



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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When We Pray **Dr. Steve Walker**

Alright as we're giving of our offerings, I want to encourage you to get your bibles in your hands. Let's get them open to Ephesians chapter 3. While you're doing all that I have to just confess, I was I was giggling to myself here right here before I walked up, which is usually not a good sign when you're giggling to yourself, but for some reason I was thinking this morning about my Christmas lights. I just got the Christmas lights on the outside of my house hung yesterday. How many of you've already got your Christmas lights on your house, they're working, all you overachievers. Yeah so, I stopped putting up my own lights several years ago. The older I get the more frightened I become of heights. Now, it used to be I'd get on the roof and just started getting nervous. Now I get on like the second rung of the ladder and I start to sweat and shake. So, I just stopped getting up on the roof and I pay someone to do that for me, it's the best money I spend all year, without a doubt. Right? And so yesterday the guy comes to hang my lights and I got a new guy this year, because the old guy I don't know what happened I lost his number or whatever.

But anyway, I found another guy through some neighbor and say use our guy. So like my doorbell rings yesterday morning and opens and there's this guy standing there like he's 10 years older than me, and he's got totally white hair down to the middle of his back in a ponytail, and I'm looking at him and I'm kind of looking over his shoulder like is your grandson with you? Like who's going to get on my roof? And he was the guy. And I first of all I was embarrassed like I'm 10 years younger than I should be up there and he wasn't afraid. Anyway, he ran up and down my roof like a monkey. I mean he was not afraid of anything. But anyway, that's the best money I spend. Does anyone else like me pay someone to hang your light? Like you're smart? Let me see, yeah ok, I noticed everybody my age is raising their hands right. Yeah that's yeah, I quit doing that. Anyway, Tammy is happy, my kids are happy that the lights are on, we're good to go.

All right it's Christmas, it's official. We're at Ephesians chapter 3. At the end of the chapter, actually and for the second time in three chapters the Apostle Paul abruptly breaks into a prayer for the Ephesians believers that he's writing this letter to. Both times that he does this so far, you get the sense that he's writing to them about some of the most important theology in the entire New Testament. And he stops himself, it's like he just realizes what he's writing the magnitude of what he's teaching them about God. and about the peacemaking work of Jesus on the cross for us. is so great and it's so vital. to their holiness and their happiness that he just has to stop and start praying for them. You get the sense he's writing about all these things about God and Jesus and he just stopped puts his pen down and just breaks into a prayer. And he writes the prayer down like I've got to pray for you. In chapter one, he prays that their understanding of God's mysterious plan of redemption through the shed blood of Jesus would basically move from their heads to their hearts. He wants their faith in Jesus and in the death and resurrection of Jesus, not to be something in their past that they believed in to save them but something right now in their present in their hearts, something that matters, that they can feel, that affects them, he wants that to go from here to here. And then today in chapter three he stops again to pray, and this time you get the sense that he is praying that it goes from their hearts to their everyday lives.

All this stuff he's teaching them about God. If it doesn't play out in the way we live, if it doesn't affect our decisions, and our priorities, and our values, and things like that how we relate to each other, then what good is it? And so, he stops again, and he prays and what we have today is really a powerful example of how to pray for ourselves and how to pray for each other. And my hope is that when we're done with this little section of Chapter 3, that are our prayers will mature to a higher level, to a higher level of faith, a higher level of hope. And what we're going to actually do is as we learned from Paul here, we're actually going to try to pray like him.

So, let's stand and let's read the passage and then see for ourselves and I'm trying to describe for you here we're going to back it up into verse 13, that's where Jon left off last Sunday, but we'll start there for context. Paul's writing and he says, *“so I ask you not to lose heart over what I'm suffering for you sufferings for you which is your glory don't lose heart. 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 the know the love of*

Christ, that surpasses the knowledge that may be filled, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Wow what a prayer.

Let's pray. Dear gracious and compassionate God, we are standing right now before you so grateful, grateful for your holy word. So grateful that you have made known to us your power and your promises, through the life and death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus. Father in heaven, we stand here right now with our heads bowed before you a grateful and a needy people. God some of us in this room need, God we need hope in impossible situations. God some of us are standing here right now who need wisdom in difficult decisions, God others they need healing in broken bodies. But God, all of us need your grace and mercy for the forgiveness of our sins. And so, we stand here faithful, we stand here assured that you are on your throne. You're accomplishing your perfect purposes. That God you say will be for our good and for your ultimate glory to spread throughout the earth. So, God we trust you Christ's name, amen. Let's be seated.

