

## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

LOVING AS GOD LOVES

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

MARCH 6-12, 2015



### MAIN POINT

When we are connected to Christ, His love will bear fruit in our lives.

### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. If you were to identify one guiding principle behind your life, what would you say that it is?
2. Why did you identify this particular principle? How does this one principle guide everything else you do?

**Leader:** Christians are people whose lives have been changed by the transforming love of God in Jesus Christ. As Jesus' Spirit brings us life, we begin to live lives that are guided not by our own desires and intention, but by God's. As we know more of Christ's love, our lives exhibit more of His love. We will never find the end of Jesus' limitless love, which means for us, it is a never ending well we can continue to pull from. The love of God becomes the guiding principle of our lives, which is why Paul prayed as He did for the Ephesians in the text we will look at today. As our connection to Christ is strengthened, we live a life more fully pleasing to Him.

### DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 3:14-16.

3. In these verses Paul describes God as our Father for whom we are named. What is significant about this description of God and of us?
4. Why did Paul feel the need to go to God for spiritual strength? What does that teach us about the source of spiritual growth? What are some practical ways we can sustain our connection to Christ?

**Leader:** As children derive their name from their father, so the members of the family of God derive their name from Him and are known and recognized as His children. God's power is available for the asking, but we cannot benefit from it if we are still trying to live the Christian life in our own strength (2 Cor. 12:7-10). We find strength in reading and hearing God's Word, and through prayer. We see God's power displayed in our lives when we yield to the Spirit's leading and obey that Word as well.

5. How have you observed the way in which living for Christ requires more and more spiritual strength? What could be the risk of trying to rely solely on our own strength instead?

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 3:17-19.

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6. Paul could have prayed that the Ephesians would witness boldly, receive the gift of prophecy, or perform miracles. Why do you think he chose to pray for their ability to comprehend God's love instead?

7. How does grasping the magnitude of Christ's love for us give us the power to live the full lives God intends?

8. How might praying for these things help us share Christ and shine the light of Christ?

**Leader:** In Scripture, the heart is used to indicate the feelings, or one's entire being, as distinct from the intellect alone. Faith is more than accepting a set of propositions as true. As believers, we already have Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27). It is equally valid to say that we have the Spirit living in us (Rom. 8:9). Paul prayed his readers would have a growing intimacy with the Lord, not just a surface relationship. God wants all of His children to experience the things Paul prayed for his readers. Comprehending God's vast love for us transforms our lives. The ultimate goal of the Christian life is for believers to be filled with all the fullness of Christ. We are to become like Him (Rom. 8:29) to the extent that others see Jesus in our lives.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 3:20-21.

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9. What does verse 20 tell us about what we can expect when we pray to God? How have you seen Him do this in your life?

10. If God is exceedingly able to answer our prayers, why do some prayers go unanswered?

**Leader:** Paul was completely confident in God's power to supply the spiritual strength for which he'd prayed. When Paul opened his prayer, he had acknowledged God as the Father of every family and the One who has infinite riches in glory. Now he acknowledged the powerful work of God within us. He is able to do (or to work), because He is living and active, not dead or passive. He is able to do far more, because His ways are higher than ours. He is able to do abundantly, because He has limitless resources. He is able to do all, because He knows everything and can do everything. He is able to do all that we ask, because He hears and answers His children's prayers. He is able to do what we think, because He knows our thoughts better than we do. As we remain connected to Christ, He is at work in us, making us into people who know His love and respond in love to others.

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

11. Earlier in our discussion we talked about practical ways we can sustain our connection to Christ (question 4). Why is this connection critical for our daily lives? What difference does it make?
12. Think about a specific time when you felt a strong connection to Christ. What did you learn through that season that could encourage someone who doesn't feel close to Him now? What next step do you need to take in an effort to strengthen your connection to Christ?
13. Have you ever turned the prayers we find in Scripture into your own prayers? How could you do this with Paul's prayer in these verses this week? What are the benefits of praying the words of Scripture?

**Leader:** Take some time now to pray Ephesians 3:14-21 together as a group.

### PRAYER

Pray that the love of God would fill you up. Ask that you would know the greatness of the love that Jesus has for you, and pray that Jesus' great love for you would motivate you to pursue the mission of God in the places where God has given you grace and influence.

