

ABOVE & BEYOND

HOW TO USE OUR MINISTRY PASS SERMON SERIES GUIDES

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS NOT

- This guide isn't a set of sermon manuscripts. While sermon manuscripts can be both useful and a powerful training tool, our sermon series guides are different. Rather than tell you what to say, our aim is for this material to spark your imagination, assist you in planning your sermon, and offer a boost to your study time.
- This guide isn't ironclad. While we hope you use our material, the pieces of this document are designed to be moved, tweaked, and altered. As you study the suggested passages, and pray through your message, this guide will hopefully be a launching pad, rather than a landing net.

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS

Included in each guide is:

- A sermon series outline that breaks up the teaching set into a specific number of weeks.
- A "big idea" of the series.
- A passage, "big idea" of the sermon, topic list, and a number of illustrations and talking point ideas are included in each weekly section. The "Sermon Ideas and Talking Points" area is filled with observations about the text, relevant applications, creative ideas, and illustrations.
- A small group discussion sheet (located in a separate document in this bundle).

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- Plan ahead. Our guides are best utilized in advance versus the day or night before. Read over the ideas and illustrations provided, thinking through how you can possibly utilize them in your message. We've purposely kept our guides simple so as to give you the best opportunity to create your own, unique message.
- While we give you a passage and "big idea" of the message, take time to study the text.
- Utilize the media contained in this bundle to promote and communicate your series message.

Note: Although we've worked hard to verify the accuracy of the material in this guide, we encourage all pastors to carefully review the information before sharing it with their congregation.



MINISTRY PASS



Above and Beyond

Big Idea of the Series: Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:14–21 is rich with hope for spiritual growth and flourishing through the God who is able to do above and beyond what we could ever ask or think! This sermon series for the new year uses Paul’s prayer to encourage hope in the heart of believers.

Week 1

Text: Ephesians 3:14–15

Topics: Prayer, Blessing, Humility, Hope

Big Idea of the Message: As Paul begins to shift toward ethical issues in the second half of Ephesians, he prays for his hearers to have hope for the future and trust in God’s plan.

Application Point: As we look forward to the new year and all it may bring, we need to base all our hope and trust in God, who can do above and beyond what we can imagine.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. BibleProject’s overview video on Ephesians lays some helpful groundwork for understanding the book’s literary design (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ephesians/>).
2. N. T. Wright describes Ephesians 1–3 as a prayer. He writes, “People sometimes say that in a letter like Ephesians the first half is ‘doctrine’ and the second half is ‘ethics’—half of the letter on what to believe, half on how to behave. But in fact, as a glance back through the first three chapters will reveal, much of Ephesians 1–3 is not ‘teaching’ so much as prayer. The present paragraph isn’t a sudden change of style or mood. It is simply going back, explicitly, to where the letter has been all along, praising God, and praying for the young church” (N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004], 38–39).
3. “Whatever the contemporary normal posture in prayer, v. 14 refers to mental, not physical, kneeling; this is not to dispute those prayer manuals which say that

posture is important. Since there is no word for prayer in v. 14, kneeling must have been instantly recognisable as indicating that a prayer was about to commence; had [the author of Ephesians] spoken of Paul as standing in the Jewish manner, his Gentile readers might have needed an explicit reference to prayer. Probably kneeling conveyed to them a greater sense of humbleness than would standing” (Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998], 337).

4. “In ancient thought a ‘name’ was not just a means of distinguishing one person from another; it was particularly the means of revealing the inner being, the true nature of that person (cf. Gen. 25:26; 1 Sam. 25:25). So for God to give creatures a name was not simply to provide them with a label, but signifies his bringing them into existence, exercising dominion over them (cf. Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:26), and giving each their appropriate role. The verse thus affirms that the Father is the Creator of all living beings (cf. Eph. 3:9; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–18), so that their existence and significance depend on him” (Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 256).
5. A “heat check” is a phrase used to describe when a basketball player has made several shots in a row and then launches another attempt from a ridiculous location or angle. Having made a few shots, the athlete develops so much confidence that he or she thinks every shot will go in the basket. Paul refers to God as the Father of every nation, because he wants us to place our hope in the God from whom all things come. If you want to see a classic example of a heat check working out, watch these highlights of Klay Thompson against the Oklahoma City Thunder in 2017 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oOLr5QJAGs>).
6. Children think their parents can do anything. They have no concept of money, strength, or time. Naturally, they think their mom and dad can buy them every toy, stop an attacking monster, and skip out on work to play with them all day. While we quickly learn that our parents aren’t like that, Paul’s prayer begins by emphasizing how great God is.

