

How to Pray with Power

Ephesians 3:14-21

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A young boy prayed for weeks that God would give him \$100, but nothing happened. He decided to write God a letter telling Him he really needed the money. Not knowing where to send the letter, he simply used the address “God, USA.” When the Post Office received the letter, they sent it to the President. The President was amused so he sent a \$5 bill, thinking this would be a lot of money to the young boy. The boy was delighted to receive the money and sat down to write a thank you note to God, which read, *“Dear God, thank you very much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you sent it through Washington, D.C., and as usual, those turkeys deducted \$95 in taxes.”*

This boy was not afraid to pray a big prayer! Instead of reading our passage which contains a really big prayer, I’m going to pray Ephesians 3:14-21 for each of us: *“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. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

Here’s our main idea: *God gives us more strength than we can even ask for when we fully surrender to Christ.*

Here are a few observations that will help us understand this powerful prayer.

- **This prayer is Trinitarian.** All three members of the Trinity are mentioned. Verse 14: *“I bow my knees before the **Father**...”* Verse 16: *“...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through His **Spirit**...”* And in verse 17: *“So that **Christ** may dwell in your hearts...”* The most common way to pray in the Bible is to address prayers *to* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Spirit.

However, it's certainly appropriate to address Jesus and the Holy Spirit when we pray.

- **This prayer is focused on our inner person, not on our bodies.** So many of our prayers have to do with our health and physical needs. Paul is more concerned with how we're doing on the inside. In fact, all of Paul's prayers recorded while in prison, dealt with the believer's spiritual condition, not the physical. While there is nothing wrong with praying for physical health, Paul's primary concern is internal, not external.

Related to this, one pastor suggests most of our prayers fall into two categories:

- 1) Pain-avoidance: *"Lord, this hurts too much. Make it stop."*
- 2) Change of circumstances: *"Lord, I don't like this situation. Change it, please."*

Interestingly, we don't see Paul praying these kinds of prayers, even though he was in chains in prison (see Ephesians 6:20).

- **Paul prayed with passion.** The Apostle did not just pray with his mind – he threw his heart into his prayers. Paul prayed with fervency and a sense of urgency, much like Daniel did.
- **This prayer is focused on the need for power.** The word ***"power"*** or ***"strengthen"*** is used four different times. If the prayer in chapter one was for *enlightenment* so we might *know* God's power, this prayer is for *empowerment*, so we will *use* the power of God available to us.

In this passage we'll see the posture of prayer, the petitions of prayer, and the power of prayer.

1. The posture of prayer (14-15). The first thing we notice is Paul's posture: ***"I bow my knees before the Father."*** To ***"bow"*** means, *"to bend in homage, to stoop in reverence and submission."* There are various postures of prayer seen in Scripture – Abraham stood (Genesis 18:22-23), David sat (1 Chronicles 17:16), while Jesus fell on His face and prayed (Matthew 26:39). The normal way for Jews to pray was standing up (Mark 11:25).

When the situation was dire and the individual was broken, or the one praying wanted to demonstrate humility in the face of an extraordinary event, he or she would hit their knees. To kneel represents humility and adoration before God. We see this in Psalm 95:6: ***“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!”*** Solomon, Ezra, Daniel, Jesus, Stephen, Peter, and Paul hit their knees when they prayed.

This does not mean we must always kneel when we pray, but we should be kneeling in our hearts. We can pray as we walk, drive, exercise, sit, or recline, as long as we revere God in our hearts.

Paul refers to God as ***“Father”*** 42 different times in his letters, which is an application of how Jesus taught His disciples to pray: ***“Our Father...”*** There is no other description used as frequently in the New Testament. In that culture, *“father”* was a term of intimacy and authority. It was the name used most often by Jesus when He prayed.

In verse 15, Paul acknowledged, ***“from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.”*** God names every family, which shows His heart for the home, and the family unit as the primary discipleship engine. The church’s role is to partner with parents in making young disciples (see Deuteronomy 6). Notice that some of God’s forever family is already ***“in heaven”*** while others of us are still on ***“earth.”*** To be ***“named”*** in biblical usage refers to our identity and reflects the authority of the one who does the naming.

Because of this verse, this week I’ve been kneeling for my time of prayer in the morning. I don’t say that to lift myself up because it’s not something I’ve done very often until now. While I don’t believe this is the only way to pray, it has helped me focus as I approach God with humility and reverence. You may want to try it yourself if you’re able.

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2. The petitions of prayer (16-19). Next, we see how Paul prayed five petitions for the Ephesians. These same requests are good for us to pray as well. Warren Wiersbe suggests these requests are not isolated, but rather are like parts to a telescope. Paul prays that our inner being may have spiritual strength, which comes from surrender, which will provide stability and a settled faith. This deeper experience will enable us to be saturated with the fullness of God.

