Remembered
God helps believers understand the riches and greatness of His calling on their lives.

Ephesians 1:15-23
Memory Verse: Ephesians 1:18

- **Read** Ephesians 1:15-23, First Thoughts (p. 24), and Understand the Context (p. 24). Pay attention to the specific prayers Paul prayed on behalf of the Ephesians.

- **Study** Ephesians 1:15-23, using Explore the Text on pages 25–29. Review Pack Item 1 (Map: Paul’s Second and Third Journeys), noting that Paul visited Ephesus during both his second and third missionary journeys.

- **Plan** the group time, using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 30–31) and More Ideas (p. 32). Focus on the main idea that God helps believers understand the riches and greatness of His calling on their lives. Consider ways to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 32).

- **Grow** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

- **Gather** the following items: ❏ Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: ❏ Pack Item 1 (Map: Paul’s Second and Third Journeys); and ❏ Pack Item 2 (Outline of Ephesians). Make copies of: ❏ Pack Item 7 (Handout: Ephesians Time Line); and ❏ Pack Item 13 (Handout: The Trinity in Ephesians).
FIRST THOUGHTS

Insight comes from understanding the relationship of cause and effect. Scientists propose theories based on cycles and predictable observed patterns. Sir Isaac Newton posed the theory of gravity based on an apple falling perpendicularly to the ground. The effect revealed the cause. In our Christian lives, we see the realities of cause and effect. Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would realize the effect salvation through Christ had in their daily lives.

(In PSG, p. 19) How do effects point to a cause in this world? In a person’s spiritual life? Can a cause exist without producing an effect? Explain.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

Paul began his letter to the Ephesians by enumerating some of the blessings God had given them because of their salvation. The Father had chosen them, adopting them into His own family (Eph. 1:3-6). They did nothing to earn it; God had done this because of His graciousness. Jesus had redeemed them through His own blood, offering forgiveness, an inheritance, and wisdom for living (1:7-11). The Holy Spirit had sealed them, showing ownership and protection, and was the down payment promising God would finish what He started in them (1:12-13). All of this was done to the praise of God’s glory.

Having emphasized God’s work in the believer’s life, Paul prayed for the Ephesians in 1:15-23. Paul often began his letters with a prayer of thanksgiving for his recipients. He thanked God for the Romans and prayed that God would give him an opportunity to visit them (Rom. 1:8-10). In First Corinthians, Paul thanked the Lord for the believers there and commended them for their eagerness to display their spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:4-10). In Second Corinthians he prayed for their comfort in the face of suffering (2 Cor. 1:3-7). To the Philippians, Paul offered thanks for their partnership in the gospel (Phil. 1:3-11), and to the Colossians he praised the Lord for their faith (Col. 1:3-8).

The notable omission of prayer and thanksgiving in Paul’s letter comes in Galatians, where Paul launched into the problem of them turning away from the Lord to a different gospel (Gal. 1:6). The subject matter was so serious in Galatians that Paul dispensed with any formalities and attacked the problem from the beginning. This was not the case in Ephesians. He had heard of their faith and prayed that God would help them continue to grow in their relationship with the Lord (Eph. 1:15-23). At the time of Paul’s
ministry, Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the world, with a population estimated at 250,000 people. The church was in a strategic location for the gospel. Paul had founded the Christian work there and remained in the city for three years (Acts 20:31). Both Timothy and John would also serve as pastors there. By the end of the first century, the church was still active in ministry, though it had apparently abandoned the first love that it once had (Rev. 2:1-7).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (EPH. 1:15-17)

VERSES 15-16
Paul began his letter by enumerating some powerful truths and highlighting some tremendous blessings from God (Eph. 1:3-14). He had spoken of the Father’s choosing them before the foundation of the world (v. 4) and adopting them as His own children (v. 5). Then, he reminded them of the redemption Jesus had purchased for them with His own blood (v. 7). Finally, he reminded them of the Holy Spirit, who sealed them and became the down payment securing their salvation (vv. 13-14). These were the things that Paul would have had in his mind when he introduced the prayer of thanksgiving with the words, this is why. These blessings were ultimately beyond human comprehension, so Paul took this occasion in the letter to pray for more enlightenment.

