

I Bow My Knees
Ephesians 3:14-21

Bethany Baptist Church
June 18, 2017

...pray...

Look to the right and see; for there is no one who regards me; there is no escape for me; no one cares for my soul. Psalm 142:4

“No one cares for my soul.” **That** is a sad thought!

One of the most *soulful & powerful* expressions of *caring* is passionate **prayer**.

And one the most *needed & effective* **echelons** of *prayer warriors* in the *Church & in the family* is *Christian fathers*.

Men, if you are **not** *praying* for your *family & your church*, you are *sleeping at your post & you are missing a blessing!*

Turn w/ me to one of the Bible’s most beautiful prayers in Eph 3:14-21.

This powerful and beautiful passage ends the first half of Ephesians (doctrine) & prepares us for second half (practice → lifestyle).

This is the *second* of **three** *prayers* in Ephesians.

It is a prayer of *mind-blowing & soul-growing* proportions. Paul is asking God to give His children *spiritual power*.

Each *point* in Paul’s prayer leads to the *next point*, like moving up a sweeping grand *staircase*, or watching a carefully planned, increasingly spectacular, *fireworks display*.

In the end, the entire prayer *explodes* with an incredible declaration of *confidence* in God’s *power & willingness* to answer your prayers!

Seven keywords to help you pray for yourself, your family & your church:

- 1. Identity (vv. 14-15)**
- 2. Strength (v.16)**
- 3. Presence (v.17)**
- 4. Love (vv.17-19)**
- 5. Fullness (v.19)**
- 6. Confidence (v.20)**
- 7. Praise (v.21)**

Beloved, if you are “in Christ” you should be filled with hope because you belong to God!

1. Have you noticed all the different **DNA commercials** on television?
(ancestry, my23&me?)
 - a. Everyone wants to know *where they came from* and *who they are!*
 - b. The only famous relatives I’ve been told I have are the **19th** century Missouri *bank robbers, Frank & Jessie James!*

2. Now (14) Paul returns to the prayer he started back in **3:1** (compare – *For this reason*).
 - a. And clearly the apostle has *prayer* in mind, as he speaks of *bowing his knees before God*.
 - b. OBTW, Paul’s point is *not* that you have to pray from a *specific position* (**Jonah** prayed from the *belly of a fish!*), but that you pray w/an attitude of *reverence & humility*.

3. The apostle addresses the “*Creator of Everything*” as his *Heavenly Father*.
 - a. Paul likes *this* understanding of God and uses it *all over Ephesians*. In the entire **OT**, God is only referred to as *Father* about **15X**, but in the **NT** Jesus made our “*family connection*” to God clear, and often in relationship to *prayer* (→ “*Our Father, who art in heaven!*”).
 - b. And Paul has just written (12) that when we come to God we come with *free speech & open access* to the Father’s *throne of grace*.

4. *Bro/sis* we can pray to God as our *Father* because we are now **His children!**
 - a. Every man & woman on the planet is God’s *creation*, but Christians are uniquely His *children* by right of *spiritual adoption*.
 - b. *Spiritual adoption* is another *big idea* in Ephesians, as we read in **1:5** that God our Father *predestined us for adoption before the foundation of the world*. And with that *adoption*, we have an *inheritance*.
 - c. The result is that we are now members of *God’s royal family* (2:19).

5. Powerful prayer starts w/ your *new identity* in Christ! *Because* you are in the *Father's family*, He wants to *hear your prayers*. Here is **two** simple prayer suggestions based on these first **two** verses:

- a. *First*, if you are **not** confident that you are in God's family, ask God to *forgive* your sins, & to *save* you through the *death & resurrection* of Jesus, & to give you *assurance* that you are now *His child*.
- b. If you **are** a Christian, simply **thank** God for *adopting* you! ☺

2nd: Pray that God will strengthen you & yours with spiritual power (read v.16).

1. This request for *power* is the *launch pad (starting line)* for rest of Paul's prayer.
 - a. He isn't praying for *physical power* –we all know that *comes & goes*.
 - b. Paul wants you be strong on the *inside (inner man)*, i.e. you need **spiritual power**.
 - c. Jesus clearly said: "*My power is perfected in (your) weakness*," which caused Paul to declare, "*when I am weak then I am strong*."
2. *How much* spiritual power does it take to *live the Christian life*?
 - a. I'm not sure *how* to measure that! But do you see God's promise in **v.16**: *in measure with the wealth of His glory*. That's *big*...!
 - b. God's *glory* is *all that He is & all that He does*! Is that *enough*!?! ☺
 - c. Paul writes that power comes **according to His wealth**... So God's *kingdom wealth* is the **measuring-stick** & that suggests a lot of power!
 - i. When a *millionaire* gives you **\$20**, he's giving *out* of his *wealth*. But it doesn't take a *millionaire* to give **\$20**...
 - ii. When a *millionaire* gives you **\$20,00**, he's giving you *according to (in keeping with)* his *riches*.
 - iii. God gives strength *in keeping with* all His *treasure*!

