

Powerful Prayer

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. We're going to continue on in our series in Ephesians this morning. If you would take the Word of God with me and go to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, and we'll finish out to the first section of the book of Ephesians, who we are in Christ, our identity in Christ.

The teens have been going over that on Wednesday nights, talking about their identity in Christ, and that's what we've all been looking at as a church in this first half of the book of Ephesians. So if you go to chapter 3, we're going to continue on verses 14 through 21, the end of the chapter. If you're able to, would you stand with me? And let's take the Word of God and read together Ephesians 3, verse 14.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

[1 : 15] I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. God, I pray that you would bless the reading of your Word. I pray that you would speak to us. Show us how important it is to not forsake daily communication with you through prayer.

And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Before we get started, is there any news from any burnt orange wearing people in the audience?

Just want to get that out there. What elephant in the room kind of thing. No? We're still waiting? All right. Well then y'all just let me preach and don't tell me till the end, all right?

[2 : 34] So, there's a Jimmy Moses for Alabama and a few of us Longhorn fans are kind of waiting to see how this whole college football playoff thing works out. But let's take our minds off of that for just a few minutes and let's get into the book of Ephesians, all right?

So, we've been talking in our series on Ephesians, of course, who we are and how we live. Much of the study from this book and kind of the outline for today's sermon in particular comes from this Christ-centered exposition commentary series and Pastor Tony Merida from out in North Carolina wrote that particular book in that series.

The background of the book of Ephesians written by Apostle Paul around AD 62. Anno domini means in the year of our Lord, all right? So, that's kind of giving you that, that Tony was quizzing y'all on that.

Tony's always good for a Bible quiz, man. Just trivia with Tony sometimes. It's awesome. The setting was Paul's Roman imprisonment and he was very familiar with this church in Ephesus, far away from Rome, had to be taken by courier, his letter to this church and then distributed to other churches around the area.

But he knew this church well because he had been their pastor for three years. So, he was very intimate with these people and God gave him these words to write to them and then to send on to all of us for all time.

[3 : 59] The word of our Lord lives forever. The breakdown of the book of Ephesians, those first three chapters we're finishing up today, talks about who we are in Christ. Next Sunday, we will begin how we live for Christ, chapters four through six.

We'll take a break for Christmas Eve Sunday and talk about that. But we'll continue on in our series in Ephesians the rest of the Sundays. So, part one, we're finishing up our identity in Christ, who we are in Him, and the text for today is Ephesians chapter three and verse 14.

We have been having some fill-in-the-blank notes for you. I didn't get those in today, this week in time, so we've just got some blanks for you to jot down notes, but I encourage you to do that if you're in the habit of taking notes in the service.

The theme for today's sermon is powerful prayer. Powerful prayer. Not just prayer, not just a rote religious exercise, not just something that you've seen others do and feel like you should, but praying, communicating with Almighty God with power.

So that's what we're talking about. Number one this morning, pray with humility. Let's look back at the text. Pray with humility. For this reason, I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

[5 : 20] That is Paul's expression of ultimate humility as he kneels before God. Daniel did it three times a day. He would kneel and cry out to his God, even in the face of imminent danger as he was breaking the law of the land to do so.

But he was going to prostrate himself before God. He was going to humble himself before God. We have seen, even in Scripture and sometimes throughout Christian history, men and women who have a close relationship with God sometimes led to go even a step beyond kneeling and truly lie down prostrate on their face before God.

Whatever it is that allows you to humble yourself as you come into communication with the Master of the universe, the Creator of all that is, and the Savior of our souls, that is what is essential to effectively pray with our Lord.

We must pray with humility. Psalms chapter 95, the 95th Psalm, gives us a picture of this. O come, let us worship and bow down.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker, for He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Remember that we are just sheep.

[6 : 45] We are just sheep. There's a story. Excuse me. There's a story I wanted to share with you all, and I need to pull it back up here for a minute.

Have any of you heard of the story of Palm Monday? The story of the donkey. Y'all know about Palm Sunday, right?

When the donkey carried Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem, everybody was casting palm fronds and celebrating the coming of the Messiah, the King that would deliver them from Rome, even though that's not what He was there to do.

He was there to deliver them from their sins. But the little donkey, this fictional story is written about Palm Monday, what happened the day after.

And the donkey awakened, his mind still savoring the afterglow of the most exciting day of his life.

