

Life Group Study Guide

Ephesians—carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered-- will change our lives. This study is based on a sermon preached Sunday morning at WEFC entitled: *My Cup Runneth Over* and reflects on **Ephesians 3:14-21**.

Before you begin: Take some time as a group to *pray* that God would be at work in your minds and hearts. There is a real difference between knowing and understanding something intellectually and having a heart that is deeply affected by the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to *understand* God's word, *welcome* it into your heart, and then *apply* it faithfully to your lives.

Have someone from your group volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 3:14-21**:

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family^[c] in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now 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, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

In this passage, Paul finally gets around to what he appears to have intended to do before he got sidetracked back in **3:1**. We see this by his use of the same phrase in both verses (**v.1, 14**) "*For this reason...*". This means the "*reason*" Paul "*bows his knees*" in prayer and worship is the content of what he said back in **chapter 2**. His theology (**ch.2**) informs his **posture, prayer, and praise**.

1) The More You Know the Better Your Posture (v.14-15)

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father

Discuss as a group what truths in **chapter 2** compelled Paul to bow down low before the Father. What other kinds of physical expression are an appropriate response to the majesty of God and the miracle of the gospel?

We know we don't just speak with our mouths; we also talk with our bodies ("body language"). How do our bodies help us bear witness? Are there any things about God that have routinely gripped your heart and put you in reverential postures?

Paul says he is kneeling before his "Father,"—the heavenly Father— "from whom," he continues, "every family in heaven and on earth is named." Almost as though, now that he's down there, he can't help but think of the chief reason to kneel (see **1 Jn.3:1**). We pray to, "Our Father" (cf. **Matt. 6:9; Eph. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:3,12; 1 Thess. 1:2-3, 3:11-13; 2 Thess. 2:16-17**).

But is he just *our* Father? How can Paul say he's the Father, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named"? There is, of course, a broad sense in which all people everywhere can trace their lineage back to God. He is the Father of *all* of creation. So, perhaps Paul means that he is bowing his knee before the Father to whom every knee will eventually bow (**Phil. 2:10**). If so, Paul is saying that because God is the Sovereign Originator of all families, *every* earthly family bears his name since every earthly family is a type of echo of God's life-creating fatherhood. That would technically be a true statement, but it doesn't appear to fit the context of what Paul has been saying so far in this epistle. Everything we've been reading is that *only* Christians are the children of God. We're adopted (**Eph. 1:5**), through spiritual rebirth (**Eph. 2:4**). We saw back in **Eph. 2:1-3** that the unregenerate are "*sons of disobedience*"; "*children of wrath*." Consequently, as Creator, God is the Father of all; but as loving Redeemer, God is only the Father of those who *believe* upon Christ. You must be born again (**John 3:7**).

Furthermore, the Greek word for "every" is also rightly translated "the whole": "*I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named.*" Why does that reading make more sense? What did Paul spend the second half of **Eph. 2** talking about? What, in the ensuing prayer, also suggests Paul is referring *specifically* to God's Fatherhood over the universal family of Christians?

What does it mean to bear the family name of God? What traits and characteristics should mark the family of God? (Hint: God is Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

How might this clarification of v.15 affect your posture in the presence of God?

2) The More You Know the Better Your Prayer (vv. 16-19)

Ephesians 1:15-23 was Paul's prayer for *enlightenment*. It was based on all the amazing gospel realities he had celebrated in the preceding verses. He wanted God to open the eyes of our hearts to see the richness of what it means to be in Christ. His theology (his doctrine) informed how he prayed. Here, in our passage, the pattern repeats. His theology moves him to pray an astonishing prayer for *enablement*. The first prayer was about knowing, this second prayer is more about *being*. Paul wants the church to be able to fulfill its climactic purpose, described in **2:21-22**, to "grow into a holy temple in the

Lord." And, in Christ, for us to be built together into "*a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*" Paul longed to see that happen, for God to fill his new temple, and fully reside in his new home, the church! So, **he turns his theology into prayer.**

Do you want to pray better, more powerfully, like Paul? What does Paul's prayer pattern teach us? What can we do to grow in this spiritual discipline? Discuss.

