

Introduction: Pg. ____

Story: Power - Of A Plane . . . Marsha & I got to get away this week to a conference we were invited to attend called Refresh. We got on the plane to return home . . . Marsha was talking about it: "It's amazing." I'm thinking, yeah, yeah. Let me read my book . . . You've flown before. I've flown before. This is nothing new or all that amazing. But in my pride, about 40 minutes after we made our way through the clouds to cruise at 35,000 feet above the clouds, the captain addressed the cabin to let everyone know that we were making good time thanks to a tailwind that helped us move at 611mph!

611mph. 35,000 feet in the air. And I'm riding on the clouds. That's impressive! We had a powerful force moving taking us to our destination.

As we dive into Ephesians 3:14-19 this morning, Paul is going to pray that the Ephesians would know a force even more powerful than what we can experience here with the things of earth. He is going to ask God to strengthen the by the power of his Spirit, so that we can experience all the fullness of God.

Context: Paul picks up where he left off in verse 1 of chapter 3. Paul prays to God on behalf of the Ephesians, in light of everything he has said in the first part of his letter. He wants these realities to be pressed deep into their souls.

As we work our way through these verses, we are going to be encouraged to . . .

The Point: Pray with Passion for Others to Progress by knowing what they Possess.

At the outset, it is very important that we all understand, Paul is praying for

**"The Life Inside"
Ephesians 3:14-19**

Not circumstantial... Not surface level wants and needs... He is addressing matters of the heart.

Read 14-19 {{PLACEMENT}}

Someone has said this prayer is like a staircase where Paul climbs higher and higher in his aspirations for them. Four steps: strength, love, and fullness.

T: What do we learn about how we should pray from Paul?

I. Pray for others to be strengthened by God's power (3:14-17a)

Paul's prayer flows out of his ministry to them. . .

- Prayer is service. If you like to serve others, pray for them, and not only that: pray with them.
 - How often do you pray for others? How often do you pray with others?
 - Paul was serious. Earnest. We are going to look at how he prays and for what he prays.

Posture in Prayer

- Though kneeling was not uncommon, it was customary for Jews to stand and pray.
- When we kneel in prayer, it is a physical position of humility and submission.
- Men, get down on one knee to ask their spouse to marry them. Citizens, sometimes bow before great dignitaries of nations. Is that how we come to God?

- We must not come before God to boss him around, as if that were possible. No, we come with humility, and the posture of kneeling can be a helpful expression of that.
- When we humble ourselves in prayer, we also express our dependence on him.
- **Prayer expresses our desperation for God.** Let me prove it to you: When you do you pray the most? 1) For what you desire the most; 2) When what you desire clearly outstrips your ability to make it happen. (Combine?)
 - Example: Someone you love is diagnosed with cancer. Diagnosis. You just got let go at Work, and you don't know how you're going to pay the next bill. You just became a prayer warrior.
 - If you want to discover what someone really cares about, study the content and intensity of their prayers.
 - Tell me if you disagree, but I think *intensity* can often be measured by quantity and quality.
- Are you desperate in prayer? Desperate enough to smell the carpet? Desperate enough for our knees to ache? In 1 Kings 18 we see the prophet Elijah with his face between his knees begging God for rain. That's desperate.
- I don't know how else to say it: we need to make more time for prayer.

Now, let me give you some reasons to be confident when we pray: Because God cares and God is powerful.

- God cares. He is Father. We have the picture of intimacy.
- God is also powerful. He is sovereign, in control. "every family in heaven and earth is named." Everything owes their existence to him. In prayer, we surrender control to the power of God

T: What is Paul Praying for? Look at *verse 16*.

