearst. Perhaps some of you have had the opportunity to visit there and to see that magnificent structure. One of the times that we were there, and we were receiving a tour from a tour guide, we heard the legendary story of an incident from Hearst's life.

Now Hearst, you have to understand, was an art collector. This was the greatest hobby of his life. He was passionate about it. If you've ever been to San Simeon and to the Hearst castle there, you know that that place is crowded with art work of all kinds and varieties. At one point in his life, he even had to begin warehouses in which to accumulate the art work that he didn't have room for in his homes. In fact, when he died, I think there were some six warehouses filled with art work that he had no room for in the six massive homes that he owned.

But there was one particular piece that he took an interest in at one point in his life, and he embarked upon a lengthy search to locate that one piece of art work and to secure it for his collection. But this one proved to be much more difficult than the others to locate. He had his staff scour the face of the earth to find it without success. Months later, they finally found the piece that Hearst was looking for. It was stored in one of those warehouses that he himself owned. The piece that he was looking for, he had already purchased, and it was his all along.

You know, that's really how it is with us as Christians. We're always looking, always searching for that illusive spiritual resource that's going to ignite and fuel our growth, not knowing, that all the time, we already have in our possession everything we need. We just need to better understand what we already have--what is already ours in Jesus Christ. Paul understood that. In fact, that's exactly what he prays for his beloved friends in the church in Ephesus.

Let me read for you again a portion of this prayer. Ephesians 1:15,

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“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, 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, 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.”

Beginning there in the middle of verse 19 and running through the end of the chapter, he develops that concept of power for which he prays these people will understand. Now when you look at this paragraph, here Paul shows us how he prayed for the spiritual growth of others. And as an apostle, as we note his prayer here in Ephesians 1, his prayer serves as a model, as a pattern for our prayers, both for ourselves and our own spiritual growth as well as for the spiritual growth of others. As we've seen in these verses, Paul teaches us three aspects of intercessory prayer, the kind of prayer that intercedes before God on the behalf of the spiritual progress of others.

Three aspects: First of all, we discovered in verse 15 the reasons behind intercessory prayer.

In verse 16, secondly, we discovered the pattern of intercessory prayer, exactly what his prayer looked like on an ongoing basis.

And thirdly, we have begun to study the content of intercessory prayer. That begins in verse 17 and runs through the rest of the chapter.

Now when you look at exactly what it is that Paul prays for these Ephesians and the surrounding churches, the heart of his prayer is for their illumination. The Holy Spirit had already revealed the truth to them through the word of God, but they still needed to grasp its full significance and live in light of it. That's illumination, and that is what Paul prayed for the Ephesians. But Paul doesn't leave his request for illumination in general terms. He gets very specific. He prays that the Spirit will illumine our minds in two very specific ways.

First of all, he prays that the Spirit would grant us illumination so that we would grow in our knowledge of God Himself, in our knowledge of God. Paul wanted the Ephesians to have illumination so that as they studied the Bible, they would come to a real, deep, thorough,

personal knowledge of God Himself. We studied that in great detail last week. But there's a second specific for which Paul prays regarding illumination. Not only did he want their minds to be illuminated to the truth of the Bible so that they would grow in their knowledge of God Himself, but he also wanted them to grow in their knowledge of God's blessings. He wants us to grow in our knowledge of God's blessings. Not only of God himself, but our knowledge of God's blessings as well. Notice verses 18 and the first part of verse 19.

*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.

Here, Paul begins verse 18. As he prays that we would understand these spiritual blessings, he uses a phrase similar to the phrase he used in verse 17. Notice what he says: "*I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...."

Now to fully understand that expression you have to look ahead a couple of chapters to 4:17. Turn there with me. Chapter 4:17, Paul writes:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, [that is, as unbelievers walk, and here's how they walk-- here's how they live, this is what their pattern of life is like--they walk] in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

Now in those verses Paul reminds us of what we were like prior to our salvation, and of what all unbelievers are like today. And he works backward. He starts with the results, and he reads to the cause. So, to really understand the logical order, you have to read these two verses backward. You have to start at the end of verse 18 and work your way gradually back, because the problems, our problem, begins at the end of verse 18. We had a hard, rebellious heart. That was our problem. We had a hard, rebellious heart toward God.