He carried Jesus, right? Never before had he felt such a rush of pleasure and pride.

[7 : 49] He walked into town and found a group of people by the well. I'll show myself to them, he thought. But they didn't notice him. They went on drawing their water and paid him no mind.

Throw your garments down, he said crossly. Don't you know who I am? They just looked at him in amazement. Someone slapped him across the tail and ordered him to move. Miserable heathens, he muttered to himself.

I'll just go to the market where the good people are. They'll remember me. But the same thing happened. No one paid any attention to the donkey as he strutted down the main street in front of the marketplace.

The palm branches! Where are the palm branches? He shouted. Yesterday you threw palm branches. Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother.

Foolish child, she said gently. Don't you realize that without him, you're just an ordinary donkey?

Folks, can I remind us that without him, we're just ordinary donkeys?

[8 : 55] Without him, we are just sheep. Without him, we are nothing. But with him, we are children of the king. With him, we are blood-bought.

We are redeemed. We are valuable. We are precious in his sight. We are his treasure. With him, all things are possible. But without him, we are nothing.

So it's important to come humbly in prayer. Number two, pray for God's full power and full love. We read about this in Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 16.

Pray for God's full power and full love. Paul writes, I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is that length and width and height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness for God's full power and full love.

[10:14] We see two key emphases here in this passage. It's power and it's love. So, we're talking about, first of all, the inner being.

Look back at verse 16. He says, I pray that you would be strengthened with power in your inner being. If you'll notice something about God, he's always more concerned with the inside than he is the outside.

We are generally just the opposite. We are far more concerned with the outside than we are the inside because we're selfish people. We're self-centered.

We're self-absorbed. We're self-consumed. And so, as long as everyone else looks like everything's fine, then we don't have to worry about anything else. As long as everybody is dotting their I's and crossing their T's and everything seems fine, then we're okay and we don't have to be concerned. But God is far more concerned with what's going on in our hearts. 1 Samuel chapter 16. The Lord does not see as man sees.

[11:25] For man looks at the outward appearance. But God, the Lord, looks at what? The heart. He looks at the heart. He cares about what's going on inside.

He cares about not how much we profess our love for Him, but how much we truly love Him on the inside. From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Eventually, what goes on on the inside will come out on the outside. But man, you can fool people for a long time, can't you? You can put on a good face.

Sunday mornings when we all gather together, we can make it seem like we've got it all sorted out.

We've got our lives under control. We're dressed up nicely and everything looks like it's A-OK.

God knows the truth. He knows the reality. And He wants us to live in that space. He wants us to be real, be genuine, be authentic. For a long time, churches have struggled with that.

[12:32] Religion has seemingly focused more on the outward than it has on what's going on in the heart. And that's not God's religion. That's not what Jesus came to do.

He came to save us from the inside out. And He'll save all of you. He'll save every bit. But transformation on the outside is a lifelong process.

It is a journey called sanctification in which God is making you more and more into His image until someday you cast off this fleshly, sinful body and you take on your glorified body.

And we get to live forever in heaven with Jesus. That's the good news, right? That's what we're all looking forward to. But until that day, this sanctification process is happening. But that is more essential to happen from the inside out rather than the outside in.

Man, it's hard to just adapt yourself to something and truly be transformed. The transformation happens first through the power of the Holy Spirit of God because you and I can't change anybody.

[13:39] We can try. Wives, you ever tried to change your spouse? Don't raise your hand right now. Please. We all know the answer. Of course you have, right? We need it. But good luck, right?

We can't really change anybody, but Jesus can. The Holy Spirit of God can. And so that is what we must be content with.

God changing us on the inside. And then the adaptation happens. Then the transformation happens visibly. But God is more concerned with the heart.

So it's all about that inner being. And then secondly, under this second point here, dwell. Get this concept of dwelling. Where do we see it?

Back in Ephesians 3, verse 17. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. What do we mean by this word dwell?

[14:38] All right, now I did a study of the Greek. It's this combination of two words. I'm not going to dive into a Greek lesson with you today. I took my four semesters of Greek in college, and I'm done.

I'm done with that. All right? We're not going backwards here. But it is helpful sometimes to look back. And the concept that we get behind this word dwell is settling in.

Putting down roots. Getting comfortable. What we've been trying to do in Henrietta for the last six months. Dwelling. That is what Christ wants to do in your heart.