Firstly, Paul **prays for us to be strengthened (vv. 16-17):**

"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"

Paul knows that when people place their trust in Christ and come to be united to him, Christ gives them his Spirit. The Spirit of God comes to indwell them. That happens at the very beginning of the Christian life. The Spirit of Christ sets up residence in your heart, or to put it another way, Christ lives in you by the Holy Spirit, which is mind-boggling! It boggled Paul's mind and drove him to his knees in prayer.

When you begin to think about the power, the strength, the majesty of who Jesus Christ is, you will inevitably be drawn to the conclusion that you are not possibly capable of sustaining that. You're worthy, the cross saw to that, but you're like a malnourished man with an impossibly large feast suddenly set before him. Regardless of your appetite, you just don't have the capacity to devour all that steak, potatoes, and bread.

We need to be "*strengthened with power by his Spirit in our inner beings so that Christ may dwell in our hearts*".

This happens, Paul says, "*through faith.*" Can you remember where faith comes from? (see **Eph. 2:8**). How do **vv. 16-17** of our text create a sort of upward spiral of God allowing us to house more and more of Himself in our hearts?

Is this a prayer you have prayed? I assure you, it's never been prayed by those who think becoming a Christian just meant inviting a little Jesus into their big roomy heart. No, this is a prayer for paper-bag Christians who wonder, how could I be capable, for even a minute, of sustaining the grandeur and the greatness of the King of Glory? Why does it take seeing Christ for who he is and yourself for who you are to produce a prayer like this? Can you see the principle that *the more you know, the better you pray* at work here?

Why is it fantastic news that God gives us strength "*according to the riches of his glory*" and not "*out of the riches of his glory.*" Discuss the difference between a portion and a proportion.

Secondly, **Paul prays for us to know the love of Christ (vv. 17b-19a)**

Linguistically this petition flows out of the first, Christ dwelling powerfully in our hearts, results in us *"being rooted and grounded in love"* (v.17b). Paul is using two metaphors, one agricultural the other architectural: *"being rooted and grounded."* Think of **a tree** and **a house**: one deep and tall, the other long and broad. One has deep roots and high branches, the other many rooms on a broad foundation. That's how Paul wants us to understand the relationship between ourselves and Christ. We're planted like a tree, constructed like a house, in the soil of, and on the foundation of, his love for us.

Paul seems to just carry this thought over into his second petition in **vv.18-19**,

"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."

It's almost like he's saying, "You're going to need more strength from God because I want you to grab a shovel and try to discover how deep the roots of his love go for you. I want you to climb the tree and see how high the branches stretch. I want you to get inside the house and start running the long corridors of his love. To start opening doors, and exploring the ballrooms and the libraries and the chambers and the banqueting hall, and on and on. I want to see all the marvellous dimensions of his love for you so that you **know** it *"surpasses knowledge!"* It gets beyond something you can *know* to something you have to *experience*. Discuss.

How have you *experienced* God's love for you? Where can we see the love of Christ for you, measured most clearly? (Hint: **Rom. 5:8; John 3:16**).

Lastly, Paul prays for us to be **filled with the fullness of God (v.19b)**.

That's a staggering thought! It's the climax of everything he's already prayed: that God would strengthen us in our inner being, by his Spirit, expanding our capacity to take Christ into our hearts by faith. So that Christ can then flood our hearts with the love he demonstrated for us on the cross, and all of this in order that we *"may be filled with all the fullness of God"* (v.19b).

Remember, this is a prayer of enablement for **2:21-22** to happen. Paul wants us to *"become a dwelling in which God lives."* He wants us to enjoy the fullness of his glory, the radiance of his beauty, the perfections of his attributes, and the depths of his love. Beloved, when this begins to dawn on you, does not the echo of David's great words become a reality in your life? *"My cup overflows"* (Psalm 23:5).

God's plan for the body of Christ is truly astonishing. We can't take it all in. But one day we will (cf. **1 Jn 3:2**; **Rev 22:4-5**).

This is prayer takes us into high theology, which, of course, always spills over into high doxology—high praise.

3) The More You Know the Better You Praise

In **Exodus 20:25**, God commanded, *"If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you profane it."* Some altars are pure, and to touch them, is almost certainly to defile them. So, we'll let Paul's closing words of praise speak for themselves. Read them, contemplate them, make them your own, until you can say with Paul, *"Amen."*

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.