

## Kingdom Family Maturity

### Ephesians 3:14-19 (NASB)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

In our passage today we read Paul's PRAYER for the Ephesian Christians to mature.

- This is a prayer that he wrote down in this letter to the Ephesian Church so that they would be able to read the prayer for themselves.
- Paul is both PRAYING for these Christians and also TEACHING them how to pray.

He starts this prayer reminding us that God is our FATHER:

### Ephesians 3:14 (NASB)

**For this reason I bow my knees before the Father**

This may seem obvious, but our view of what God is like shapes our heart more than anything else.

- If you think God is a creator who is not involved in His creation, then you will talk to Him like you'd talk to a distant relative.
  - "Hey God, it's me. It's been a LONG time and so much has happened that I should probably catch you up on it..."
- If you think God is more like a Landlord who just wants you to pay rent and not break anything, then your prayers will sound like deposits...
  - "I'm just checking in, God. Just paying my dues... Just saying and doing what I need to do in order to cover what is required of me..."

**Our view of who God is FORMS how we talk with God and respond to God.**

**Throughout our study of Ephesians Paul has been teaching us that God is our FATHER and we are His CHILDREN.**

This idea of a "Heavenly Father" strikes a perfect balance between intimacy and reverence.

- Intimacy without reverence is mere emotional sentimentalism.
- Reverence without intimacy is simply legalism and heartless submission.
- *But intimacy AND reverence represent the love of a father.*

***Intimacy and reverence speak to a RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.***

***Prayer is not a ritual we perform in order to get something from God, it is an encounter WITH God.***

- We are brought near to GOD—the LIVING GOD—as His children!

Our culture talks about prayer all the time, but it is in a way that removes the OBJECT of true prayer. The language used reveals this:

- "My thoughts and prayers are with you..."
- As if our prayers have substance in-and-of themselves apart from whom I am praying to.

In our culture, we are 100% OK talking about prayer as long as we don't mention God.

- These prayers are like magical wishes that we grant people in hopes that they might actually work.

This reminds me of the 1990s when email became a thing.

- People—especially older people—would email me and I'd be all excited.
- "Uncle so-and-so emailed me! I'm going to write him back and form a pen-pal thing!"
- Then—NOTHING in response.
- When I see him at a family function—"I was just seeing if the email thing actually worked."

He didn't want to talk with me—he wasn't trying to communicate with me.

**He was fixated on the process of email—not the relationship of family.**

- That is rude—we would never do the to someone.

**But this is what we are doing when we remove God from prayer!**

- We elevate the means to replace the end.
- Our culture has faith in faith and prays prayers to no one...

But the Bible doesn't present the science or art of prayer, it presents the God of prayer.

- Prayer is not about prayer—or others.
- Prayer is about GOD and knowing God and knowing God's plans THROUGH prayer.

Paul prays to God and asks for SPECIFIC things...but before we read these things I want to point out Paul DOESN'T pray for:

- **Paul doesn't ask God to change anything about their circumstances.**
  - He knows that if they have what he is praying for then they can face ANY circumstance.
  - If they receive what Paul is praying for they will be spiritually "FULL"

So what does Paul pray for?

### **Ephesians 3:14-19 (NASB)**

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Paul is primarily praying for the Ephesian Church **to be strengthened in their inner being.**

- To be STRONG in the Lord.
- To have an INNER strength.
- Paul is praying for them to have real POWER...

But power to do what?

**First of all, to be strengthened to experience life IN Jesus**

- **AND life WITH Jesus**
- **AND life TOGETHER IN Jesus.**
- "Us IN Jesus and Jesus IN us" is really just a way of talking about both sides of the same coin.
  - It is by the Spirit that Jesus dwells in our hearts.
  - Our faith in the indwelling of Jesus in us is fueled by the Holy Spirit.

Paul has already identified the recipients of this letter to be Christians who are "sealed by the Spirit".

**Paul is writing to Christians...so why does he pray this for them?**

- They already have the Spirit—they are already "in-Christ"
- If they are Christians, isn't it already true that Jesus is in them?
- Why is Paul asking God for something that is already true of them?

**Since this is all already true of these Christians, Paul is addressing a dissonance between what they know in their heads and what has gripped their hearts.**

- There is a gap—a difference—between what they know to be true and what they experience as their daily reality and identity.
- Like some of us, they might say something like this:
  - *“I know the truth that God loves me... but the reality is that I don’t feel loved, and I am actually consumed and driven by my need for love.”*
  - *“I know that God has a plan for me, but my life feels like a disorganized mess.”*
  - *“I know the truth that God is with me... but the reality is that I feel totally alone.”*

**Unfortunately, what is true doesn’t always feel real.**

- *There is a real danger for us to fake it and become inauthentic or shallow.*
- *So we need to acknowledge this gap and receive what Paul is trying to teach us here.*

**Paul teaches us that **The Spirit causes what is true in our heads to become real in our hearts.****

- We don’t just KNOW truth—we are GRIPPED by it.

**Paul prays for Christians to know God—not just in an intellectual way—but in a way that shapes our affections, determines our identity, and directs the way we live life.**

I think we all understand this distinction that Paul is making here between knowing about something and truly KNOWING something...

