

## Praying for Power

**14** For this reason I kneel before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. **16** I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **18** may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, **19** and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

**20** Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

*Ephesians 3:14-21*

Good morning! My name is Jeff and I'm the Groups & Discipleship pastor here at City Church. I'm excited for our time together today because as I was doing research and writing this sermon, there were things about this passage I never noticed before or had some incorrect assumptions about. And Jesus has taught me a lot in this passage and brought a lot of encouragement for my heart. So I hope as we talk about this passage today, you'll also be encouraged as I was encouraged. Turn with me to Ephesians 3.

### Intro to the passage

To recap so far in Ephesians: Paul spent the first 2 chapters of this letter, unpacking that we are all adopted into God's family and now we have a Heavenly Father that loves us, he sees us as his treasured possession. And we are also made alive by His Spirit, that we are no longer spiritually dead. That we are filled with the Holy Spirit now and we no longer need to be enslaved to our desires. And all these good blessings we get is all because of grace, undeserved charity from God. All because Jesus was perfect on our behalf and died the death we deserve. And furthermore, this good news extends to all people, Jews and Gentiles. So after all that, Paul explodes into a prayer, which is our passage for today. After reflecting all the good news of who God is, what he's done for us, and what it means for us now, Paul's response is to pray. Let's see what he prays for.  
Ephesians 3:14-19

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*that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Ephesians 3:14-19*

So Paul prayed for 3 things: Christ may dwell in your hearts, grasps the love of Christ, and be filled with the fullness of God. **What's interesting here is, who is Paul praying for here? Paul is actually praying for these things for people that are already following after Jesus. And not only that, the things Paul prayed for, he just spent the last 2 chapters saying these are things you already have if you are following after Jesus.** Paul said in chapter 2, as a follower of Jesus you already have Christ dwelling in you, and through hearing and knowing the Gospel, you understood the love Jesus had for you when he went to the cross for you. You can't be a Christian if you don't know that. And Paul spent a ton unpacking in Chapter 1 that because we are united with Christ, we already have the fullness of God in us. So this begs the question, Why would Paul pray for these things, for people who already have these things? It would be like I see you all today and I get up here and started praying "Jesus, I pray for our church family that you would magically give them all clothes to wear so they would stop running around naked in our city.". It doesn't make any sense for me to do that.

**What Paul is doing here is this: on one level the Ephesians already do have the things he prayed for and on another level they haven't experienced the things he prayed for.** It's one thing to *know* about the love of Christ and it's another for you to *grasp* how long how wide how high and how deep is the love of Christ. What Paul is talking about is the difference of something that you believe is true of you, or something you believe in principle versus something you *experience*. Look at verse 16,

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*

In your inner being. Paul is praying for his readers to grasp this love of God in their inner being, in their hearts. Not a knowledge of or an opinion of God's love for them, but that love pressed into their inner being, into their heart.

### **Why this matters**

So some of you may be wondering why this matters. Why is it so important to distinguish the difference between knowing something and grasping it in your inner being. This is massively important: **because it is entirely possible for**

**followers of Jesus to live their lives in a way that's hollow, shallow, or in a degree of phoniness, they live their lives in a way that is powerless, fruitless, dry.** Because the thing they know and believe and actually have in principle, is not something they actually have experienced, something they have grasped, in their inner being and their heart. There is a gap in what they know and what they have experienced in their core. And with that gap, you live a life without power.

Here is what I mean. Let's pretend in this hypothetical scenario, you had a relative that passed away and left you a sum of money in a bank account. You know that that relative didn't have much money, so you haven't really looked into the details of it. And now years later, you are experiencing some financial difficulties, you need to make some major life changes and it's just really painful during this season. What if in this hypothetical situation, the money that was in the bank, was far bigger than what anyone thought, that it has grown much more than you can imagine. So there's this tremendous amount of money that is legally yours. In the bank, for you to take. But because you didn't draw on it, you live poor. Paul is saying that is an entirely possible for Christians to live spiritually poor.

It's legally yours. You have the fullness of God living in you, you are a treasured possession of God, a child of God, you are loved by Jesus unconditionally. And you are not drawing on any of that. You are living poor.

