

## All Access

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### Week 1: Know God Better

- Back in 2010, I was in college and living with my Aunt Jeanne in the Columbia, SC area. And there was one weekend where I was attending a wedding of one of my high school friends back in Virginia.
- I stayed for almost the entire reception and still had a 5 hour drive back to Aunt Jeanne's so it was going to be a late night.
- But I wasn't gonna rush, I remember I had my Rascal Flatts burnt CD going, and I was in cruise control goin about 5 to 7 over as is my custom on these types of road trips.
- Then it got to be about 1 or 2 in the morning, and all of the sudden without any warning, I went from clear skies to a torrential downpour.
- But I didn't panic, I just calmly got into the lane that was on higher ground to avoid the

puddles, and I slowed my cruise control down to a little under the speed limit.

- The problem was however, whenever I allowed the cruise control to set again, the wheels kicked too much, caught the water, and I began to hydroplane, and before I knew it I was spinning 360's on the interstate, smacked into a guard rail, ended up facing the opposite direction on the interstate, and I just heard the horn and saw the blinding lights of an 18-wheeler come screaming by me
- I don't know how close that truck was but it felt like he missed me by inches.
- I got out of the car to inspect the damage and the front of the car was pretty banged up, but all I really had to do was pull some grass and mud out of the wheel well, the car started right back up, and I was able to make my way home.
- As I pulled off, I realized that there was only a little strip of guard rail along that part of the

road, it couldn't have been longer than a couple hundred yards or so.

- And as I thought about it, I had been around 4 or 5 cars the whole time I was driving, in front of me, behind me, beside me, but when I started spinning out it was like all of the cars around me just weren't there any more
  - It was kind of perplexing
- The next morning Aunt Jeanne sees the car, comes and gets me out of bed and says, "What happened??"
- I told her the story, and she said, "It's crazy, somewhere between 1 and 2 am, I woke up in a panic, and felt like I needed to pray for you. So I just started praying real hard."
- But then she asked the question I'll never forget. Very simply she just asked, "Why?"
- "Why did God wake me up to pray for you? Did my prayers save your life? If I had decided to just brush it off and go back to sleep would

things have happened different? Why does He do things like that?"

- Now my Aunt Jeanne is as strong of a Christian as I have ever known. And I don't know if I had ever seen someone that I knew to be a strong person of faith, be willing to ask a question like that.
  - Normally we're just supposed to take the win and share the testimony. But rarely do we take the time to ask the question, "Why?"
  - Why do we pray? Why does God prompt us the way He does at times? How do we know that it's God and not just our feelings? Does God actually speak back? What's the point of praying over and over for things if what you're praying for doesn't happen?
  - These are all things that we are going to discuss throughout the course of this series.
- We are entitling this series All-Access because Paul tells us in Ephesians "***For through Him***

***we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”- Ephesians 2:18 (ESV)***

- So because of what Jesus has done through His life, death and resurrection, we now have Full Access to God.
  - Hebrews says we can come before the throne of Grace with boldness.
    - However, how many things do we have access to, but don't use.
    - Like the gym membership that is rarely taken advantage of
    - The streaming channels you pay for and forget all about
  - Just because we have Access doesn't necessarily mean we use it the way that we should.
  - And all of us have the same access and privilege of prayer, but how many of us are taking full advantage of it?
- Now, I'm sure that we all have had some questions before in regards to prayer, like we mentioned before
  - But it's almost never questioned that prayer is, in fact, important.
    - Even in secular circles, prayer is normally not disregarded, it's almost a natural instinct.
    - You'll see in secular tv networks, whenever a tragedy happens, even if they have been very anti-christian or anti-Jesus in many ways, it still almost rolls off the tongue when they say, "Our thoughts and prayers are with you."
  - It's almost all too obvious that there is this natural draw and desire for divine intervention.
    - One study done in 2004 found that even 30% of adamantly proclaimed atheists admit that they pray sometimes.
    - Another found that 17 percent of nonbelievers admit to praying regularly