That is what Christ wants to do in your inner being. Is dwell there. Make it His home. Make it His domain.

Rule through His Spirit in your heart and life. He wants to dwell. He wants to settle in there.

Colossians chapter 3.

[15 : 41] As I was doing my slides, I realized I use Colossians a lot. And there's a lot of parallels, I think, between Ephesians and Colossians. So we're kind of bouncing back and forth each Sunday between Ephesians and Colossians.

But here we go. Colossians 3, verse 15. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

There we have that word again. Let the word of Christ settle in and get comfortable in your heart, in your life. Let it rule there.

Let it have its way. You ever had guests over and said, make yourself at home? Did you really mean that? Did you really want them to treat your house like they would their own home on an average Tuesday?

Did you want them to leave their shoes on the floor and, you know, not put things away and leave the dishes in the sink and maybe clean up in the morning? Did you really want them to make themselves at home, right?

[16 : 48] But I think that is exactly the picture that we get of Christ embracing the mess that is us on the inside. The real us.

The real us, right? Yeah, we're a mess inside. Yeah, we've got dishes sitting out. Yeah, we've got a mess to clean up. Like I said, we put on our best front, but we know inside things are not always exactly as we would want them to be.

And that is where Christ wants to dwell. That's where he wants to live. That's where he wants to help you little by little clean up and morph into his image.

And that's going to be a lifelong process. So don't get in a hurry. But Jesus can transform it. He's telling you, I'm not scared of the mess. I know it all.

I know the worst of you, the worst you'll ever do. I know the worst you ever could do. I know what you're capable of. And I saved all of it. I transformed all of it.

[17 : 48] I redeemed all of it. I can help you. Let me dwell. And then experience love through this way, being secure.

So what did we have? The inner being, dwelling, letting God settle in, and now experiencing his love.

This was the other part here. We're talking about power. We're talking about love. We experience love, and we understand that God's love for us makes us secure.

This is a secure love. Look back at Ephesians 3 again. The second part of verse 17. I pray that you being rooted and firmly established in love.

Do you notice what it says? It does not say, Paul does not tell us, I want you to be rooted and firmly established in love. He says, I pray that you, this is why English is so awesome, okay?

[18 : 54] I pray that you, comma, being rooted and firmly established in love, comma, so there's a phrase right there. That's kind of parenthetical. It's like you could erase it and the sentence would still stand on its own, okay?

I just lost half of you, but that's okay. I pray that you, skip down, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love.

Awesome. But what was that part we skipped? Being rooted and firmly established in love. He's saying, you already are. You are rooted and firmly established in God's love.

How do we know that? Because we're His children. Because we accepted Him. Now, if you haven't, then you're not rooted and firmly established in Christ's love.

If there's someone here with us today who has not yet made that once-in-a-lifetime decision to put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and becoming God's child, then this doesn't apply to you.

[20 : 05] You've got to make that first, most important decision. I'm not talking about coming to church. I'm not talking about cleaning up your life. I'm not talking about any of those things. I'm talking about just saying, I can't help myself.

I need Jesus. And if you repent from your sin and turn to Jesus and believe Him enough, trust Him enough to say, I put all my faith in Him, then He'll save you from your sins.

He'll cleanse you and He'll make you His child forever. So that is the most important thing. And then, if you do put your faith in Jesus and you are His child, then you're rooted and firmly established in His love.

And that love is secure. It's secure forever. Romans 8 talks about this. Where are we here? Would you turn to Romans 8 with me real quick?

Man. God's love makes us secure. And God's love is limitless. That's the second half of this. And Romans 8 kind of talks about all of it.

[21 : 15] The very end of the chapter here. Verses 38 and 39. I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth.

Remember that from over there in Ephesians 3? The length and width, the height and depth of God's love? It says, nothing, nor any created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's the good news you come to church to hear about. That's the good news that we're reminded of whenever we open up God's Word. That is the good news that God loves us and nothing can change that.

If you put your faith in Jesus, He says, you become His child and He will never leave you. He'll never abandon you. He'll never forsake you. No one else can change that and you can't change it either.

You're now part of God's family. You've been regenerated, regened into the family of God. I mean, that's an incredible truth. And I pray we never get over it.

[22 : 30] I pray that never loses its meaning for us. God's love is secure and God's love is limitless. He says He casts our sins as far as the east is from the west.

You can't get farther than that. He's forgiven us forever for everything. That's His love. Read about it there in Romans 8.