First of all, remember that Paul's writing to the Ephesians from his prison cell, from a jail cell. It's been a couple of years since he tearfully left the Ephesian church and he tells them, we're probably never going to see each other again. Paul knows that he is where he's going next, he's going to die. And it's been a few years, so by now when they get this letter, they know he's in jail and he's probably been there a while. And they're starting to feel the pressures of persecution in their own lives. The apostles are starting to really take it. Several of them have already been killed by now, they're starting to struggle, they're struggling not to lose heart. They're struggling not to give up they're struggling not to run away from God. And so, Paul stops and he prays for them. And you don't find Paul praying for their safety or their relief. He doesn't pray that God would remove the persecution or whatever the struggles are that they're going through. No, his prayer rises above the fray of the immediate. This is a different level of praying. His prayer is a call for God's help. For things more powerful more lasting. And before we try to unpack that, I want to just recognize a few phrases a few things Paul says before he actually starts praying.

The first thing he says is for this reason I bow my knees before the Father. It's always with the appropriate humility that we find Paul praying. And what he's doing here is he's reminding us of the divine privilege of access that we have to God as children of God. You know not everybody's prayers go to God. Jesus said the only way to the Father is through him. The only reason we can be confident and bold in trusting that God here's our prayers is because we have put our faith and trust in God's Son. Look back up a few verses at verse 12, this is what Paul has already said. He says, *“in Christ Jesus our Lord unversed in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him”*. So, Paul never

lets us forget, you never get the sense that Paul got too comfortable with this that he got too casual when he approached God, it's with intense humility and appreciation for this privilege we have. And then he says he's praying, he's on his knees before the Father from whom every family he says in heaven and on earth is named. Paul's referring to I believe to all those from every nation who have become members of God's family; they become members of God's family through faith in God's Son Jesus Christ. Some are already in heaven some are still on earth when Paul prays this prayer. Now there's some ambiguity as to what that phrase means, but I think what I've just shared with you is close enough and doesn't necessarily remove us from the spirit of what Paul is saying here.

And then he says he's praying according to the riches of his glory. Without hesitation Paul always prays with confidence that he is petitioning the One True God who possesses perfect holiness, infinite power and unconditional grace and mercy. You never get the sense that Paul thought his prayers depended upon how well he prayed, or that he just worded it just right or that he said he said the exact words that somehow got to God better. You never get the sense that Paul was trusting in his wordiness or his vocabulary or his ability to speak to God. That's never a part of the apostle Paul's life. He prays with confidence because he knows that the God of Heaven possesses everything in abundance that we could possibly need in any moment of our lives. And so, it's with that attitude and with that expectation that I want us to learn to pray today and want us to encourage us to pray.

And now the prayer really begins, what we learn from Paul is that when we pray, let's pray for inner strength. Paul prays that God would strengthen us with a power that is from Heaven, not from earth. And he words this request with two parallel phrases that essentially mean the same thing. Look at your bibles. He says, *"I pray that he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being."* And then in verse 17, he uses a second phrase *"so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"* and what you have here is the spirit's strength in our inner being meaning the same thing as the indwelling of Christ in our hearts. Two parallel statements you see when you read Paul especially in his prayers, he never separates the second and third persons of the Holy Trinity. He always has them together, to have Jesus dwelling in us and to have the Spirit dwelling in us is the same experience, it's describing the same thing. Now there are several verses in the New Testament that prove this out let me just show you one in Romans 8. I'll put it up on the screen. Paul writes to the Roman believers and he says, *"You however are not in the flesh but you're in the spirit. If in fact the spirit of God dwells in you"*, there's the dwelling of the spirit in us. And then he says, *"anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him. And here it is. But if Christ is in you the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you."* So again, he's talking about the Spirit being in us and Christ being in us. He's just

using those who describe the same thing. If the Spirit is in us, it is the Spirit of Christ, which means Christ is in us. And so, I don't want you to get tangled up in it and get all kinds of twisted up over that wording. It's Paul's theological mind just running forward in full speed, saying we have the very Spirit of Jesus himself inside us. He's praying that we will live with hearts surrendered to the Holy Spirit for our strength.