- Some of us might even say today, ***“Yes, I know God loves me, but it hasn’t worked it’s way down to where it GRIPS my heart and affects my life.”***

*In 1734 Jonathan Edwards gave an incredible analogy of this:*

Edwards gives the analogy that there are 2 ways of knowing that honey is sweet:

1. Through the rational mind and reason—we can understand the composition of honey and the physiological way tastebuds work and conclude that honey is sweet.
2. The second way you can know honey is sweet is to taste it.

The second way of KNOWING something allows for the first.

- *You might taste honey and say, “Well, I knew it would be sweet, but now it is real to me.”*

Edwards goes on to say that it is one thing to have the opinion that God loves me, but it is another thing to KNOW that love in your inner being in a way that shapes your life.

YES, we need to know that God is good...

YES we need to put our trust in God... but we can’t stop there!

- We can’t stop at simply intellectually knowing...

**Psalm 34:8 (NASB)**

**O taste and see that the Lord is good;**

**How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!**

This is a call to experience what we already know.

In our current Christian culture there is an awkward tension between “Knowledge” and “Experience”

- Some put TOO MUCH emphasis on experience at the expense of God’s truth in scripture.
- Others talk about “experiencing God” as if it is a bad thing.

**This is a false dichotomy—we SHOULD experience what you believe!**

- If we believe in justification, we should expect to NOT feel guilty.
- If we believe in the resurrection, we should expect to FEEL alive.
- If you believe in the return of Jesus, you should FEEL hopeful.

- If you believe God loves you, you should FEEL loved.

These “feelings” aren’t simply emotions—emotions don’t necessarily change our life... Paul is talking about experiencing God’s presence and love in the INNER BEING.

A true experience of God’s love in our inner being is not something that we are going to achieve intellectually.

- This EXPERIENCE is more than intellectual knowledge and it is more than emotions.
- This is a gripping, powerful, life-altering, identity-shaping experience of God’s Spirit IN US!

**Paul is praying that we would experience what we already know and ALSO that we would be transformed by what we already have.**

- We’ve been given SO MUCH in Christ, but often we find ourselves wanting for more...

I heard a story of a woman who wanted to bless her frugal, elderly parents by replacing their bed. She waited until they were gone and had a new bed and mattress put into their bedroom. When the couple came home and saw the new bed they panicked and nearly fainted—they had been saving cash in the old mattress for decades and estimated that their daughter had thrown away hundreds of thousands of dollars...

- All that time this couple endured an old, worn out mattress—sleeping on top of a PILE of money.
- They HAD the money, but they didn’t ever tap into it.

***Paul is praying for Christians who live their lives like this old couple—sitting on a TREASURE, but living in spiritual squalor.***

- *He is praying for a connection between what we HAVE in Christ and how we live...*
- *He is praying for the lives of Christians to be EMPOWERED by the power that is already IN THEM!*

**We need the Spirit to help us experience what we already know and already have!**

It is important for us to see HOW the Spirit empowers us to do this.

- Paul does not pray for Christians to “MUSTER UP” more strength or love...
- Paul isn’t telling us to fake it...

He prays for us to tap into what we already have—what God has ALREADY DONE in us!

- We don’t muster up the strength to live powerfully, we rest in the Lord’s strength which is already in us!

He prays that we would know the power of the Spirit, but also that we would know the love of Jesus.

**Ephesians 3:17b-18 (NASB)**

**that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge**

First, we saw that we need the strength of the Holy Spirit in order to experience what is already ours in Jesus.

Next, Paul reveals our need for the Spirit to increase our capacity to grow into what we already have know to be true.

My little Shem likes to tell me, “Daddy, I love you to the moon and back.”

That is cute...what is he doing when he says that?

- He is grasping for words and analogies to try and communicate a strong feeling that he has inside of him.

Similarly, Paul is praying for us—for Christians needing to grow into the Love of God—to explore and become empowered to experience the indescribable reality of God’s love and grace for us.

We need God to give us a greater capacity...

My wife and I have 5 kids... people ask “how do you do it?” and I seriously don’t know.

- We were overwhelmed with our decision to adopt our 1st child, but the Lord brought us another...
- We went to the hospital for my wife to deliver #3, and that same month we received our 4th kid!
- As our family grew, so did our capacity to love and receive and nurture more kids.
- In the MOMENT it felt like we were handed kids as we were fighting a structure fire...
- And #5 is the most loving and clingy of them all, and I LOVE IT!!
- It’s crazy, but God as I have trusted God for the capacity to love my family, He continues to increase that capacity.
- By God’s grace I have the bandwidth to care about and connect with DOZENS of J-highers and High Schoolers too!

**All this love pouring out of a guy who naturally has the emotional maturity of an avocado.**

Paul is praying that God would increase our capacity to understand God’s love for us.

He’s praying for God to stretch the boundaries of our understanding of God’s love.