So how do we get this power? Pay close attention to what Paul prays for here for the Ephesians. This is something so incredibly easy to miss if you're not paying attention. Have you ever thought about why Paul prayed for what he did instead of other things? Why did Paul only pray for them to grasp the love of Christ? Think about life in the first century in Asia Minor. Think about how hard and dangerous life is back then. Wars. Famine. The life expectancy is 25 years. The infant mortality rate was about 30%. Would it not make sense for Paul to pray for safety, for protection, for comfort for his readers? Or traveling mercies (which I have no idea what that is but a lot of people sure do ask for it) He doesn't ask God for anything for the circumstances they are in. But instead, he prayed for them to grasp the love of God in their inner being. Because Paul knows, when you grasp it, when you grasp the love of God in your inner being, you will have the power to face any circumstance that comes your way. Paul prayed for power for his readers and not the circumstances they are in.

### **Believing vs Grasping**

So that's how you get the power. But what is it exactly Paul wants for his readers to get? He's praying for the Spirit to strengthen the inner being of his readers, for

what purpose? What is the Spirit doing here? So you may grasp *how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ*. So the idea here is the Holy Spirit is preparing our inner being so we can grasp the love of Christ. And we've talked about his readers at this point already know that God loves them. They already know Jesus went to the cross for them. They already know the love of God. And the key word here is the word grasp. Paul is praying for them to grasp the love. Grasping something and believing something are different things, right? Grasping is to grip something, take hold of it. And he's asking the Holy Spirit to help his readers to grasp the love of Christ.

To understand this, I'm gonna have to use an analogy that may be lost for some of you in this room. Believe it or not, back in my day, when you take pictures or any kind of photography, you actually needed something that's called film. I know, I know, now if we need to take a picture, we just swap out our fancy phones and snap a picture. But back in my day, you actually needed something called a camera and the film. And the way it works is the film is treated with chemicals to where it is incredibly sensitive to light, the film have been synthesized or been treated by the chemicals. Unrelated fun story, after I learn this process is called synthesization, I've been trying to use it in all of my conversation lately. Need all the help I can get trying to sound smart. Ok, so when the camera takes a picture, the shutter opens up to let the light in, so the light that's bouncing off the object your taking is quite literally gripped onto the film. It permanently stays on the film. So if you are taking a picture of a person, the light that's bounced off the person is imprinted onto the film. And because the film have been synthesized by chemicals is now a reflection of the person, gripped onto the film. Now if the film haven't been treated with chemicals, light comes in from the shutter, nothing happens. It stays the same. It is not sensitive to the light. The image is not gripped onto the film.

When you have truths about who God is presented to you, like God is good, God is gracious, God is in control, God is Holy, and the Holy Spirit has spiritually synthesize your heart, have treated your inner being, these truths take root in your heart. So when you hear God is gracious, you now feel all the burden on your shoulders to be perfect slipping off, you feel free. When you hear God is in control over you and everything else, you feel safe and unafraid of the unknown. And when you hear God is Holy, it gives you fuel to fight the sin in your life. With the Holy Spirit synthesizing your heart, these truths grips you, it changes you.

So here's a situation that happens in my LifeGroup all the time, and I'm guessing it probably happens in yours too if you're in one. Someone will mention something they're struggling with in life, and then another person will respond by going "hey I

just want to remind you, here's who God is, here's what's true of him, here's what's true of you in the gospel, and in light of that, here's the hope for what you're experiencing." And often, the person struggling will respond with "yeah, I know that, I just need to work on believing it." That right there, is the difference Paul is talking about. That's the difference he's praying for. When we say "yeah I know that," but it hasn't yet taken root in our hearts yet. It hasn't been realized in how we think, how we act, how we go about life. Paul is praying in this passage that we would move from believing something, to grasping it.

Because when you grasp it, it becomes altogether something more real, more alive. The best way for me to understand this is like this: You can know about how delicious steaks are. You can know it in your mind. You can look at pictures of delicious steaks, you can read a ton of books or articles on deliciousness of steaks. You can watch videos of people enjoying a steak. Or. You can experience and taste how delicious a steak is. Taste the buttery goodness for yourself. You can know it with your mind or you can know it with the tongue by experiencing it. It's going from the rationale knowledge to sensing and experiencing how good the steak is. Look at Ps 34:8.