- The study also found that the frequency of prayer among nonbelievers and atheists increases with age
- There is something deep within us and our design that knows that there is a Higher Power that can be engaged with.
- I also think that the reason that the frequency of prayer goes up with age because this broken world leaves us for a desperate desire for Hope.
  - And we can learn a lot from Paul whenever he gives us insight into why he prays and what he prays fervently for.
- In Ephesians chapter 1 he says to the church, ***“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may***

***know Him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people,” -Ephesians 1:15-18 (NIV)***

- So in this prayer, he gives us his two main purposes for prayer.
- TO KNOW GOD BETTER & TO KNOW THE HOPE
- PRAY
- Back in 2013 I went to the Passion Conference down in Atlanta, it’s the largest Christian gathering of college students and young adults in the world and that year was probably the largest gathering they had had to date.
- But that conference was completely life changing for me. Now I had known that I called to ministry, but it was at that conference that I really felt the draw and the call to preach.

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- And that was sparked when I heard Pastor Judah Smith speak at the conference. I had never heard of him before that moment, but I was enamored with the way that he clearly and passionately communicated God's word.
  - And for the next few years, I never missed a message that he gave, I read his books. To this day he is probably the single greatest influence on my life and ministry out of anyone that I've never met.
  - But I was so invested in his ministry and what he was doing that I felt like I knew him. I felt like I was a part of his church. I remember listening to one of the Sunday messages one week and he announced that they were changing the name of the church from City Church to Churchome, and I remember feeling hurt that I wasn't consulted about this.
  - Like "Why you just blindsiding me with this, Judah??"
- It's amazing, especially in this day and age with the rise of Social Media and the information age, how we can have this illusion that we know people that we actually never met
- I fear that too many people, that claim to be Christians, have that type of relationship with God.
  - They tune into church, they hear the messages, they've read the books, and scriptures, but still haven't actually met Him.
  - They feel like they know Him, because of the things that they have seen, heard, and witnessed from a distance...but they've never actually come close themselves.
- That's what makes what Jesus said in Matthew 7 so terrifying. When He said, ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons***

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***in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me...’”  
-Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)***

- Can you confidently say that you know Him?  
Or do you just know about Him?
- Back when Rachel first walked into our church offices down in Shelby, I was determined to know who she was
  - When I first caught a glimpse of her, I didn't see her face, but I knew I wanted to.
  - I saw which office she was in and it was directly across from Pastor Jeremy's office so I pretended that I needed to go ask Jeremy a question so I could try and get a better look.
  - Well joke was on me, because her back was still to the door and Jeremy wasn't even in his office!
- So I just kind of hung around the bookshelves in the open area waiting for her meeting to be

over, for probably just long enough to make it a little weird.

- But eventually she came out, we made eye contact...and yea, I needed to know her
- So Skip immediately went on his social media hunt, and we found her.
- A few days later I mustered up the courage to send her a friend request on facebook. She accepted.
- A few days after that, she added me on instagram. I almost crashed into wendy's whenever that notification popped up on my phone.
- Later that day, she added one of my friends as well that I was having dinner with. He said, "Who is Rachel Lewis?" I said, "Uhh, MY WIFE!!"
  - Was that prophetic or cringe-y? Probably a little of both
  - So I didn't want to share that story until after we were engaged, because at that time I only

knew about her, from what I had learned from social media and mutual friends

- But I didn't want to wait around to really know her, so that Sunday I had a friend introduce us. So now that we had been introduced I could say that I knew her.
  - But it wasn't enough just to know her, I wanted to know her better. So I asked her out in the first 45 seconds of talking to her, and we went on date after date, had phone call after phone call and we really began to get to know each other more and more.
- And the better I got to know her, the more I knew that this was a person that I didn't want to go through life without.
- You see, when Paul is writing to this church at Ephesus he says that he is confident that they know God. He says that he knows of their faith in God and love for people.
- But he says that He keeps asking, asking for what? He says, ***"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious***

***Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better."***

- Here Paul gives us the primary purpose for prayer:
  - **THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF PRAYER IS: TO KNOW GOD BETTER**
    - You see, it's not enough to just know God. God's desire in this spiritual journey is that we would know Him better and better.
    - It's impossible to get to know someone if you do not talk to them.
- But too often we don't treat prayer as a means of communication and relational development. We use it as a merely as a way to make requests and demands.
  - The late Dr. Tim Keller points out that we don't treat prayer as way to get things from God, but rather we pray to get more of God Himself.

