

## And Now, Finally, In Conclusion...

### Parting Prayers From A Departing Pastor

#### *“That You My Know Him Better”*

#### Ephesians 1:15-21

When I was a college student preparing for the pastoral ministry and took my very first “preaching” class, *Homiletics 101*, I was told by my professor that the two most critical moments in a sermon are the introduction and the conclusion.

I remember him saying, half in jest and half in truth, *“If you have a powerful introduction and a moving conclusion then it really doesn’t matter a whole lot what you say in between.”*

Now, of course, he was being a bit facetious. But he was trying to impress upon us the importance of having a great start and an excellent ending.

The Bible reminds us in **Ecclesiastes 9:11** that *“the race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong”* (NIV). What really counts is how well we finish! And so my mind has been drawn to the fact these last several days that I don’t have a whole lot of time left with you in serving as your pastor.

Counting today, I have three more times to bring God’s Word to you as your pastor. Now if my professor of preaching was correct and last words, final thoughts, are incredibly important, then what is it that I really want to say to you from God’s Word in these final three messages? That’s the thought that has been running rampant through my mind these last several days.

Now, as I’ve prayed about it, my heart and my mind has been drawn to what the apostle **Paul** did when he realized and understood that his time of ministry was drawing to a close.

Right in the middle of the New Testament you find several little books written by Paul which are commonly referred to as his *Prison Epistles*—**Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon**. They are

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referred to as his “*Prison Epistles*” because they were written while he was incarcerated in Rome.

He knew that his time upon the face of this earth was drawing to a close. He knew that the door of opportunity to share God’s truth with the church, to encourage them and counsel them and coach them, was slowly closing. He knew that each moment might be his last moment.

And so while he is in prison, he pours out his heart to the church and shares with them some final words and thoughts and prayers. Now what has really connected with my spirit these last several days have been those prayers that Paul for the church.

And I thought, as I was reflecting upon these final few opportunities I have to share with you from God’s Word, what Paul prayed for the members of the church two thousand years ago is exactly what I feel and desire for you and pray for you as I move on to the next chapter of my pastoral ministry.

And so I have entitled this series of three sermons: **And Now, Finally, In Conclusion... Parting Prayers From A Departing Pastor**.

The first prayer I pray for you is that prayer Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus in **Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 15-21**.

**For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.**

**I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.**

**I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.**

**That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and**

**authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.** (NIV)

If you don't mind writing in your Bible then I'm going to encourage you to take a pencil or a pen and underline two words in this passage. They are the same word but it occurs twice in this short prayer. I'm talking about the word "**know**."

The first place it occurs is in the last part of that **17<sup>th</sup> verse** where it says, "**So that you may know him better.**" Now the second place it occurs is in the opening part of the next verse, **verse 18**, where it says, "**I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.**"

This is a prayer for **knowledge**. As Paul sat in prison and thought about the members of the church, people whom he had led to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, people with whom he had worked, people whom he had nurtured, people in whom he had left the future of the church, people for whom he had poured out his heart and his life, the one need to which his heart was drawn to in prayer first and foremost was the need for **knowledge**.

Now not head-knowledge, information, facts, figures, data, intellectual enlightenment! They were drowning in a flood of information in Paul's day just as we are drowning in a deluge of information in our day. Paul lived in the heyday of classical Greek philosophy. He lived and worked in the Grecian world. There were fans and followers of Aristotle and Socrates every which way you looked.

The culture of that day was obsessed with learning and education and intellectual knowledge but that's not what Paul was talking about. Notice how he prays. "**I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better**" (Ephesians 1:17 NIV).

The kind of knowledge Paul is talking about can't be learned from books or lectures or professors or research or study. Notice what he prays—that God will "**give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.**"

**Wisdom** is the ability to apply truth rightly in our lives. It is the right use of knowledge. The Bible says in **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 8:1**, "**Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up**" (NIV). Or, in other words, knowledge in and of itself is not necessarily virtuous. It's not enough to just be smart—we must know how to rightly apply that truth to our lives.

*So where does that wisdom come from?* According to the Bible, it comes from God. **Proverbs 2:6** – "**For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding**" (NIV). **Ecclesiastes 2:26** – "**God gives wisdom**" (NIV). **Psalm 111:10** – "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom**" (NIV).