Now what does Holy Spirit inner strength look like, especially in the face of trials, in the face of real time struggles? What does that inner strength produce in us? Why is Paul praying like that? Well I think first of all it means it produces in us holiness instead of compromise. That's what this strength from the Spirit of God produces in his holiness instead of compromise. Paul is praying for the Holy Spirit strength in us so that we can say *no* to the old way of life and *yes* to the new life. Because there's no doubt that when the pressure to compromise our faith whether it's at work, or at school, or even in our own homes, when the pressure to start compromising our faith increases, we need divine power to resist caving in to the old ways of our old life.

Paul's going to get into this very specifically in the next three chapters. But let's just take a sneak peek look over in Chapter 4:17. Paul is saying *now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds*". He's saying, hey you can't walk anymore, you can't respond to the pressures and trials of life the way we used to, ok. Now, scoot down to verse 22 saying *"I'm testifying to you to put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on that new self-created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness"* This is this is what this inner strength from the Holy Spirit empowers us to do and be; say *no* to the old life and to put on the new life. Look at Chapter 5:1, *"therefore he says be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality in all impurity and covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking which are out of place but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this that everyone who is sexually immoral are impure or who is covetous that is an idolater has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord walk as children of light"*

Okay, Paul over and over wants what we believe in our heads and our hearts to be true to affect the way we live. When he prays for inner strength through the Spirit that's in us, he's praying that we would have the strength to say *no* to the old ways of life that the world constantly pushes on us every day. But I think there's a second thing that this produces in us this inner strength and its courage instead of fear. Sometimes the tribulations of life can really induce fear in us, anxiety, right? Trials maybe persecution tribulation in our life. We get scared we get anxious especially in the face of rejection and persecution. And what can happen is this unsettling fear begins to tempt us to doubt God's love and God's power. But look at chapter 3 verse 20, I've saved this verse from next Sunday. Paul is at the end of his prayer that we just read, and he says in verse twenty "*now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power that it is at work within us.*" That's the inner strength he's praying. He's saying, man now to him who is able to do way more than we could ever even ask or think because there's power inside of us. Well he's saying when we pray for inner strength the strength of the Holy Spirit, we are asking God for courage to *believe* in him who is able. We need divine strength, we need the Holy Spirit to give us courage to not doubt that God is able. That he possesses everything we could possibly need in this life. And my question for you right this minute is, do you need inner strength today? Do you need inner strength to push back and resist the old ways of life that keep getting pushed at you and on you from this world we're live in. Or maybe you need courage today. Maybe there are circumstances in your life for the life of your loved ones that and it's you just right on that line of wondering, God are you still there?

Why don't we bow our heads for a minute and let's do this. I'm going to encourage you right now to either pray for you or pray for that person you know that needs inner strength. Ask him right now for inner strength to be holy and or inner strength to have courage and not be afraid in your circumstances. Again, maybe it's someone you know that needs you to pray for them to have inner strength.

Amen. Number two, when we pray, let's pray for inner strength, and then let's pray that love rules our hearts. Paul's praying that God will strengthen us by his Spirit in us *to* love. I wonder if life's tribulations or struggles have ever made it hard for you to love someone. I think if we're real, if we're honest, there are very few things more difficult more difficult to do on our journey of sanctification than to love those who are so difficult to love especially if they claim to be Christians. Look what Paul says he's praying that we're strengthened in our inner being he says, "*That you will be rooted and grounded in love.*", at the end of 17. Paul uses two metaphors to describe the effects of this kind of love rooted which is a botanical metaphor and grounded which is an architectural or building metaphor. And these two things they indicate a depth a depth of love as opposed to a shallow kind of love. We're to have deep roots like a well rooted tree were to have a firm foundation like a well-built house. That's the effect of this

love that Paul is praying that we have inside of us now knowing the context of the believers that he's writing to. I think it's evident that Paul is praying that we would be rooted and grounded in our love, first in our love for each other. That would be the first place we need to be rooted and grounded in love.