### MEMORIZE

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

3:14. Repeating the opening phrase, Paul resumes his original prayer which he started in verse 1. The kneeling posture (compare Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5; Rom. 11:4; 14:11; Phil. 2:10) represents humility and reverent worship in contrast to the common practice of standing to pray (Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11,13).

3:15. Prayer is directed to the Father. This Father is the Father of all fathers, for every family in heaven and on earth derives its existence and its family name from the Father. Certainly such a powerful, creative Father can hear and answer the prayers about to be uttered.

3:16. The prayer has four requests that build on each other, or that flow out of each other. The first request is for inner spiritual strength. This is not the “when the going gets tough the tough get going” kind of power. This is not self-discipline or the power of positive thinking. This is not mental renewing, or self-talk, or getting a grip on yourself, or turning over a new leaf. This is a fundamental work of God from His Spirit to our spirit.

3:17. This leads to the second request, deep faith. This is not salvation. Paul was writing to Christians, and Christ takes up residence in our heart when we accept Him (John 14:23). This is more than resident faith that comes with salvation. This is Christ’s being at home in our heart.

The third element is a prayer for abundant love that finds concrete expression in 19a. First Paul gives the qualities needed to be able to receive this prayer. Love must become the dominant quality of life, the roots of your existence, the foundation on which all else rests. Such love in your life comes from the divine love.

3:18. The strengthening of our inner man by the Spirit allows us to let Christ be at home in all the rooms of our heart. Letting Christ be at home in all the rooms of our heart enables us to know the vast dimensions of the love of Christ.

We need foundations for our experiences and relationships. We can’t handle life unless we are assured that God loves us and has accepted us—that we are dear to Him. When we know this, then we know who we are. Then we have a sense of well-being. Love gives us that. This sense of identity and being loved gives us the ability to relate to others, so we can comprehend with all the saints the magnitude of the love of God. Knowing God’s love is not an individual accomplishment. It occurs only in the loving context of the church and involves the whole church, not isolated individuals.

3:19. Paul’s request then is that the church and each of its members know in a personal, emotional way, as well as an intellectual one, this love of Christ. We measure this love only with cosmic dimensions and understand it only by seeing it expressed at its deepest, most intimate level on the cross. Praying that we can know it, we ultimately confess that it is beyond our full comprehension.

The final request is a prayer for God’s fullness. The inner strength of the Holy Spirit, which is a gift God gives to those who pray for it, leads to the indwelling of Christ, which leads to abundant love, which leads to God’s fullness in us—being satisfied with God. We all want to be filled up to the fullness of God. The only way it will happen is if we pursue Him. If we pray for Him to strengthen us with power by His Spirit by the inner man, Christ will be at home in each room of our heart. If Christ occupies our heart, we will have a confidence and security in His love for us. If we have such confidence and security, we are able to love others. This ability to know God’s love and thus love others, leads to the fullness of God in us. His presence, His power, His love, His life inhabit us. We participate fully in His kingdom on earth. That is Paul’s prayer for you.

3:20. Paul ends his discussion of the mystery of the church and his prayer for power with a spontaneous burst of praise to God. His prayer forms a great doxology to the Lord for His power and glory. We see three things emerging from this doxology. First, we see the sovereignty of God. God in His sovereignty may choose to do whatever He wills. What He can do far exceeds anything we can dream or imagine, must less ask for. God’s sovereignty means our prayers can be answered far beyond even what we ask.

Second, we see the omnipotence of God. God manifests His great power in many ways. Most obviously, He manifested it when He created the world. He used that kind of power to bring Jews and Gentiles together and

form them into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. The power we see in creation and in the church is the power of God that works in us in the love relationship of prayer.

3:21. Finally, we see His glory. The power God has manifested and continues to display has a purpose—bringing glory to Him. All that God has done is to resound to His glory forever. God has done things in the church among His people and in Christ Jesus—where His people now abide and where God completed His plan of salvation. As we see and recognize God’s work in the church and in Christ, we respond in praise and worship, giving God glory.