

Session 4 The Prominence of the Knowledge of God

INTRODUCTION

Turn to Ephesians 1. What we're going to do today is a little of what we did yesterday; it's the same kind of idea. We're going to talk about how prominent the subject of the knowledge of God is in the plan of God.

There were two basic points I made yesterday. The first point was this: how prominent, how vital, how in the front of God's mind is this subject of revealing the knowledge of God. The reason I want to stress that point is because there's such a great deficiency in the Body of Christ on this subject. It is, in my opinion, the most prominent subject on God's mind. Yet it's also the most deficient.

The second point I want to make is the same one I made yesterday. I want to give examples from both the lives and doctrines of others to demonstrate the transforming impact of the knowledge of God on the human heart.

Those are the two points I made yesterday, really: number one, how prominent in God's thinking, in God's plan, is the release of the knowledge of God, and then, number two, how powerful it is in terms of transforming the heart. I'm going to give you Bible verses that declare it, and then examples through the Bible of how it changed people.

Today is Tuesday. On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, we're going to discuss practical methods of growing in the knowledge of God. Here in the first two days, we're just establishing the fact. It's overwhelming how much is in the Bible on this subject. I mean, the call to the knowledge of God is overwhelming; it's everywhere.

There are those of you, like me, who were raised in a setting where believers didn't believe that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were for today. Then, when you began to believe in it, you found it everywhere, but until you believed in it, you didn't see it anywhere. All of a sudden, you had a new lens, a new set of glasses, a new paradigm. It's everywhere. You think, "What was I thinking all those years?"

It's the same way with the subject of the knowledge of God. When you're not thinking about it, it just casually appears, but when you're focused on it, it stuns you; it's on every page. You say, "Why did I never focus on this before? Why did I not demand in my soul own to possess this above everything else?"

So I'm devoting these two mornings to really establishing that point in you.

It's so prominent in God's scheme of things, in time and eternity. Secondly, it's the number one transforming element in the grace of God. It's the thing the grace of God uses to transform you. It's clearly the number one issue that changes the human heart—no question.

Possibly a third point I want to make is that God promises a revival of the knowledge of God at the end of the age. I think it's the most prominent feature of the end-time revival: the revelation of the knowledge of God. That point is similar to the first one—the certainty that it will prevail. This subject will prevail in the Church before the Lord returns. Maybe that would be the third point. I really made those three points over and over yesterday. I'm going to make them over and over again today. We won't even get halfway through the subject in terms of the Bible. The Bible says it over and over again, so much more, that I won't even have time to cover it all here today. Then again, tomorrow we'll look at practical ways to grow in this in your own personal life.

THE MOST PROMINENT BOOK TO THE MOST PROMINENT CHURCH

We'll start in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is one of the big books on this subject. The book of Revelation would be like that as well. Actually, Ephesians declares how prominent the knowledge of God is; the book of Revelation illustrates it. The book of Revelation shows the majesty of God by implication, because the majesty of God is all over the book, and the people of God are so drenched in the knowledge of the majesty of God. Ephesians declares how important it is, and Revelation really does illustrate it. We're not going to spend much time in the book of Revelation this morning.

We start off in Ephesians 1. By the way, there are three great prayers in the book of Ephesians: 1:17, 3:16, and 6:18. That's just a bunny trail for intercessors. There are a couple of verses on both sides of them, but those are the core. It's more than just those verses, but that's the paragraph. Those are some of the great intercessory prayers.

Paul starts off with the great first intercessory prayer of Ephesians. The reason that this is so strategic is because, if you read Acts 19-20, you find that when the church of Ephesus was birthed, it became the major revival center of all Asia. What happened at the church of Ephesus was transported all over Asia. Paul cared so much about what happened to the Ephesian church that he spent three years there. Paul the apostle didn't spend three years anywhere else, except in jail a couple of times. Actually, that's not true: it was two years once and one year another time. He spent three years in Ephesus, which in itself tells you how vital this city was, and how strategically important to God in terms of spreading the gospel.

The book of Ephesians is like Romans. I would call them the two foundational books of the New Testament. If you were being held at gunpoint and you could only pick two books, you would want to choose Romans and Ephesians. The whole plan of God is summarized in those two massive books—massive in terms of the amount of truth that's communicated.

The reason that I'm telling you all this is because I want you to know how prominent the epistle of Ephesians is, because the subject of the knowledge of God is the prominent subject in the most prominent book in the most prominent church in the first century. Yes, Jerusalem was, initially. Then Antioch became the next real hub of activity, but clearly the church in Ephesus was the main church of the first century in terms of spreading the gospel and establishing the way of thinking in the kingdom of God. Here we have this major book written to the most prominent church in the first century; it's a prominent statement, and the revelation of the knowledge of God is the main issue of the book. I just wanted you to catch that context.

THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

I'll have to go through these quickly, meaning I can only barely touch them, and I leave it to you and the Lord to search them out. Really what I'm doing is advertising these verses for you to go and dig out for the next five or ten years. I want to make you hungry for the verses and have you say, "Oooh, I have to go check that out." Go get some commentaries, wait on the Lord, pray these verses, and let the Lord develop them in your thinking. I'm advertising these verses to you rather than exhausting them in explanation.

Paul bows his knees in verse 15. He basically says, "I'm going to pray and seek the Lord for you" (Eph. 1:15, paraphrased). Then he goes on to say, "I don't cease to give thanks, making mention of you in my prayers" (v. 16, paraphrased).

Here's what he prays, in verse 17: that God, "the Father of glory," would give you something very specific—the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Jesus. He says, "This is my number one prayer for the most powerful, most prominent church in the first century." I mean, obviously Jerusalem was the most prominent church for the first ten or fifteen years, but the church of Ephesus was clearly most prominent for an entire generation. He says, "The first prayer I pray for you is that the Father of Glory would give you something you can't have apart from divine impartation: the spirit of wisdom and revelation, specifically in the knowledge of Jesus."

THE HIGHEST DIMENSION OF WISDOM AVAILABLE TO THE HUMAN HEART

When the Bible talks about the spirit of wisdom, sometimes we think about how to wisely minister, how to wisely administrate our finances, how to wisely raise our children, and so on. I think wisdom certainly pertains to that, but the holy of holies, the wisdom of wisdom, always pertains to the being of God. Wisdom is first and foremost an issue of the being of God Himself. Running your finances, running a family, running a church, and running a ministry are certainly subcategories of wisdom, but the wisdom of wisdom always pertains to God Himself. Jesus is called the wisdom of God.

When he prays for the spirit of wisdom, don't think only of a good life vision, and ordering your time and your finances rightly. Though that's certainly a part of wisdom, it's by no means the highest dimension of wisdom available to the human heart. That's the wisdom of God Himself. So he prays for a spirit of wisdom and a spirit of revelation in the knowledge, the unveiling, of Jesus to the heart.

In my early years in the Lord, Ephesians 1:17 was the number one prayer of my life for many years, until John 17:26 took over about fifteen years ago. I call those two prayers the two prominent prayers in terms of my devotional prayer life. John 17:26 would be number one. I pray that Jesus would declare the Father to my heart, so that the love that He has for Jesus would be in me. If I could only be locked into one, single prayer, that would be the one. Then Ephesians 1:17 would be the next: that the Father would give the spirit of revelation, a supernatural impartation to my heart of wisdom and revelation about the person of Jesus.

THE FATHER UNVEILS THE SPLENDOR OF JESUS TO THE HUMAN HEART

He goes on to describe it in verse 18. He says, "Here's what I'm talking about." The New King James says, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Eph. 1:18)—or opened. One translation says, "the eyes of your heart" (NIV). That's the point. You can't have this knowledge apart from supernatural revelation. You can't. No amount of philosophy, no amount of natural study, can open that treasure chest, that storehouse of treasure which is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which is the prize possession of all the ages—when God reveals His Son to our hearts. There's nothing more precious and more rare and more absolutely valuable than when the Father unlocks the treasure chest, so to speak, and lets us go into that vast treasury of the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ.

That's the essence of what eternal life is about. It takes the Holy Spirit. I call it the Holy Spirit escort. I have this metaphor that we're on this long journey that we continue on throughout the eternal ages. We start in time and we go right through the eternal ages. We're climbing this mountain. It's a mountain of fire. I think of Exodus 19, when Moses stood before Mt. Sinai. It was filled with flaming fire—the glory of God. Jesus Himself is the mountain of fire. That was just a dim picture of what redemption is about. It's about gazing on the mountain of fire, and Moses ascended it. That's really what our journey into the heart of God is about: us climbing that

mountain, us going on that journey with a Holy Spirit escort forever. He takes us by the arm and says, “I will take you places on that mountain and show you the fire of God and treasures that you can’t even fathom.” It’s Jesus Christ.

NOTHING IS MORE GLORIOUS THAN WHEN JESUS REVEALS JESUS

In Luke 24 on the road of Emmaus, Jesus appears to two disciples, and He speaks to them. Their hearts begin to burn with fire (Lk. 24:32). That’s what’s happening in Ephesians 1:18: the eyes of the understanding, or the eyes of the heart, are being opened. There’s a spirit of burning that comes. There’s nothing more glorious than when Jesus reveals Jesus. Here’s Jesus among them talking about Himself. Nothing could be a greater experience, in time or eternity, than when God reveals God to the human heart. Their hearts burned with fire and the Scriptures opened up to them supernaturally. Jesus, because He’s God, is opening the Scriptures in a way they never could have seen.