Think about our church, we are a people many of whom the world would consider to be natural enemies, right? Or at least when you look at this group of people, we're sitting with today the world would look at us and say at the very least it would be very unnatural for most of us to even care about each other, let alone love each other, And we should get that, right? When you when you look in this place called the family of God the church here locally and Bothell were from every language, were from every nation practically, from every race, were from every economic, and political, and educational, backgrounds. And now we're brothers and sisters in Christ. Nowhere else in the world, no other religion does this happen. You know that, right? This requires a miracle, right? And Paul says, oh I pray that your love for each other ground you and root you deep in your faith in God. Because as more pressure from this sin broken world pulls and pushes on us to live our lives with the old attitudes, and the old values, and the old prejudices, and the old priorities, it's imperative that we love each other. And Paul's going to show us in the next three chapters what that love looks like. It is intense, I want to give you a little peek look at chapter 4 again. Verse 1 *"I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all who is overall and through all and in all, but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christs' gifts."*

Wow, that's how you describe why and how we love each other. You see when hate seems like the right thing to do, we love each other. When anger at each other seems like the right thing to do we love with kindness. When revenge and bitterness feels like that's what I want to do right now, we love with forgiveness. When gossip and envy and jealousy starts to well up in us and when we start to feel that way towards each other we stop, and we love each other with humility and repentance. When we feel like saying the heck with you, I'm done with you, I'm tired of dealing with you, you're so weird, you're so rude, you're so immature, I don't need this, in fact some people will say I don't even need the church anymore when we start feeling like that, we love each other with even more patience. We bear one another's burdens and we love. We mourn with those who mourn, and we love. It takes supernatural Holy Spirit inner strength to love like this, amen? They will know we are Christians by our love.

I don't think Paul has our love for each other in mind alone. I think when we pray that we are rooted and grounded we're praying that we're grounded and rooted in our love for our enemies. Again, the context of Ephesians 3 is not much different than our context in 2018. Living in Seattle, this part of the world the anti-Jesus, anti-Christian, anti-church sentiment is increasing exponentially. I believe Paul is praying that the Holy Spirit will empower us to love in the face of hatred. That is the epitome of the life of Jesus isn't it, to love in the face of hatred, even to his very last breath on this earth.

What does that mean to love our enemies? There a lot of things that means let me give you just a few today. Loving our enemies means to be willing to speak the truth and love. Jesus never avoided the truth in the face of persecution or opposition or lies, but he always spoke the truth lovingly. We don't compromise the truth, we don't deny the truth, we're not embarrassed about the truth, we just speak the truth in love. Loving our enemies also means to turn the other cheek instead of lashing back, lashing back with equal or greater sinful force. That's the old us. That's the Italian us, it's the East Coast US right. No, we pray for inner strength the Holy Spirit to be rooted and grounded in love for our enemies. Remember Pilot was chiding Jesus and he said so you're a king huh, where are your armies, where are your people. Jesus said, listen I could call down legions of angels from heaven right now and they would destroy and wipe this place out, but he didn't do it. And I also think loving our enemies means to look for ways to show them Jesus. Expressing an undeserving care and love for those who are so hard to love because that is what Jesus does best.

His unconditional undeserving grace and mercy for us is what moves us to love our enemies like that. Whoever told you that Christianity is for wimps, doesn't know what the Bible says. That's no easy deal is it? It's imperative that we raise up our prayers to this level. And I ask you are you struggling to love a brother or sister in Christ right now? Or is there someone else that's just there are enemies of God potentially. But they are hell-bent on being your enemy. If we would just bow our heads right now, could we pray for inner strength? Does someone come to mind in your life that is so hard to love? Would you pray, to either love that brother or sister in Christ or the love that enemy. Name them by name and ask God for that inner strength. Amen.

Number three, when we pray let's pray for inner strength, pray that we're rooted and grounded in love, and then let's pray that the love of Jesus is our greatest comfort, our greatest comfort. Paul's praying that Jesus love for us will be a constant source of strength, because he knows that if we can wrap our minds around this, we'll never lack the inner strength to live a fruitful and faithful life, even in the face of struggles. Look what he says here he says, *"I pray that you may have the strength to comprehend with all*

the saints. What is the breath 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.” Whoa! How miraculous would it be to understand the love of Jesus to such an extent that even if we lost every earthly dream and every earthly possession in this world that Jesus would still be enough? What if we understood his love for us that much?

Paul knows that in our natural sense our limited capacity. It makes it impossible to wrap our minds around the divine enormity of how much Jesus loves you and me. And so, he prays that the Holy Spirit will give us a greater understanding, of the breath the length the height the depth of Jesus love. You get the sense that Paul is just he's just like this when he's writing you can't come up with all the words, he can't even describe it it's so intense, he knows that only the Spirit of God in us can open up our hearts and minds to get a glimpse of how much we are loved by Jesus.

