

Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction: How did you learn to pray? Traditional churches: Set prayers repeated word-for word. Semi traditional like us: For example, how often do you hear this intro? “Father thank you so much...” Set prayers aren’t all bad, especially if they are scriptural. They can also be used as models when we don’t pray them word-for-word. If we want to invigorate our prayer life the prayers of Scriptures have a lot to teach us about God’s priorities in prayer.

Learn God’s priorities for our prayers by using the prayers of Scripture as a model.

At the end of chapter 3 of Ephesians Paul records a few things that we can pray for that will enrich the spiritual life of every believer. Read text: **Ephesians 3:14-21**

- I. That we would be strengthened through God’s Spirit (vv.16-17a)
- II. That we would be able to comprehend Christ’s love (vv.17b-19a)
- III. That we would be filled with all the fullness of God (19b)

- I. That we would be strengthened through God’s Spirit (vv.16-17a)
 - A. The goal is that Christ would be able to settle down and be at home within us – that’s the meaning of the word “dwell” used here.
 - B. The means to that end is the inner strengthening by God’s Spirit.

Christ ... is asked to make his home in our hearts. This is the ideal, but a deal of fixing would have to be done in our hearts for Christ. – Robertson

“Of course, Christ does dwell in the heart of every true believer, but not every heart is a comfortable home for Him.” – Wiersbe

Illustration: Renovating a house. When you buy an old house all rooms belong to you immediately, but you only feel at home in them *after* they have been renovated.

- C. We need to be strengthened in our faith. We need that inner, spiritual fortification that only God can provide. This passage tells us two important things about this work:
 - i. God’s resources empower the work.
 - ii. God’s Spirit accomplishes the work
- i. God’s resources empower the work. We might best learn the importance of this by a contrasting statement: Limited resources would limit the work.

Illustration of School #18: This building that is over 100 years old. It always needs work. We’ve done a lot, but with limited resources we only do what we can at one time.

Paul’s prayer includes a request that we would be strengthened “according to the riches of His glory”. “The riches of His glory” – that’s the budget God has for the task of strengthening us inwardly.

- ii. God’s Spirit accomplishes the work. Another lesson by contrast: Limited ability would limit the work.

Illustration: Work can be impeded not just by resources but by ability. Think back to the building. Not everyone has the same aptitude even if you give them the resources they need. My dad and his brothers all had other jobs, but used to build houses in their spare time. Some of my cousins have gone on to do the same thing. For some (like me) it doesn't matter that you supply them with all the right materials and all the right tools to do the job. Limited ability limits the work that gets done.

Consider the doxology at the end of the chapter, especially v.20. Paul extols God's ability, but emphasizes that this is the "power that works in us." God has unlimited ability to inwardly transform our lives. God has skills. He's a God capable of doing the job.

Application: We should pray for people to be inwardly strengthened through God's Spirit, using his infinite ability and infinite resources. In that way, through their faith, Christ will settle down in their hearts and feel at home there. Jesus wants to feel warm and cozy in their hearts. Our prayers can be the catalyst for that to happen in their lives.

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II. That we would be able to comprehend Christ's love (vv.17b-19a)

Regarding this request, there are three things that we need to understand:

- A. We are firmly established in Christ's love
 - B. We are surrounded by Christ's love
 - C. We really can have a valid experience of Christ's love
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- A. We are firmly established in Christ's love – "rooted and grounded" (NKJV)
 - B. We are surrounded by Christ's love
 - a. Christ's love is above us, below us and on all sides of us. We're firmly established, yet suspended in the middle of it. Christ's love surrounds us on all sides and you'll never get near the edge of it. Read **Romans 8:37-39**
 - C. We really can have a valid experience of Christ's love
 - a. How can we "know the love of Christ which passes knowledge"? It almost sounds contradictory.

Illustration of Comprehending the Ocean: We can swim in the ocean, take a ride in a boat, and fly over it in a plane. All of these experiences of the ocean are valid experiences. They are very real encounters with the very real ocean. Nonetheless, though we become acquainted with the ocean by personal experience, our knowledge of the ocean remains limited. The ocean is too big, too wide, and too deep. In comparison, we remain so small.

Application: We should want people to have new, real and wonderful experiences of Christ's love, and then we should pray for that. We can even pray something like that for ourselves. We'll never be able to fully understand it, because it passes knowledge. But that means this prayer will always be useful, always be helpful and always apply.

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- III. That we would be filled with all the fullness of God (19b)
- A. When we think of “being filled” perhaps we most often think of being filled with the Spirit. As it says later in Ephesians 5:18 (NKJV) ... “be filled with the Spirit”.
 - B. But although the Persons of the Trinity are distinct, we cannot fully separate them. A classic statement dating back to the IV century on the connectedness of the three Persons of the Godhead goes as follows:

“...these Beings can reciprocally contain One Another, so that One should permanently envelope, and also be permanently enveloped by, the Other, whom yet He envelopes.”
(– Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity III.1*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/330203.htm>)

- C. Therefore, through the indwelling Holy Spirit each and every believer can be filled with all the fullness of God.

Conclusion:

Paul truly desired a life-changing work to happen in the hearts of all believers; therefore, he made that the subject of his prayers. The things he prays about here should be repeated in our own prayers for others. Imagine the transformational impact upon the real lives of real people if the Lord would answer prayers like these:

Application:

- 1) Let the priorities of Scripture become the priorities of our prayers. Here are the priorities we looked at today in just this one prayer of Paul.
 - a. That we would be strengthened through God’s Spirit (vv.16-17a)
 - b. That we would be able to comprehend Christ’s love (vv.17b-19a)
 - c. That we would be filled with all the fullness of God (19b)
- 2) Think of the weak, struggling believers you know and pray that God would strengthen them inwardly through his Holy Spirit.
- 3) Think of the people who struggle with understanding or even believing Christ’s love for them. Pray that they might better comprehend Christ’s love through valid personal experience.
- 4) Which of us doesn’t need to be filled with the Holy Spirit? We should pray this not only for ourselves but for others.
- 5) We should want people to have a rich, fulfilling, life-changing relationship with the Lord and we should pray for exactly that.

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NKJV) ²⁰Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.