

Today I want to build on what we discussed last week. If you recall, we unpacked and dug deep into Paul’s prayer to God for the Church at Ephesus. The Church needed a boost, inspiration, and positive ground in which to stand. Who better to provide that than the One and Only True God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and Father of Glory. The prayer Paul offered was for the Church to have the spirit of wisdom and revelation as they came to know God more and for the hearts of the Church to be enlightened (opened), so that they may know of God’s hope, God’s will, God’s riches, and God’s immeasurable power. As we closed, I offered that Paul’s prayer wasn’t for the hearts of the Church to just be opened, but to be opened wide, so they could experience more of God’s goodness throughout their life. And I encouraged us all to take this past week to pray this prayer to God ourselves.

I am curious then, did anyone experience the spirit of wisdom and revelation as you were with God this week? Did anyone have their hearts enlightened and opened by God? Did anyone come to know more of God’s hope and God’s will for their life? Did anyone come to know of God’s riches? Did anyone come to experience more of God’s immeasurable power?

This prayer is good all the time (all year) not just this past week. For to come to know God more and experience more of God’s spirit of wisdom and revelation is the greatest desire of God’s and the greatest gift we can offer ourselves.

Today, I want to build on this prayer, inviting us to indeed open wide for the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and also invite us to strap in. Strap into what? Strap in for what? To learn more let’s turn a couple chapters to **Ephesians 6:10-17**.

With Ephesians 6:10-17, a text most notably known as the armor of God, the image of strapping in comes to mind. It is not so much about strapping into a what as much as it is strapping into who. The who is God and from God the what can be understood as God’s characteristics: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation. As to strapping in for what, that is answered over the course of life and the many challenges and struggles that may come our way. There is a battle we all fight in life, a battle between good and evil, and therefore, we must be prepared for battle by putting on the armor of God, which helps us fight off the evil and keeps us from being overtaken. The key for us then is to put on and wear the armor of God. To put on and wear the armor of God though we must first know what the armor of God is. To know what the armor of God is we must be taught. And to get to the point in which we

can be taught, either we or someone we love like a parent or grandparent, must acknowledge the benefit and need of the armor of God for life.

So, let me ask, who knows of the benefit and need for the armor of God right now in their life? Who could use the belt of truth? The breastplate of righteousness? Shoes of peace? Shield of faith? Helmet of salvation? We ALL could. None of us are immune to the attacks of evil, for evil isn't prejudice in any way. With God, we are given a chance against evil when we strap into God and adorn our lives with God's character.

An interesting thing to note is that when it comes to putting on armor a warrior does not get ready alone. To put on armor a warrior needs assistance to lift, place, and fasten all the necessary equipment in the right order. Think about that for a moment. For us to come to know and experience God and God's armor we need each other to help us fully recognize and fully prepare. We need teachers and mentors and friends and family to help us along our journey. We aren't created to do it on our own. I dare say we can't do it on our own. I shared last Sunday that today, Spark Sunday, a day that marks the beginning of the churches program year, I was going to share an illustration that attempts to light a fire (a spark) with water. At the end, I pray you will find this illustration helps highlight the importance of our remaining strapped into God.

Disclosure: There are not physical flames in this illustration. Just spiritual flames 😊.

This illustration can be understood through our baptismal covenant, so I am going to use the font, a cup, a pitcher, and some water.

The cup is us...

The pitcher is God...

The water is the spirit of wisdom and revelation...

The font is the world or people surrounding us...

True life is made possible when we turn to God for fulfillment- God, in God's goodness, fills us...

A challenge we face is that when we are full and feel good we tend to say "That is good" and we step aside from God to do things on our own... while stepping aside we live and our cup begins to empty...

It is not usually until we don't have anything left in the cup, or stuff in life starts to hit the fan, that we then come back to God, to church, and ask to be filled again...

God, in God's goodness and kindness, because God wants us to be whole and experience true life, fills us again...

What do we tend to do when we get full again? Again, we have a tendency to step aside from God, from church. What happens? Again, we live, and our cup becomes empty.

Consider This: Rather than open ourselves up to God and then step aside to live, consider your life opened wide and strapped in all the time to the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

God, in God's goodness and kindness and power and superabundance of riches, is going to provide for us and fill us. Will God ever stop pouring?

When we remain with God, opened wide and strapped in, learning more about God through worship, prayer, singing, bible study, Sunday school classes, serving others a meal at Daily Bread or delivering Meals on Wheels, God's hopes and God's will become clearer to us, and God's riches overflow from us into the world and surrounding people, and we see God's immeasurable power because our cup, our life, continues to be filled and nourished through God's power.

What I think happens when we remain strapped into God and the ministries of worship, education, and outreach as God's church, is our cup gets bigger because the more we learn and understand about God, the closer we draw near to God, the wider we want to open ourselves to God.

What I think God wants from us ALL is to open wide and strap in!

I get it and I see you. You strap in. You strap into worship. You strap into the choir. You strap into a study. You strap into helping others. I get it and I see you. For you who are open, are you willing to ask yourself if you are open wide enough? Could you be open wider? Maybe it is the time for you to share with others how and why you open wide and strap in and the importance that plays in your life.

For you who may be still partially open- open at times and closed at others- I wonder if you are willing to know more of the hope to which God has called you, more of the riches of God's glorious inheritance, and more of the immeasurable greatness of God's power. It is time to open wide and strap in! Don't wait!

When was the last time you attended a bible study class?

When was the last time you came to youth group?

When was the last time you sat down to study a lesson with a group of others?

When was the last time you committed to coming and singing in the choir?

When was the last time you allowed yourself to be physically present in worship with others?

When was the last time you attended a church fellowship event?

When was the last time you sacrificed your time and energy to help give dignity to a neighbor in need?

It is time for us, the church, to open wide and strap in! To do so helps build us up and strengthen us more fully for the life God calls us to. This is true individually through our personal interests and callings, and it is true corporately as the church. As we grow individually, we help strengthen the bonds and possibilities of each person around us. If each puzzle piece does its part to fit into the pieces it is surrounded by, the whole image of the body of Christ, with Christ as the head, can be made complete. This is the call of discipleship for us as the body of Christ.

Let all God's people say... Amen.