That’s really what we’re talking about. Ephesians 1:17-18 is God revealing God, and supernaturally opening the Scriptures so that our heart receives revelatory knowledge of God. It tenderizes us, it empowers us, it changes our emotional chemistry. We think differently; we feel differently. We interpret life differently, we interpret pressures differently, we interpret opportunities differently when God reveals God to our heart.

So we start off there right there, in Ephesians 1:17-18. It’s that which releases power and riches (v. 18). It goes on and on. This verse is so loaded. Every phrase is filled with depth of meaning. We can’t go into it now, but I would maybe get a book on it, and search out some commentaries. In our city, there are three or four seminaries or Bible schools. I just go to the seminary libraries, look up something, Xerox a couple of pages, and bring it home. If I really like the book, I Xerox the first page, and then I go order the book. I search that stuff out. There are so many resources on the Internet now; there are so many commentaries, there are libraries and bookstores everywhere. Even secular libraries have commentaries in them. Secular and Catholic universities are loaded with good Bible sections. I’m not even talking about a Bible school, but a regular Catholic university, like Notre Dame. Some of these university libraries have incredible theology sections, and all kinds of commentaries.

Be creative. There are ways you can have access to this knowledge. Don’t just look at your checkbook and go to the first Christian bookstore and see only three or four commentaries, and give up completely. Most Christian bookstores don’t have much but Christian pop. Don’t give up that quickly. Don’t say, “Oh well, I only have only fifty dollars, and they don’t have very many good books anyway. I tried.” Don’t do that. Get on the Internet. Drive an hour to a university, to a Bible school library. Talk to a pastor. Ask him if you can look at his library. Xerox key pages. I’m beginning to tell you what I’m going to tell you tomorrow about how to go on this quest. I don’t want to do that right now.

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF JESUS CHRIST

Look at verses 18 and 19. There are so many powerful phrases there that won’t be immediately apparent at first reading. Ephesians 1:17-18 is where we began. The next verse that I really like is Ephesians 3:8-9. Again, the whole paragraph is loaded with the idea. Here’s what Paul says: “This grace was given me: to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:8, paraphrased).

Paul says, “Grace has been given to me.” Let’s put the word *anointing* instead of grace in Ephesians 3:8, because grace is empowering. Mercy is the forgiveness wing of grace. Paul is talking about an empowering, an

anointing. A divine enabling is what he's talking about—the power to do the will of God. He's not saying, "God forgave me so that I could preach about Jesus." He's saying, "God empowered me to preach."

What's the theme of Paul's preaching? It's the person of Jesus. It's "the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ." That's the theme of Paul's preaching. I love that—*unsearchable*. That's an interesting phrase. It can't be searched out. It means man can't get it apart from God's aid. That's what it means. An uninspired search, an uninspired mind, can't grasp these treasures. It doesn't mean that the believer can't search it out; it means that without the aid of God it can't be grasped.

What does another version say? The Oxford Bible calls it "boundless riches." The Jerusalem Bible calls it "unfathomable treasures." The NIV calls it the "unsearchable riches." The NASB says, "unfathomable riches." It's beyond the grasp of the human mind apart from revelation. That's really what it means.

JESUS DOES WHAT HE DOES BECAUSE HE IS WHAT HE IS

Notice the theme of Paul's preaching. It's the unfathomable riches of a man, the Man Christ Jesus, fully God and fully Man. When we think about the riches of Jesus, some people will automatically think about what He did as the fullness of His riches. What He did on the cross, which is unfathomable to me, is a reflection of who He is. What He did flows out of who He is. The riches of Jesus aren't summed up, but rather are indicated, by His actions. There are riches in the personhood of Jesus that aren't fully made known by His actions. It's His indescribable majesty and beauty, the riches of Christ Jesus. It's what He did; it's who He is.

Another component of the riches of Jesus Christ is His plan—His plan to bring the bride beside Him as His co-heir and eternal companion. His plan is unthinkably rich. It's what He did in history, it's what He's going to do in the future, and it's who He is in the essence of His being. That would be the primary one.

AN ANOINTING TO UNVEIL THE GLORY OF A PERSON

When you ask God to anoint you, you want an anointing to unveil, to make known the riches of a person. I said, "Lord, when I'm done with my life, when I look back over it, I don't want to be just clever and cute and have witty sayings. I want people to groan in their spirit when I leave because they're thinking about Jesus. I don't want them to be thinking about me; I want them to be thinking about Jesus. I don't mean in every meeting, every time, but I want the essence of their hearts to be, 'God, I love You; God, I want You.'"

