

## Main Point

Through faith, believers can pray to the Father for strength from the Holy Spirit, be rooted in the boundless love of Christ and the fullness of God, and stand amazed at the goodness of God.

## Introduction

Have you ever tried to do something out of your own strength, but just couldn't accomplish the task on your own?

I was recently at a local women's soccer event, where the stadium put several people from the crowd, mostly young girls or women, on the scoreboard and encouraged them to flex or show a strength pose as a way to highlight their inner strength. Not a terrible message for our daughters to hear, and looking around the room, I see a lot of strength here today, but ultimately our human strength is finite.

I come from a long line of rugged individualists (who may or may not be called stubborn) who refuse to ask for help and try to do things on our own. I live on a two-acre lot in Delaware County. On several occasions, I have been out mowing the yard after a rain and have gotten my John Deere lawn tractor stuck in the mud. Do I immediately get off the tractor, go ask for help and get back to the task at hand? NO WAY! That's not the tough guy way to get things done.

Instead, I keep trying to shift from forward to reverse repeatedly, with the wheels spinning, and just end up getting myself stuck deeper and deeper in the mud. After several minutes, I may realize the futility of the situation, get off the tractor, and then figure out how stuck I really am.

When I am lucky, the mud is shallow enough that I can lift the tractor a little and move it ever so slightly to the left or right and then proceed with the task at hand. When I have really succeeded in getting stuck deep in the mud, I have needed to call on one of my children to sit on the tractor while I push it out, or worst-case scenario, I will call on a neighbor come over with a chain and tow me out. However,

that call for help only happens after I have exhausted all other means of fixing the problem and have completely drained my strength.

When we're struggling with a situation that seems hopeless and trying to solve it on our own, it can feel like we're just sitting there spinning our wheels, not getting anywhere, and frustrating ourselves more and more. We feel isolated and helpless with no way of getting unstuck.

That feeling of hopelessness is not God's plan for us, as we're going to read in today's passage from Ephesians 3:14-21. Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus while he was imprisoned in Rome for sharing the gospel. We are going to learn how we as a body of believers can tap into a source of strength beyond our collective abilities, be rooted in the boundless love of Christ, and experience the power of God to bless us and those around us beyond our wildest dreams.

Let's turn to the passage now and hear from God's word:

Passage (Ephesians 3:14-21 NIV)

*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.*

### Point 1 – Pray to the Father for strength from the Holy Spirit (v14-16)

Let's read verse 14 again "For this reason I kneel before the Father". The first thing that Paul is modeling for us from this passage is the practice of kneeling before the Father to pray for others. Paul not only wrote that he is praying to the Father, but he is also demonstrating a physical posture of humility by kneeling, not just bowing. Kneeling for any length of time can be very uncomfortable, but that is what Paul is doing for the Ephesians. From this example, we can learn to earnestly seek Him with our whole body, not just our thoughts, in a spirit of humility.

Psalms 95:6-7 also instructs us to kneel, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."

Jesus proclaimed the power of prayer in Matthew 7:7-11, "7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!'"

When was the last time you knelt to pray for someone or something? I know that I don't do it nearly enough, and even though I am getting old, and my knees aren't what they used to be, kneeling to pray is a habit that I want to practice more often in obedience and reverence to God the Father.

I am in a period of personal fasting and prayer right now, during the 40 days preceding my last day at Nationwide. On Thursday, I physically knelt down to pray, instead of my normal practice of praying in bed before I wake up or bowing to pray while seated. One thing that I noticed by kneeling was that my mind was much more focused on what I was praying to God. My mind didn't drift off to think about something else, and I felt as if the communication was much more meaningful. Within 4 hours, I had a

response to that prayer. I'm not saying that every time you kneel to pray that God will answer right away, but I personally witnessed the power of kneeling before the Father this week.

In verse 15, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they, like us, are part of the family of God, a community of believers united by Christ. Our entrance into the family of God was declared to us in John 1:12-13, "12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. "

Paul has a similar message for the Galatians in Galatians 3:26, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith". Thus, we are all part of the family of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ, and this should encourage us to love and serve one another.

In verse 16, Paul prays that through God's abundant riches, He may strengthen us through the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. God's resources aren't limited, and He has the power to cleanse us and strengthen us as He wills.

Ezekiel prophesied about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel 36:25-28, "25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. 28 Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God."

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in John 14:15-17, "15 'If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.'"

Jesus also proclaimed the power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Romans 8:14 ties the family of God theme to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”

Thus, we see from the first 3 verses of this passage that Paul is kneeling before the Father, in supplication for his brothers and sisters in Christ, that God will strengthen them by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in them and guides them.

#### Point 2 –Be Rooted in the Boundless Love of Christ and the Fullness of God (v17-19)

The first portion of verse 17 promises us that Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith. In Exodus 29:45-46, God promises to dwell among the Israelites, so that they will know that He is their God.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 has a parallel message for us in that “16 Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.”

We see from these passages that the promise for us is much greater than it was for the Israelites in that Christ will dwell in us, not just be with us. God is not just accessible to us through an intermediary such as a priest or prophet, but we have direct access to the power of God living in us. How encouraging is that?

