

# EPHESIANS



Day 265

## “So That You May Know Him Better”

September 22 - Ephesians 1: 1-23

Once officiated when a couple renewed their vows to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. What a privilege it was to gather with their children and grandchildren to honor a couple who were going the distance. When the bride came to the backyard altar to meet, again, her beloved of fifty years, her eyes were all aglow. He met her with a winsome smile and took her hand, and they stood before me to do it all over again.

A question popped into my mind on the spot and I asked them, “Are you guys still learning new things about each other?” He said that was true and she nodded as well. Think about that, 50 years and they are still gleaning, from time to time, new insights into the heart of their partner. I think that is a beautiful thing.

The depths of God will never be tapped. He is so deep, even beyond our wildest imagination, that to think that you have a handle on His nature is like saying that you understand the mysteries of the universe. Remember that when Job challenged the Almighty, the Lord appealed to the intricacies of all that He had created to help Job realize that his own understanding fell horribly short of being able to comprehend the way of God. In the end Job learned to trust that God was able to meet the needs of His own.

There is a flavor of this in the first chapter of Ephesians. Paul says that God has revealed some of His mysteries to the church so that those in Christ could appreciate the way God chose them from the beginning, out of love. And it’s not just His own who are in the confines of His will, for He works out “everything in conformity with the purpose of His will,” (verse 11). Not only did God choose you in Christ, but

He also sealed you with the Spirit as a guarantee that you would one day receive the inheritance God has bought for you.

After reading this first chapter, God wants you to grasp the earnestness of His love for you, and the lengths He went to save you. These deep thoughts are intended to inspire appreciation for the God who loves you and has brought you to Himself. Our natural response is utter amazement. Why would God do these things in my life? I don’t feel worthy for Him to work His will in me. Why was I adopted? God knows that I am not the cream of the crop. Why me, Lord?

Paul says the answer is “in accordance with His pleasure and will.” It is grace again; grace that baffles us and upends our conventional thinking that in order to be loved I must be lovely. Paul calls it the “riches of God’s grace.” Believe me, if you have experienced this kind of love you feel like the richest person in the world.

Paul’s response to this grace is prayer. He prays for them with thankfulness. He wants God to make Himself known to them. Go back and read the things he desires for them. How often do you hear these kinds of prayers being prayed today? The things Paul prays for are like a mirror reflecting back the glory of God.

He wants them to experience wisdom and revelation so that they can know God better. Too often we lean on our own understanding and spiritual background to know God. Paul knew it took more than that. They needed supernatural wisdom and revelation in order to become more acquainted with the Father.

He asks for their eyes to be open spiritually so that they can grasp the true nature of the hope we have in Christ. No half-hearted, man-centered prayers for Paul. No, he wanted them to be spiritually alert, awake to the truth of God and leery of the schemes of the evil one. He also wants them to be aware of the prize, the inheritance awaiting them on the other side of this veil. And lastly, but not least, he wants them to know the power of God. This is no ordinary power, but the power that raised Jesus from the dead. This power gives life and vanquishes the enemy. As soon as Paul mentions the power of the Lord his mind goes on and on about the superiority of Jesus and how He

rules over all. He rules over all powers and is the head of the church.

Are you still learning new things about God? Are you alive to God today or are things getting stale? What do you know you have to do to bring Paul's prayer to life in your own situation? Maybe now is a good time to stop and pray his prayer for yourself.

"God, give me wisdom and revelation. Renew my hope in your inheritance, and let me experience the power you promise to live the Christian life. In Jesus Name, Amen."

God's blessings reveal more of God's heart to us,  
Pastor Steve



## "The Gift Of God"

September 23 - Ephesians 2: 1-22

**H**ow separated is a sinner from God? How far away were you from God before Christ bridged the gap? Was God next door, or nowhere to be found? Did God come into view gradually, or did He burst into your life all of a sudden? How desperate is a sinner's alienation from his Creator?