At its highest, that's what the anointing is for. Yes, it relieves us of the pain and misery of life by healing our pains, our injuries, physically and emotionally. Those are very important, but the anointing at its highest purpose is to make known the riches of the person of Jesus to the human spirit. That's what the Holy Spirit does best, and that's what He likes most. Of course, all the ministry of healing reveals Jesus. I don't just want to alleviate human pain; I want to bring the human heart into contact with that for which it was created—to be in partnership and communion with the uncreated God. That's what I want to do in my life, far beyond relieving temporal pain on the earth, though I certainly value that. That's not the fullness of what we're called to do. We're to bring the human heart into contact with that for which it was created, to be in communion with and to be the partner of the glorious God, Christ Jesus—and the Father and the Spirit as well.

I call it "the Ephesians 3:8 anointing." That's what we want, isn't it? If you're going to pray and fast and intercede and study, then study and pray and fast that you get an anointing for Ephesians 3:8. Not just so that

our ministries would be bigger and people would like us more and we would finally be important; the anointing is given for something far more important than that, obviously.

“STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT THROUGH HIS SPIRIT IN THE INNER MAN”

Look at Ephesians 3:16-20. This is the second prayer. The second prayer in the book of Ephesians also relates to the subject of the knowledge of God.

Paul prays “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16). There it is again, that treasure of God. It’s riches and treasure. I did a word study once on riches and treasure as it relates to the being of God. It’s fascinating; it’s everywhere, all throughout the Old and New Testaments. Just get out a concordance and study riches and treasure or wealth as it relates to the being of God. There will be many that say, “The king of Judah had great treasure,” but study the ones that relate to the person of God Himself. It’s fantastic.

God will strengthen your inner man according to the treasures of the glory which is the person of God. He will reveal Himself to you. It says here, “strengthened with might” (Eph. 3:16). That divine might will empower your emotions, your inner man, when you see the riches of the glory of the person of Jesus. Divine might will strengthen you. It changes your emotional chemistry. That’s the way I like to say it.

THE HIGHEST DIMENSION OF THE TREASURE OF HIS GLORY

He goes on to talk specifically about the riches of glory. It isn’t only about the love of God, but the love of God is certainly way high up on the list. Paul prays “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love. . .” (Eph. 3:17). That, in my opinion, is the highest dimension of the treasure of His glory; it empowers us with might on the inside: that we’re rooted and grounded in the doctrine and the reality of the knowledge of the love in Jesus’ personality. Jesus’ personality is overflowing with the riches of divine love. When you’re rooted and grounded in that knowledge, your inner man is strengthened with might. A person who is emotionally unstable becomes strengthened with divine might on the inside. It’s related specifically to the treasure of His glory, which is the treasure of the personality of God—His love.

THE FOURFOLD DIMENSION OF THE LOVE OF GOD

He goes on and develops the idea of love in verse 18. He says, “What I’m talking about is that you would comprehend, that your understanding would be enlightened” (Eph. 3:18, paraphrased). He’s going right back to the theme of Ephesians 1:18: that enlightened understanding, the ability to comprehend supernaturally. It’s like Paul is being repetitive. He gives the fourfold dimension of the height, depth, length, and width of the love of God. He lays it out there.

Each one of those words has a meaning to it, by the way. It’s not just Paul thinking, “Well, let me throw something out there.” I call it the fourfold dimensions of God’s love. Paul says this: “Your inner man will be divinely strengthened with might as you come into contact with being rooted in the knowledge of the fourfold love in the personality of Jesus for you.”

JESUS IS THE DOOR INTO THE FULLNESS OF GOD

It not only strengthens the inner man; it goes far beyond that. It brings us into the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19). The way into the fullness of God is through the door of the revelation of the personality of Jesus. It’s the way into the fullness of God. Notice that in verse 19 he says, “. . . so that we will be filled with all the fullness of

God” (ibid, paraphrased). What’s Paul’s methodology into the fullness of God? What’s Paul’s strategy to reveal the knowledge of the personality of Jesus? That’s what brings us into the fullness of God. Really, all Paul has done is to repeat his first prayer. The essence of the first prayer is the knowledge of Jesus to the heart. The essence of the second prayer is the ability to comprehend one particular facet of Jesus’ treasure and personality, and that is His love. It is His love that brings us into fullness. Really, he’s saying the same thing twice. Paul says, “I can’t say it enough.”