*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!*  
*Ps 34:8*

The writer says come and taste and see the Lord is good. Not come and believe the Lord is good.

### **Testing of Grasping vs Believing**

So it is entirely possible for you to know all different things about who God is, and you can even be incredibly sure about them or have strong opinions of who Jesus is, and never encounter them yourself, never experiencing them yourself. But when you encounter them, these truths become the most real thing than anything else in your life.

### **Loved and Accepted**

Here is what it looks like: For example, the idea of God loves you and has accepted you because of Jesus. That can be an idea you absolute believe in, you have no doubt about it in your mind and you may not realize you have never grasp it. So when someone critiques you or bring up a blindspot in your life, you respond by being defensive, or you lash out, you play the blame game. Or you are so personally offended by this person you no longer can be in relationship with them. Or maybe you just downplay their critique and minimize it or outright dismiss it. But when you actually grasp that you are loved and accepted by God, in the midst

of criticism, you can face them with humility without being defensive or offended. There is a sense of peace that comes with knowing you are loved and accepted by God that allows you to face your shortcomings fully without needing to run, the fight back, or hang your head in shame.

### **Gracious**

Or the idea God is gracious towards you and he has forgiven you in everything you have done in the past, present, and future. You can absolutely love that idea or champion it wherever you go, telling everyone the grace that God has for you and for them. But yet you have a hard time offering grace if someone sinned against you. Or it could be that you have a hard time forgiving yourself for the things you have done, that you just can not see past your own sin and are always upset with yourself, filled with shame. But when you grasp that God is gracious towards you and he has forgiven you in all things, no matter how overwhelming you feel your sin is, you can quiet all those voices in your head that says you are a hopeless case. You know you are forgiven because He is gracious. When you're u grasp God's forgiveness, you will be able to forgive those who have hurt you and sinned against you. Instead of seeing just how much they have hurt you and dwell on that, there is a sense of tenderness and sadness for the offender because you see how their sin affecting them and their relationship with God.

### **Wise and all Knowing**

How about the idea of God is wise and all knowing. You can believe with all your might that God is wiser and smarter than you. And yet, if you don't grasp it, the way you go about making your decisions in life, you look to yourself to come up with the answers. You trust in your own wisdom. You do what it feels right to you. But when you grasp God is wise and all knowing, there is a healthy amount of distrust of your own wisdom. You seek his wisdom instead of relying on your own. You dive into scriptures to see what God's wisdom has to say on variety of things. You pray to him and ask for his wisdom. You seek out other people who is filled with the His Spirit and see what they say. And you listen to what they say and not dismiss them. And when there is a difference in what you feel like you should do versus what God says you should do, you happily trust in His wisdom instead of your own. That's what it looks to grasp God is wise and all knowing.

### **Good and in Control**

I have seen people who have a strong belief in God is good and is in control. And when they experience suffering, they no longer follow after Jesus because they feel like he has abandoned them. They go "Are you Kidding me God. I have done everything right and you allow this to happen to me?" And, I have seen people who have *encountered* that God is good and is in control, and in a season of

suffering I have seen them while in tears pounding their fist into the ground saying “He is still good, he is still good” over and over again. As they suffer, they cry out to their Heavenly Father instead of blaming him.

You see, when the Holy Spirit synthesizes your heart, when these truths about who God is are presented to you, they change you, they move you, they compel you, they lift you up. It’s not just a knowledge that doesn’t affect you.

### **Intellectualism vs Emotionalism**

So I want to take a quick pause here. Up to this point, you may think what I am saying this whole time is we are to not only just knowing certain truths in our mind but feeling them in your emotions. While of course emotions are involved but this is going way beyond that. Because it is entirely possible to have your feelings moved but it doesn’t actually change the way you live. Look at what Paul says,

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,*

*Ephesians 3:17*

That we would what in love? Be rooted in. Be grounded in. That our foundation, our core, is rooted in this love from God. And when that love makes its way down to down to our foundation, it permanently changes the way we live. We will not be as proud, we will not be as needy, we will not be as self-centered, we will not be as self-absorbed, we will not be as afraid, we will not be as self-hating. We will be permanently changed.