And notice what that hard heart of rebellion toward God produced: back the next phrase, ignorance. There was ignorance in us. Our hard heart produced ignorance of God and of His ways. Now note this is a willful ignorance. It's not that God had somehow not revealed Himself clearly in creation and in conscience, and we had just missed it. We had good hearts longing for

the knowledge of God, but we missed it. No, our ignorance before Christ was a willful ignorance. God had displayed Himself, even as we read from Psalm 148, throughout the creation. He had made His greatness known. Paul argues in Romans 1 that the invisible things of God are evident from the things that He's made. In Romans 2 he argues that the law of God is written on the conscience of every man, so we weren't ignorant because God had failed. Ours was a willful ignorance. Because we were hard-hearted, we were gladly, willingly ignorant of God and the things of God.

That, in turn, notice verse 18, working our way backward starting with a hard heart, then there's ignorance of God, a willful ignorance of God, that in turn alienated us from the life of God. And that alienation from God, the only source of true wisdom and knowledge, darkened our understanding. In other words, our hard heart produced an ignorance of God and His ways, which alienated us from God, and because God is the only source of true knowledge and true wisdom, our understanding was darkened. It turned out the light of general revelation, what God has shown about Himself in creation; and of special revelation, what God has shown Himself to be in the Bible, what should have been crystal clear to us, we were oblivious to.

This week, I read a book that was written last year by a radical anti-theist named Richard Dawkins called *The God Delusion*. And in this book, he takes on the concept of God, as a concept whose time has come to go. That it's unhelpful, it's even harmful to human creatures to believe there is a divine being. And in that book he argues that if there were a God, he certainly hasn't made himself clear. Well, that's not what Paul says at all. The reason we were darkened in our understanding is because we were alienated from the life of God. We were willfully ignorant, and we were hard-hearted. That's where the problem started. We wanted our way and not God's way.

As a result, notice verse 17. Again, working our way backward, because of that darkened understanding, we walked, that is we lived consistently as a pattern, with minds that were filled with futility. We thought about the vain, the futile, the meaningless, and the false. That's what occupied our minds. So, one way to describe who we were before Christ is that our understanding, our perception of God and spiritual reality, was dark. When it came to spiritual reality, our minds were as dark as the blackest midnight.

Now, go back to Ephesians 1. That's who we were before Christ. Into that darkness came the Spirit of God, and at the moment of salvation He turned on the light of spiritual understanding. God gave us spiritual life, and at that moment we began to see. We began to understand. We

were like the prodigal son who found himself there in the pigpen, and in a moment in time he came to his senses, Jesus said. He began to think rightly about himself and his circumstances and his father. That's how it was with us. At that moment in time the darkness began to give way to the breaking of the dawn, and the light came. But although the darkness has given way to the light of truth, spiritual knowledge and perception does not happen all at once. We didn't gain all the spiritual perception and knowledge of truth we needed at the moment of salvation. Instead, the Bible portrays the fact that at the moment of our conversion the Holy Spirit turned on the light, and we began to see, but our entire spiritual lives are a process of greater and greater comprehension of spiritual realities.

Perhaps we could use the image of, you remember the man that Jesus healed from blindness, and in this particular case, he wasn't immediately able to see everything clearly. Instead, the light came. He could see somewhat, men as trees walking, he describes. But then over time, his vision clarifies, and he can see clearly. That's how it is with us. There is a process through which our vision becomes clearer and clearer. Our knowledge gradually increases. Our spiritual perception gradually increases as we grow spiritually. And that's what Paul is praying for the Ephesians. So, when you look at verse 18, I think it's appropriate to translate it as the NAS has here, because essentially what Paul is praying for in verse 17 in the words,

may God give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation [and what Paul is praying for in verse 18,] ... [May God enlighten] the eyes of your heart may be enlightened....

Those two expressions are really praying for the same spiritual reality, illumination. But illumination for two different ends. In verse 17, illumination for the knowledge of God. Notice the end of verse 17. That you would have

the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him [And in verse 18 illumination so that we would grow in our knowledge of God's blessings to us.] 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 His inheritance, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power.

Paul is asking God to grant us illumination to better understand not only God, verse 17, but to understand the blessings that are ours in Christ, verse 18. Now, this is both fascinating and absolutely foundational, listen carefully, foundational to all Christian growth. In fact, it is so

foundational that before we go any further in this text this morning, I want us to stop briefly and make a couple of general observations.