GOD’S ARCHITECTURAL BLUEPRINTS FOR THE CHURCH

Turn to Ephesians 4:11-13. Again, the theme goes beyond the couple of verses that I’m giving you. The whole paragraph, which I’m highlighting, is on this subject. I’m getting right to the cream here.

Verse 11 is the fivefold ministries, right? God gave the fivefold ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He anoints men and women. For what reason? To equip and edify (Eph. 4:12). We’re all pretty established on the purpose of the fivefold ministry: to equip and to edify. Why? Where is this thing going?

Verse 13 is what I want to highlight. Where is this thing going? When the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are at their highest effectiveness, what’s it that they will achieve?

I call verse 13, “God’s architectural blueprints for the Church.” These are the three lines that the Holy Spirit is working to bring the Church into. These three things have to happen before it’s all over. The reason we know is because of the word *until* in verse 13. The fivefold ministry will equip and edify until something happens. The Church will not be completed in this age until three things take place.

Someone says, “The Lord may come at any moment.”

I say, “No, not a chance.” There are three things that have to happen before the Lord returns. These three things described in verse 13 are really a restating of John 17:20-26, the last seven verses of the prayer we looked at yesterday. I said there are about fifteen features in those last seven verses. They’re summarized by these three things. Paul just condenses it. These things have to happen before an unbelieving world, with the world as witness. So be of good cheer: there’s going to be a great breaking-in of God’s power on His Church before He returns.

What are the three things? Number one: “the unity of the faith” (Eph. 4:13). What does unity look like? I don’t know. Everyone debates it. Everyone is divided about what unity looks like. It doesn’t matter. It will be clear when we’re there, and we’re not there, so there’s a lot more to come. Number one is unity.

Look at the second one. That’s the point I want to highlight. Look at this second thing that has to happen to the Church—to the Church, not the world. “That the Church would come to the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:13b, paraphrased).

“Well, I thought the Church already had the knowledge of the Son of God.”

Paul says, “Well, they have the introductory knowledge; they have enough knowledge of Jesus as Savior to be redeemed, and that’s really powerful. That’s awesome.” He says, “The introduction to the Son of God isn’t the

fullness of what God is going to do. The Church will be established in the knowledge of the Son of God in a deep way before it's over.”

If I had to summarize the focus of my ministry, it would be the second one right there. I appreciate all of them, but typically God, when He anoints a man or woman for ministry, gives them two or three things to do out of the fifty things that the grace of God does in the Church. He normally gives you one or two areas. Most people have boundaries on their ministries so that they focus on one or two areas. They all contribute to these three things. I didn't always know what my boundaries were or what my focus was from the Lord, but I've known for some years now. The Lord has made it clear to me. He says, “I want you to focus on this second point: the knowledge of the Son of God. I want you to really care about the other ones; I want you to do some of the other ones, but I really want you to focus on this second one.”

THE CHURCH WORLDWIDE WILL HAVE THE MATURITY OF JESUS

Other people really focus on the first one. Others focus on the third one, which is maturity. The Church worldwide, corporately, will have the maturity of Jesus. It's unthinkable to me, but it's true. It's unthinkable that the maturity of Jesus' ministry for three and a half years will be represented in the Church universally across the world. I don't mean every single believer will be as mature as Jesus, but the wisdom and the power and the character will be mature. I call it “gifts, fruit, and wisdom.” I always sum up maturity in three things: gifts, fruit and wisdom. The gifts of the Spirit is power. The fruit of the Spirit is character. The wisdom of the Spirit is the administration of things—how God does the works of the Spirit. Jesus had significant power, character, and understanding of how God wanted to do things. I'm using wisdom here in a secondary sense to connote how things are done, along with God's order of things, God's administrations of His purpose. Some ministries really focus on the maturity of gifts, fruit, and wisdom. That's powerful. The Church can't be complete without all three lines happening. These are all super-valuable to God. I'm not extolling one over the other; I just make them all the top one. They're all tied for first place.

GOD WILL BRING UNITY, INTIMACY, AND MATURITY TO THE END-TIME CHURCH

I like to say it this way: unity, intimacy, and maturity are the three lines of work that the Holy Spirit is about in the end-time church. It's unity, intimacy, and maturity. That's the architectural blueprint of the end-time church. Unity is the relational dimension, with people. That's the hard one, by the way. The man whom I think does that as well as anyone is John Dawson. I don't know if you guys all know John Dawson. He's profound in his understanding of how human beings interact with one another in honor and in unity in the grace of God. I hear him and I'm blown away. He has such revelation of how human beings in the grace of God honor and walk in unity together. There are many who do. That's really what James Dobson is doing. He's focusing on the family element of it, but it's really about unity inside the family. It's unity, intimacy, and maturity. I would think of John Wimber as equipping the saints in the power of God. He does all of these, of course, but he focuses on the power dimension of maturity, and how to move in the power of God. Different parts of the Body of Christ really focus on character development. Others focus on the apostolic order of the building of the Church. Peter Wagner, for example, focuses on how churches are mobilized, and how they reach out. There are all kinds of men and women who focus on the whole leadership development of the Body of Christ, and how the administration of God's purpose goes forth. You don't have to choose one over the other. All three of these have to happen: unity, intimacy, and maturity, and maturity in gifts, fruit, and wisdom.