Week 2

Text: Ephesians 3:16–17

Topics: Foundations, Spiritual Growth, Love

Big Idea of the Message: Paul prays that the gentile believers would be rooted in God's love so they can develop into the people God wants them to become.

Application Point: We need to ensure that all our hopes and dreams are rooted in the love of God and directed toward our spiritual development.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. On Ephesians 3:14–21, N. T. Wright says, “Essentially, it is a prayer that the young Christians may discover the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It means knowing God as the all-loving, all-powerful father; it means putting down roots into that love—or, changing the picture, having that love as the rock-solid foundation for every aspect of one's life. It means having that love turn into a well-directed and effective energy in one's personal life” (N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004], 39–40).
2. “Since no particle links this verse to the preceding it is probably parallel to it, yet also clarifies it. The parallelism is seen in the two διὰ clauses (faith and the Spirit are also linked in 1:13) and in ‘inner person’ and ‘heart.’ The two verses also express the same idea; v. 16 would have been more easily understood in the Hellenistic world; v. 17 is more Semitic” (Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998], 341).
3. “Vv. 16 and 17 also contain a carefully crafted parallel construction in which two clauses containing the same number of syllables (twenty) both speak of God dwelling in the believer's inner being and thereby strengthening the believer (‘strengthened through his Spirit in the inner person’ and ‘Christ dwelling through faith in your hearts’)” (Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 273).
4. “The ‘heart’ here, as elsewhere in Ephesians, is employed in its customary Old Testament sense of the centre of one's personality, the thoughts, will, emotions, and whatever else lies at the centre of our being. If Christ has taken up residence in our hearts, he is at the centre of our lives and exercises his rule over all that we are and do” (Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 259).
5. Outward strength is not always an accurate indicator of our health. Some body builders die of heart attacks even though they look like they're in incredible shape (Danielle Zickl, “This 25-Year-Old Bodybuilder Was Totally Healthy—Then He Died of a Heart Attack,” *Men's Health*, October 2, 2017, <https://www.menshealth.com/fitness/a19537116/bodybuilder-dies-of-blockage-to-heart/>). Paul's prayer is that Christians will be inwardly healthy and rooted in the love of God. Only from that foundation can we do all that God has for us to do.

6. “Love and power, power and love: these are the themes of perhaps two-thirds of the novels, plays and poems ever written. The love of power has laid waste continents and empires. The power of love has driven weak people to do powerful things—and, not infrequently, powerful people to do foolish things. These are the forces which shape our lives, our homes, our countries, our politics, our world. And these are the themes that run through the great prayer that Paul prays for the young Christians to whom he is writing” (Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*, 38).

Week 3

Text: Ephesians 3:18–19

Topics: Love, Knowledge, Prayer

Big Idea of the Message: Paul wanted his audience to understand the power of God’s indwelling presence in their lives.

Application Point: As we look to the future, we need to pray that God will reveal how important his presence is to our lives.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. “After the brief parenthesis of v. 17b the intercession is resumed. Though empowered by the Spirit and indwelt by Christ the readers still lack something (Ewald) and, as we shall ultimately see, this is not gnosis but love. The ἵνα clause here assumes that of v. 16 and takes it further; though underpinned by love believers need a fuller understanding of that love” (Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998], 343). (For more on a ἵνα [*hina*] clause, see [here](#).)
2. Commenting on Ephesians 3:19, O’Brien writes, “This petition is remarkable, for although the apostle has said much in chapters 1–3 about his readers being in Christ, he assumes that they do not adequately appreciate Christ’s love. Also, God’s almighty power is needed to grasp its dimensions; hence he prays for *power* to enable them to understand how immense it is” (Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 264).
3. “The final *hina* clause in v. 19 gives us the ultimate goal of the prayer—that the audience be filled with God to the full. Paul ends the prayer with the rhetorical flourish of alliteration—three words beginning with *p*, two of them cognates from the same stem, *plerōthēte* and *plērōma*. ... Their growth and development in Christ happens not just through learning but also through worship and prayer and finally through obedience, a subject Paul will dwell on in chs. 4–6. The emotions have been engaged as well as the mind in preparation for the exhortation to the will in the latter half of the discourse” (Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 276).