I grew up never thinking about whether I was anywhere near God. Life for me was simply rolling along, and I guess I never really cared much about eternal issues. When I did wrong things, I buried them. When I did right things, I felt self-justified. I was on a selfish mission and wasn't concerned how far God was from me.

When a person is separated from God the distance can be misleading, because in a certain respect God is all around us. We live in His world, and His creation screams His involvement in all that is made. So as we walk through God's world, we can feel like all is well, because God built the place we live in. And the Holy Spirit is alive and well in those who are close to God. Our association with these believers gives us a

false sense of security. Have you ever heard someone talk about a Christian parent or grandparent as if their faith somehow made up for the gap between him and God? Also, because mankind was made in the image of God, people tend to think they are gods. Through success, or strength, or the ability to help others, or the smarts to build something or discover something or cure something, man tends to exalt himself to god status. How can you feel very far from God when you are Him?

Paul says that we are spiritually dead. He doesn't say we are sleeping or in a coma or injured or misled; he says we are dead in our trespasses and sins. By the way, trespasses means premeditated violations of God's law, and sins means all wrongs in general, premeditated or not. The point is that man's Pre-Jesus condition is dire. For a moment, apply this to the person who thinks that by obeying the law or keeping a set of rules he can be saved. Have you ever seen a dead man working? Picture a skeleton sitting next to you at work. "Who's that?" someone asks. And you tell

them that it is a dead guy trying to earn his way into heaven. Crazy, isn't it? Dead people do not work.

Jesus talked about this problem. Someone asked Him if it would be OK to go back home and bury his parent. Jesus told him to let the dead bury their dead—you follow me. Who are the dead? Obviously they are the spiritually dead. The physical dead would have a hard time burying anyone.

Spiritual birth is a resurrection from the dead. Those who were dead are made alive by Christ. You were dead, unresponsive to God, and bound by the darkness in your dead world. In that condition Christ came along and raised you out of the darkness and transferred you into the kingdom of light. When a baby is born you will often hear a parent emphatically say that the experience was a miracle. The spiritual birth is like that. It is a miracle work of God in your life.

In God's kindness he did something for you that you could not earn, nor did you deserve. He raised you. It was because of the riches of His grace that you have received the great gift of salvation. God didn't look into your future and see that you were any more

special than anyone else; God simply placed His favor on you and brought you up from your spiritual grave. Paul says that no man can boast about his own part in the process because it is God's work from first to last. It is the magnificent gift of God, given freely in Christ.

"But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ," (2:13). We were "far away," farther than we ever really realized. We can only comprehend that when we understand that it took the bloody death of Jesus to bridge the gap. Only his sacrifice can bring a sinner into the presence of the holy God. All other approaches are landings on a different runway. Only the blood of Jesus can unite a person to the one true God.

This runway is lit for landing. Are you approaching His way, or your own? In this day and age people tend to play fast and loose with their knowledge of God. There is a way, Proverbs says, that appears right to man but the end of it is the way of death. To land there is to crash and burn.

God's blessings are abundant in grace,  
Pastor Steve



## "Pray Like Paul"

September 24 - Ephesians 3: 1-21

**T**he Best Regards Of The Day,  
I recently received a correspondence from someone in prison who said that he had always believed in God but he had no idea how to pray. Have you ever been in his shoes? I sure have. I can remember thinking that I'd love to be able to pray, but at the same time I felt unable to muster any words.

Even now after several decades with the Lord, I am still sometimes befuddled by the subject of prayer. Let's face it: most of us see prayer as the last resort when we are in a fix. I have been in many situations where I had no clue what to do and all I could think

to do was cry out to God for help. Prayer becomes an emergency option. I'm sure you've heard people say, "You haven't got a prayer." What do they mean by that? Aren't they saying that no matter what you do, your situation is a lost cause and not even a plea to God will make any difference?

Think for a moment about the content of your prayers. Do you have a prayer list that you work through when you talk to God? Is it mainly people that you are praying for? Do you pray for yourself? What do you bring to God when you are in His presence in prayer? Do you see your prayers being answered?