Yes, question from the audience? My personal opinion is that that's not how it's supposed to be. I believe that they're three distinct things. That doesn't mean I'm right, but that's what I think. I've studied this out; I think

most translations would make them three distinct things. What translation do you have? The New American Standard. OK, so that's just something to look for.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT IS HARDER THAN THE FIRST

Again, it's because of John 17:21. Jesus separates unity. It's one of His major cries in those last seven verses of John 17. Unity is the first thing He addresses, and I think that's because it's the hardest and rarest. We will have intimacy with God before we have unity with people. People like God a lot more quickly, a lot more easily, than they like people. They really do. My focus is the first commandment—being wholehearted lovers of God. The second commandment really is the hard one. Maybe I copped out to the easy one. I don't know. No, it was a divine calling, but the second commandment is clearly the hard one. It really, really is. And then there's the Great Commission. I even think of it that way. There's the first commandment, the second commandment, and the Great Commission would be the maturity one of gifts, fruit and wisdom.

What I want to share with you is this: there's going to be a revival of the knowledge of the Son of God that's the fruit, the outworking, of the fivefold ministry. One of the great, prominent features of those five ministries before the Lord returns is that they'll bring people to the knowledge of the Son of God. They will bring the Church to the knowledge of the Son of God.

JESUS SANCTIFIES AND WASHES THE CHURCH BY THE WORD OF GOD

Look at Ephesians 5:25-32. I'm going to zero in. It's talking about a man and a woman in marriage, but then he moves into Jesus and His bride, the Church. Paul is constantly going back and forth between the two themes, natural marriage and spiritual marriage—natural marriage on the earth and our spiritual marriage as the bride of Christ to Jesus.

He says in verse 26 that Jesus sanctifies and washes the Church by the Word of God. He washes the Church by the Word of God. It's the knowledge of the Word of God, of which the knowledge of God Himself is the prominent feature. That's not the only thing that Paul is talking about. It's the Word of God that washes and cleanses the bride. The reason I say that is that we come up with so many other modes of healing people's emotions rather than the Word of God. I'm for the things that the Holy Spirit is bringing into the Church, and it doesn't have to use biblical language as long as it uses biblical principles. Some of the prominent emphasis today is on the many, many models of healing the emotions. I do appreciate that. They don't have to use biblical language to be biblical. You can state a biblical concept in contemporary language. The Lord doesn't mind that. What I care about in all these different approaches to healing the emotions—which is a Holy Spirit emphasis—is that the Word of God is seen as the primary agent that cleanses and makes strong the heart.

When you think of the Word of God, particularly the Word of God pertaining to the knowledge of God Himself, the reason He's going to wash her by the Word in verse 26 is to present her in glory. It's the Word washing us that causes us to be mature and to be filled with the glory of God. What I would like to see is the Church returning to a good, old-fashioned lifestyle of having the Word of God prominent in our individual lives. I believe that the Word of God has such a minimal place in the life of the average believer in the Western world right now. We have to see the Word of God become central in the lifestyles of God's people. I don't mean you grit your teeth and endure the Word of God, but you see the Word as that which brings the spirit of glory to the human heart.

JESUS NOURISHES AND CHERISHES HIS CHURCH, AS A HUSBAND HIS WIFE

Look at verse 29—again, I’m reading from the New King James. I love the language here about Jesus nourishing and cherishing the Church. The NIV says, “feeds and cares” (Eph. 5:29, NIV), but I like the words, “nourishes and cherishes” (NKJV). Those are powerful verbs. Jesus is going to cherish and nourish His Church. Paul makes it clear that He does it by revealing Himself in a prominent way. That’s the book of Ephesians.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD CAUSES LOVE TO ABOUND

Turn to Philippians. I’ll have to be much briefer here, but I’ll just give you a menu to work off of for the future. Philippians 1:9. What’s the prayer? “That love would abound in you” (Phil. 1:9, paraphrased). How is love going to abound? When you have knowledge and discernment. Knowledge of what? What knowledge causes love to abound in the human heart? Well, it’s the knowledge of the Word of God in general. I’m not in any way trying to minimize that, but it’s clear from hundreds of verses that the knowledge of God causes love to abound. Paul prays right off the bat that love would abound in the emotions of God’s people in knowledge or by the receiving of knowledge.