4. "It is also important that the living Lord, the king, should make his home within each Christian. ... That, as Paul says in the climax of the prayer in verses 18 and 19, will expand our mental and spiritual vision of the whole range of divine truth. Everything that might be offered in the fancy religions of Paul's day and ours ... all the ups and downs and to-ing and fro-ing, the breadth and length and depth and height, of knowledge whether human or divine—all is ours in the king and in his love. Having him, we are filled with all the fullness of God" (N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004], 40–41).
5. Have you ever had an appliance that wouldn't work? No matter what you tried, you could not get it to operate. Once you became sufficiently frustrated, you finally called someone to help you get it working again. Be honest: How many of you have had your friend point out that the machine was unplugged? If you have ever had this experience, you appreciate the importance of power in a real—and embarrassing—way.
6. Mary Poppins is famous for her magical bag. She pulls all sorts of objects out of it to the children's bewilderment. They can't figure out how she does it. They poke their heads inside the bag, but it doesn't make any sense. That's because the power is with Mary, not the bag alone (*Mary Poppins*, directed by Robert Stevenson [Buena Vista Distribution Company, 1964]).

Week 4

Text: Ephesians 3:20–21

Topics: Love, Worship, Praise, Expectation

Big Idea of the Message: After praying that his audience would know God's love, Paul concludes his prayer with praise for the God who can do infinitely more than we can imagine.

Application Point: As we look forward to the future, we praise the one who can do far more with our hopes and dreams than we could ever imagine.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. "The first and 'theological' section of the letter concludes, as Romans, with a doxology (cf Rom 11:26). The only possible response in the light of what has been said about God in 1:3–3:19 is to voice his praise. The doxology is probably not a separate item tacked on at the end of the intercession but should be regarded as a part of the prayer" (Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998], 348).
2. "In the earlier petition of chapter 1, God's effective power towards believers (1:19) was said to be nothing less than 'the operation of his mighty strength' exerted in the resurrection of Christ (1:20). Now that same power which raised Christ from the dead, enthroned him in the heavenlies, and then raised and enthroned us with him, is at work *within us* to achieve infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. In the doxology Paul thus praises God for the bestowal of

strength by his Spirit on his people, and affirms that the full realization of God's gracious purposes for them and in them becomes possible" (Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 267).

3. "From a rhetorical point of view the sound of the concluding Greek phrase is important—*eis pasas tas geneas tou aiōnos tōn aiōnōn*. Not only the endings of words but also in two cases the beginnings of words have the same sound," says Witherington, arguing that the repeated sounds are meant to emphasize the need for unending praise of God (Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 277).
4. "Read verse 20 carefully. Then think of what God might do in you and through you—you as a community, you as an individual. Now reflect on the fact that God is perfectly capable of doubling that, trebling that, going so far beyond it that you would look back at the present moment and wonder how you could be so short-sighted. But this isn't a magic trick. God's power is not ours to do what we like with. If you want to get on the map of verse 20, ask yourself whether you're on the map of the three chapters it's taken to get Paul to this point" (N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004], 41).
5. We need to regain some of the enthusiasm of childhood. If you hand a child a one-dollar bill, she will walk into the store as if she could buy anything and everything she wants. The great news is that God can take our finite lives and do something infinitely greater than we can imagine.
6. Have you ever opened an especially meaningful present on Christmas morning? As you unwrap the paper, you discover an extravagant gift that you wouldn't have imagined someone might give you. Simultaneously the significance of this gift dawns on you. The person who gave it to you loves you more than you knew. If this is how we feel with meaningful gifts in our lives, imagine what impact the love of God will make on us when we reflect on the meaning of Jesus's crucifixion. God loves us and longs to give us that which is good.

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