- And if we treated prayer this way we wouldn't be so discouraged and confused whenever we don't get the things that we pray for.
- **Prayer is not the means by which we control circumstances. Prayer is the means by which we can better understand God's presence within our circumstances.**
- Almost every single Psalm in the Old Testament is a prayer in itself. And we can learn a lot about prayer by the way we see David praying throughout the Psalms.
- And we see Him pray in one of the most famous Psalms, in Psalm 23 when he says, ***"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me."*** -Psalm 23:4 (NKJV)
  - He doesn't say, "God keep me from the valley of the shadow of death," He doesn't say, "If I happen to go through the valley of the shadow of death."
- No, he knew that inevitably it was going to happen that at some point he was going to go through some pretty low and dark seasons of life.
- But he said when that time comes, he doesn't have to fear, why? Because "I know You are with me!"
- You see his faith and trust in God wasn't determined by if things were going well or not.
- His confidence was based on God's presence
- Knowing whether rain or shine or in the highs or in the lows, God was going to be with Him.
  - He reiterates this in Psalm 34 when he says, ***"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."*** -Psalm 34:18 (ESV)
  - Almost everyone will agree that you will find out who your real friends are whenever



things go wrong. You find out in those time who is really there for you.

- And if God were to just completely take away the free will of man, the consequences of sin and the broken world that we live in, and just never allow any bad things to ever happen, would we ever really know how Good He is and how much He cares for us?
- But we miss that beautiful truth about Him and His character whenever we fail to take the time to really get to know Him and His heart for us.
- Whenever we just treat Him as some sort of cosmic genie rather than an actually Loving and Caring Father, we won't actually get to know Him because all we'll care about is what He can do for us rather than just appreciating who He is.
- Too many people will only give Him the time of day whenever things start to get bad.
- And whenever you only look to Him when things go wrong, we will start to associate Him with hurt and hardship because we only

look His way whenever we experience those things and we'll blame Him rather than cling to Him.

- *I remember when Fletcher first had to get shots, it was probably more traumatizing for me than anyone else.*
  - *Because the nurse asked me to hold him and distract him, and there was no way that Rachel was going to do it because she has a track record of passing out around any sort of doctor equipment.*
  - *But laid him down, I held his arms, and he looked up at me and gave me smile.*
  - *I smiled back at him, but then I thought, "Oh no..."*
  - *Because while he was locked into eye contact with me, the needles went in. And he didn't look away from me at all, but his whole demeanor changed. And he went from smiling at me, to screaming at me.*

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- And I picked him up and tried to comfort him, but he just kept screaming louder and louder because he didn't want me, he didn't trust me anymore, no he wanted mom!
  - And I swear, (Rachel doesn't believe me), but I swear he held a grudge against me for a few days.
  - It might have been in my head, but it seemed like he didn't interact with me the same way he had, holding him was different. Our relationship was off.
  - So anytime we took him to get shots, I would still hold his arms down, but I would duck down the back of the table so he couldn't see me.
  - But over this past year, we've spent so much time together, our relationship has grown as he's grown, our bond has strengthened
  - And this past week we had to take him to his 1 year appointment and not only did he have to get two shots, he also had to get blood drawn
- Rachel definitely wasn't holding him for that! She was about to pass out just being in the room!
  - But even though I had to hold his arms down for the shots, and keep him in my lap for the blood being drawn... this time he didn't blame me, but he reached for me.
  - Because he knows me better now than he did when he got his first shot.
    - You see, when Fletcher get's hurt, he doesn't get mad at me for allowing him to get hurt, or because I didn't keep him from getting hurt. Rather he cries for me for comfort and help make it better
  - In the same way, we cannot afford to have a seasonal relationship with God. We can't afford to only look his way when we get hurt. We need that consistent relationship with Him, to really Know Him. And the better we get to know Him the better we get to know that:
    - He's a friend that sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24)