That sounds like the Ephesians 1 prayer, doesn’t it? It’s the same kind of prayer: that knowledge would grow in our emotions. In other words, when knowledge abounds in you, what does it mean? It means that you’re emotionally healed. Emotions filled with abounding love means healed emotions. He’s talking about wholeness here. Where do wholeness and abounding love come from? They come from knowledge imparted to us by the Holy Spirit. That’s not the only place; I’m not trying to be simplistic. It’s the prominent place, not the only place.

Turn to the famous passage in Philippians 3:8-10. I’m skipping a few secondary references to the knowledge of God and just going straight to the prominent ones. I don’t know which I like more, Ephesians 3:8 or Philippians 3:8—either the anointing to preach the unfathomable riches of Jesus, or the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus. I always link them together here.

Paul says, “I count everything loss” (Phil. 3:7, paraphrased). That’s a pretty radical lifestyle of obedience. Isn’t that a pretty extravagant way to say, “I obey God with all my heart?” “I count everything loss.”

How did you do this? Why did you do this? For the purpose of “the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8). That’s the New King James language—“the knowledge of Jesus.” Paul describes it as the most excellent thing in his life. When the knowledge of Jesus enters my heart, it’s so pleasurable, it’s so excellent, it’s so enthralling and exhilarating to my human spirit. When the knowledge of Jesus enters my heart by revelation, it’s excellent. It’s enthralling. It’s thrilling. It’s invigorating. The knowledge of Jesus resonates in my spirit. That’s what *excellent* means.

“FOR WHOM I HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS”

“For whom I have suffered the loss of all things” (Phil. 3:8b). Paul denies disobedience in order to position himself to receive the knowledge of Jesus in a greater way. Then the knowledge of Jesus makes him more empowered to obey. Both of them play off of one another. We say no to sin in an introductory way, with an introductory knowledge of Jesus. It’s like how the rich get richer. The more that I say no to sin, the more I grow in the knowledge of Jesus, and the more I grow in the knowledge of Jesus, the more I say no to sin.

Both of them play off of one another. Someone says, “Which comes first?” It doesn’t matter. They both come together. They both increase in you. It’s a divine partnership of these two issues. Obedience begets greater knowledge of God, and greater knowledge of God begets greater obedience.

Paul says, “I have suffered the loss of everything.” Let me tell you that it was real when he lost. When the flesh says no, it’s a loss. It’s real that he suffered the loss. How many of you know that denying the flesh is genuinely a loss? There are times when we have to deny something and it’s really costly. Paul said, “I know what it means to really suffer in that. I know what it means to not like the decision I just made, but in the wake of the knowledge of Jesus, at the end of the day I count it rubbish. On the front end it was sacrificial. On the back end it seemed stupid that I even held onto that thing.” He says, “It’s rubbish. That which I viewed as suffering at the beginning of my journey, I now see differently. I view it as rubbish now. I don’t even want it now because of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus.”

THE THREE PRIORITIES OF NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY

Then he goes on in verse 10 and gives what I call, “the three priorities of New Testament ministry”: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). There are three lines of thought: “I want intimacy with God, I want to make impact on others, and I’m willing to endure the fellowship of suffering. I’m willing to take the counterattack of Satan.”

Look at the order. “I want intimacy.” God doesn’t want you in a cave your whole life. He does want you to make an impact on people. He wants you to change people who need change. I remember one time when I was really into this. It was about fifteen years ago. I was really gripped with this issue of the knowledge of God. The church that I’m now pastoring, Metro Christian Fellowship in Kansas City, was just beginning. I was really wrestling with the Lord. I didn’t want to be a pastor of a church. I had been pastoring for about seven years before that, and I said, “I don’t want to pastor. I just want to know God and tell people about God. I don’t want to run systems, children’s church, elder’s meetings, and the home groups, budgets, buildings, lights, parking lots, sound crews. Lord, I don’t want to do all that stuff. I’ve done this a few times already. I just want to go be alone with God all day and find out good stuff about God and tell people what I find. I don’t want to do all of this other stuff. Let someone else do it.”

The Lord was challenging me, and He said, “I want something more from you than being a holy man and a lover of God.”

I thought, “Hmmm.” I mean, it came to me so clearly.

He said, “There’s something I want more than an extravagant, holy man who loves Me extravagantly. I want a billion people who extravagantly know Me and love Me.”

It hit me so hard: “There’s something that I want more than one man who worships Me with all of his heart. It’s a company of people in the whole earth that do it.”