Read about it there in Romans 8. Read about it there in Romans 8. And then experience this about God's love. Filling the heart more than the mind. This is why I use the word experience.

Now sometimes you can get into this experiential Christianity which focuses on the tangible. It focuses on the things that you can actually see. And basically if God's not blessing you exactly how you want Him to, then God doesn't love you or God doesn't value you and vice versa.

If God is, you know, giving you money, etc. It's this prosperity gospel. Then you'll be rich. If God loves you and values you and you're His child, then you'll never have a hard time and you'll always be rich.

[23 : 43] I don't see how that kind of thinking, obviously it doesn't line up with what the Bible teaches. I don't see how it could last very long. You know? At some point, that's going to ring very false, right?

Usually it ends up with something like send money to me, the preacher who's telling you all this stuff so I can buy my second jet or something like that. I don't even have one.

I don't know what's wrong with y'all, but still waiting on my first jet here. Somebody's going to buy me a little matchbox jet and say, here you go, preacher. Thank you.

Anyway, so experience is not the most important thing that we need to rely on. We need to rely on what the Word of God says. That is the foundation that can't change. Our experience can be deceiving, it can fool us, it can lead us into wrong thinking, but the Word of God will not.

However, God is experiential. God does want you to experience His love. He wants you to experience His goodness and not just fill your mind with it.

[24 : 46] He wants to dwell in your heart and fill it up with all these experiences of God's love because that is what's going to matter. That's what's going to change you is when He breaks through to the heart.

It says it surpasses knowledge. So you can try all day to understand who God is, what He's like, why He loves us, and how much He loves us, and you'll never totally be able to wrap your mind around it.

It's beyond human comprehension. It surpasses knowledge. But instead, you can be filled with the fullness of God despite not being able to fully grasp the height and depth, the length and width of

God's love and who God is.

You can still be filled with His fullness because we're talking about the inner being. We're not just talking about the mind. That's why we say you experience God's love more in your heart than your mind.

Andy Stanley, son of Charles Stanley. Anybody ever listen to Charles Stanley on TV or radio, read his books, that kind of thing? Yeah. Andy's a little different.

[26 : 06] He's gotten into, you know, some takes on things that I don't always necessarily agree with, but a lot of the things he says is valuable and this one is very important and key to what we're talking about today.

Read that again. Knowledge alone makes Christians haughty. Application makes us holy. Jesus said, be holy for I am holy.

You have to not just know, not just fill your head, with Bible knowledge, with theological understanding, not just fill your head with all these facts about God.

Say, look at me. I can answer all your Bible trivia questions and I can know exactly how and when and it happened in the Bible, but instead, how is that applying in your life?

How is that actually making you more holy? It happens when it takes root, when it's firmly established. It happens when you let Christ dwell in you, in your heart, not just your mind.

[27 : 15] You understand the difference there? We're saved through faith in our heart and that's the exact same way that we grow closer in our relationship with God is through the heart.

it's not just the mind. Yeah, you have to have understanding that you are a sinner. You have to have understanding and knowledge that Jesus did die on the cross, that he did rise from the dead, that he is willing and able to save you if you put your faith in him for the forgiveness of your sins. You have to know all those things, but the faith has to come from the heart and nothing changes after salvation. That's still where he wants to reside.

that's still where he wants to dwell and help you grow. So knowledge alone just makes us proud of ourselves, just makes us haughty, but applying it, that can make us more like God, holy.

So, number three, we spent a long time on number two, but quickly, number three, pray with great expectations. Great expectations. This finishes out Ephesians 3, this finishes out the first section, the first half of the book of Ephesians.

[28 : 30] Pray with great expectations. Look back at verse 20 of Ephesians 3. Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Expect great things from God. Pray with great expectations. Expect, number one, that God is able.

When we pray, expect that God can. I can't, but God can. Let's say that together. Ready? I can't, but God can.

Do you believe that? You believe it in your heart? Amen. That is praying with great expectations.

We know and we expect because we believe it in our heart, not just in our mind, but in our heart by faith that God is able.

We see that there in the very first part of verse 20. To him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think. And then secondly, expect that God will work in me.

[29 : 38] God will work in me. Expect that. Don't expect how he will work. Don't expect what he will do because that's putting ourselves in God's shoes and determining what is best.