Paul makes these requests not according to our ability to receive them, but according to God's ability to give them. In other words, Paul does not want us to experience a puny portion of God, but to draw from God's limitless supply: ***“that according to the riches of His glory...”*** If a billionaire donates ten dollars, he gives *out* of his riches, but if he donates ten million, he gives *according* to his riches.

As we've defined it before, ***“glory”*** literally means, *“Heavy in weight, important, significant, having a great reputation and splendor, brightness and beauty, worthiness and honor.”* God's glory is the sum total of the weightiness of all His attributes. It has to do with the fame of His name and represents His presence and power.

Let's look at these petitions and determine to make them part of our prayers.

- **Strength.** The first request in verse 16 is for God to give power and strength to the very core of our being through the Holy Spirit: ***“...He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being.”*** To ***“grant”*** means, *“to give freely.”* The word ***“strengthened”*** has the idea of *“growing strong and being established.”* The word ***“power”*** is where we get *dynamo, dynamite, and dynamic.*

Notice the Holy Spirit does this strengthening in our soul, or ***“inner being.”*** That makes me think of 2 Corinthians 4:16: ***“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”*** Psalm 138:3 says: ***“On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.”***

- **Surrender.** In order to have the Holy Spirit strengthen us in our inner being, we must be fully surrendered to Him. We see this in the first part of verse 17: ***“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...”*** Paul's prayer is that Christ would ***“dwell”*** in our hearts. This word is a compound form of two Greek words which means, *“to settle down and feel at home,”* in contrast to feeling like a visitor. It has the idea of being comfortable in a home.

The prayer is for Christ to ***“dwell deep at home in your heart.”*** It's possible for Jesus to be *in* your heart but not *at home* there. Jesus wants to be more than just a guest in our lives. Because He is the owner, He wants our hearts

to become His home. The question is not, “*How much of the Lord do I have?*” but rather, “*How much of me does the Lord have?*” The idea is not that “He Gets Us,” but that “He Saves Us” in order to rule and reign supreme in our lives.

[Play, “He Saves Us” video]

We’re the ones who need to “get Him” by surrendering to His supremacy. Paul summarized his surrender in Galatians 2:20: “***It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.***” In Colossians 1:27, he writes, “***Christ in you, the hope of glory.***”

- **Stability.** After praying for strength and surrender, the third petition is for stability, found in the last half of verse 17: “***...that you, being rooted and grounded in love...***” Paul mixes his metaphors in order to communicate the importance of going deep with God. Just as a tree must grow roots deep into the soil to find nourishment and stability, so believers must go deep. In Matthew 13:6 Jesus warned, “***And since they had no root, they withered away.***”

The verb “***rooted***” is from the world of botany while “***grounded***” refers to the foundation of a building. Warren Wiersbe tells the story about a building program at one of his churches. After spending thousands of dollars taking soil samples, which delayed construction, the workers spent weeks pouring footings and laying the foundation. When Wiersbe expressed his frustration at how slowly everything was going, a contractor replied, “*Pastor, the most important part of the building is the foundation. If you don’t go deep, you can’t go high.*” Wiersbe reports that sentence was like a sermon to him. *If you don’t go deep, you can’t go high.*

The most critical part of a building’s stability has to do with the firmness of its foundation. Matthew 7:24-25 says, “***Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.***”

Notice this prayer is for believers to be rooted and grounded “***in love.***” According to John 13:35, love is the defining characteristic of a disciple of

Christ: ***“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

Earlier this week I was out in the community and saw two Edgewood members meeting for Intentional Discipleship. They had their study guides, and their Bibles were open. Later, I observed them praying together for about 10 minutes. If you’ve been a believer for a while, would you consider discipling someone? If you’re new to your faith, we can help connect you to someone who is a bit further along so you can be ***“rooted and grounded in love.”*** The booklet we use for this is called *Growing in Christ* and is available as a resource at the Café.

- **Settled.** In verse 18 and the first part of verse 19, we discover the fourth petition is to pray to have a spiritual settledness about the limitlessness of God’s love: ***“...may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”*** One translation uses the word ***“grasp”*** for ***“comprehend,”*** which literally means to ***“be made strong to apprehend or seize”*** the enormity of Christ’s love.

He wants ***“all the saints”*** to take hold of this divine love. This is not referring to super spiritual people who have died, but to believers who have been set apart for Christ. In the New Testament, the word, “saint” is a synonym for a Christian.

This also shows the importance of gathering regularly for worship and being connected with other Christians. We can comprehend better when we’re in community ***“with all the saints.”*** We’re not designed to be disconnected from other disciples. John Stott says, ***“The isolated Christian can indeed know something of the love of Jesus but his grasp of it is bound to be limited by his limited experience. It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God.”*** Another commentator adds, ***“The subject is so great that no one believer can possibly grasp more than a small fraction of it.”***

In an effort to convey the limitlessness of God’s love, Paul attempted to measure it by describing its four-dimensional vastness.