- That we can cast every care on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7)
  - That He even knows the number of hairs of your head (Matt 10:30)
  - That even to our old age and gray hair, He will carry us (Isaiah 46:4)
  - He is a Stronghold in the day of trouble (Nahum 1:7)
  - He is Strength for the weak (Psalm 73:26)
  - He's a Shield for those who seek Him (Psalm 8:10)
  - He blesses us, He keeps us (Number 6:24)
  - He never leaves us, He never forsakes us (Deut. 31:8)
  - And He will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19)
- He's the God that is with you and for you, He loves you, and there is not a thing in or out of

this world that can ever separate you from the Love of God (Romans 8:38-39)

- When you get to know Him for Him. You will lose all sense of a conditional relationship.
- We see in David's prayers that there wasn't really anything that he wouldn't talk about with God.
- There were times that he was angry with God, vented to God, was confused and frustrated with God, and he felt comfortable expressing all of that to Him because he knew the relationship was always going to be intact.
  - God wasn't going anywhere. He could talk anything out with God, because it wasn't like he could hide anything from God anyway.
- He even said in Psalm 7, "**The One who examines the thoughts and emotions is a Righteous God.**" -**Psalm 7:9 (CSB)**
- He knows what we're thinking, He knows and understands our emotions. There's

nothing that you could say to God that will catch Him off guard.

- But He still wants us to take all of that to Him in prayer because whenever we pray we're inviting His presence into our circumstance
  - And whenever we do that, we get to experience His personal comfort, His Fatherly care, and gain a heavenly perspective.
- That way we can still request things from Him, but stay confident in Him enough to leave all things in His hands
- We see Jesus even praying this way in the Garden before He goes to the cross. As He's in that Garden, sweating drops of blood in anxiety of the anticipation of all that was about to happen to Him, He still requests, ***"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done."*** -Luke 22:42 (ESV)

- Dr. Tim Keller said in His book on Prayer, ***"Prayer is the way to experience a powerful confidence that God is handling our lives well, that our bad things will turn out for good, our good things cannot be taken from us, and the best things are yet to come."***  
***-Tim Keller: Prayer***
- He also points out that we can know that God is working out all things for our good and His glory according to His will as Romans 8 says, We can know that, but very seldom can we discern what that good actually is.
- That's why our confidence must be in Him more than outcomes.
- James says that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of Heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows
- He's a Giver of Good things not a taker of Good things

- And He doesn't change, we change, times change, our circumstances change but He is the same yesterday, today and forever
  - And even whenever this life is difficult and things get bad, He has the ultimate Good waiting for us at the end of it all
  - And that is why Paul gives us his second primary purpose for prayer:
    - **THE PRIMARY PURPOSES OF PRAYER IS: TO KNOW THE HOPE**
    - ***I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people,* -Ephesians 1:18**
    - First he says, to know the hope of the calling
      - That word called, or calling means: *“the divine invitation to embrace salvation in the kingdom of God.”*
- Now these people have already been saved! They have already embraced their place in the family and Kingdom of God
  - However, Paul doesn't just want them to know God better, but he also wants them to know their salvation better
    - He prays that the eyes of your heart, be opened or enlightened more and more
    - The reality and truth of your salvation should grip your heart more and more over time as the Holy Spirit gives us a greater insight and deeper revelation into what Jesus did for us
    - When we spend intentional time in the presence of God, we can't help but be overwhelmed with what He's done for us, and who we are now.
  - ***“Every time Christians merely remember who they are in Christ, that great word comes home to us and we will find, over and over again, the heart to pray.” -Dallas Willard: Hearing God***