General observation number one. Spiritual understanding is a slow process of growth. Spiritual understanding is a slow process of growth. You don't suddenly come to Christ and know everything you need to know. Instead it is a life-long process. The light comes on at conversion, but the light increases in intensity and your perception of spiritual reality increases as you grow. And it is a life-long process.

Number two. We cannot produce spiritual illumination in ourselves. You can't work this up. This isn't something you can do for yourself.

And that brings us to number three. We must pray for the Spirit to illumine our understanding. Now, this should be a regular practice of our lives. There are times when a Christian will say something like this to me. "You know, I know I'm a Christian, I know I'm in Christ, but when I read the Bible, when I try to read the Bible, I just don't get anything out of it." Well, of course there are a couple of possible reasons for that. One is that the person is not a genuine Christian, because the natural man doesn't understand the things of God, they're spiritually discerned. So, it may be that he's not a believer.

It may also be that he doesn't understand this very important truth that Paul is laying out here for us in Ephesians 1. Illumination is essential. We must pray for the Spirit to illumine our understanding of the Bible. You can't get to the life-changing truth of Scripture on your own steam. We must remain dependent on the Spirit of God. Have you ever tried acknowledging your ignorance? Have you ever tried praying before you read and study the Bible, saying God, I don't understand the Bible on my own? I'm incapable of truly grasping in a profound spiritually, life-changing way, the truth of Your word. Teach me.

One of the catechisms asks the question, why does Jesus need to be our prophet, one of the offices that He held when He was here on earth? And I love the answer. The answer is, Because I am ignorant and in need of a teacher. Have you ever tried acknowledging that to God, before you come to the Bible? I do that all the time. God, I am ignorant, and in need of a teacher. Open my mind to see the truth, and not just understand it in a mental way, but grip my soul with it in a way that it changes me. Make the truth clear and alive and powerful in my life.

Number four, general observation number four. We never outgrow the need for illumination. We never outgrow the need for illumination. Remember Paul had taught these people for three years in person. Imagine having the apostle Paul as a teacher. I am a poor substitute. Having Paul for your teacher for three years! And then, they had had six additional years of spiritual maturity. And yet, Paul is still concerned chiefly about their grasping the spiritual truths that he had taught them. Six years later in their Christian maturity, this is still his primary concern. Listen, I don't care how long you've been a Christian, I don't care how biblically knowledgeable you are, you are still totally dependent on the Spirit of God to teach you. We must pray together, I am ignorant and in need of a teacher. We never outgrow the need for this.

The fifth general observation, and the most important of all is, illumination is essential to your spiritual growth. Illumination is essential to your spiritual growth. These spiritual blessings that Paul is talking about here, are already a reality. They already belong to you if you're a Christian. But Paul's concern is that we don't understand them. As S. Lewis Johnson puts it, "Our problem is, we need to learn how to possess our possessions." This is absolutely key. And we miss this. In fact, let me ask you a question. When you think of spiritual growth, how do you picture that happening in your life? How do you picture your making spiritual advance?

Perhaps, you think, well, it's through a moment of decision when I surrender myself more fully to God. That's a very common misunderstanding. It kind of has this mindset to it, if I just surrender this sin again to God, if I just rededicate my life to follow Christ, then I'll begin to grow as a Christian. Churches are filled with people, there are many churches in which there's a steady stream of people down the aisle to rededicate their lives to Christ many times, thinking that that's the solution to their spiritual growth.

A second misunderstanding about how spiritual growth happens is through a moving emotional experience. I will be changed. I will begin to grow through a moving emotional experience when God seems especially near to me, and I'm filled with joy. And so, the thought is, if I can just reproduce that experience that I've had before, then I'll grow somehow as a Christian. Another misperception is through growing in your knowledge of the Bible. But growing in your knowledge of the Bible in a way that you grow in your knowledge about, say, a play of Shakespeare. You begin to grasp the facts about the Bible, and so if I just go to another Bible study, or if I just go to another conference, then I'll start growing.

Now there is a legitimate place for all those things. We do make important decisions that affect our growth and development as Christians. We do have legitimate emotional experiences that

fill our hearts with genuine joy. And we do have to grow in our knowledge of the Bible. And conferences and Bible studies are a wonderful way to accomplish that. But listen carefully. Do you understand that Paul's prayer here means that your spiritual growth will not come primarily through those means?

