

Ephesians 3:16

Ephesians 3:14-21

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Have you ever had someone say, *“I’ll be praying for you?”* Have you ever say it and then not pray for that person? Have you ever heard it and wondered if they were really going to pray for you?

Paul was one of those people who’d say, *“I’m praying for you”* and really meant it.

At least 18 different times in the letters that he wrote, he tells the early church that he was praying for them.

Romans 1:9-10a, *“God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.”*

Ephesians 1:16, *“I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”*

Paul prays that God will give them strength and wisdom. That they’ll be able to resist temptation and to do what’s right, that their love will overflow, and that they will be encouraged.

Over and over again in his prayers, he thanks God for the early Christians. And when he’s not telling the early church that he’s praying for them, he’s asking them to pray for him.

Which brings us to this week’s 3:16. Ephesians 3:16, *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”*

This is the beginning of a prayer that Adam Clarke refers to as *“...one of the most grand and sublime in the whole oracles of God.”*

This prayer, that Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus 2000 years ago, is also the prayer that he prayed for us today. He's simply praying that God's purpose will be fulfilled in our lives.

When I started looking at the words of this prayer I discovered that it isn't just a "bless Oscar" prayer; it's multi-layered, and each layer leads to the next one and depends on the one before.

He's praying that Christians will be all they should be and all they could be. So, let's look at his prayer and see where it takes us.

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Paul begins with these words in Ephesians 3:14, *"For this reason I kneel before the Father."*

Since Paul begins with the posture of prayer, it's easy to think, *"Well, it's obvious that the proper way to pray is to kneel,"* but that's not what he's saying.

Paul isn't saying that he always kneels to pray, although that might have been the case. Here he says that he is falling to his knees for a reason, but what was the reason?

Since the verse starts by saying *"For this reason,"* we should ask ourselves, *"What was he thinking about?"*

In fact, Paul says this at the beginning of this chapter, but then goes off on a tangent. Now, he's back. What is this reason he keeps bringing up.

Well, you have to understand that the world at that time was a mess. The Roman Empire was dissolving into political and moral decay.

William Barclay writes this about the world of the Ephesians, *“This world is disintegrated chaos; there is division everywhere, between nation and nation, between man and man, and within a man's inner life.”*

So, Paul sees the solution to the problems of the world as being in Christ.

In fact, there are many today who see the same problem and the same solution, but they seek to politicize the message and try to legislate behavior.

So, Paul's prayer wasn't that the culture would become Christianized, his prayer was that the church would reflect the true nature of Christ and through that, the world would be transformed.

That passion is what drove him to his knees here in verse 14. In fact, the burden was so great that Paul finds himself not just kneeling but at times prostrate in prayer.

Scholars tell us that the normal posture for prayer 2000 years ago for the Jews was to stand with their arms outstretched and their palms open to heaven.

Now, there's nothing in the Bible that gives us direction as to the posture of our prayers. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray in Matthew 6, He said nothing about the posture they were to assume.

But there are times in the Bible, both in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, that people were driven to their knees in a sense of desperation and urgency.

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Next, Paul directs his prayer to the Father. In fact, he almost develops a complete theology of Father God here in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:5-6, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

We also discover that He’s the creator of all things.

Ephesians 3:14-15, “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”

Then we discover in Ephesian 3:12 that we have access to the Father, *“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”*

And through that access, the Father wants to give us the wisdom needed to grow in our Christian walk.

Ephesians 1:17, “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.”

So, there’s no doubt to whom Paul’s praying.

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Then we read this week’s 3:16, *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”*

Paul’s praying for the Ephesians to become more mature in Christ, a theme that occurs in all of Paul’s letters.

In his letters, there’s never an expectation that the Christian will be born again as a mature Christian.

But neither is there an expectation there that the Christian will never move beyond the point of their salvation. So, let's begin where Paul begins.

The first thing that Paul asks, for the people of this church, is that God would empower them with an inner strength.

Paul's acknowledging that we don't have what it takes to be the follower that Christ wants us to be.

Notice, he doesn't begin by asking God to empower us with the things that we believe will give us power, i.e. extraordinary human strength, human beauty, political clout, or financial resources.

Instead he asks God to give us inner strength or fortitude. Specifically a fortitude that comes through the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes I think our philosophy of Christian growth and character comes from a book, and not THE book.

Too often we take our cues from *"The Little Engine That Could"* adopting the mantra of *"I think I can, I think I can."*

As an aside, it was Les Brown who said, *"You'll never be like The Little Engine That Could, if you sit around on your caboose."*

While that might be a great philosophy for your life, or your career, I believe we can do so much more than we think we can.

I don't believe we can be all that God intends for us to be as Christians simply because we think we can.