3. How does God *transfer His wealth* into *your spiritual account*? He does it as the Holy Spirit *lives* within you & *empowers* you & *leads* you!
 - a. Do you remember **1:13-14?** (read)
 - b. Every true Christian has the Spirit *living* in them, *never to leave*!
 - c. He *marks* us as God's *children* & *secures* us in God's *family*.
 - d. And now (3:16) the Spirit *strengthens* us with *spiritual power*, on the *inside*!
4. Fathers & grandfathers, here are a few useful examples of how to *harness* the power of the Holy Spirit thru prayer:
 - a. Ask God to give your children the spiritual power to *resist temptation*.
 - b. And ask God to give them the spiritual strength to *cling to Christ*.

3rd: Pray that Christ will feel at home in your heart (read 17a).

1. When I was young man, I read a powerful little *booklet* titled "*My Heart, Christ's Home*" (Rob't. Munger; you can still *find it*).
 - a. It pictured the believer's *heart* (= *life*) as his *house*... You know what we like to say: "*A man's home is his castle!*"
 - b. But every *new Christian* has a *new tenant* in his home – Jesus! Jesus is *not* a quiet guest!
 - c. He wants you to *clean up* your place – He came in to be the *Lord of your Castle!*

2. Now when Paul prays (17) *for Christ to dwell in your hearts thru faith*, you have to think a little *carefully*.... We are saved thru *faith* alone in *Christ* alone, but in Ephesians, ...
 - a. He is **not** praying about *salvation* – this letter is written to those who are already *Christians*, to teach them about *life in the church*.
 - b. The *apostle* is praying about **sanctification** – **how** Christ lives in your *house & how* He makes you *more holy!*
 - c. Jesus does not like a *morally* or *doctrinally* sloppy house! Will you make Him feel **at home...!?!**

3. **At home**that’s Paul’s *point!* ...*that Christ may dwell in your hearts*...
 - a. There are a couple of related **Gr** words that we could translate as “*dwell*.”
 - b. One means – *to live as temporary* guest.
 - c. The other (~“*settled*”) – *to live as a permanent* resident.
 - d. *Guess* which word Paul used in **v.17**....? ☺

4. It takes *faith* to let Christ *inspect & clean up* your *morally messy* heart!
 - a. Will you **trust** Him with the *rooms & nooks & crannies* of your life?
Will you trust Him w/ ...
 - b. Your *schedule?* Your *finances?* Your *relationships?* Your *troubles?*

5. Here is a simple example of using this prayer principle of *presence*:
 - a. “Heavenly Father, please **strengthen** my *faith* so I will allow *Jesus* to *clean & control every room of my heart.*”

And then pray to *know* Christ's *unknowable* love (read 17b-19a)!

1. The *love* the Bible teaches to God's children is called (Gr) *agape* ...
 - a. *Agape* means love **w/o** concern for *loveliness* or *deservedness* → *agape* love is **unconditional** & **unselfish** & *sacrificial*.
 - b. The ultimate example of *agape* love is Jesus, *perfectly sinless* & yet *dying* in our place to *pay* for our sins.

2. How do you **measure** a *love* like that!?! How *big* is His love?
 - a. We just sang a hymn (*Here Is Love* → *Love Song of the Welch Revival*) – “*Here is love, vast as the ocean, lovingkindness as a flood, when the Prince of Life, our ransom, shed for us His precious blood!*”
 - b. Here in his prayer Paul writes of the *immeasurable* love of Christ in the *dimensions* of *breadth* & *length* & *height* & *depth*.
 - c. **John RW Stott comments:** the love of Christ is **broad** enough to encompass all mankind (incl Jew & Gentile), **long** enough to last for eternity; **deep** enough to reach the most degraded sinner; **high** enough to lift him to heaven...!

3. We want our lives to be built on a *great* & *strong* **foundation** of love.
 - a. Paul prays that we would be *rooted* & *established in love* (17).
 - b. He pulls together **2** *word pictures*:
 - i. ...the *garden* where a fruitful vine's *roots* go down *deep*;
 - ii. ...the *construction site* where the architect designs a *firm* *foundation*.

I.e., we need to start w/...

4. We need to *start* w/a *foundation* of love & we need to *keep growing* in love.
 - a. Paul prays that we *comprehend* (→ *seize*) these *incredible, immeasurable* dimensions (b, l, h, d) of *Christ's love* (18) & then...
 - b. ...that we *know* (→ *experience*) the *love of Christ* (i.e., the *love that Christ has for us*).
 - c. We need to *grow/increase* in our *experience & expression* of the *unconditional love* possessed by Christ, who now lives in our *hearts* by *faith*.

5. Paul asks God that we might *grasp* this concept along with *all the saints*.
 - a. You can't love in a *vacuum*, You can't love *sacrificially* in *isolation*.
 - b. And you certainly need *unconditional & unselfish love* to live in *unity* (→ a *big theme* in Eph) w/*all the saints*.