Your spiritual growth will come through an increase in your real spiritual perception of the truth of Scripture, through your real spiritual perception of what you already have in Christ. This makes the Bible a huge priority, by the way, because illumination is only in and through the Scripture. And we can't comprehend the Scripture in a life-changing way without the work of the Spirit of God, so that also makes prayer a huge priority. Both of these work together.

Paul's prayer, then, is that we would come to grasp the spiritual resources that are already ours. John Stott, in his commentary on this passage puts it like this. What Paul does in Ephesians 1 and therefore encourages us to copy, is both to keep praising God that in Christ all spiritual blessings are ours, that's verses 4 through 14. And praying that we may know the fullness of what He has given to us, that's verses 15 through the end of the chapter. Thanking God for the blessings He's given us, and asking Him to better understand them.

Now in Ephesians 1 Paul specifically prays that we will come to know these, not only God but these spiritual blessings. And he highlights three spiritual blessings that he particularly wants us to know better. All of them begin with the word "what." Notice verse 18.

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know "what" is the hope of His calling. [That's number one.] What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. [That's number two.] and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. [That's number three.]*

So those are the three spiritual blessings that Paul specifically wants us through the work of the Spirit to have a deeper understanding and spiritual apprehension of. Now, be honest with yourself. How many times have you prayed for yourself that God would help you to better understand these things? You're a most unusual Christian if you have ever prayed once that God would open your heart by the Spirit of God to understand these things. And yet, this is what the apostle Paul prayed. It must be crucial for us to understand.

Today, I want us to briefly examine the first of these blessings that we need to more fully and profoundly understand. The first one is in verse 18. "What is the hope of His calling."



Now, what does Paul mean, first we have to ask, by “His calling.” He uses an expression similar to this over in chapter 4:4. He says, “There is one body and one spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling...”

What is God’s calling? Sadly, few Christians really understand this. The word calling is a Greek word that’s used in secular Greek of a call to attention. It’s used of an invitation to a feast or a special gathering. It’s also used of a court summons. In fact, what’s interesting about this word calling or called, is, a frequent one-word description of Christians in the New Testament is simply the word “called.” If you are a Christian, you are part of “the called.” What does it mean to be called by God in this sense? Well, when you look at both the Old Testament and the New, both the Hebrew word in the Old and the Greek word in the New that are translated “call” or “to call,” they are used in four very similar senses.

First of all, they’re used of naming someone. I’m called Tom. Whatever your name is, you’re called that. That’s one sense of the word called. That’s obviously not what’s in mind here. A second sense of the word is calling someone to a state or task in life. For example, we speak of someone being called to the ministry. That also is obviously not what’s in mind here. Then there are two other senses. A third sense is of an invitation or command to salvation that may be sinfully disregarded, an invitation or command to salvation that may be sinfully disregarded. And then a fourth sense of the word in the two testaments is God’s work in drawing people to a saving relationship with Himself.

Now where does that evidence lead us? Well, it has led Bible scholars and theologians, through the history of the church, to the conclusion that there are two distinct kinds of calls. There is a general call, or what’s also called an external call, and there is an effectual call, an internal call. Let me explain those to you. The general call is simply the proclamation of the gospel. Think of it like this. Every time an unbeliever encounters the gospel, God is issuing a general call to believe the good news. And every time a person hears the gospel who isn’t a believer, God is in that gospel, calling them to repentance and faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Repent and believe the gospel, Jesus said. That is an external, general call to faith and belief.

But there’s also an internal, effectual, that is effective call. And it’s related to, but entirely different from, the general call. Listen to Wayne Grudem’s definition of it in his systematic theology. He says “An effectual call is an act of God the Father speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel in which He summons [there’s our word, he calls or summons]

people to Himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith.” In other words, there’s the external call. In that call, the proclamation of the gospel, some may refuse to come.

But in the internal effective call, God calls in such a way that the person comes to saving faith. A good biblical illustration of these two calls is found in Luke 14. Turn there with me. Luke 14, Jesus tells a parable here about a banquet, a big dinner. Verse 16 of Luke 14. Jesus said,

“A man was giving a big dinner and he invited many, and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, Come, for everything is ready now. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused. Another one said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused. Another one said, I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.”