Prayer was Paul's motivation for ministry. For him, prayer had purpose. His prayers were based on the solid truth of the Word, as well as revelation that he had received from the Lord Jesus. Take a second look at his prayer here in Ephesians 3, and you will see his emphasis on the truth that Jesus was alive after a brutal death, and that His power was available for the "saints" so that they could experience God in "all" His fullness.

How does that sound? Wouldn't it be a wonderful experience to have the power of God in your life? And note the application of this power. Isn't it mostly about knowing the love of Jesus? Think about the transforming power of love. When you know someone loves you and wants the best for you, there is a welling up of great purpose in your daily life. Paul knew that kind of love, and he was driven to share it with others.

Do you know that God loves you?

Do you believe that Jesus lives in your heart and that He is right there with you through it all?

Are you experiencing the power of God to live beyond yourself, and is that power making the love of

Jesus real to you?

God loves you. He gave Jesus to demonstrate that once for all and forever. Jesus rose. He lives now in your heart by faith. Do you believe that? If so, today you can see in some way how much he truly cares for you.

Let's walk in love.

I was traveling with some friends to Seattle to take in a baseball game and we had some time to kill, so we thought we'd visit the fastest-growing church in the country. That's what I had heard, anyway. Unfortunately, I had neglected to look up the address of the church before making the trip so I wasn't quite sure how we'd find it. Well, that morning we went for coffee and when we got to the counter I asked the gals there if any of them had heard of this church. One gal said she was a member there, and of course she was able to give us directions. Coincidence? No. God loves us and shows us that He does in little ways every day. Thank you, God.

God's blessings come with great power and love,  
Pastor Steve



## "Let's Grow Up"

September 25 - Ephesians 4:1-16

**D**o you remember growing pains? I will never forget them. We tend to remember the really painful experiences in life, don't we? I can remember getting up in the middle of the night with a cramp in my leg that put me in a desperate position. I'd dance around my room, holding the back of my leg or I would stretch out on the floor and try to work the cramp out. Any way you look at it, it was painful growing up.

If you could go back and re-do junior high, would you? No? Well, why not? We did more painful growing in those two or three years than at any other time,

didn't we? Do you remember how you felt in junior high? It seemed like every day was a test of your maturity. The bummer for the boys was that the girls were already growing up, while we were caught in some undefined purgatory, not knowing what we were or where we were going. I was always getting stomach aches in class. I'm sure I was nervous about wanting to fit in like most of the others, but I was also overly conscientious about grades and reputation and doing well in sports. Junior high was a real defining time for a good number of us.

How much of your life and your time have you

spent covering up the truth about yourself? Do you understand what I mean by that? Are you who you really are, or do you have a collection of masks that you conveniently put on to adapt to the different people and places in your life? Do you interpret events in your life accurately, or have you embellished them to fit an image that you would like to maintain? Do you tend to downplay the experiences in your life because you think no one would like to really see and understand the real you? Maybe you think you are too boring to let people take part in the day-to-day you. Do you need a friend, a confidant, who can accept you right where you are, holding your friendship in confidence so that your privacy is protected?

Some people are loners and some people are clowns. I think people join the circus and become clowns because the costume allows them to be the person they would really like to be—fun, outgoing, relational, and downright silly. Remember the class clown in your school? He was the guy who could make everyone laugh and he didn't seem to care if the teacher was perturbed by it. He found his strength in being able to entertain. The loner, on the other hand, deals with life by escaping from the pressures that people lay on him. Loners are just fine when they are all alone. They may not want to fit in for a variety of reasons. They may think people treat them rudely and they would just as soon be by themselves than in a crowd of folks. Sometimes their aloneness is an unhealthy escape from problems they ought face and overcome. They can become cynical and bitter, seeing life through the lens of dreariness. Both of these types are characteristically on medication that their doctor believes will boost them out of the doldrums.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul, as usual, is expounding on the life of the church. He talks about the different leadership roles and then he turns back to church unity. Remember, before Jesus left He emphasized that love would be the defining mark of the Christian. He said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, by your love for one another." The Lord had given specific instructions that we were to love one another as He loved us. Paul must have had these thoughts in mind when he wrote about unity. He talked about not acting like kids when it came to understanding the truth of God. That way, he rea-

soned, you would not be tossed and manipulated by disruptive teachings. Paul said something along these same lines to the Corinthians, who also needed to hear about Christian maturity: "Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature," (1 Corinthians 14:20).

