



# Life-Changing Power

## LESSON 7

### Topic

Prayer and spiritual growth

### Theme

God responds to prayer for spiritual growth by His abundant power working in us.

### Desired Response

Learners will pray for spiritual growth both in themselves and others.

### Materials

- Visual 18.

### Scripture Focus

Ephesians 3:14–21

### Summary

Paul resumed the prayer he began in Ephesians 3:1. He prayed that the Father would grant the Ephesian Christians spiritual strength, a deep awareness of Christ's companionship, and a thorough knowledge of His love.

### Outline

#### I. Continuation of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 3:14, 15)

- A. With retrospect (3:14)
- B. With reverence (3:14, 15)

#### II. Content of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 3:16–19)

- A. The Spirit's power (3:16)
- B. The Son's companionship and love (3:17–19)
- C. The Father's fullness (3:19)

#### III. Conclusion to Paul's Prayer (Eph. 3:20, 21)

- A. Confidence in God's power (3:20)
- B. Concern for God's glory (3:21)

### Memory Verses

*"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20, 21).*

## GETTING STARTED

### Powered Up

Nearly everything is powered by electricity or batteries today. But that's not always been the case. Things like lawn mowers, car windows, recliners, and toothbrushes used to require people power to work.

**ASK:** What has gone from manual to power in your lifetime? (Q1)

**ASK:** Which transition from manual to power impacted your life the most? (Q2)

Paul recorded a prayer for the Ephesians. He made sure they understood that living for Christ is not a manual operation. God's power is in believers to help them become like Christ. We will examine Paul's powerful prayer today.

### Mom or Dad?

**ASK:** When you were growing up, over which parent did you have more persuasion power?

**ASK:** How did you use your power of persuasion to get what you want?

Paul recorded a prayer for the Ephesians. He prayed confidently, demonstrating that God's power is not only readily available to us but is also in us! We don't need to try to persuade God to answer our prayers for spiritual growth. He's already onboard—literally! This lesson examines Paul's prayer.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Although Paul was under house arrest in Rome when he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, he was not overcome with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. He believed God was all-powerful and totally in charge of the situation. Furthermore, he was concerned about others and prayed for them. Ephesians 3:14–21 records his brief big prayer for the Christians at Ephesus.

### I. Continuation of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 3:14, 15)

#### A. With retrospect (3:14)

Ephesians 3:1 reveals that Paul had started to pray. He wrote "for this cause" and then digressed into a lengthy discussion about the mystery of Christ. Mentally, at least, we could write, "to be continued" in the middle of verse 1. Now, beginning with verse 14, Paul resumed his prayer.

Paul began with the same three words he had used in verse 1: "For this cause." In retrospect, as Paul thought about God's gracious act of including both Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ, he bowed to pray. Perhaps we would pray more often if we reflected more often on God's grace in raising us from sin to a position of privilege in Christ.

Note that Paul ended his digression from praying by telling the Ephesians not to lose heart because of his tribulations for them (3:13). Paul focused on the grandness of God's grace rather than on the troublesomeness of his circumstances.

**ASK:** What occupies your mind more—the grandness of God's grace or the troublesomeness of your circumstances? Explain. (Q3)

**ASK:** How might you focus more on the grandness of God's grace? (Q4)

## **B. With reverence (3:14, 15)**

**ASK:** What did Paul indicate about his heart by bowing his knees to God? (Q5) *Humility, reverence for God, and an acceptance of God's will for His life.*

Paul addressed his prayer to “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (3:14). In his pre-conversion life as a Pharisee, Paul perceived God as the supreme judge, Whose acceptance he had to earn by rigidly adhering to hundreds of religious laws. As a believer, however, he perceived God as his Heavenly Father, the first Person of the Trinity, Whose Son, Jesus, was Paul's Savior. By grace, Paul could call God Father and could revere Him.

Verse 15 doesn't teach the universal fatherhood of God to all mankind. Scripture makes it clear that not all people can claim God as their Father. In John 8:37–44, for example, Jesus said the Jews who rejected Him but claimed God as their Father were actually sons of the Devil.

“Family” (Eph. 3:15) refers to the saints of all the ages who placed their trust in God. Only those who place their faith in God have the right to call Him their Father. Yet all creation owes its existence to God. He deserves universal reverence as the God of creation as well as the God of redemption.

**ASK:** How should praying to God as our Father affect our prayer life? (Q6) *We should be assured that God cares for us, is working in our lives, and will respond to our prayers.*

## **II. Content of Paul's Prayer (Eph. 3:16–19)**

In his brief big prayer, Paul made specific requests to God the Father on behalf of the Ephesians.

### **A. The Spirit's power (3:16)**

Paul told the Ephesians in verse 16 that he was asking the Father to “grant you . . . to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” The inner man is the rational self, the part that makes a person conscious of his or her existence. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit because of prayer, believers live according to God's will and walk in His ways. Instead of assigning life's highest value to material possessions, they assign it to spiritual matters. They may feel weak and weary at times, but they grow stronger in the inner man and anticipate the joys of Heaven.

**ASK:** When, if ever, have you prayed for someone to be strengthened by the Spirit in his or her “inner man”? (Q7)

**ASK:** What circumstances might warrant such a prayer? (Q8) *We need strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man as we face all circumstances, but trying circumstances, especially physical troubles that come as a result of persecution, demand an extra measure of strength.*

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul testified to the enduring quality of spiritual life and the temporal quality of the human body (2 Cor. 4:15–18). The Spirit’s divine enabling of our inner man has no restrictions. We can measure it only in comparison to the wealth of God’s glory.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 4:15–18.