Now these are excuses. They are not legitimate reasons. All of them are flimsy. For example, the first one says, I have bought a piece of land I need to go look at. Nobody buys a piece of land sight unseen, at least in the ancient agricultural world, because what mattered is how much of the land was usable. And so, undoubtedly, he’s already seen this land. This is an excuse. Same thing with the second reason that’s offered in verse 19. Again, in an agricultural society, it was imperative that the oxen you bought be healthy and able to pull a yoke, able to cultivate the land. And so, he would have seen them before he purchased them. This too is an excuse.

And finally, the last excuse in verse 20, I’ve married a wife and for that reason I cannot come. You know that in the Jewish society, for the first year the newly married couple were relieved of certain responsibilities. The man didn’t have to go off to war. There were other exceptions so that they could enjoy their newly married life together. But skipping a social engagement like this would not have been allowed. This is a flimsy excuse. So, all of them are excuses.

The slave comes back, verse 21, reported this to the master. The head of the household became angry and said to his slave. Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame. The slave said, Master, what you commanded has been done. There’s still room. So, the master said to the slave, go out into the highways and along the hedges and compel them to come in so that my house may be full.

Now in this parable, the first group invited are the Old Testament prophets calling the Jews to respond, and Jesus, the Pharisees. This pictures the general call. Come to the banquet. God's throwing a banquet. Come. Enjoy forgiveness. Enjoy the freedom that comes with being a slave of Jesus Christ. Come. But they all made excuses and refused to come, so there's the general call. There's the call, repent and believe, receive forgiveness, come; and they all had excuses. They didn't come. They refused.

But the second group here describes the effectual call, because here, these people aren't so much invited as compelled to come. Notice verse 21, bring them in. Literally, the Greek says lead them in. Verse 23, compel them. Make them come. The idea isn't drag them kicking and screaming, but compel them. This group represents those who responded to the preaching of Jesus and His apostles. The outcasts, the tax collectors, the sinners, and even the Gentiles. Now, in a very similar parable to this one, in Matthew 22:14, Jesus makes this closing comment. It's appropriate for both parables. He says this, "For many are called but few are chosen."

The called in that expression are those who first received the general call or invitation but refused to respond. Many are called. Many experience the general call. But, then he says, the few are chosen. That represents the smaller group who were forcibly brought to the dinner. That's the effectual call. Efficacious. Because everyone God calls in this sense comes to His banquet. They come to His dinner. Turn to Romans 8 and you see this in Paul's straightforward teaching in Romans 8. A familiar verse, 28.

... we know that God causes all things to work together for good [And He does it for specific people.] to those who love God, to those who are called according to ... [God's] purpose. [Here is the effectual call. The ones who have been called by God who now love Him, for them God works everything together for good. Now, he bounces off of that in verse 29, and he says,] For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son.... [Everybody that He chose is going to be like Christ.] Verse 30, and these whom He predestined ... [to be like Christ,] ... He ... called, and these whom He called, He ... justified, and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

In other words, the call in this sense isn't a general call you can just ignore. The people who are called here end up being justified and ultimately end up being glorified. This is the effectual or efficacious call. Everyone God calls like this ends up in heaven.

Think of it in this way. Unregenerate people are spiritually dead. They do not understand the Bible, they cannot respond to the Bible. And so, it's perfectly understandable then, that when a sinner sits in a service like this and hears the gospel, or from you as an individual they hear the gospel being presented, what does he immediately conclude? The sinner immediately concludes that he is hearing something that is totally irrelevant to him. How many times have you shared the gospel with someone and that's been the response. Well, thank you but no thanks. It's irrelevant. It's unimportant. It doesn't matter. Every time you present the gospel there's a general call. But sometimes as such a person listens to the message, something miraculous happens.

Listen to how Robert Raymond describes it. "Mysteriously, imperceptibly, he no longer hears simply the voice of the preacher. Instead, what he now hears is also the voice of God summoning him into fellowship with His Son, and he responds in faith to Christ. What happened?" Raymond asked. "The Scriptures would say that God had effectually called an elect sinner to Himself."