Paul says the road to spiritual maturity is by "speaking the truth in love..." We must focus on being truth-tellers. We must resist the temptation to cover, hide, and run; but instead stand our ground and talk about truth. Specifically, Paul is talking about staying in the truth of the Bible, God's truth. We also need to be honest with God, others, and ourselves in regard to our lives and our circumstances. As we have said before, in any given day we will probably have thousands of thoughts, and of these a certain percentage will be bogus. If you begin to base your life on bogus thoughts and fantasies you will sink your ship before you know it. On the other hand, if you focus on those thoughts that are true, whether they are happy true thoughts or unhappy true thoughts, you will find a sense of control and freedom that will bring you into maturity.

Look at Jesus' example. He always spoke the truth. In John 8 there is the classic bout between Him and the unbelieving Pharisees. They accuse Him of not being true. He didn't yell or swear or get all riled up. He simply answered their accusation with truth. And then He also told them the truth about themselves. It wasn't always pleasant, but it was true, and truth will always defeat what is false.

The truth has a way of dispelling lies. People believe lies about all sorts of things. Why? Because we tend to believe those that seem authoritative. If the person telling us something has a deep voice, a superior attitude, or a first-class education, then we cower before their falsities. Others believe untruths about their family background, or their part in some event that they are blamed for, or some cutting remark that a parent has made. These zingers leave a mark that only grows unless you deal with them before they have a chance to define your life.

While it's clear that truth-telling is critical, the attitude in which we tell the truth is important as well. Paul says to do it in love. Peter says that we are to talk to others with "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:16).

I like to use the word “kindness.” So many err here. They speak the truth, but very harshly and with the intent to set someone straight. They use the truth like a hammer to break apart and wound. Have you ever used truth like that? I have. God wants us to gently and firmly talk about what is real. If you do, you will become more real. Paul says we will be like Jesus and grow up into Him. We'll follow in His footsteps.

I cannot help but think about Jesus when he stood before Pilate. Jesus said, “You have no authority over me...” Pilate thought he was sovereign, but he wasn't. Finally Pilate said, “What is truth?” And he walked away, not staying to hear Jesus' reply. I would have loved to hear the Lord's answer to that question. He

may have said, “I Am.” Some, like Pilate, don't want to hear the truth. They have other things to do and they would rather not take the time to find out what is really the fact of the matter.

How about you? Do you speak truth? Can you quickly size up a situation and talk about it in a matter-of-fact and truthful way? If so, add more conversations about God's truth to your life and you will have the ingredients for Spiritual growth. It's God's will for us. He loves to see us mature and become more like His special Son.

God's blessings come when we speak truth in love,

Pastor Steve



Day 269

### “Get Practical”

September 26 - Ephesians 4:17-5:7

**T**he Lord Is Good,  
Bad habits are hard to break. Talk to a junk food junkie about eating healthy and their stomach will do a somersault at the thought of fruits and vegetables. It is so difficult to change our ways, that most of the time it takes a monumental wake up call to get us moving in the right direction. Maybe we get on the scale and realize that we have 50 pounds weighing us down, and we get mad and determine at that very moment to do something about it.

Marketers spend millions and millions of dollars every year to try and help us reach our goals. Most of them offer easy solutions to complex problems and very few, if any, offer motivational tools to continue the product or process until we actually see results. Meeting our goals always boils down to finding the motivation to persevere when we do not feel like moving ahead. Most of us move on to the latest gismo or gadget that promises results in half the time with half the energy expended.

For the follower of Jesus there is a lifetime process of putting off the “old man,” that corrupt and self-serving fellow who wants to dominate our day-to-day lives. When we get up in the morning, there he is, beckoning us to take the low road, look out for number one, and use people to gain egotistical ends.