Paul had received news of the Ephesians’ faithfulness to the Lord. The two qualities of faith and love were also linked together in other letters of Paul (Col. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:3). Though Paul had witnessed many coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, more continued to come to faith after he left. Paul rejoiced that many had put their faith in Christ. The love they displayed for all the saints was evidence of genuine faith. Outward religious activity was never what assured Paul of faith; rather, it was “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Jesus had also taught the same truth—that love was evidence of genuine faith (John 13:35).

A church is blessed to have people praying and giving thanks constantly.

When Paul heard about the faith and love of the Ephesian church, he began to give thanks and pray. He reminded them that he was constantly giving thanks for God’s work of grace in their lives. Paul didn’t evangelize and then forget those who had come to faith in Christ through his ministry. Neither did he plant churches and then leave them without support. He constantly prayed for those impacted through his ministry. Therefore, Paul said he would never stop thanking God for the church. A church is blessed to have people praying and giving thanks constantly.

In addition to giving thanks, Paul used the more general word for prayers, the term used most often for prayer in the New Testament.

VERSES 15-16
15 This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.
VERSE 17
17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

VERSE 17
This verse reveals the first request Paul prayed on behalf of the church. He grounded his prayer in the identity and character of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. One must know Jesus in order to know God. Paul prayed to God on behalf of the Ephesians, and he grounded his prayer in the character of the glorious Father. God’s glory is a regular theme of Paul’s writings. (See Rom. 3:23; 5:2; 15:7; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:11; 1 Tim. 1:17.) He also assigned the same glory to Christ. (See Rom. 16:27; 1 Cor. 2:8; 2 Cor. 4:4,6; 2 Thess. 2:14; Titus 2:13.) Any further knowledge of God was ultimately grounded in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The specific prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesians was that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. He prayed that they would know God better. No matter how close a person is to the Lord or how many years he or she has walked with Him, there is still more of Him to know. Only arrogance would think otherwise. So, Paul prayed that the church would be granted the Spirit of wisdom. Though some have taken the reference to Spirit to be the human spirit, it seems more likely that Paul was referring to a work of the Holy Spirit. They had been granted the Spirit at salvation (Eph. 1:13-14), and His work was to help them grow in two areas: wisdom and revelation. Revelation referred to the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:9-10), and wisdom referred to the practical ability of that knowledge to influence the direction of one’s life.

(In PSG, p. 22) How does Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian believers compare to most prayers voiced today? How might prayer habits change if the main focus were on spiritual growth?

VERSE 18
18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, HOPE OF GOD ( Eph. 1:18-19)

VERSE 18
Having just prayed for the Holy Spirit to give the Ephesians a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God (Eph. 1:17), Paul gave the specifics of what he wanted the Holy Spirit to reveal. He listed three areas where he wanted the eyes of the heart to be enlightened. The heart was the seat of intellectual and spiritual life, and Paul believed that the heart had eyes! The eyes of the heart could be closed, leaving one in darkness, or they could be opened to reveal the light. Apart from Christ and the work of the
Holy Spirit, people live in the darkness of sin with their eyes closed to the gospel. Though Paul believed that the Holy Spirit came to a person’s life at the moment of conversion (Eph. 1:13-14), he also believed that continued growth in knowledge was needed after conversion.

First, Paul prayed that the Ephesians’ eyes would be opened to know what is the hope of his calling. Paul often spoke of the relationship he had with God as a calling. Certainly, this had a past dynamic to it. Paul explained to Timothy that God “saved us and called us with a holy calling” (2 Tim. 1:9). However, this calling had continuing influence in the present. Paul implored the Thessalonians to “live worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). A past calling carried present implications. Also, the calling of God was to future glory. Paul also reminded the Thessalonians that God had called them so that they might “obtain the glory” of the Lord Jesus (2 Thess. 2:14). Paul saw past, present, and future wrapped up in the calling.