I understand this. I grew up in the church. I heard the gospel many times before I genuinely heard it. I was called by the gospel many times to repent and believe. But it was irrelevant to me. But then came that one day in 1978 when I heard the gospel, and God, through that message preached, called me effectively, effectually to Himself. And that call, I answered. The same is true for you if you're in Christ. God has effectually called us to Himself. Just like He did with Abraham. That's His calling.

But what does Paul mean then, by the "hope of His calling?" If that's what it means to be called to God, what is the hope of our calling. First of all, it's very important that you understand that the Greek word for "hope" and the English word for "hope" mean different things, very important you understand that when you come to the New Testament. The English word for "hope" is "a desire for something that is to some degree uncertain." So, when we use the English word "hope" we are talking about "desire plus uncertainty." Let me give you an example.

Since I've moved to Texas, I've become twice the football fan that I was before. I love football. I'd loved it before. But let's say for example that your football team has one second to score the game-winning field goal. And your kicker is a rookie. The kick that he needs to make is 50 yards long, but the longest kick he's ever made in his life is 40 yards long. As he lines up to kick this impossible kick, the kick of his life, you sit up on the edge of your couch, and what do you say? I hope he makes it. Desire, but a whole lot of uncertainty.

Now, the Greek word for “hope” isn’t like that. It includes “desire and certainty,” very important to understand this. So, in New Testament terms we could define “hope” like this: “The absolute certainty and expectation of something not yet received, the absolute certainty and expectation of something not yet received. So, Paul wants us to know the hope of God’s calling on us. What does that mean? Paul wants us to know the hope which God has brought us by calling us. It’s the hope that was held out to us in the gospel. Turn to Colossians 1. Colossians 1:5. Paul makes this clear. He says, you have this hope that’s laid up for you in heaven “of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel....”

You see, this hope that we have was offered to us in the gospel. Now understand that it’s an objective hope. Notice verse 5 says it’s laid up for you in heaven. Whether you get it or not, whether you understand it or not, it’s there. It’s real. It’s going to happen. But Paul is praying that these Christians would come to a subjective personal knowledge and understanding of their hope.

So, let’s ask the question. What promises were offered in the gospel that now form our hope? What promises were offered in the gospel that we hope for? Well, it’s expressed or defined in various ways in the New Testament. Let me just give you a brief list. We’re not going to turn here, but let me just run through them. This is what the Scripture says we hope for.

We hope for salvation, I Thessalonians 5:8, to be rescued from God’s wrath against our sin. We hope for righteousness, Galatians 5:5. We hope for resurrection, I Corinthians 15:52 and following. We hope for a new body, a glorified body, Romans 8:23. We hope for eternal life, Titus 1:2 and Titus 3:7. We hope for Christ’s return, Colossians 3:4. We hope to share in God’s glory, Romans 5:2. Remember desire and certainty. That’s what we hope for.

Now, how many times, believer, have you longed for all those things to be true right now? How many times have you longed right now to be rescued from the penalty, power, and presence of sin in your life? How many times have you longed to enjoy comprehensive personal righteousness? How many times have you longed for a redeemed body that doesn’t decay or get sick or die or lead you down the path into sin? How many times have you longed for eternal life, a higher quality of life that isn’t bound by the passing of time? How many times have you longed for Christ’s return, and to share in God’s glory? And when those things don’t happen here and now, what happens? We get discouraged. Why am I not enjoying this now? When instead, we should be responding with hope.

What we hope for is certain. It's secure. It's going to happen. How can we be so sure? I love Colossians 1:27, and again in 1 Timothy 1:1. In 1 Timothy 1:1 Paul says, "Christ is our hope." The reason our hope is sure is what we hope for is as certain as Christ is real and is alive and has promised it.

But I like Hebrews 6. Turn there with me. Hebrews 6: here, the writer of Hebrews tells us just how certain our hope is. All those things we so much long for, they're going to be ours. And here's how God has made it clear to us. Hebrews 6 beginning in verse 13, he basically says listen, God has sworn to you with an oath. Verse 17:

... God, desiring ... to show to the heirs of the promise [that's us, the promises in the gospel] the unchangeableness of His purpose, [guaranteed His promise] ... with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it's impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge--[that's refuge in Christ] would have strong encouragement to take hold ... [to grip firmly] the hope set before us. [Now watch what he says about our hope in verse 19.] "This hope [the hope of everything promised in Christ] we have as an anchor of our souls."