- God’s love is WIDE—it is for EVERY people group in every nation!
- God’s love is Eternal—It extends forward to us from the beginning of time.
- God’s love is HIGH—it is celebrated by the angels in heaven.
- God’s love is DEEP—it reached down so low as to humble Jesus to the point of death and burial.

The love of God is mesmerizing and can even be disorienting—until we fix our eyes on Jesus.

- Jesus brings the love of God into CLEAR focus.

God’s love is not just strong emotions and giddy feelings—His love is demonstrated by His willingness to sacrifice for us.

### **John 3:16 (NASB)**

**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**

### **Romans 5:8 (NASB)**

**God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

- This is the GOOD NEWS that Paul not only wants us to hear, but allow it to sink into our hearts.
- This Good News needs to sink deep and produce in us a deep love for God and for others.
- This Good News needs to sink in and expands the bounds and capacity for us to know God’s love.

He prays we would understand God’s love, “with all the saints”

- This is an important phrase!

The picture it paints is NOT of each of us going off by ourself and having this sweet, private moment with the Lord...NO!

**Paul’s prayer isn’t that we would be dazzled as individuals, but that we’d be captivated by the love of God and captivated by the FAMILY of God.**

- That WE—as a FAMILY—would know God’s love more deeply TOGETHER!
- It takes the whole Family of God to grasp the whole love of God!

This is a prayer for US to experience a move of the Spirit to take us deeper into knowing God’s love.

- We often get this exactly backwards.
- We often think that if we love God more then God will love us more.

But we learn here that:

**A genuine love for Jesus springs from an awareness of Jesus' love for us.**

The POWER that Paul is praying for is the Spirit who gives us an awareness and a sensitivity to God's love for us.

- This is the most powerful thing we could ever lay ahold of.
- Knowing God's love for us COMPLETELY changes us.

This raises a question: **Why would anyone resist God's love?**

- Why does Paul have to reiterate this to the Ephesians when they already knew it?
  - Why do we need to hear this over-and-over again when we already know it?
- Maybe it's because you feel unlovable—you need to remember that you were created to be loved by God.
  - Maybe it's because you feel God must not fully know you—but God DOES know you and still loves you.
  - Maybe you resist God's love because you think you don't deserve it—You DON'T deserve it. That's why it is such an amazing gift! God CHOOSES to love you.
  - Maybe you resist God's love because you're ashamed of something you've done—but God's love is so persistent and powerful that it forgives and frees us from shame of the past.

**Remember, in Jesus, you are made a child of God.—adopted as God's child into His family.**

Finally, in v19 we see Paul praying for us to:

**Ephesians 3:19 (NASB)**

**and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

I have a favorite swimming hole here in the local mountains.

- Mid-summer and fall the water level gets low and algae will accumulate—gets real nasty...
- We usually hike to it in the spring because the water is flowing to the point of OVERFLOWING
- The fullness of fresh water prevents the gross stuff from accumulating.

This is how I picture what Paul is saying here—for us to know the love of God to the extent that God's love fills us to overflowing!

- And that this overflow pushes out lesser loves and inferior ideas about love.
- That as we overflow with God's love, we would have an abundance of love to SHARE!
- This overflow of love cleanses us and renews us and refreshes us...

This expression: “filled up to the fullness of God” is really a way of talking about us growing up into maturity.

- Our maturity is directly related to our ability to understand and receive God's love.

We often think of Christian maturity as something that extends BEYOND the love of God.

- “OK, I get that God loves me, now I need to go and do this and that...”

**But**

**We will only grow and mature as Christians to the degree that we understand God's love in a genuine and authentic way that changes us.**



Paul prayed earlier that we'd be rooted and grounded in love—that's the kind of love that you don't just move beyond—we REMAIN—we ABIDE there.

- Those are 2 pictures: Being ROOTED and being GROUNDED in love.
- **These 2 pictures are BOTH metaphors for GROWTH!!**
  - OUR growth comes out of this love!

The love of God and the Word of God is the soil from which our love grows.

- It is the foundation upon which we build our identity.

One thing that a tree's roots have in common with a building's foundation is the both are buried.

- Paul is pointing us back to our INNER self.
- The goal is for the love of God to get to the CORE—the inner-man.
- For God's love to grip our heart in a way that changes us.

This is totally contrary to the messages of culture.

- Culture sells us on the idea that we take care of the outside and appearance and everything will be fine.

**Paul is praying for Christians to have an inward renewal.**

- He prays for Christians to experience the Spirit revealing the love of God to them.
- So that we might live our lives for the glory of God

**Church, this is a prayer for KINGDOM FAMILY MATURITY**

- This is a prayer we should be praying for OURSELVES and for EACH OTHER!
- This is a prayer for REVIVAL in the hearts of Christians and REVIVAL in the Church!

In this season—as we grow as a Kingdom Family, let's pray this prayer for one another...

- Let's pray this prayer for US.

**That we—each one of us AND all of us—would KNOW and GROW in the love of God.**

Prayer for each other and for the Church:

- **Pray for the Spirit to reveal the love of God to each of us.**
- **Pray for God to increase our capacity to receive, be changed by, and walk in God's love.**
- **Pray for us, God's Kingdom Family, to be full to overflowing with the love of God.**