One of my favorite go to guys and I'm studying is an old preacher and commentator named John Stott. I love his stuff. I'm going to borrow from him just to kind of help unpack this a little bit. He says, *“it seems to me legitimate to say that Jesus love is wide enough to include all of us, every tongue and nation and race, men women and children, rich and poor, smart and simple, the weak and the strong, the single the married the divorced.”* I know this will be hard for you to believe, but even Cougar fans, is wide enough to include us all, no one is excluded. He loves all of us enough to die for us and there's no greater love than this than when a man lays down his life for a friend. Jesus said I call you my friend. You are the friend of Jesus not only wide enough to include a soul but long enough to last forever. Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus. He loved us Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, before the foundation of the world before God created one thing in the universe, He already loved us. And he will not leave us, and he will never forsake us, or betray us, or lie to us.

It's wide enough it's long enough it's also deep enough to cover over my worst sins. Remember Paul was a proud murderer and persecutor of Christians. He never got over what Jesus forgiveness meant to him. He cleanses us from all of unrighteousness. And the truth be known some of us have such a past of wicked sin in this room right now that if those sitting next to you knew your past they'd probably get up and sit somewhere else. And Paul says, hh I pray that you will never lack an understanding of how much Jesus loves you. Wide enough, long enough, deep enough, and high enough, to bring us all the way to heaven. Jesus promised he's preparing a place for us in heaven and he promised that he's going to return again and take us to be with him forever. And that his Holy Spirit who dwells in us is the down payment the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance of it all. Listen if you ever forget how much Jesus loves

you the cross in the empty tomb are the greatest evidence in the world. The cross and the empty tomb is the greatest proof in the world of how much you are loved, and if you start doubting that you just go find a cross. And you let that open your heart up again to how much you are loved.

Now notice something important Paul qualifies our understanding of Jesus love with the phrase look at it says here. It's so it's so fast you probably missed it. He says here in verse 18 *"you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints. What is the breadth the length height and depth of God's love, Christ's love"*. With all the saints together with all the saints. You see comprehending Jesus love doesn't happen in Christian isolation. It can only happen in genuine community. One of the surest ways of losing our comfort, one of the surest ways of losing the strength of knowing how much Jesus loves us is to continue to try to do the Christian life without genuine community, because it's in each other, and it's with each other that we are so often reminded of his unfailing love. And what we sadly see a lot of in today's church and we see it in our counseling ministry all the time, we see how many people are going through some of life's most horrible struggles and they're doing it alone, there's no community in their life, there's no one in their life to remind them, to point them, to pray with them, to bring them, to lift their eyes up to the one who loves them most. And they're struggling alone separate from Christian community. And when that happens inevitably when that happens there is a greater tendency to lose hope, there's a greater tendency to panic, there's a greater tendency to be overwhelmed with excessive grief and pain and worry. There's a there's a greater tendency to just give in or to just give up. And worst of all what we see all the time is there's a greater tendency to begin to doubt how much you were loved, and how powerful God is. And so, I ask you, do you need the strength right now, the inner strength of a greater understanding of how much Jesus loves you.? Is there someone in your life who needs that understanding in a greater way.

Let's bow our heads for a minute. If you have found right now that it's easy for you to just forget. It's easy for you to neglect dwelling on how much Jesus loves you. Maybe there's someone in your life going through some horrible things right now and you can tell they're starting to lose hope in God. Pray for yourself or pray for them or both. Whatever you sense is needed right now, inner strength, amen.

I want to encourage you to use this powerful prayer is maybe a template to pray once in a while to mark this in your Bible. Write these thoughts down in a journal, and when you find that in that moment when you just don't know what to pray for anymore, you get to that place where you're thinking my prayers feel like they're just so mechanical or they feel like I don't know even know what to say anymore. Turn to this prayer and lift your prayers up to a new dimension of faith and hope in the power and love of God. And if you're sitting here right now and you're sensing whole wait a minute in this whole prayer

thing is weird enough or foreign enough you realize you don't have a prayer life that means anything because you don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. And if that is you and you're starting to sense, and you desire and need for Jesus to forgive you and to come into your heart and save you and be your Savior, that's what these folks are up here for. They want to help you take that step of faith to say all right I get the prayer thing, but I got to get God first. Where do I go there? How do I get that forgiveness and that love? They're up here to help you take that step. I hope you will. And if the holidays are just a little more difficult than usual for you this year, maybe you just need someone to say a prayer with you before you go home, they would be glad to do that as well. All right we're going to be back at it, verse 20 next Sunday. Looking forward to it, bring your bibles.