Second, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints. While the inheritance would certainly include the final act of redemption at the return of Christ, it does not have to be that alone. Believers are joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), but they begin to receive that inheritance immediately upon conversion as the gift of the Spirit is given to those who believe (Eph. 1:13-14). Christians spend a lifetime learning more of what is involved in that inheritance, and they will not receive the full inheritance until after death or the return of Christ.

VERSE 19
In verse 18 Paul prayed that the Ephesians’ eyes would be open to their calling and their inheritance. In this verse, he added the immeasurable greatness of his power. The term immeasurable is used only by Paul in the New Testament. It is a compound word that could literally mean to “throw to the next level.” No matter how much people are able to comprehend the power of God, it pales in comparison to His actual power. It is immeasurable.

In the Ephesians’ worldview, people saw power in magic, astrology, the Artemis cult, and even in the worship of the emperor of Rome. Life was a battle for supremacy and power. People lived in fear of political or spiritual powers. Paul wanted to make sure the Ephesian believers understood even more deeply that God’s power was unrivaled.

In verse 19 Paul used four different Greek terms for power. The first is the general word power. It was used of the miracles of Christ and seemed to be an umbrella for all the other words related to power. A second word used of power in this passage is mighty. It too was used both of Jesus’ miracles (Luke 1:51) and the authority to rule over something as strong as death (Heb. 2:14). A third word, working, is where we get our English word for energy. It was the output of power at work. The final word, strength, was used for physical, mental, or spiritual power. Though it is difficult to distinguish between the use of the four words, the presence of all four as synonyms in this passage heightens the prayer request for believers to comprehend the power of God.
How are the three requests of Paul in verses 18-19 related to each other? How does growing in each area lead to greater understanding and praise of God for His salvation?

POWER OF GOD (EPH. 1:20-23)

Having prayed for enlightenment in the believer’s heart concerning the power of God, Paul expanded on that theme in verses 20-23. In these four verses Paul called attention to four things God did in Christ that demonstrated His power: He raised Jesus from the dead, seated Him at His right hand, subjected everything to Him, and gave Him headship over the church.

If God can raise the dead, is there anything that He cannot do?

VERSES 20-21

20 He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens — 21 far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

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VERSES 20-21

God exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus was a central tenant in Paul’s gospel presentation. (See 1 Cor. 15:4,7; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:10.) If God can raise the dead, is there anything that He cannot do? Second, God demonstrated His power by seating him at his right hand in the heavens. This was a reference to Jesus’ ascension.

Though it was not mentioned as much as the resurrection, the ascension was a crucial part of the gospel story. (See Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9.) God not only reversed the process of death in the resurrection, but He transcended it by enthroning Jesus next to Him in heaven. This probably was an allusion to Psalm 110:1, “This is the declaration of the Lord to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” As the extension of David’s line of kingship, Jesus sat forever on the throne next to His Father, putting all His enemies, including death, under His feet.

In addition to resurrecting Christ and seating Him on the throne in heaven, God showed His power by subjecting every enemy to Jesus’ authority. Jesus is superior to every competitor for His throne. Paul stated that God placed Christ far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion. Whether earthly or spiritual, all who claim authority fall under the authority of Christ. Paul emphasized that Christ had authority over every title given. Literally, this says in Greek, “every name that is named.” In other words, if you can name an authority, Jesus has ascended far above that authority.
God has **subjected everything** under the feet of Jesus. Perhaps the language of Psalm 8:6 was in Paul’s mind here. Not only was everything inferior to Christ but all was subjected to Him. Though Jesus had taken the sin of humanity upon Himself and died for our sins, God had raised Him and seated Him in a place of absolute authority. This was a powerful demonstration of the power of God. Only God could do that.