- Paul addresses the inner life. He asks God to work in places we can't see.
- Human beings are embodied souls. We have physical bodies, flesh and blood, but we are also spiritual beings, made in God's image.
- When Paul speaks of our inner being, he is talking about the "heart" (as he says in v 17). Our heart is the center of our thoughts, emotions, desires, and affections. As we pray for one another, this should be our highest concern!
- App: We live in a culture that constantly wants to push back the hands of time.
- We try so hard. Work out videos. Botox. Wrinkle cream. Photoshopped images fool us into thinking we should look like we're 23 when we're 63.
 - Did anybody watch the Grammys? Melanie Griffith.
 - We are all dying here! We are all progressively getting more ugly. (Aww junk!) Not Marsha. But the rest of us. Ok, just the men. Women, You're not getting ugly, generally speaking, you're just not looking better, ok. Haha - I planned to say all of that. What!?
- Outwardly, we are wasting away. But that's what's happening on the outside.
 - On the inside, because of Jesus, we are being made more and more attractive.
 - **"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16)**
 - Here's a better theology of beauty...
 - We try to teach our girls, and I want them to hear this from me a million times
 - Inside. Inside. Inside. Our 9 month old, Jordyn, can barely talk. I want this to be one of her first words! INSIDE.
 - Strive for godliness. Inner beauty that does not fade" as 1 Peter 3 puts it.

- I love hanging out with older Christians. Depth. Maturity. Wisdom. Physically, they may not be in the best shape, but spiritually, they toned up!
- **Are you willing to make sacrifices for your outward appearance?** New clothes, new shoes, new makeup, \$100 haircuts?? I'm not hatin'. I'm just trying to help us think.
- **How willing are you to make sacrifices to invest in your spiritual appearance?**
- This is where we should focus the greatest intensity of our prayers.
- The only way to look good on the inside, which always is displayed on the outside, is by being strengthened by God's Spirit. This is Paul's first request.
 - We need to be strengthened by the empowering presence of God who lives in us! Paul already prayed they would know the infinite power of God (Ephesians 1:19ff) Now he is praying that God would actually strengthen them by that power.
 - The word "strengthened" means to "fortified, braced, invigorated." (F.F. Bruce)
 - This is a job God can get done. No doubt about it. "According to the riches of his glory."
 - Paul often refers to God's ability to get things done. He speaks of abundance, fullness, riches when he prays. {We are going to get a mega dose of this truth next week, and I can hardly wait. I'm licking my sermonic chops. Just sayin.}
- Listen, if we are not strengthened in the heart, on the inside, we will be 1) operating in our own strength, which leads to exhaustion, and 2) we will so spiritually anemic that we will be a hollow shell of our potential in Christ.
- In the first part of *verse 17a*, he elaborates on this thought: "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"
- Wait a minute! Doesn't Christ already live in us? Yes! Paul prays for his continual presence in us to grow stronger in us.
 - "The indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees." - Charles Hodge
 - As Christ takes up residence in our lives, his presence begins to characterize his home.
 - PIC – Married Dudes – LIVE DIFFERENTLY.
 - Dwell = means to settle down, not temporarily but permanently.
 - We are IN Christ & CHRIST IS IN US! And **Christ in us becomes Christ through us.**
 - That is a basic summary of Paul's prayer and the entire Christian life. Intimacy leads to Ministry. Transformation on the inside leads to glorifying God on the outside.
 - "I pray that Jesus would be strong in them!"
 - How? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Col. 3:16

Don't miss the presence of the Trinity here: Paul prays to the Father, that they would be strengthened by the Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in them.

T: Do you see why Paul is praying like this? He don't play in prayer. Uh-uh. He doesn't stop there. Paul's develops his prayer by asking that they would know the limitless love of Christ.

II. Pray for others to know the limitless love of Christ (3:17b-19a).

We know a lot about a lot of things. Boston is the Athens of America. There are a lot of smart people 'round here. I think we have more Ph.Ds in our church than I had met in my entire life before I went to college. No kidding... What do you know a lot about? Do you know the love of Christ?

Paul is confident that as Christ dwells in our hearts, we will be increasingly "rooted and grounded in love." He uses an agricultural term, "rooted," and an architectural term, "grounded."

- Here's something to consider: Can you see the roots of a tree? Generally speaking, No. Can you see the foundation of a building? Generally speaking, no.