Paul is consistently urging us not to live like we once did and not to follow the sinful ways of the Gentiles. He warns us that these are habits that will draw us away from a close walk with the Lord. He speaks confidently of the believer's new attitude and position in Christ. He says, in contrast to the old way of life, in order to push them in the right direction: “You however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus,” (4: 20,21). I have to say that I just love this Scripture. Knowing the truth in Jesus is the primary motivation for a person to change his ways.

Jesus changes lives. Think for a moment about

how He has changed you so far. You may not be where you want to be, but you certainly are not where you were, are you? The fact that He changes lives should give us much hope for the things that still need to turn around. Fortunately, Paul gives us direct help when it comes to applying the Lord's will to our lives. This statement is tried and true, and if we will take it to heart and put it into motion, we will be less bothered by sins that weigh us down.

So what does he say? Generally he is saying that we need to REPLACE old habits with new, spiritually-charged ones. For example, if you have been in the habit of lying, stop doing that, but don't stop there. Begin to speak the truth on a regular basis; before you know it, the truth habit will replace the bad habit of lying. Paul goes on to give some very specific advice. He says to not let anger get the best of you. It is better to talk out your anger feelings before the situation spirals out of control through thoughts that make things even worse. Again, if you are a thief, begin to use your hands to make things for others rather than take things away from them. Also, watch what you say. If you let unhealthy thoughts make their way into words there will be no end to the corruption that results. On the other hand, if you use your mouth to build others up you will not have time to tear them down with words.

Replace hatred and malice with kindness that

prays and reaches out to those you struggle with. Replace obscene talk with words that bring others closer to God. Replace bitterness with forgiveness. Again, it is not enough to give up the old habit and not replace it with the better thing. If you don't replace it with the good, you will probably slip back into the bad habit sooner or later. Jesus taught that when demons are driven from a man they go out and find other demons to come back to that house (body), and if they come back and find the house swept clean, but unoccupied, then they bring all of their friends and overwhelm the person. The vacancy needs to be filled by God and godly things so that the demons would be helpless to enter again. It is not enough to kick an old habit, you must re-supply with a good habit if you would like long term results.

Is there an area in your life that aches like a sore tooth? What can you replace it with that will enable you to move in a good direction? Is it time for you to talk to someone who might be able to steer you in the right way? Take the time today to pray about it, and then pick up the phone and call that person. Pretty soon you may be on a course where you won't even be able to remember the hold that area once had on you.

God's blessings cannot be replaced,  
Pastor Steve



Day 270

### “Are You Full?”

September 27 - Ephesians 5:8-33

**I** had a grandmother whose mission in life was to fill me up. The moment I opened the door to her house I heard, “Are you hungry? Sit on down and I'll fix you something.” My grandma was from Oklahoma so she could fry almost anything. I remember her chicken most of all. Even though I am not a big

chicken fan, I loved it the way she made it. It was truly finger-licking good. For some reason she wasn't happy unless I was full. The truth is she would fill me to overflowing, topping off the meal with some rich dessert. If you had a grandma like mine then you know what I mean, and as I write you are getting hungry just

thinking about it.

I'll never forget the big holiday meals and how much we had to eat. There was turkey and prime rib and mashed potatoes and cheese broccoli and fruit salad and tons more. After we were done with the meal, the house looked like a bomb had gone off; not because of the mess we had made, but because of all of the bodies strewn all over the house anywhere they could find a place to repose. You'd think we had just run a marathon judging from the way we looked and from the snoring sounds shaking the walls. We were just...satisfied. Plus, all of the blood in our heads and other parts of our bodies had made it down to our stomachs to digest the mother lode. And so we were sleepy and content.