**Every decision and every direction for the church should be set by the Lord Jesus Christ.**

God also **appointed him as head over everything for the church.** The head of all things is also the head of the church. Every body has a head, and Jesus is that head for His church. He is head of everything for the church. Every decision and every direction for the church should be set by the Lord Jesus Christ. Only as the body comes under the head can it move and be useful.

In verse 23, Paul arrived at one of his loftiest descriptions of the church. First, he called the church Christ’s **body.** This was not the only place Paul made this association. (See Eph. 4:12,16; 5:30; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Col. 1:24; 2:19.) Paul viewed the church as an organism rather than merely an organization. It had life as it was connected to its head, Jesus Christ. As the body was subjected to the head, so should the church be subjected to Christ.

The next description of the church has caused much discussion and several different interpretations. Paul described the body as **the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.** The different interpretations can be expressed in three primary ways. First, the church is filled by Christ, and Christ fills the world completely through the church. In this view, the church receives all it needs from Christ and participates with Him as His purposes are accomplished in the world. The second interpretation is that the church is filled by Christ, who, in turn is filled completely by God. In this view, Christ fills His church as He is filled by God. The Bible does emphasize Christ as the fullness of God. (See Col. 1:19; 2:9.) The third main interpretation of this verse is that the church fills up Christ as more and more members are incorporated into His body. Though each of these interpretations could be possible, the first one seems to hit at the meaning of this passage. God’s power is best seen in the fact that Christ, who is Himself the fullness of God, fills all things in every way, and the church participates with Him in extending His work to the world. The church should be a demonstration of God’s power as it relates to its head, Jesus.

What are characteristics of a church operating under the authority of Jesus?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

WELCOME: Read or summarize the illustration about the relationship of cause and effect from the first paragraph of the PSG (p. 19). Ask: What are some other examples from daily life where the effect reveals the cause? (Examples: symptoms reveal an illness, a growling stomach reveals hunger, sunrise reveals daytime, and so on)

DISCUSS: Invite the group to share specific examples of effects that reveal a person’s relationship with Christ, and record the list on a board or tear sheet.

EXPLAIN: Our study today focuses on how God helps believers understand the riches and greatness of His calling on their lives.

INTRODUCE: Review key points of the Understand the Context section from the PSG (p. 20). Direct the group to Pack Item 1 (Map: Paul’s Second and Third Journeys) and Pack Item 2 (Outline of Ephesians) to give a visual point of reference for the original recipients of this letter. Note the events surrounding Paul’s writing by distributing copies of Pack Item 7 (Handout: Ephesians Time Line). Highlight the amount of attention Paul gave the Ephesians.

TRANSITION: As we will see from Paul’s prayer in these verses, salvation through Christ has the effect of producing the knowledge of God, hope of God, and power of God in every believer’s life.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:15-17. As they read, direct the group to circle words or phrases that reveal how Paul felt about his listeners.

SHARE: Briefly discuss what the words or phrases they circled reveal about Paul’s relationship with his listeners. Then read the following statement from the PSG (p. 21): The apostle’s prayer for the Ephesian church was characterized by two important qualities: persistence and gratitude.

DISCUSS: What practical steps could believers take in their daily routines that would help them increase their focus on others for the purpose of praying for them? (PSG, p. 22)

EXPLAIN: Verse 17 reveals the heart of Paul’s intercessory prayers for the Ephesians. He asked God to give the Ephesians a deeper knowledge of Himself (PSG, p. 22). Note that this deeper knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. Distribute copies of Pack Item 13 (Handout: The Trinity in Ephesians) and discuss how each Person of the Trinity is at work in helping us grow in the knowledge of God.

DISCUSS: How does Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian believers compare to most prayers voiced today? How might prayer habits change if the main focus were on spiritual growth? (PSG, p. 22)

TRANSITION: Paul’s prayer for his readers did not stop with their growing in the knowledge of God.