- So the “unseen cause of [our] stability” in life is love.
- What makes her live like that? Why is he so sacrificial? How can they be so focused on others when every one is focused on themselves?!
- The love of Christ.

We must be established in God’s love so that we can comprehend its greatness. This is where Paul takes us in *verse 18*

The prayer is that we, being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, would have power to know this love in greater ways!!

There is definitely some truth in the statement: “Knowledge is power.”

- If you knew you were going to knock out that project tomorrow at work, with no interruptions and complete excellence, would it change the way you work tomorrow?
- If you knew it was going to be a sunny 75 degrees with a cool breeze tomorrow, (That’ll preach!) would it change the way you go to bed tonight and get up tomorrow?
- In a much greater way, if we truly understood the magnitude of God’s love, the superabundance of his benevolence and kindness toward us in Christ, it would influence everything we think and everything we do.
- Only God’s grace can teach us how expansive and vast God’s love truly is: Look at how Paul puts it: “may have strength to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth.”
- These dimensions “are regarded as a unity, since they are covered by the one definite article.”
- **Pic #1 of the Amazon River**
- The Amazon River, (shout out to our South Americans!), stretches over 4,000 miles LONG, and during rain season, peaks at over 24 miles wide.
- Just look at how far its reach stretches. The **Amazon River Basin [PIC #2]** covers over 40% of the continent of South America! Crazy!!
- No one is standing on the side of the Amazon and saying, “That’s weak. Look at that little stream.”
- And *no one* can see the love of Christ and say, “It should be a little greater, a little higher, a little wider; it doesn’t meet expectation.” The love of Christ cannot be measured. It is limitless.

I believe we fail to grasp the love of Christ because we consistently get distracted by lesser loves.

- This causes us to doubt God’s love and downsize it in our hearts. In our experience, the love of God begins to shrink. Like a plant that shrivels up due to lack of light or water, so our view of God’s love shrivels when we give our attention to lesser loves.
- We should ask God to show us when we love things in our life more than him, and if necessary, we should be willing to ask him to take them from us that he might be our first and greatest love.
- Look at *verse 19*: and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Do you see the paradox: comprehend the incomprehensible. Understand what can’t be fully understood!
- Do you know how much God loves you?
 - “IN love he predestined us for adoption (1:5)
 - “Because of the great love with which he loved us.” (2:4)
 - John 13:15
 - Romans 8:35??
 - I John 3:1
- Listen to these words from Brennan Manning: **“Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. God’s love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that, and let it become the most important thing in your life.” – Brennan Manning**

T: #3

III. Pray for others to progress through the power of what they possess (3:19b).

Read 19

- To be filled with all the fullness of God is a prayer for progress, spiritual maturity. He wants them to “Be all that God wants them to be” (Carson) That’s Paul’s goal
- Here’s the implication: you can’t progress like God wants you to progress unless you possess a deep knowledge of his love!
- Progress in what?
 - In everything that is in step with belonging to Jesus.
 - God is our standard. Be holy as I am holy. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Follow me.
 - [[Our speech, our thoughts, our actions, our reactions, our relationships, our goals, our values— all are transformed if only we live in the self-conscious enjoyment of the love of Christ. - Carson, D. A.]]
 - This prayer actually is so pivotal because his words propel them into the practical encouragements to “Walk worthy” of Christ that fill the final three chapters.
- At the top of the list is progressing in that same love... it flows from the inside-out.
- If the Christian life is anything, it is a life of love.
 - Are you increasing in your love for God?
 - Are you increasing in your love for God’s church? Your spiritual family?
 - Are you increasing in your love for God’s world? For those who have yet to believe in Christ?

Conclusion:

The audacity of Paul’s prayer is meant to drive us to experience Christ’s love in such tangible and complete ways, that we will overflow that love to others.

I’m going to read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 slowly and I want you to see how Christ love is designed to motivate our love for God and our love for all people:

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

What is going to move you to greater heights in your love for God? The love OF God in Christ.

What is going to move you to step out in humble boldness to invite that friend to Easter, to pray impossible prayer, to be a part of the greatest mission under the sun? The love OF God in Christ.