## **B. The Son’s companionship and love (3:17–19)**

Paul’s second prayer request was “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:17). This request may seem strange because the Ephesians were believers. Christ lived in them already. A look at the meaning of the word “dwell” helps us understand Paul’s intent. “Dwell” is a compound word. It includes the words meaning “down” and “to live in as a home.” So “dwell” means “to settle down and be at home.”

It is possible to stay in someone’s house and never feel at home. Though Christ lives in the heart of every believer, He can “feel at home” only in the hearts of those who acknowledge His presence and give Him the run of the house. This relationship occurs “by faith” (3:17). Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would pursue the life of faith so Christ would feel at home in their hearts. Do we live by faith? Does Christ feel at home in our hearts? Do we value His companionship?

**ASK:** What attitudes or allegiances on the part of believers might keep them from experiencing close fellowship with the Lord? (Q9) *Adherence to sin; pride; self-sufficiency; bitterness.*

Strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit, the believer is “rooted and grounded in love.” “Rooted” suggests being securely anchored. “Grounded” means having a firm foundation.

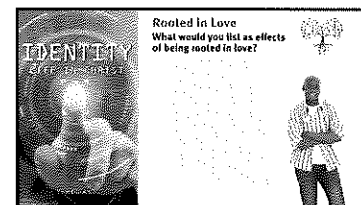
The soil that produces spiritual fruit is divine love. It is also the ground on which a believer can build his or her life. Rooted and grounded in love, a Christian can comprehend and experience the far-reaching dimensions of Christ’s love (3:18, 19).

Christ’s love surpasses knowledge (3:19). Perhaps a good marriage illustrates this kind of love. No matter how well one spouse shows love for the other, each day brings new opportunities to display more love. Thus, as long as both partners live, they never experience the full range of their love for each other. Similarly, no matter how much we experience Christ’s love, we will never exhaust its supply.

The fact that Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know Christ’s love shows believers that demonstrating the love of Christ doesn’t come naturally. God’s enabling is necessary for those who want the love of Christ to flow from their roots

and bear fruit in their lives. God's enabling comes through prayer.

**DISPLAY:** Visual 18—Rooted in Love. **ASK:** What would you list as effects of being rooted in love? (Q10) *Secure faith, love for others, confidence in hardships, seek the best for others, desire to please God, friendly demeanor.*



### C. The Father's fullness (3:19)

Paul informed the Ephesians that he was also praying that they “might be filled with all the fulness of God” (3:19). The word “with” means “unto,” Paul wanted the Ephesians—and us—to be filled unto the measure of God's own fullness. That doesn't mean, of course, that we will become God. We can, however, become godly. We will never be equal with God, but we can reflect His moral attributes. As the Holy Spirit strengthens us in the inner man and we mature in Christ, cultivating His companionship and experiencing His love, we manifest God's love, mercy, compassion, and forbearance (Gal. 5:22, 23).

**ASK:** What will happen to the believers who try to be like Christ without the Father's help? (Q11) *The believer will either become self-righteous and think he or she has attained Christ's standard or will become frustrated with trying to change without the Father's help.*

## III. Conclusion to Paul's Prayer (Eph. 3:20, 21)

As Paul contemplated what God could accomplish in the lives of His people, he extolled God's power and glory.

### A. Confidence in God's power (3:20)

Paul closed his brief big prayer with a doxology in which he expressed confidence that God was more than able to grant his requests. Paul had asked God to accomplish much because he believed God “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (3:20).

God's superabundant activity in our lives is according to His powerful presence in us. The omnipotent God is present in us, energizing us to be what He wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do.

**ASK:** What excuses might believers give for not growing in the Lord? (Q12) *Too busy; don't understand the Bible; didn't go to Sunday School as a child; the pastor's messages are boring; tried before and nothing happened.*

With God's supernatural power working in us, we have no excuses for not growing spiritually in the Lord.

### B. Concern for God's glory (3:21)

Paul continued his doxology by adding, “unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus” (3:21). God is glorified in the church, the Body of Christ, and in Christ Jesus, the Head of the church. We are to glorify God “throughout all ages, world without end” (3:21). Our praise of Him must never end, because, after all, there is no end to the reasons to praise Him.

The prayer closes with “Amen,” a final petition to God that the desires, wishes, and hopes we express will become a reality.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to underscore the importance of praying for spiritual growth in oneself and in the lives of others.

### Pray for Yourself

**ASK:** How often do you pray for your own spiritual growth? (Q13)

**ASK:** Why might some believers neglect to pray for their own spiritual growth? (Q14) *They might think they are being selfish; they might believe growth will come only through their own efforts.*

Encourage your learners to take time in the next week to pray through Ephesians 3:16–19 with their own spiritual growth in mind. (Q15)

### Pray for One Another

Divide the learners into groups of four. Instruct the learners in each group to pray for one another with the requests in Ephesians 3:16–19 in mind. Challenge the learners to use Ephesians 3:16–19 as a prayer request list for five other people in the coming week.

### Memory Verses

Encourage your learners to memorize Ephesians 3:8 and 9. Give them an opportunity to say the verses in class next week.