So wisdom comes from God and so does revelation. **Revelation** is that act of God in which He grants truth to us that we would not otherwise know. It is a gift from God. The Bible says in **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:9**, "**No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit**" (NIV).

So wisdom and revelation come only from God. What Paul is talking about cannot be learned or acquired or taught. It comes only through God's Spirit. He is talking about a fresh anointing of God's Spirit in which you might know four things. *Did you catch all four of them?*

- **That you may know him better!**
- **That you may know the hope to which he has called you!**
- **That you may know the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints!**
- **That you may know his incomparably great power for us who believe!**

Now as I have been thinking about what I want for you for the future—even though I won't be here—I could not possibly express it any better than it is expressed here in this prayer from Paul.

**I Pray That You Will Know Him Better.** **A. W. Tozer** begins his classic book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, with this provocative sentence: "**What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.**" He goes on to say, "**We tend by a**

*secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.”*

*Do you catch what he is saying?* He is saying that, little by little, we become and move towards that which we believe in and worship.

*Do you recall the words of the psalmist in Psalm 115?* The psalmist is warning us about the dangers of idols, their destructive nature, and what happens when we fall prey to them. He writes: **“Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them”** (Psalm 115:8 NIV).

Inevitably we become like the God we worship. And that’s why it’s so important that we come to truly know God—who He is, what He is like, His spirit, His nature, His character—less we have some kind of defective image of God and become like that “god”...overbearing, vindictive, harsh, legalistic, permissive, hypercritical, condemnatory.

The renown British preacher and writer, **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**, was absolutely correct when he wrote in one of his best-selling books, **“Our supreme need is to know God.”** He meant, of course, to know God *well*, to know Him *deeply*, and to know Him *truly*.

Now I understand that most of us here this morning are believers and followers of Jesus Christ. The great majority of us have been spiritually reborn. We have come to know Jesus as our Savior, our Redeemer, our Deliverer. And there is a legitimate sense in which every believer has come to “know” God.

Jesus prayed in His high priestly prayer in **John 17** not just for His disciples of that day but for all of the future believers who would come to faith in Him and this is what He said. **“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”** (John 17:3 NIV).

If you have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, you know God. But here is my prayer for you, **“That you may know him better.”** I’m reminded this morning that Christianity is not a *religion*, it is a *relationship*—a relationship between you and the living God. And

like any relationship in life, nothing is automatic!

It doesn’t run on autopilot. It doesn’t just occur inevitably and naturally. Building and nurturing and maintaining a relationship takes time and energy and commitment. Think about a marriage relationship. Oh, it’s easy to have an exciting relationship when you first fall in love. You can’t wait to see one another each day. You call each other. You email each other. You text message each other. Everything is so new and fresh and exhilarating.

But growing a marriage, maintaining a marriage, sustaining a marriage, keeping your relationship alive and close and growing takes deliberate effort, time, energy, commitment. The Bible says, **“Love is patient...it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”** (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:4, 7 NIV).

And so it is with our relationship with God. When you first come to a saving faith in Jesus, when you are first delivered from your sins, it is so new and exciting and fresh. You just can’t wait to talk with Him every day. But it’s easy to allow that love, that relationship with God, to grow distant and cool and stale. It’s easy to begin to take your relationship with God for granted, to just kind of go through the motions, to let everything become routine and ritualistic.

That’s why **Paul** prayed for the members of the church in his day that God would give them **“the Spirit of wisdom and revelation”** so that they **“may know him better.”** They’re Christians. They’re believers. They’ve been filled with God’s Spirit. But Paul knows how easy it is for us to lose our first love, to get off track, to get distracted, to allow things to come between us and the Lord.

And so he prays for a fresh anointing of God’s Spirit upon their lives—that they may **“know him better”**—and become like Him in spirit and character and heart. Someone has said it like this: **“If we knew Him better, we would love Him more.”**

That’s one of my parting prayers for you. I’ll be gone, out of sight, but prayers for you will continue. And I’ll be praying first and foremost that will **“know him better.”** And let it be your prayer.