- 1) **Breadth.** God’s love is so wide it reaches to all people, nations, needs, cares, and situations. Whenever I baptize someone and they

seem nervous, I encourage them to think about all the people who have been baptized since the time of Christ and then I tell them they are simply the next one up. I also encourage them to think about all the people getting baptized at the same time all over the world. That helps them think about the breadth of believers.

- 2) **Length.** God’s unconditional love existed before time and extends into eternity. God’s love is long enough to last forever. Jeremiah 31:3 says, “***Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love.***”
- 3) **Height.** This word was used of the highest heaven and means, “*elevated.*” The love of God is high enough to take those who are saved to Heaven.
- 4) **Depth.** God’s love is deep enough to reach and rescue the worst sinner. He can save from the “*uttermost to the guttermost.*”

This list of dimensions reminds me of the description found in Job 11:8-9: “***It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.***” We’re also drawn to worship as we hear Romans 11:33: “***Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!***”

When we look to the cross, we see God’s love displayed on the horizontal beam through its breadth and length. The vertical beam displays the height and depth of God’s love. How much does He love you? Look at the Cross and you’ll know. Someone captured it like this: “I asked Jesus, ‘*How much do you love me?*’ And Jesus said, ‘*This much.*’ Then He stretched out His arms and died.”

Paul prayed for believers to know the love of Christ not just intellectually but also experientially. His love “***surpasses knowledge,***” which means, “*above and exceeding.*” Most of us understand intellectually that God loves us, but we’re called to also experience this love. The New Living Translation renders it like this: “*May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully.*”

The beginning part of verse 19 seems like a contradiction: “***and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.***” How can we know the love of

God that is beyond knowing? How do we comprehend the incomprehensible? How do we know the unknowable? Humanly speaking, we can't. Paul is not praying for us to know the love we have *for* Jesus, but for us to know the love *of* Jesus. When we contemplate His love, it should overwhelm us and blow us away.

- **Saturated.** Paul's fifth petition is for believers to be saturated with the fullness of God. We see this in the last part of verse 19: ***“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*** How do you contain the uncontainable? This is an amazing thought. As believers we have been created to be the containers of God. He desires to pour His life into ours and fill us until we're full. One commentator captures this beautifully, *“To be FILLED with God is a great thing; to be filled with the FULLNESS of God is still greater; but to be filled with ALL the fullness of God utterly bewilders the senses and confounds the understanding.”*

“Filled” comes from a word that means, *“to be filled to the fullest, to be filled to overflowing, like a cup that is running over.”* It means total dominance, to come to the place in your life where you are totally overwhelmed by God's presence. It means giving everything to God and leaving nothing of yourself. This suggests a progressive experience where we ask God to constantly fill and flood us with all His fullness.

Do you experience the saturation of God on a regular basis? That's what Paul prays for believers. If you don't live with this kind of fullness, try praying this prayer for yourself and for others. Are you willing to say to the Lord, *“Lord, fill me up so that my life is all You and none of me?”*

Think of an empty cup. How do you get all the air out of it? There's only one way – by filling it with something else. How do we remove the weakness, the sin, and the junk from our lives? By being filled with the fullness of God. Psalm 81:10 urges us to pray big prayers to a big God: ***“Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.”***

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3. The power of prayer (20-21). After contemplating the thrill of experiencing God's strength when we surrender, we can be stable, settled, and saturated with all the fullness of God. Next, Paul bursts forth into a glorious doxology of praise in

verse 20: *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.”* Theology must always become doxology. The word “doxology” comes from *doxa*, meaning “glory,” and *logos*, which means “word.” A doxology is a word of worship centered on the glory of God as seen in the phrase, *“to Him”* used in verse 20 and in verse 21.

- **God’s greatness.** God is *“able,”* which means He has the power to do anything He purposes to do.
- **God’s grace.** Paul piles synonym upon synonym to show how gracious He is: *“to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us.”* The phrase *“far more”* means *“to surpass, to go over, above, and beyond”* and *“abundantly”* means *“to exceedingly overflow.”*
- **God’s glory.** Verse 21: *“To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* Paul sees the centrality of the church as the means by which much glory can be given to God. In other words, as we utilize the power given to us in the church, God receives the glory in the church.

The extent of His ability is seen in the manner in which Paul pyramids words to describe super abundant blessings:

Able
Able to do.
Able to do what we ask.
Able to do what we think.
Able to do what we ask or think.
Able to do all that we ask or think.
Able to do above all that we ask or think.
Able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think.
Able to do far more abundantly above all that we ask or think.