***So when your heart is synthesized by the Holy Spirit, you don’t have to choose between thinking and feeling, you do not have to choose between theology and experience.*** Now unfortunately in the church world today you do have to pick between the two. There are churches that emphasize and focus so much on doctrine and theology and learning, and they are afraid of experience. They are afraid of the feelings. It’s too mystical. They avoid it. But then you have plenty of other churches that puts so much emphasis on the mystical experience. And there’s no emphasis on the word, sound doctrine, and the truth. It’s all about the mystical experience, all about the feelings.

But the bible doesn’t pick one over the other. Separating those two categories doesn’t even appear in the bible. It’s only the fusion of the two together. ***The truth gets to our mind and deeply rooted in our hearts with the power of the Holy Spirit and we become transformed people.***

## Grasping the Love

And now look at this, when Paul is writing about grasping how wide, how long, how high, and how deep is the love of what? Love of God? In verse 18 it says it's the love of Christ. Don't miss that. God's way for us to see, to taste his love for us is not, he didn't send us a 44 volume encyclopedia, listing out and describing his love for us. What He did instead is He sent his son. His one and only son that he loves deeply. He sent Jesus to come for us. Through Jesus, he is showing his love he has for us. And ***it is by looking at Jesus***, we then can understand just how wide, how long, how high, and how deep is his love for us. Let me show you.

## How Wide

How wide is God's love for us. Isaiah 1:18 paints just how wide God's love is for us.

*"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord:  
though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red like crimson,  
they shall become like wool.*

**Isaiah 1:18**

The image here is crimson, its used to describe something that's soaked in blood, it's a stain you can never get out no matter how hard you try. And because when Jesus willingly took on your sin, my sin, we are now white as snow. The deep crimson, blood soaked stain is now washed clean, white as snow. That's what happened when Jesus hung on the cross. He did it for us. So no matter what you have done, no matter how dirty you feel, how you feel like you can never be cleaned again, you are now white as snow, pure, clean. Look at Psalm 103:12

*as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

**Psalm 103:12**

That's how wide God's love is for us.

## How long

How long is God's love for us? Here is what Jesus said in John 6:38-40:

**38** *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39* *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40*



*For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

**John 6:38-40**

Jesus said he will not lose a single one of us. Not a single one. So all our lives, he will hold onto us. He is not going to let us go. So how long is God's love for you? Your entire life, for an eternity. It's never ending. In Philippians 1:6 it says

*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

**Philippians 1:6**

Here it is saying what Jesus started in us, He will carry it to completion, He will finish it. So when you feel like you can no longer go on anymore, know that he will carry you, always. For how long he will do this? Always.

## **How High**

How high is God's love for us? We read this in early in this series. Ephesians 2:6-7 says

*6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

**Ephesians 2:6-7**

No matter how lowly we feel, on days where we feel like depression is crushing us, and we don't deserve anything. Because of Jesus, we are now spiritually and one day will be physically be seated with him. You and I, we will be seated with the King of the universe.

## **How Deep**

And just how deep is the love God has for us. The way Jesus described his relationship with the Heavenly Father is they are one. Meaning Jesus existed perfectly with the Heavenly Father, they were always together, in perfect unison, perfect harmony, no tension, no distance. It's a relationship that's filled with love, intimacy, caring. And on the cross, Jesus cried out "My God my God why have you forsaken me." On the cross Jesus suffered tremendous amounts of pain, the physical pain of being nailed to the cross and suffocating in his own blood. But when Jesus cried out my God why have you forsaken me, he's experiencing an

agony he has never felt before. He was separated from his Heavenly Father for the first time in eternity. He's never known what it is like without the love of his father. But because Jesus took on our sin, he also took on the judgement that was meant for us. The judgement that was the wrath of the God that was supposed to be poured out unto us, but instead it was poured out on Jesus. And for that, he was cast away, shunned, rejected, abandoned from his Father. The perfect relationship that existed, now broken. And with all this pain and agony, it was not a surprise to Jesus. He knew what it meant for him to go to the cross for us. Look at Hebrews 12:2

*looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

**Hebrews 12:2**

The joy set before him. He endured the cross, despising the shame. With joy because he knew he would gain us. You, me. There is no place where you can outrun Jesus. He endured the cross, he will endure anything to come after you and me. That's how deep God's love is for us.