So many of our prayers are so earthbound. *“God, heal my loved one. God, get me a job. God, sell my house. God, get me through school. God, bring a man into my life or bring a woman into my life.”* I’m going to encourage you to pray the prayer that Paul prayed for the members of the church in his day. *“God, give me Your Spirit of wisdom and revelation that I may know You better.”*

Now here’s the second thing I want to pray for you.

**I Pray That You Will Know The Hope To Which You Have Been Called.** I read somewhere that everyone needs at least three things if they are going to be healthy and happy in life. They need: (1) **A positive sense of hope for the future;** (2) **A healthy sense of significance and value;** (3) **The confidence that they have the power to meet successfully the trials and troubles of life.**

Now here’s what I notice. These are the very things that Paul says we can *know* through faith in Christ Jesus. And this is the very *knowledge* that Paul prays for on behalf of the church.

He begins by praying that they *“may know the hope”* to which God has called them. People need to know that they have a future and that this future is good. Now not everyone, of course, has such a hope. Those who are apart from Christ are described in the Bible as being *“without hope and without God in the world”* (Ephesians 2:12 NIV).

But that’s not true of those who are in Christ. The Bible declares in **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3** that, *“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade”* (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3-4 NIV).

Our future—those of us who know Jesus as Savior and Lord—is secure. Jesus said, *“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”* (John 14:2-3 NIV).

Jesus said of His disciples, *“While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost”* (John 17:12 NIV).

I pray that you will know the hope to which you have been called and that future is secure in Jesus Christ. The Bible asks, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31 NIV). I pray you will have the assurance of that knowledge.

There is an old adage that goes like this:

- He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool.  
Shun Him**
- He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is a child.  
Teach him.**
- He who knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep.  
Awaken him.**
- He who knows, and knows that he knows, is wise.  
Follow him.**

I pray that you will know that you know the hope to which you have been called through Christ Jesus.

Now, third...

**I Pray That You Will Know The Riches Of His Glorious Inheritance In The Saints.** Not only does God want us to know that we have an inheritance *awaiting* us in heaven, He also wants us to know that He has an inheritance *in* us right now. We matter to God. We are loved beyond measure.

When Jesus went to the cross, He went with one purpose in mind—to redeem us of our sins and to bring us into a right relationship with God, forever and ever. He wants us. He treasures us. The writer of **Hebrews** says that Jesus endured the cross *“for the joy set before him”* (Hebrews 12:2 NIV). *What joy?* That God might receive us as His pure and holy children!

I pray that when Satan, that old father of lies, begins to accuse you and condemn you and beat you over the head with guilt and shame and

failures from the past, that you will be reminded and know the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints—just how much you are loved, treasured and valued by God. It will keep you and hold you and lift you in times of attack.

Now here's the fourth thing I pray for you.

**I Pray That You Will Know His Incomparably Great Power For Those Who Believe.** Everyone needs to have a sense of confidence that they will be able to meet the challenges and trials of life. Everyone needs to know that they'll have the power and the resources necessary to deal with the troubles and the situations that come their way.

Listen to the kind of power that is available to us in Jesus Christ, according to Paul. Resurrection power! ***“That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion”*** (Ephesians 1:19-20 NIV).

Jesus said, ***“I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades”*** (Revelation 1:18 NIV). In another place, He says, ***“Behold, I make all things new”*** (Revelation 21:5 KJV).

Sometimes there are things that come to us in life that just “kill” us. We find ourselves just empty, lifeless, emotionally and spiritually dead. But Jesus has the power to make that which is dead to live again. And I pray that you will know that you have this incredible power in Christ Jesus.

There may be times of sickness, loss or trouble. You may wonder if you can make it through it successfully. I pray you will be able to say with Paul, ***“I can do everything*** (even this!) ***through him who gives me strength”*** (Philippians 4:13 NIV). That's the power that is at work in me and in you.

*Do you remember what Jesus said to Mary and Martha in their time*

*of great sorrow?* Their brother had died. They had sent for Jesus to come and help them but He hadn't come in time (or so they thought!). Jesus said, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...Do you believe this”*** (John 11:25, 26 NIV).

That's my question for you this morning. *Do you believe this?* I pray that all of this will be much more than just theological knowledge for the mind but will travel the critical journey of 18 inches, from your mind to your heart, and will keep you steady, encouraged and vibrantly alive and in love with Christ Jesus.