You know the 23rd Psalm—the one about the Shepherd and the sheep? Remember that the sheep are made to lie down in green pastures. Sheep will do that only after they have had their fill and are satisfied; only then will they recline, usually just kicking back chewing the cud. This is a wonderful spiritual analogy for us. Jesus fills us with the kind of food that really satisfies. He said that He was the bread of life. And He said that His words give life. After He feeds you, you can lie down with contentment and satisfaction, secure from the pressures of life. If we have drunk from the “still waters” and have eaten from the rich pastures, then we can recline in safety and under the protection that only God can offer. We are under the care of the Good Shepherd, whose rod and staff will lead us. But for now, we are enjoying the assurance of being full.

In Ephesians, Paul commands us to keep being filled with the Holy Spirit. That's the way the verse reads in the Greek New Testament. Make it your ongoing practice to be filled with God's Spirit. Remember, the Spirit is God, so actually you are asking God to fill you with Himself. In Corinthians Paul said that we are the temple of the living God. God lives in us because of Jesus and by His Spirit. So how can we stay full each day?

Paul begins with a “what not to do.” Don't live recklessly. Don't let wine take you down a road of debauchery. That's the kind of careless life that God cannot inhabit. In Galatians Paul talked about not walking in the “flesh,” but in the “Spirit.” Then he listed the

works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit. If you compare what he says in Corinthians with Galatians you'll see that the Spirit is pushed out when we walk in the flesh; for example, in Corinthians Paul says that our bodies are not for fornication. Fornication defiles the body and the spirit. You cannot be full of the Spirit and at the same time be engaged in an improper relationship. The two are mutually exclusive.

Paul says worship, thankfulness and accountability are key ingredients for being filled with the Spirit. Let's take a glance at each of these and then add a fourth point from one of Paul's other epistles.

**Worship:** The act of worship, specifically worship through music, has a profound impact on most people's hearts. The Psalms were originally set to music. Jesus, just before the events that took His life, sang a hymn with His disciples. In Revelation the hosts of heaven are seen in worship, singing. Worship reminds us of the nature and ways of God. It reaches our hearts with words and melodies that draw us into the presence of God and bring God closer than ever. Do you know a worship chorus by heart? Pause now to hum or sing it, would you? Draw near to God and be filled with His Spirit.

**Thankfulness:** This attitude acknowledges God's sovereign involvement in every detail of our lives. We are to give thanks “for everything.” How can we do this? We can when we can acknowledge that God is there with us in every circumstance. Pause now to say or write a prayer of thankfulness. Remember, that thing that is tough right now is there so you will hold on to God and find His grace sufficient. We cannot ever disconnect prayer from the name of Jesus. He is the reason we can give thanks in everything. He said He would never leave us or forsake us. Never. He is there with you right now. Maybe you are on your way to the hospital to visit someone you care about. He is right there by your side, and when you pray for them, you can be sure He will guide your words. Give thanks and be filled with the Spirit.

**Accountability:** We are to submit to one another. We need one another. We need to be connected. Are you connected to a group of believers who hold you accountable for your actions? This kind of fellowship group can be a lifesaver because they remind you of the good things of God, but still allow you to have

doubts and struggles. We all struggle and we need friends there to hold us up. Connect to others in the church and realize that you are being filled with the Spirit in the process.

Paul also associates our relationship with the Word of God to being filled with God. God's Words in us correlate with having God in us. Listen to what he says in Colossians: “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful (sound familiar?). Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him,” (3:15-17). Doesn't that sound like what we have just been

looking at in Ephesians? Sure it does, because Paul emphasized these things so that we could be filled with the Spirit.

What does it mean for you to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly?” Try to answer that question today. If you do, and then practice the answers you find, you will be in the Word and at the same time filled with the Spirit. A friend of mine recently said that when he is in the Word he can only do what God wants him to do. The Word has such an impact on his mind and heart that it puts him right where he wants to be—close to God and filled with Him.

Let your cup overflow today!

God's blessings fill you up,  
Pastor Steve



Day 271

## “Be Strong”

September 28 - Ephesians 6: 1-24

**S**ome chapters in the Bible are so full of practical wisdom that it is tough to summarize them. The book of Proverbs, for example, is like that. In one chapter in Proverbs, you can have 20 or so helpful truths to think about. The problem is, if you read right through the chapter you will not be able to assimilate all of the important things that you read. Ephesians 6 is like that.