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- Many times we do not make prayer a priority because we have become callous to the truth of our salvation.
- And whenever we allow that to happen, our spiritual lives will begin to drift
- That's what happened to David, he lost sight of the magnitude and gloriousness of God in his life
- And in turn, his relationship with God began to take a back seat to his schedule, his responsibilities, his kingdom, his pride and it eventually lead to him having a family destroying affair
- But David did repent, and God did forgive him. And in his prayer of repentance he asks God, ***“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” -Psalm 51:12 (NIV)***
  - Other translations say, “Make me willing to obey you.”
- He understood that what was going to give his life purpose and value, what was going to sustain him, was allowing the joy of God's salvation to once again grip his heart and when that happened, he could once again walk in obedience to God's will
- And that was only going to be possible if he got into the presence of God through prayer
- Genuine change in our lives, will only come through prayer
- Because *prayer is the avenue by which God reveals to us who we really are, and how He loves us anyway.*
- It's impossible to get to know God better, and not know yourself better at the same time
  - Because when you are in the presence of an Almighty God, you begin to sense your smallness in light of His Greatness. You begin to sense your sinfulness in light of His Holiness. You realize that there is nothing about you, your thoughts, your desires that can be hidden from an All-Knowing God.

- But all of those revelations will not lead you to a place of despair, they will lead you to a place of repair
- Tim Keller puts it this way, ***“Through [prayer] we sense His presence and receive His joy, His love, His peace and confidence, and thereby we are changed in attitude, behavior, and character.” -Tim Keller: Prayer***
  - That’s why our hearts being enlightened to how much we have been saved from is so important, and we will not stay in a place of gratitude if we don’t stay in a posture of prayer
- Paul describes this Hope that He’s called us to as, *“the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people”*
  - *And because we know that there is an inheritance that we have, we know that we are not just sinner’s that have been saved, we’re not just lost one’s that have been found, we are not just prisoners that have been set free.*
- *But even more so, we are orphans that have been adopted into God’s own family.*
- *God makes you His child that has been written into His will and has all of the privileges of a royal family member.*
- Paul says in Romans 8, ***“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” -Romans 8:14-16 (NIV)***
- Paul tells us that, rather than fear, the Spirit of God fills Christians with confidence in God’s loving attention, similar to the trust of a little child toward a parent.
- The Spirit leads us to “Cry.” That is a greek word that means fervent prayer.

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- This isn't some last resort sort of prayer, no one pastor described that "The Holy Spirit gives us a confident faith that turns naturally into prayer."
- The Holy Spirit within us causes faith to come as naturally to us as a child crying to their dad to make it better, or crying out "Look Daddy Look!" Whenever they've learned a new trick.
- The Holy Spirit gives us insight that our relationship with God is not like an employer to employees...no our relationship with God is based around His parental love for us.
- Dr. Tony Evans said when commentating on this passage, ***"Paul wants the Ephesians to be aware of their family privileges. Knowing who their Daddy is has staggering implications. Many Christians are living spiritually poor lives, while sitting on a pile of spiritual wealth. While God holds most of your spiritual inheritance for eternity, He will give you what you need now to fulfill His purpose for you."*** -Dr. Tony Evans
- And to be fair, a lot of people have a hard time wrapping their minds around this spiritual truth because they haven't had many positives experiences when I came to their natural family.
- It's a heartbreaking reality that many people have a difficult time seeing God as their Heavenly Father because they have had such a bad experience or no experience at all with their earthly father.
- So many people have had the power, beauty, and sacredness of family diminished in their lives.
- If that was your experience, I am so sorry.
  - That was not God's will, intention, or design for you life.
- But if that was your experience, THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED!
  - If your earthly father was absent, you need to know that your Heavenly Father is present



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- If your earthly family was abusive, you need to know that your Heavenly Family is Caring, Loving, and Nurturing
  - If you had a family marked by betrayal, you need to Know that your God will always remain Faithful, even when we are faithless
  - If you had a family that you felt like you couldn't communicate with, you need to know that All-Mighty God in Heaven values every single word that you say to Him
  - If you had a earthly family that was closed off, God wants you to know that He has opened Himself up to you.
- He went to extraordinary lengths to make Himself available to you.
  - He literally came from heaven to earth
  - He experienced this world in such a way, that he can relate to you in every way
    - He's your greatest confidant, your closest ally, and you truest source of love
- So talk to Him
  - You have ACCESS to Him
  - If you don't know where to start, start there
  - Pray out loud
  - Listen
  - If hearing God confuses you, that's ok, because that's exactly what we're going to talk about next week.