You understand this? Like an anchor that holds a ship safely in its position, our hope in Christ guarantees we will not be moved. It guarantees our safety. A ship's anchor goes down into the ocean bed, and that's how it gets its stability. Where does our anchor, our hope get its stability? Notice what he says in verse 19: It "... enters within the veil." You know what he's saying? Our hope goes into the very heavenly throne room of God and latches on to God Himself. Our hope is anchored in God Himself, and therefore it's secure. It's sure. It's certain. It's going to happen, just as really as if it had already happened.

You know, perhaps, the best biblical example of living in hope, in God's calling, is Abraham. You remember Abraham was called by God out of Ur of the Chaldees, and when God called him he made certain promises to him. But were all of those promises fulfilled in Abraham's life? No. Yes and no would be the right answer. Yes, he got Isaac, he got a son. But no, he didn't get everything God promised him. Turn just a few pages over to Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11:13, speaking of the patriarchs including Abraham, says, "All these died in faith" [They died in hope without receiving the promises. But they saw them and welcomed them from a distance, confessing they were strangers and exiles on the earth.] Verse 16, "... they desire[d] a better *country*, a heavenly one."

Abraham died in hope. He never got all the promises until he got to glory. He lived in this life in hope, and folks, that's how you and I have to live. Just as Abraham had received these promises, but he wasn't getting them in this life. He lived in hope and expectation, the certainty and desire that they would be his. And even so you and I have to live that way. Not everything God has called us to will we receive in this life.

We don't enjoy freedom from the presence of sin in this life. We don't enjoy comprehensive personal righteousness in this life. We grow in righteousness, but never are we without sin. Those things we live in hope of. We need to live in hope knowing that we will receive it. This is what Paul says about our salvation in Romans 8. In Romans 8:24. He says,

For in hope we have been saved. But hope that is seen is not hope. [Once you get it you're not hoping for it any more.] But who hopes for what he *already* sees? Verse 25, But if we hope for what we do not see [what we don't yet have] with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

That's how we are to live our lives here. You're not going to get everything God promised you here. But we are to live in perseverance, waiting eagerly for the reality, and it will come.

In his commentary on this passage Ken Hughes tells the story of a man who attempted to cross the frozen St. Lawrence River in Canada. The man was extremely uncertain if the ice would hold him, and so he started by lying on the bank and reaching his hand down and pressing against the ice, and when his hand didn't stick through the ice, he assumed that the ice would hold him, and so he very carefully lowered his entire body just on the edge of the ice, and again noticed that it hadn't given way. And so, measuring every movement, he began inch by inch to cross the St. Lawrence River on his knees. He was afraid that at any moment he would reach a weak spot and plunge to his death there in the icy waters.

When he'd reached about halfway across he heard a noise behind him, and he turned to see what it was. And to his horror, he saw a team of horses pulling a carriage leave the river bank and head out onto the ice in the same path that he himself had been on. In a matter of just a few seconds, the horses and their carriage had overtaken him and passed him. The carriage quickly reached the other bank and headed off into the distance. The man was still there in the center of the river, crouching for fear on all fours as the truth of what had just happened began to dawn on him. If only he had understood how secure he really was on the ice, it would have dramatically affected his behavior that day. In the same way, if you and I really come to spiritually grasp the

hope of His calling, the hope to which He called us, it will change how we live here and now. In fact, in Ephesians 4, when Paul gets to the practical section, the commands, notice how he begins them. Ephesians 4:1, “Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, plead with you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

He said, listen, if you understand what you’ve been called to, you’ll start living like a Christian. Understanding your calling will have a profound effect on how you think today and how you live. We need to pray that we will gain a spiritual understanding of the future that we have in God’s plan. May God give each of us illumination to truly grasp and live in light of the hope of His calling.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we confess to You with shame that our minds have not often gone down this path. Not many times in our spiritual life and experience have we prayed like this for the spiritual growth of ourselves or for others. Lord, teach us through Your Word. You have spoken to us today. May these things become important to us.

And Father we realize that even having learned these things today, even having studied them, they still will produce no lasting benefit and change apart from the illuminating work of Your Spirit. Father, grip our souls with the importance of this passage, the importance of this prayer, and understanding the hope to which You have called us. Father, may it change the way we think, and may it change the way we live.

We pray it in Jesus’ name and for His glory. Amen.