How can we accept this gift of the love of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Romans 10:9-10 has an answer for us, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

In the second half of verse 17, Paul prays that the Ephesians may be rooted and grounded in love. There is a clear visual that is presented here of a strong plant or tree that has had time to develop a strong foundation that will be able to withstand the storms of life and be steady no matter what happens.

We are not to be like the wicked who are described in Psalm 37:1-2, "1 Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; 2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away."

Rather, we are to be like the believers described in Colossians 2:6-7, who "just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

Another passage that paints the picture for us is Jeremiah 17:7-8, "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. 8 They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Having grown up in an agricultural area in southern Ashland County, near Mohican State Forest, this beautiful imagery of being unwavering through the storm, because of having deep roots resonates with me profoundly.

My family has lived on a wooded lot for the past 12 years, and we have witnessed over that time period that most of our trees have survived severe wind and thunderstorms, including a derecho and storms that produced tornadoes nearby, but several of our trees have not survived.

A few years ago, we had a large tree in our front yard that looked strong and healthy, but when the winds came, it did not have strong enough roots and was ripped out of the ground, roots and all. Others may have had a strong root system, but the trunk and branches weren't hearty enough, and the top part of the tree snapped off.

Finally, the strongest trees with the deepest and healthiest roots, have had what it takes to stand tall, stay strong, and keep living. What a great metaphor for us to inspire us to build our life's foundation on the love of Christ!

As we think about being rooted, one important thing that we are reminded of from the Parable of the Sower is that it is impossible to be rooted and grounded in love if we are the wrong type of soil. As we read in Mathew 13:23, "the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." We must hear the word and understand it; we can't just fall away when difficult times come around or allow the word to be choked out by the wealth or other earthly pleasures. No, in order to be rooted and grounded in Christ's love, we need to embed the love of Christ into our hearts.

In verses 18 and 19, Paul prays a bit of a paradox in that the Ephesians "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." To paraphrase, we are to be overwhelmed by the love of Christ that is beyond all human understanding.

In Romans 8:39, Paul also tells us that "neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When thinking about heights and depths, it is comforting to know that whether we fall to the bottom of the Mariana Trench, which is more than 7 miles deep in the Pacific Ocean, or climb to the top of Mount Everest, which is over 5 miles high, regardless of where we go, we can not escape the love of Christ. It is so encouraging to know that the love of Christ is with us.

Verse 18 also shows us that love is best experienced together with others in a community of believers, as Paul prays that we grasp the love of Christ together with all the Lord's holy people. Thus, it is an exhortation to be part of a body of believers, not just a lone wolf Christian who tries to go through life on his or her own.

Finally, in verse 19, Paul prays that the Ephesians may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. How can we be filled with the fullness of God?

I am going to go back to my analogy of a tractor, if I neglect to put anything in the gas tank, at some point the tractor will stop working, as it cannot operate on its own strength.

Likewise, if I put water or anything other than the right kind of fuel in the tank, it will not go anywhere either, as it needs the right kind of fuel to do what it was created to do.

However, if I fill the tank with gasoline, the tractor is empowered to fulfill its purpose, and the lawn gets mowed.

Likewise, if we try to operate out of our own strength or fill our minds with the wrong kinds of media, we will be incapable of fulfilling God's purposes for our lives and will not feel the satisfaction of being in alignment with God's will. Only by being filled with the fullness of God can Christ's love for us flow from us and into the world around us.



### Point 3 – Stand Amazed at the Goodness of God (v20-21)

Paul closes the chapter in an encouraging way, “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.”

First, in verse 20, Paul encourages us that working through us, God has the ability to bless us beyond what we can comprehend. To me, this is an encouragement to step out beyond my comfort zone and embrace what God has prepared for me by living with a risk-taking faith.

Until I am willing to step out and obey His commands for me, I won't be able to enjoy the fullness of His blessing.

Similar passages of encouragement can be found in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” and Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”.

Looking back over my life, if you would have told younger me at age 18 all the ways that God was going to bless me over the next 30+ years of my life, I would have never believed it. From meeting my future spouse who came to the school from California while I was minding my own business in the basement of our college dorm watching a golf tournament (I know that I am a nerd), to graduating and getting married 5 days later, to having 4 wonderful children, to working in a career that I loved for 30 years, to having financial blessings, to being part of a community of like-minded believers and friends, to having a great place to live, to seeing my 4 kids grow up, graduate, find spouses, and finally having a grandchild, the blessings from God have been overflowing. While all of these blessings have been tremendous, the biggest gift of all has been how I have been transformed from the inside out through deepening faith & the love of Christ.

The only right response is what Paul does in verse 21, which is Praise God!

All of you know the journey that I have been on since I started this class, where God has asked me to step away from my comfort zone, leave my current occupation, and lean into the works that he has prepared in advance for me to do (Ephesians 2:10).

I don't know how this story of risk-taking faith is going to end, but I am confident in the love and goodness of God to write a fantastic ending. I have already seen God move in ways that I could not have imagined when we started in August.

To conclude, I hope you join me in kneeling before the Father that all of us can experience the love of Christ, the fullness of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit that Paul describes in this chapter of his letter to the Ephesians.

### Conclusion

Through faith, believers can pray to the Father for strength from the Holy Spirit, be rooted in the boundless love of Christ and the fullness of God, and stand amazed at the goodness of God.