As you may know, one of Edgewood’s Go Team partners is Keep Believing Ministries. Pastor Ed and I have the privilege of serving on the board with Ray Pritchard. At our meeting two weeks ago, we were brainstorming ways we could get the Spanish version of the gospel book, *Anchor for the Soul* into the hands of more people. Pastor Ed talked about the possibility of partnering with Moody in their conference ministry but none of us knew how that could happen.

Just days after our meeting, I received an email from someone I know at Moody. She asked if KBM could provide *Spanish Anchor for the Soul* books to pastors at an upcoming conference! This week Gary and Kathy Pinger, who ship these books around the country, drove to Moody and delivered more than 1500 copies. God did way more than what we could ask or imagine because we didn't even ask!

Action Steps

- 1. If you don't have physical limitations, try praying on your knees for one week.**
- 2. Pray this prayer for yourself on a regular basis.**
- 3. Pray this prayer for other people.** Put their names in the prayer and ask God to grant them strength, surrender, stability, settledness, and saturation.
- 4. Think of an impossible situation right now and choose to trust our really big God.** Is there something you are facing that seems way beyond hope? It's time to pray a really big prayer.

Closing

Nearly 40 years ago, I read a brief booklet which I find myself still thinking about on occasion. It's called, "*My Heart, Christ's Home*" by Robert Munger. Here's an abridged version.

In the joy of his new found relationship with Christ, Munger prayed,
"Lord, I want this heart of mine to be yours. I want to have you settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to you. Let me show you around and introduce you to the various features of my home so that you may be more comfortable and that we may have fuller fellowship together."

First, I led Christ into the study or library, which represents the things my mind focuses on. The Lord had a bit of cleanup work to do there, getting rid of books and magazines, as well as some shameful pictures on the wall of my mind. We moved on to the dining room, which represented my fleshly appetites and desires.

From there, we moved to the living room. It had a fireplace, overstuffed chairs, a bookcase, and a quiet atmosphere. We agreed to meet there each morning to start our day together. At first, we spent some wonderful hours there. But then, as pressures mounted, the time began to be shortened. Eventually, I got so busy that I started skipping these times.

One morning as I was rushing to leave the house, I saw that the door to this room was ajar. There was a fire in the fireplace and the Lord was sitting in there alone. I turned to Him and asked, “*Master, have you been here all these mornings?*” “*Yes,*” said the Lord, “*I told you that I would be here every morning to meet with you.*” The Lord went on to explain that I viewed the quiet time only as a means for my own spiritual progress, rather than as a time to meet and fellowship with the living Lord.

Then Jesus asked if I had a rec room, a place where I went for fun. I was hoping He wouldn’t ask about that. But finally, I realized I would have no joy unless the Lord remodeled that room of the house also.

One evening, when I was on my way out to have a good time with my buddies, Jesus asked if He could join us. I answered rather awkwardly, telling Him He wouldn’t be comfortable going where we were headed, offering instead for Jesus to join us at Bible Study later in the week. Jesus answered, “*I’m sorry, I thought when I came into your life, we were going to do everything together, to be close companions.*” I ended up leaving Jesus home but felt miserable about it.

We moved on to the workshop, where He could work through me to produce good works. I was relieved that the Lord had finally finished the remodeling project and was comfortable living in my home.

However, one day I came home to find the Lord waiting at the door. He said, “*There is a peculiar odor in the house. There is something dead in here, in the hall closet.*” I knew about that closet, but I wanted to keep it off limits to the Lord. I certainly didn’t want Christ to see what was in there. In fact, I was angry it was even brought up, after all I had given up for Him.

The Lord simply and softly replied, *“Well, I can’t stay in here with that foul odor. I’ll make my bed out on the porch until this is cleaned up.”* I was fearful of losing fellowship, so I whispered *“I’ll give you the key, but you’ll have to...clean it out. I haven’t the strength to do it.”*

Shortly after this, I asked Him a question: *“Lord, is there any chance that You would take over the responsibility of the whole house and operate it for me and with me just as You did that closet? Would You take the responsibility to keep my heart what it ought to be and my life where it ought to be?”*

I could see His face light up as He replied, *“Certainly, that is what I came to do. You cannot be a victorious Christian in your own strength. Let me do it through you and for you.”* But, He added slowly, *“I am not owner of this house. I am just a guest. I have no authority to proceed, since the property is not mine.”*

I saw it in a minute and dropping to my knees, I said, *“Lord, You have been a guest and I have been the host. From now on I am going to be the servant. You are going to be the owner and Master and Lord.”*

Running as fast as I could to the safe, I took out the title deed to the house and eagerly signed it over to Him alone for time and eternity. *“Here,”* I said. *“Here it is, all that I am and all that I have forever. Now You run the house. I’ll just remain with You as a servant and friend.”*

That’s how God works in our hearts. He wants to move from room to room until every area of our lives is suitable for His dwelling place.

Are you ready to sign over the deed of your life to Jesus right now?

Benediction

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)