He gave me the verse, and I have had very few subjective, lightning bolt words from God, but it changed my life. It was Joshua 1:2, when the Lord told Joshua, “I want you and the people to go into the land” (Josh. 1:2, paraphrased). That verse just came to me out of nowhere. I hadn’t read it in years. “I want you and the people.”

I said, “Lord, I just want to go.”

He said, “Well, there you go—your puny, little, skinny, selfish heart. No, I want you and the people to go into the land.”

That’s when I officially added to my prayer list the second part of verse ten. “OK, then I need the power to impact others. Knowing You isn’t enough in my relationship with You. You want me to impact people.”

He said, “Yes, if I just want you to know Me, I’ll take you to heaven. When you die, that’s the signal that I don’t want you to impact people anymore, and that I just want you to know Me. Until I give you that tremendous witness of the Spirit, when you doze off for a moment and you wake up and the lights are brighter and the colors are sweeter and the sounds and the tastes and the fragrances are like you’ve never seen, then you know that I’m really happy for you to just lock into number one. Until then, I want you to do number one and number two.”

By the way, when you make number one and number two priorities, there will be a counterattack of Satan. Satan is like a devouring lion; he’ll be right there. That’s part of the responsibility in this fallen world, to bear the counterattack of Satan.

THE REWARD OF LIFE IS BEING LOVED AND LOVING GOD

The fact I want you to see is that Paul’s number one cry was for intimacy first and for ministry second. In Song of Solomon, the bride cries out in the fourth verse, “Draw me after you, and let us run” (Song 1:4, paraphrased). “Draw me into intimacy and let me run with you in partnership in ministry.” A lot of times we get it reversed. We want to run in partnership with Jesus to minister to people. We want to run with Jesus to touch others before we’re drawn as a lover of God in intimacy.

My burden is not, “Oh, shame on you; how bad and carnal you are if you do that!” I’m not focused on how bad you are if you do it. My view is different. My view is how ineffective it is, even in your own life, if you do it. Ministry without a foundation of intimacy is a lot less powerful. It burns you out and it breaks you. Ministry without intimacy burns you out. It really hurts the vessel. I’m not rebuking people and saying, “Why aren’t you lovers of God?” I’m warning them that they aren’t made that way. They’ll break. Ministry without intimacy breaks you, because intimacy carries in itself the reward. The reward of life is feeling the love of God and having the power to be a lover. That’s the reward of life. When I have that reward working in my soul, when I feel loved and I feel love back, anyone can attack me and I have power on the inside. They can take my stuff, they can steal my money, they can divide the church, and they can hate me. Anything can go wrong if I feel loved by God and I feel love for God, which is the way I have been designed as a human being. I carry the reward with me. People can do all kinds of mean things and something is still alive on the inside. If ministry is first and intimacy is second, when people take your stuff from you, whether it’s your reward, your honor, your money, your position, your authority, the things you’ve accumulated in ministry and power, your reward is gone and you break on the inside. Intimacy really is the thing that makes our spirit buoyant.

I know many men of God who are anointed in ministry. This sounds overstated, but this is a true statement. They’re terminally bored in their life in God. They stand on platforms and the power of God is released through them, but inside they are dying of boredom. They’re so wounded, because anytime you stand on a platform with any kind of visibility you’re going to have a lot of enemies. There’s no way you can talk to thousands of people

without having lots of people mad at you for dozens of reasons. Sometimes they're jealous, sometimes it's the devil, sometimes you're really doing it wrong. There are dozens of reasons why they're mad at you. If you stand on a platform, you're going to have people come against you. They will undermine your credibility and your honor, tell lies about you, and misrepresent you. They're going to take people from you and your budget isn't going to work. People are going to get mad because they get fired because the budget didn't work.

There are all these things and they all work together, and these people walk around in a ball of pain because the reward they have is their ministry working. There's no one's whose ministry works all the time. Paul the apostle was in prison for two years at a time. His main men betrayed him. Everyone's ministry is that way. The reward is in being loved and feeling the power to be a lover; that's what makes the spirit buoyant. When I see men of God in whom intimacy is really minimal and secondary in their life, I don't say, "How carnal you are!" I say, "How vulnerable to destruction your heart is." You'll have no remedy for the arrows that you take on the front line. You'll just live in pain and bitterness all the time. Ministry gets really nasty when that happens. Our hearts shrink. Our hearts become cold and hard.

"We still have the anointing on us to touch others!"

No, no. We have to have intimacy first. "Draw me after You. Let me be drawn into the heart of God, and then let me run in ministry and power with You, Jesus, to touch other people."

Amen.