### **Together with all the people**

So all of this, how wide, how long, how high, how deep, this is the type of love Paul is praying we would be rooted in. And don't miss this, look at verse 18 in our passage,

*18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,*

**Ephesians 3:18**

"Together with all of the Lord's holy people." This is something we talk about a lot here at City Church. That we are made to exist in community, to experience God in the context of community. In order to have the power Paul is praying for here, you need other people to show you how to walk in God's power, you need other people to encourage you when you are not walking in that power, and you need other people to pray on your behalf when you need that power. And on the flip side, you are needed in community, so you can be there to encourage others when they are not walking in that power, and to pray on their behalf that the Holy Spirit will root the love of Christ in their inner being.

## **Practicals**

So what does all this mean for us tomorrow when we wake up? What are some practical things for us to do in light of everything Paul is saying and praying for? I got 4 practical steps for us today.

### ***Block out time to know who God is and pray to him***

This one may seem obvious but in order for the Holy Spirit to synthesize our heart to where we can grasp onto the love of Jesus, we first need to know what is the love of Jesus and who he is. Any of you art school people in the room, in order for an image to be synthesized to the film, what is one thing it needs? **Time**. It has to have time for the image to be imprinted onto the film. Same with us and the love of Jesus. We need to block time out to get to know him, time spend reading the bible about who God is, what is he like, and what he's done for us. Time with other believers so God can demonstrate his love for us through them. And then we need to block out time to pray for those things to take root in our inner being. If you are hoping to grasp the incredible reality of God's love for you without ever spending time familiarizing yourself with it, it's never going to happen.

### ***Pray for power more than circumstances***

The second thing is what if, like Paul in this passage, just as often we pray for our circumstances, we pray for the things in this passage? For ourselves and others. That we spend just as much time praying for the things going on in our lives or the lives of others, as we pray for the Holy Spirit to help us grasp the love of Jesus has for us, for others to grasp that same love. For us to grasp all those things in our soul instead of just believing in them in our head. What if we start seeing our biggest need in our life is actually grasping the love of Christ and not anything else. What if we did that. What if we have the lense if only we grasp the love of Jesus, that alone will allow us to face any circumstance that comes our way. Wouldn't that change what we pray for and how much we pray for it?

### ***Confess what we only believe and don't yet grasp***

The 3rd practical thing for us is let's start confessing the things we only believe and don't yet grasp. That when life squeezes you and you start to see the gap between what you believe and what you grasp, start letting others in on that gap. Don't pretend it's not there. Let others in so they can start praying on your behalf for the gap to shrink, for you to experience who God is in your inner being.

### **Encourage others with the love of Christ**

And the last practical thing for us today is, when people confess to us the gap they have between what they believe and don't yet grasp, let's remind them the love of Christ. Let's point them to Jesus, how Jesus loves them. Let's not just toss out the cliché God loves you. Let's get specific, let's point people to how God's love is on display with the person and work of Jesus. How Jesus entered into our broken world, lived among us perfectly, suffered on our behalf, died the death we deserve, and rose again to show sin and death is conquered forever. Let's help them see the love of God through Jesus and pray for the Holy Spirit to let that take root in their heart.

### **Ending**

So that's Paul's prayer for us. That we would understand this power through the Holy Spirit that is in us that can do far more abundantly than all that we can ask or think. And that's my prayer for us as a church family as well, that we will start praying for this type of power, that we would ask the Holy Spirit to help us grasp the love that Jesus has for us. That we would become a people that's spiritually full and not poor and from that we become a transformed people to reflect Jesus to everyone in our city. Let's pray.