We don't know what is best. We take our requests to him. We take our petitions to him. We take our concerns to him. We take our annoyances to him. We take our fears to him.

We lay all of this at his feet and then we say, God, please work. And then we expect that he will work because we know he's able. We believe it. And so now we expect him to work.

We see that in the second part of verse 20. According to the power that works in us. Where does that power come from? It's not you. It's not me.

It comes from God in us. It comes from God dwelling in us. So we expect that God will work in us. And then lastly, we expect that God will be glorified.

[30 : 38] We expect that he'll get the glory. This is praying with power. This is praying biblically. This is praying how God wants us to communicate with him. We expect that he is able.

We expect that he will work. And we expect that he will be glorified. Verse 21, to him be all the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.

Amen. We expect that he will be glorified. If he doesn't get the glory, then it's not worth doing. If God doesn't get the glory, then he won't accomplish it through us.

It can be a minute thing. It can be a tiny little thing. We're not talking about significance. We're talking about him getting the glory. It can be the tiniest little thing. You lost your keys somewhere and you pray for God, please show me where my keys are and he leads you to them and you say, thank you God, you get the glory for that.

It can be the simplest little thing, but as long as God gets the glory, that's when he will work. So we expect him to get the glory.

[31 : 49] William Carey, they call him the father of modern missions. We're taking up an offering today for the Lottie Moon Christmas offering to support missions around the world and this was a man they called the father of modern missions, worked in India for his entire life just about and he said, expect great things from God and then attempt great things for God.

If you truly expect God to do great things, then you'll be able to get past your fear of attempting great things. Not saying the fear will be gone completely, but if you truly expect from Christ dwelling in your heart that you have great expectations for God to work, then you'll go out and attempt something great for God.

you'll step out of your comfort zone and you'll say, God, work through me. Whatever it is, you'll talk to a family member about Jesus. You'll give more to God's work than you're used to giving.

You'll deal with a broken relationship that you've been putting off for a long time. Whatever it is, you'll attempt great things for God because you expect God to work.

So, to recap, powerful prayer, what does it look like? Praying with humility. Praying for God's full power and full love. And praying with great expectations.

[33 : 16] What's our takeaway today? Ask God to help you take the next step in your prayer life.

Very simple. But what is it? What is the next step for you? What's the next step in your prayer life? You've got your regular life.

You've got the life that everybody sees and you interact with people, but then you have your personal, private, prayer life with God. Only two are a part of that.

You and God. What's the next step in your prayer life? is it just praying more? Is it praying more with humility?

Is it praying more for God's full love, for His full power? Is it praying with more expectation for God to actually work? What is it for you that would constitute the next step in your prayer life?

[34 : 18] Would you pray with me right now? Would you bow your heads? Lord, please show us what it is that would be the next step. It's going to be different for every one of us, but there is not a man or a woman or a child in this room today who does not need to take a next step.

I need to. Everybody in this church needs to take a next step in their prayer life with you. God, I ask that you would not leave us alone, that your Holy Spirit would stay on us continually prompting us and nudging us to take that next step.

Maybe it's praying more regularly and not going hours and days and weeks at a time without communicating with our good Father, the one who loves us most.

Maybe it's recognizing that God's not as concerned with all the outward that we have such a hard time with. He's concerned with what's going on on the inside. Help us to lay that in your feet.

Leave that in your hands and say, God, please dwell in my heart. Dwell in my heart today. Dwell in my heart right now. We'll give you all the glory for it.

[35 : 32] And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Church, would you stand to your feet if you're able to? For just a moment, I'm going to be down front. If you'd like to come forward and pray with me. I forgot to do this and I don't like to let a Sunday go by.

So right now, with everyone looking up this way, if there's someone who doesn't know Jesus as your Savior and you'd like to make a decision to turn from your sin and turn to Jesus today, would you just slip your hand up real quick so I can pray for you?

Awesome. Thank you. All right. If that's you, I'd like you to come down front. Just step out into the aisle. Come down front and meet with me right down here. I'll pray with you. And if there's anybody else who needs prayer, how many people would be able to, listen, don't be ashamed.

How many would be able to say, God spoke to me about my prayer life and I need prayer right now. Would you slip your hand up as well? Let's pray for each other. All right. You can put your hands down. Use this altar. You can come pray by yourself.

You can meet me down front, but use this altar. If you'd like to join this church and put your membership here, meet me down front. We'll have that conversation as well. You move as God leads you.