READ: Direct another volunteer to read Ephesians 1:18-19. Encourage the group to listen for the three key truths Paul wanted his readers to understand.
MINI-LECTURE: Using the information under Verses 18-19 (PSG, pp. 23–24), give a brief lecture on the three manifestations of hope Paul wanted his readers’ eyes opened to: (1) the knowledge of the hope of the calling of every believer; (2) the value of the believer’s inheritance of salvation; and (3) the awareness of the greatness of God’s power.

DISCUSS: How are the three requests of Paul in verses 18-19 related to each other? How does growing in each area lead to greater understanding and praise of God for His salvation? (PSG, p. 24)

TRANSITION: In addition to the knowledge of God and the hope of God, Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians included a third request, that they grow in understanding of God’s power.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:20-23. Direct the group to listen for evidences of God’s power on display through the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.

STATE: In verses 20-23, Paul elaborated on some of the most important examples of God’s power that should not be missed—the power of the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus. Paul emphasized that the power seen in Christ’s resurrection and exaltation is the same power that secures a believer’s salvation.

DISCUSS: Why is it important that believers come to understand the power of God at work in the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus? Support the discussion by using key points from the commentary on verses 20-21 in this guide (p. 28).

READ: Call on someone to read the Key Doctrine (God the Son) on page 24 of the PSG. Ask: How does Christ’s being at the right hand of God give a believer security and confidence? (PSG, p. 25)

HIGHLIGHT: Point out from the PSG (p. 26): Why did God make Jesus “head over everything”? Ask: How would you sum up the answer to this question? After discussion, say: Christ’s power is at work in and through the church with the goal of bringing His salvation to the world.

DISCUSS: How has your response to the question on page 26 of the PSG changed as a result of today’s discussion?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Draw attention to the bulleted summaries under In My Context (PSG, p. 27). Challenge the group to pick one of the statements to give focused prayer and attention to in growing in the knowledge of God during the coming week.

CHALLENGE: As a group, discuss the first question set (PSG, p. 27) and decide on one actionable change to make together: Discuss as a group how the prayers of the group can reflect Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians to a greater degree. What changes need to be made to how the group prays for each other?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer for one another, using Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23 as a guide. Be sure to put into practice some of the changes the group just mentioned. Close the prayer time by asking God to help your group continue to grow in their understanding of the knowledge, hope, and power of God.
PRACTICE

- Email the group during the week and remind them of the changes you made to the way you pray for one another. Challenge them to connect with one other person from the group this week for whom they will spend more time in intercessory prayer.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
For an alternate Focus Attention activity, create teams. Have each team appoint a leader or spokesperson. Instruct the teams to read Ephesians 1:15-23 together, underlining each phrase that identifies what Paul hoped to see in the lives of the Ephesians. After most have arrived, lead the group to discuss the question from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 20): How does each phrase relate to a growing understanding of salvation?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- For further discussion of Ephesians 1:18-19, draw attention to the definition of immeasurable under Verse 19 on page 24 of the PSG. Ask: How do you feel when you reflect on the “immeasurable greatness” of God?
- To supplement study of Ephesians 1:20-23, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 26) to highlight Paul’s use of an Old Testament quotation in Ephesians 1:20: Read Psalm 110. Search for answers to the following questions: Why might this psalm be the most cited psalm in the New Testament? (See Acts 2:24-35; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 7:17,21; 1 Pet. 3:22.) What references to the Messiah do you find in the psalm? How does this psalm help you better understand the power of God?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Instruct the group to write out their own one- or two-sentence statements about what the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ has changed and is changing in their lives. Lead them to reflect on the final question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 27): How can you use this passage to encourage others who may have doubts about their salvation? Identify one person with whom you will share these truths this week.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Play the song “Same Power,” by Jeremy Camp, while the group reflects on the immeasurably great power of God described in Ephesians 1.