Allow me to give you some helpful tips on how to take a chapter like this and get the most out of it. First of all, let's get down to brass tacks about the amount of time we spend in the Word. If you are going through the New Testament, then you are probably making your way through the reading pretty quickly. Some of you may read more slowly but wouldn't you admit that while you're reading there are other things looming in the back of your mind? All of us are

distracted from the most important things in our lives. The tyranny of the urgent seems to constantly push out the first priorities. So let's look at a few ideas that will help us squeeze more out of our reading from day to day.

Let's begin with a more general tactic. Some Christians have adopted a particular book of the Bible and have called it their “lifetime book.” Of all 66 books, they read, study, and think about one book more than all of them. Well, Ephesians would be a fine book for this purpose. It says so much in such a small space that you could read it constantly and even memorize a great deal of it, and still benefit 20 years from now. Could you imagine if you read the book of Ephesians every day for five years, how much you'd know about it and how much easier it would be to recall verses from its pages that would help you in dealing with

problems? It would become a spring of living water always ready to fill you when you were feeling dry. Maybe it's time for you to try this idea on for size. If so, get a journal, an "Ephesians Journal," and begin to record insights that you glean as you meditate on its pages.

Secondly, read with your mind. Don't put your mind into neutral when you read, but rather engage it in the process. Think about what you are seeing on the page. It is way too easy to read with our eyes and feel like we have actually comprehended our reading matter, when in reality we only engaged our eyes but did not bring the thoughts very far into our minds and hearts. We need the word to get our attention. In Hebrews it says that we need to pay more careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away from it. That applies to our Bible reading.

Have you ever swum in the ocean? I grew up near the beaches of Southern California and I was in the water a great deal. I realized at a very young age that I needed to mark where I went into the water with some landmark, because I would look up and discover I had drifted 50 or 75 feet away from where I went into the water. The currents were pulling me away from my spot. When we do not engage our minds and hearts in our reading, it is very easy to drift spiritually. So engage your mind and let the Word penetrate to that place where you formulate your thoughts and make decisions. Then you will see how the Bible can act like a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Psalm 119:103).

Prayer before Bible reading will prepare you to receive the meat of the Word. God's Spirit, who inspired the Bible in the first place, is right with you and He wants to help you to glean from His Words truths that will build up your faith in Jesus. So ask Him to guide you. Ask Him to make His Words come alive so that they transform you, giving you the eyes you need to see spiritual truth. Ask God to open your eyes so that you can see the wonders of His glorious Word.

Third, read it again. If at first you do not get something out of your reading, read it again. Go back to the words over and over. Let them sit on your mind and simmer there until they have their fullest impact on your life. Old truths, the ones you have lived with for years, can have a new impact on you as you consider their applications to today's challenges. Take Ephesians 6 and place it like a tin plate over your life today and see if you cannot find some needed help for serving God. I love verse 18, about prayer. Prayer is a subject that all of us need to think about. From this verse we see that there are all kinds of prayers that can be used when we are faced with the issues of the day. Try it on for size.

Fourth, group subjects together for further study. For example, here we have the subject of the Armor of God. Maybe put a box around that section and begin to think about the different pieces of the armor. Think about how each piece of equipment could help you to better fight off the flaming missiles of the evil one. Or, do you have a friend who needs reassurance about some problem they are facing? You could encourage him to take up the whole armor of God so he too can stand. Also, don't neglect the first part of the chapter, which deals with the relationships in families. These few verses can be very helpful in dealing with issues at home. Now go back to the margin in your Bible where you read about the armor and look for cross-references that apply to the subject. For example, you can learn more about the armor by reading 1 Thessalonians 5.

Lastly, make your Bible reading and study a priority. The more you learn, the more you will be able to take the truth and apply it to your life.

God says through Isaiah, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word," (66:2).

Now, there is food for thought.

God's blessings are attached to His Word,  
Pastor Steve