6. Can I share my *fav thought* on this prayer request...!?! **Re-read v.17b-19a.**
 - a. *How big is Jesus' love?* Can you *measure* it?
 - b. *Can you wrap your head* around the *love of Christ, dying on the cross in your place?*
 - c. But don't you *see it* in **v.19 (pause)** ... His love *surpasses knowledge*. It's *over our heads...above our pay-grade!*
 - d. Yet Paul is praying – ***I love this!*** – that we would somehow *know* what you *can't know!* That we would, in some *growing* sense, *understand & experience* what you can never *fully understand...*!
 - e. → Christ *loves you!*

7. Here is a simple way to pray here: *Heavenly Father...*
 - a. “Please *strengthen me* to love *all saints* You've placed in my life.”
 - b. “Please *strengthen my faith* to *believe* that Christ loves *me.*” **2X**

Pray to be filled with the fullness of God (read 19b).

1. I pointed out at the beginning that these prayer requests are *progressive* & now we've reached **top** of the staircase!
 - a. John MacArthur writes: *The inner strengthening of the Holy Spirit leads to the indwelling of Christ, which leads to His abundant love, which leads to God's fullness in us.*
2. What **is** the *fullness* of God? Paul refers to God's *fullness* pretty frequently in Ephesians.
 - a. You might say God's fullness is *all He is and all that He does*. Which is very similar to the idea of *God's glory*.
 - b. We've witnessed God **do a lot** in the first half of Ephesians: *predestine & chose us before time, send His Son, give us faith, cause us to be born again, adopt us, seal us in His Spirit, promise us an inheritance, uncover mysteries, break down walls, send the apostles, build the church, amaze the angels!*
 - c. And, we've been reminded often in Eph. of **who God is**: *Creator, King, Father, eternal, merciful, loving, gracious, holy, wise.*
 - d. And because He is *infinite*, you can be sure that this doesn't even *scratch the surface* of God's *fullness*.
3. How can you be *filled* with *all of that!*?!
 - a. Paul's **Gr** verb is **πληροω**. It's a *passive* verb = *buckets don't fill themselves* & only God can **pour** His *fullness* into you, beloved.
 - b. The underlying **Gr** *grammar* pictures *direction* & *progress* towards a goal. Like slowly & steadily *filling* up a bucket.
 - c. I.e., we will *never* be completely *filled* w/ God's *fullness* (the bucket just isn't that *big!*)...but by His *grace* He will keep *filling* you *ever fuller!* And as He *fills* you, you will *grow to be more like Him*.
4. Here is a simple petition to pray from v.19: *Father, fill me & shape me.*

Pray to be *confident* that God will answer your prayers.

1. These are *big* prayers but **not** *too big* for God! (2X) ☺
2. **Read v.20.** The apostle officially ended his petitions in **v.19**, but there is still some *fuel for prayer* in the lavish language of vv. 20 & 21.
3. One writer points out (20) that one of the most important *evidence* of a real God is that He *does*.
 - a. He isn't simply a *fancy old story* or *pretty granite image*...
 - b. He *acts!* He *does!*
4. One of the *mighty activities* of the *God of the Bible* is that when you *pray* He *answers*... (Psalmist: *I love the LORD because He hears my voice & my ...*)
 - a. ...but the Lord isn't *limited* by what you *ask* for!
 - b. He might just give you far *more* than you ask for!
 - c. He might just give you far *more* than you could *imagine* to ask for!
 - d. He might just give you far *more* than you can even *comprehend*!
 - e. So even all those *wonderful, immeasurable* spiritual blessings of **14-19** can be answered *far better* than even the *Apostle Paul* knows to *ask* for them!
5. *How does God do it?* Here is a *glance back* to **v.16**: God *acts* for us thru the *inner power* that is ours through the *Holy Spirit* who *lives in us & never leaves us*. ...**pause**...
6. ...*far more abundantly above all that we ask or think*... → “*Heavenly Father, give me the faith to just ask big!*”

Pray for God to be glorified (read v.21).

1. When the **church** gets the *blessings*, **God** gets the *glory*! That's how it's supposed to work!
2. Paul ends his prayer w/ *doxology* – a declaration of *God's glory*.
 - a. The concept of *glory* is tied to the idea of *reputation*...
 - b. When the *church* prays & *God* answers (*big!*) His *reputation* simply grows!
3. As Paul's prayers are *answered*:
 - a. There is *glory in His church* because of the *unity* that results.
 - i. As we saw last week (10), *unity* among former enemies that now *amazes the angels!*
 - b. And there is also *glory to Christ Jesus*, because after all, we are *His body, His family, His citizens, His temple, His church, His bride, His army...His own people!* “*From heaven Christ came & bought us to be His holy bride.*”
4. And His is **never** a *fading glory* (*here today, surpassed & forgotten tomorrow*)...His is **eternal** *glory...true glory!*
 - a. *Glory* that starts *here* & marches *into eternity*...
 - b. ...*to all generations, forever & ever. Amen!*

Men of Bethany – will you pray!

Our Father will answer you, far beyond all that we can ask or think.

...pray...