

Ephesians 3-14-19
Do you pray like Paul?

Ephesians 3:14–19 (ESV) — **14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **16** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Prayer for illumination:

Introduction:

You can tell what someone values by how they spend their money...

If someone spends all their money on hunting gear, they really value hunting!!!

If someone spends all their money eating out, they really value fast food!

You can tell what someone values by how they spend their time.....

If someone spends all their time gardening, they really value gardening.

If someone spends all their time playing video games, they really value video games.

You can tell what someone values by what they talk about...

If someone talks about politics all the time, it is obvious that they really value politics.

In a similar sense...

You can tell what someone really values by the content of their prayers? Our prayers express the deepest desires of our hearts. Said another way, prayer exposes the longings of the soul.

With this in mind, what do you pray for? What should you pray for? Do your prayers reflect the prayers of the Bible? This brings us to Ephesians 3:14-19. This is the second prayer recorded in the book of Ephesians.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached sixteen sermons on these verses. Don't worry, I'm only going to preach one. I mention the length of his sermons series to get you to realize how exceedingly rich Paul's prayer is.

Paul's prayer reflects Paul's values. More importantly, Paul's prayer reflects God's values.

We can learn much about the nature of God honoring prayer from Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. To help us model our prayers after Paul's prayers we are going to look at two aspects of Paul's prayer.

First, the posture of Paul's prayer.

Second, the petitions of Paul's prayer.

First, the posture of Paul's prayer

Paul adopted a posture of humility!

Ephesians 3:14–15 (ESV) — 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

The phrase “For this reason” takes us back to 3:1. Paul started to pray in 3:1 but got distracted for 13 verses. Aren't you encouraged that the great apostle Paul got distracted when he prayed?

We are now back to the prayer he begun in 3:1. This prayer is inspired by the truths elucidated in chapter 2. There we learned that God saves us by grace alone, is reconciling Jew and gentile, and he is building a multiethnic church where God dwells by his Spirit.

Hopefully, you noticed Paul's prayer posture. Verse 14 says, “I bow my knees before the father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,”

Paul's kneeling posture may not surprise us, but it would have surprised the original audience. Jewish men usually prayed standing up with outstretched arms. In other words, it was not normal for Jewish men to kneel when they prayed.

Kneeling was a posture of utter humility and deep reverence! To be clear, we are not commanded to kneel when we pray, but it is certainly not a bad idea.

Is this our prayer posture? Do we approach God in prayer with humility and reverence?

Illustration: Camp song “God is hip, he is a dude and we thank him for our food!!!” Sadly, the prayer posture of the hundreds of kids that sang this prayer was the opposite of Paul's prayer posture.

Application:

What is your prayer posture? I'm not suggesting that we have to kneel, but I am suggesting that we adopt Paul's spiritual posture. After all, when we pray, we are addressing the maker of the universe, who is holy and righteous. He is a consuming fire, yet, according to verse 14, he is also a loving father. If you are a Christian, you have the privilege of praying to your father. Yet he is a holy father. Don't go to him flippantly or casually. Approach him with humility and reverence, as Paul did.

When Paul prayed...

Paul adopted a posture of humility. In addition...

Paul adopted a posture of hope

Ephesians 3:14–16 (ESV) — 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **16** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Paul was hopeful that God would answer his prayers. Why? God was his father (v. 14). In addition, he is praying to a God who is rich in glory.

God's glory often refers to his heavenly splendor. The riches of God's glory refer to the riches of all of his divine attributes. He is rich in power, he is rich in wealth, he is rich in wisdom, he is rich in love, he is rich in might.

If you are in deep trouble, it makes little sense to ask a bankrupt homeless man for a million dollars. It does not matter how passionately and persuasively you make your appeal; you are probably not going to get the money. Your cause is hopeless.

On the other hand, Paul was very hopeful in asking God for something, since he was asking the One who is rich in glory. He owns all things, knows all things, and possesses all power.

Read verse again....

One scholar writes,

How marvelous that God does not give the Spirit's power to us "out of His riches" but "according to"—which is a far greater thing. If I am a billionaire and I give you ten dollars, I have given you *out of* my riches; but if I give you a million dollars, I have given to you *according to* my riches. The first is a *portion*; the second is a *proportion*. (Wiersbe)

Illustration:

If you knew that Jeff Bezos loved you, you would be hopeful asking him for something, wouldn't you? Why? Jeff Bezos net worth is currently 187 Billion.

