



A People Who Know God's Love

(Ephesians 3:14-21)

“It is inconceivable that a genuine, deepening grasp of the love of Jesus Christ could remain entirely privatized. Paul wants the entire church to grow in this way; and he prays to this end.”

- D.A. Carson

As the capital of the Roman province of Asia, Ephesus was a strategic city along major trade routes of the Roman Empire. The letter to the Ephesians was most probably written as a “circular letter” to be circulated not only in Ephesus but throughout this important region. In Acts 18, 19, 20 we read of the deep involvement Paul had with the church in this region.

This letter is rich in both Paul's substantive teaching and his example as a leader who is firstly a follower of Jesus. It is an oversimplification but still true, that the first three chapters of Ephesians focus on what to believe and the second three chapters focus on how to behave. The substance which Paul unfolds in chapters 1, 2, and 3 leads to Paul's prayer at the end of chapter 3. In some ways, this prayer is a continuation of all that Paul prayed in chapter 1. He begins his prayer with “For this reason” so it would be wise to quickly overview the truths in those chapters... as time allows.

Read Together

Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

“Love and power, power and love; these are the themes of perhaps two thirds of the novels, plays and poems ever written. ...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.”

- N.T. Wright



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Explore Together

1. Inner Power (3:16-17a) Paul speaks of our being both individually and collectively “in Christ” in many other places (Romans 8:1, Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 1:2,30). In this case, Paul is sharing something that is equally true - Christ is in us. Notice the involvement of the whole Trinity in these verses: Paul is asking the Father according to His glorious riches, that He would strengthen us through the Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts.

Discuss: How does awareness of the full Godhead's involvement in giving us inner power impact your understanding of how you receive that strength? Think of human homes - over time, the physical house looks more and more like it is yours and your presence impacts every corner of every space. Discuss what it means for Christ to make His home in your heart.

2. Unlimited Love (3:17b-18) In The Message, this passage reads, “And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you will be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths!”

Consider this: when we reach the end of our capacity to grasp God's love, even with the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit, God still loves us MORE! You may each need some time to respond to that reality in whatever ways suit you: praying, weeping, shouting, sitting in silence, taking a quick walk... (See link in Resources, below, to Timothy Keller's message on 1 John 3:1 in which he describes John as “going ballistic” with the understanding of God's love electrifying every part of him.)

Discuss: Share a time when you have been so aware of the incredible love of God. In what ways is our ability to grasp God's unlimited love dependent upon the inner power of the Holy Spirit we have just discussed? Notice, Paul is praying that we would “be able to take in with all followers of Jesus”. How is our ability to perceive this kind of love boosted by our involvement with other disciples of Jesus?

3. Intimate Knowledge (3:19) This phrase, “to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” has greater impact when we consider the original Greek. “Know” is from a form of ginosko, the verb that is linked to the noun, “knowledge” from gnosis. Both the noun and the verb are an experiential, personal, intimate knowing or knowledge.



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Discuss: What does Paul mean when he prays, “to intimately and personally know the love of God which surpasses intimate and personal knowledge”? How is our ability to grasp this kind of love enhanced by experiencing it in a community of devoted followers of Jesus? What keeps us from wanting that kind of community more? What can we do about that tendency?

4. Active Prayer (3:14-21) Often, in our Western mindset, we think that prayer is the opposite of action. N.T. Wright points out that prayer actually brings together love and power, explaining that we see this in “the relation of love that grows up between God and the person who prays, and the flowing of power from God to, and especially through that person.”

Discuss: Share experiences when you have been praying for someone or a need and realised by a prompting of the Holy Spirit, that YOU could be an answer to that prayer. How did you respond? How can we begin to be more open to the Spirit's voice - leading us to give, to serve, to be the answer as we pray for a need?

Pray Together

Thank You, Father, for the gift of Your Spirit who strengthens us deeply within so that we are able to surrender every part of our lives to Jesus Christ.

We give You all praise as we consider that we can never dream dreams that are larger than Your ability to provide.

We live for Your glory, Lord. We truly WANT to live for Your glory. And in the places where we do not, may Your Spirit give us the power to surrender.

Amen.

Suggested Resources

- **Book: Francis Chan** - Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God
- **Book: Louie Giglio** - Not Forsaken: Finding Freedom as Sons Daughters of a Perfect Father
- **Podcast: Timothy Keller** - Beholding the Love of God

<https://podcast.gospelinlife.com/?s=God%27s%20Love>

- **Podcast: The Bible Project** - The Loyal Love of God

<https://bibleproject.com/podcast/loyal-love-god/>