When Jesus told the Apostles that He would be leaving, they went into panic mode, but then He tells them that in His place would send the Comforter.

We're told that the Holy Spirit will empower and strengthen us. It'll give us the words we need to speak; it'll teach us and guide us. It's from the Holy Spirit that we receive our spiritual gifts.

It's the Holy Spirit who produces joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in our lives.

It's interesting, as pastor I'm asked to pray for people, and the majority of those prayers are for outward strength, and physical healing, but very seldom am I asked to pray for someone's inner strength or character.

So, this inner strength that comes from the Holy Spirit is where Paul prays we should start, but that's just the beginning.

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Ephesians 3:17a, *"So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."*

When we become a Christian, Christ's presence is with us all time, but this verse isn't talking about that, it's talking about a control issue, a commitment issue.

In Biblical times, the heart was seen as the central part of a person's life. When we invite Christ to be a part of our lives, do we mean every part of our lives?

Not just the Sunday morning part, or the *"What we do for a living part?"* or the *"What we do for entertainment part?"* or the *"What we watch on TV and our computer part?"*

Or the *"How we treat our spouse and our kids part?"* or the *"What we do with our money part?"*

This is about Christ controlling our lives rather than Christ simply being a part of our lives. Have you ever heard of a remora?

Slide 6 - Remora

Here's a picture of one. Sometimes it's called a shark sucker fish.

Slide 7 - Remora and shark

They attach themselves to a shark and then go along for the ride. They live just on the outside of the shark's existence. They co-exist. Sharks don't eat them since they get rid of parasites on the shark's skin.

Sometimes I think there are some people who are quite happy to have Jesus as a Spiritual remora. He offers us some benefits that isn't real annoying, so we allow Him to come along for the ride.

Christ making His home in our heart is more than Jesus as Savior.
Christ making His home in our heart is Jesus as Lord.

Jesus having control, and that can't happen without the Spirit providing us with the inner strength we need.

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Ephesians 3:17, *"So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 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."*

Here, Paul prayed for believers to be rooted and established. Jesus talks about this in the parable of the seeds and the soils.

In that parable Jesus spoke of how seeds grew in different soils, and then He compared them to how people respond to the Word of God. Sound familiar?

That part of the parable is found in Mark 4:5-6, *“Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.”*

Then later in the story He gives the application for responding to God’s invitation in our lives.

Mark 4:16-17, *“Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”*

Paul’s praying that the roots of the believer will grow deep and strong. We do that by talking to God--that’s called prayer, and by hearing from God--that’s reading His Word.

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Ephesians 3:19, *“And to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

Not only is Paul praying that people will understand God’s love but that they will experience Christ’s love. This goes back to John 3:16.

Maybe you think this should be first on the list, but it’s usually only after we’ve been serving God for a time that we begin to understand the depth of His love.

That’s why the love of God is better experienced than explained, and you can experience it even if you can’t understand it.

Ephesians 2:8, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”*

God saved us by His grace when we believed. God saved us by His grace, when? When we believed. It's not enough to understand the love of God until we experience the love of Christ.

It's only when we truly begin to understand and experience God's grace in our lives that we can forgive ourselves and forgive others.

Now, I'm not sure which is tougher, but they both need to be done if we're going to mature in our Christian faith. Forgiveness depends on repentance, which depends on remorse for our sinful behavior.

But once we've been forgiven, we don't have to continue to be remorseful, otherwise that diminishes the entire concept of forgiveness.

So, here's the secret to understanding God's love. God loves us so much that through the sacrifice of His Son, He forgave us.

That means that when He forgives you, you've been forgiven. It's gone. But if you continue to sin, that's a different story.

If you contemplate sins that you're considering committing, you don't need forgiveness you need obedience. You can't ask forgiveness for the things you haven't done yet.

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Conclusion

Ephesians 3:19, *"And to know this love that surpasses knowledge"—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*

This leads us to what Paul has been praying for all along, fullness of life.

This is what Jesus promised the Apostles when He said He had come not just to give them life but to give them abundant life, a life overflowing, a fullness of life.

Without God, life isn't complete. I'm not saying that life can't be good without God, or that life can't be enjoyed without God, but life isn't complete without God.

Without a relationship with our Creator, life is never complete. There's always a piece missing because we were created to have a relationship with the Creator.

It's like we were born with a God shaped hole in our lives that needs to be filled.

People try to fill it with all kinds of things; things like religion, morality, and good deeds. Sometimes people try to fill it with harmful things like toxic relationships, casual sex, addictions, and hate.

But the pieces never fit. It's like having a missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle and trying to force or trim the wrong piece to fit into the spot.

Paul's prayer was that we would discover a fullness of life, and that only comes from the Life-giver Himself, Jesus Christ.