Application:

Paul adopted a posture of hope when he went to God in prayer. He was hopeful because he believed that God had the resources and power to do what Paul was asking him to do.

Is this our posture? Or is our posture a posture of doubt??? Expand....

We have looked at Paul's prayer posture, but what was Paul asking God to do??? This brings us to the second point.

First, the posture of Paul's prayer

Second, the petitions of Paul's prayer

Paul makes three prayer requests or petitions in verses 16-19.

One scholar thinks of each petition as a step on a staircase, taking us higher and higher with each petition. (Stott) In other words, each petition builds on the previous petition. We will look at them one at a time, starting with the petition for strength.

A petition for strength!

Ephesians 3:16 (ESV) — 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Paul wants the Ephesian Christians to be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in their inner being.

The Bible is abundantly clear that all of our spiritual strength comes from the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. Absolutely nothing!!!

Even Jesus Christ, in his human nature, relied on the Holy Spirit for everything (Luke 4:1; 14; Acts 10:38). How much more do we need the Holy Spirit every second of our lives????

Paul says that we need to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in our inner being. This raises the question, what is our inner being?

One scholar writes,

“the inner person is 'the interior of our being . . . the seat of personal consciousness, . . . [and] of our moral being'. It is the focal point at the center of a person's life where the Spirit does his strengthening and renewing work.” (O'Brien)

This means the non-physical or spiritual part of man where God dwells and works. It is called the heart in the next verse (Eph. 3:17).

Paul describes the inner man and the outer man in 2 Cor. 4:16

2 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV) — 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Paul prays for the inner part, that is the spiritual part of the Ephesians Christians, to be strengthened by the HS. But strengthened for what? This brings us to the next petition or step up in the staircase...

A petition for strength!

A petition for indwelling!

Ephesians 3:16–17 (ESV) — 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

The Holy Spirit strengthens us spiritually so that we can experience the presence of Christ in our inner being. Said another way, it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit that enables us to experience the indwelling of Christ in our inner being.

Wait a minute! Doesn't Christ already dwell permanently in their heart of every Christian? Yes! The moment we become Christians Jesus Christ begins to dwell in our hearts by faith. But... even though he is there all the time, we don't always sense or experience his nearness and presence.

Paul's prayer is simply that Christians would experience more and more and more of the presence of the indwelling Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Charles Hodge rightly comments, “The indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees”.

This is by far our greatest need! We need to experience the presence of Christ in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit more than we need food, water, clothing, and shelter.

When we experience more and more of Christ's indwelling presence, we are increasingly rooted and grounded in his love. Which brings us to the last petition...

A Petition for strength

A petition for indwelling

A petition for comprehension

Ephesians 3:17b–19 (ESV) — 17b—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

One of the key words in these verses is the word comprehend.

Paul wants us to comprehend, grasp, or experience the love of Christ in our inner being. Paul is not talking about theoretical knowledge. He is talking about deep, spiritual, life altering, experiential knowledge.

What do we know about the love of Christ????

Love motivated Christ to leave the glories of heaven.

Love motivated Christ to dwell in the womb of a nervous, poor, and unmarried teenager.

Love motivated Christ to take on flesh (incredible in light of the grandeur of the universe)

Love motivated Christ to live among us and experience all of our pain and suffering.

Love motivated Christ to suffer unjustly at the hands of wicked men.

Love motivated Christ to suffer excruciating pain on the cross.

Love motivated Christ to take the wrath that we deserve upon his shoulders.

Love motivated Christ to be willing to be abandoned by his own father.

Love motivated Christ to rise from the grave.

Love motivates Christ to preserve us until the end.

Love motivates Christ, right now, to pray for us.

Because of Christ's extravagant love we can be forgiven, reconciled to God, adopted by God, made Joint heirs with Christ, redeemed, spared the horrible consequences of sin, and spend all eternity in a state of joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The Bible says that God is love... I did not say that God is loving, God is love itself!!!

How can we describe this love with words? We can't, although Paul tries.

Ephesians 3:18 (ESV) — 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

Bible scholars call the breadth, length, height, and depth the four magnitudes. Speaking of these, John Stott writes,

“Modern commentators warn us not to be too literal in our interpretation of these, since the apostle may only have been indulging in a little rhetoric or poetic hyperbole. Yet it seems to me legitimate to say that the love of Christ is ‘broad’ enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jews and Gentiles, the theme of these chapters), ‘long’ enough to last for eternity, ‘deep’ enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and ‘high’ enough to exalt him to heaven.” (Stott)

But there is a paradox here. Paul wants us to know personally the love of Christ “which surpasses knowledge.” This parallels “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). We are so rich in Christ that our riches cannot be calculated even with the most sophisticated computer. (Wiersbe)

This does not imply that we cannot know anything of Christ’s love, it implies that we can never fully grasp it. Not even in eternity...

In light of this an unknown author wrote these words...

Could we with ink the oceans fill
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade—
To write the love of God above
Would drain the oceans dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky. (found in Boice)

Illustration:

Paul prays that the saints would know something of this love! Again, this is more than head knowledge. Let me provide a few examples from church history of what it looks like to experience this love.

DL Moody

“I kept on crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day in the City of New York-oh! What a day, I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred and experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke of for fourteen years. I can only say, God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand.” (Moody, Joy Unspeakable, 80)

Jonathan Edwards

“As I rode into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that was for me extraordinary, the glory of the Son of God, as mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The Person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thoughts and conceptions, which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; such as to keep me a greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust him; to live upon Him; to serve Him and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity.” (Lloyd Jones, 80)

My experience on the lawn mower....

In the summer of 1997, I worked at Manito Golf and Country Club on the grounds crew. Essentially, I mowed grass all day under the blazing summer sun. We were not allowed to listen to music because we needed to be able to hear the rich golfers yell “four!” when they hit stray balls. To stay awake while driving the large expensive lawn mowers, I often sang hymns and prayed. One hot July afternoon, while I was singing hymns, seemingly out of nowhere, I was totally overwhelmed by a sense of God’s nearness and presence. I had never experienced so much love and joy. I was so overwhelmed by the love of God in Christ that I began to sob uncontrollably. This went on for several minutes. I still can’t

describe in words, 23 years later, how I felt. But I knew one thing for sure, Christ loved me with an extravagant love that caused deep joy to well up inside of me.

This is what Paul prays for the Ephesians. He wants them to experience the love of Christ.

His three petitions are like three steps. One request leads to the next one.

He prays for God the Holy Spirit to Strengthen the inner man... so that...

The inner man would experience the presence of Christ... so that...

The inner man would comprehend the extravagant love of Christ....

It is a prayer for strength, which leads to indwelling, which leads to comprehension...

Let's make some application-

Notice what Paul does not pray??? He does not pray for the alleviation of problems, financial provision, better health, better jobs, or an easier life. Please don't misunderstand me, it is not wrong to pray for these things. God cares about every detail of our lives. Yet, if you look at the prayers of the Paul, and the prayers of the NT in general, these things are not emphasized.

Instead Paul prays for power to comprehend the love of Christ... Why is this Paul's prayer priority???

Paul knows that this is our greatest need.

When we grasp the love of Christ, we can survive intense trials.

When we grasp the love of Christ, we will become more like Christ...

When we grasp the love of Christ, we will love others...

When we grasp the love of Christ, we will forgive others.

When we grasp the love of Christ, we will give our money away.

When we grasp the love of Christ, we will tell others about Jesus.

When we grasp the love of Christ, we will stop being fearful....

When we grasp the love of Christ, we will obey his commands...

Basic gospel chemistry!!! The more we comprehend how much God loves us, the more we will fall in love with him, and the more we love him, the more we will want to obey his commands.

If this is true, how should we pray for others.

Let's say you have a friend who needs a job...

Let's say you have a wayward child...

Let's say you have a friend who is really suffering...

Conclusion:

Our prayers reveal our values. What did the apostle Paul really value? Paul wanted the saints in Ephesus to comprehend the love of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, he prayed to this end. Let's agree together to adopt the same prayer priorities. Please join me in prayer....