

How to Pray, How to Listen
Ephesians 3:14-21¹



Praying for Power

The best way to reform our prayer life is to turn to the prayers of Scripture. God's Word is rich with practical opportunities to pray in accordance with God's own delight.

After expounding upon God's amazing grace in creating one new family out of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:1-13), Paul bursts into prayer for power and love. Essentially, there are two petitions here.

1. *Paul prays that God might strengthen us with power through his Spirit in our inner being.*

- This power comes *through* God's Spirit and *to* our inner being. Christ dwells in us through his Spirit (cf., Rom. 8:9). So what does Paul mean by our "inner being?"
 - Whatever "inner being" means, it must mean the same thing as our "hearts" in v. 17.
 - The same expression, "inner being," is used in 2 Cor. 4:16. "Though outwardly [lit., "the outer man"] we are wasting away, yet inwardly [lit., "the inner man"] we are being renewed day by day."
 - Our "inner being" is the place of renewal and regeneration. Our "inner being" is *what* is born again and *what* is maturing to become more like Christ.
 - So many of us long for better physical health, a robust body, more hair, less fat, etc. Yet, Paul's focus in this prayer is for the display of God's power in our character as we prepare for heaven (cf., 1 Tim. 4:8). What would the Body of Christ look like if we paid half the attention to our interior lives as we do our exterior?
- Why does Paul pray for God's power to strengthen your inner being? "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."
 - The idea of "dwell" here means more than to take up residence. We can take up residence in our house without really making it our home. Over time as we paint, wallpaper, hang curtains, landscape, et al., our homes eventually reflect our character, tastes, etc. So too, Christ gradually and certainly renovates our inner being and makes our heart his home. This is what it means for Christ to "dwell in your hearts through faith;" his character becomes ours.
 - Note: It is "through faith" that Christ makes our hearts his home. That is, *the same way we come to know Christ is the same way we grow in Christ*. Faith is the sum total of belief, repentance, and trust and these elements must be ever-present in our lives. The faith that saves us is the faith that sanctifies us (Heb. 10:38).
 - The source of this power is "out of [God's] glorious riches." The implication here is that, apart from God, we do not have the resources available to become more like Christ (Jn. 15:5). All that we bring to the table is faith; and *that, too, is a gift of God* (Eph. 2:8-9; Philip. 1:29; 1 Tim. 1:14; Heb. 12:2).
- Paul's prayer is that God the Father would strengthen our inner being with God the Spirit so that God the Son would manifest his character in our lives.

2. *Paul prays that we may have power to grasp the limitless dimensions of Christ's love.*

- "Rooted and established in love" suggests the initial love evident to us at salvation. It is because of God's overwhelming and irresistible love that we have a relationship with Christ (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 1:4-5).
- This is not a prayer for us to love Christ more, but that we might better grasp his love for us. It is possible Paul believes the Ephesians have not fully appreciated Christ's love for them.
- The dimensions of Christ's love are staggering! Ironically, knowing the depths of our sin gives us a glimpse of God's profound love in Christ (Rom. 5:8; Rom. 8:35-39). Moreover, we are naturally inclined to depreciate Christ's love for us.
 - The four words Paul uses to describe Christ's love ("wide and long and high and deep") involve measurement. How do we measure love? We can't. Paul resorts to metaphor to show the astounding dimensions of Christ love that permeates everything. His love never lets go (Rom. 8:35-39), sacrifices self (Eph. 5:2), and brings comforts (Philip. 2:1).

¹ I'm indebted to Don Carson's *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (pp. 181-203) for many of the insights here.
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- This is a love that “surpasses knowledge.” Although love is not devoid of knowledge, it will not be limited by it. Naturally, understanding Christ’s love includes believing the facts of the cross, resurrection, etc., but it moves way beyond mere creedal confessions and becomes profoundly personal (Gal. 2:20). Read Rev. 2:1-5 and note the net effect of a mere creedal Christianity. We need the power of God to show us the love of God in Christ. And, *we must pray for it*. Otherwise, we risk a fallen faith just as the Ephesians had fallen.
- This appreciation of Christ’s love is not done privately, but is to be enjoyed and expressed “together with all the saints.” Just as Paul prays for the Ephesians, so we should pray for one another to experience the power of Christ’s love and look for tangible evidence of it in the lives of our brothers and sisters.
- Why does Paul think it so important to grasp the limitless dimensions of Christ’s love? “That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Essentially, that you may be mature in your faith; that you may be all that God intends for you to be. This is God’s personal and corporate goal for his people (see Eph. 4:12-13).
- We simply cannot be as mature as we should be without God granting us the power to grasp the limitless dimensions of Christ’s love. To experience this divine love is to experience a new life where forgiveness becomes natural not contrived, fellowship becomes precious not merely artificial, testimonies are alive and vibrant not stale and merely correct, and all our attitudes and actions become compelled by sacrifice and service to others *because Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:8). In short, “we love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19).

(Eph. 3:20-21) After praying for God’s power to strengthen us and Christ’s love to compel us, Paul turns to praise the all-powerful, benevolent God.

- God is able to do far more than we can ask or imagine, not only because he’s omnipotent, but because he’s generous. The implicit assumption here is that God is not only able, but willing to give us more than we ask. Jesus teaches that God longs to give good gifts to his children (Mt. 7:11). This is a tremendous incentive to pray!
- The ultimate goal toward which everything in this universe is moving is to bring glory to God. Put differently, the universe does not revolve around us, but around God’s glory. And, it is primarily “in the church” (you and me) where God chooses to bring himself glory.

Now That You Know These Things...

- Begin praying that God would strengthen one person with power through his Spirit in their inner being.
- When you pray, do you seek God’s glory *more than* seeking for what you ask?
- Has God become so central to your prayers that you care less about getting what you ask for and more about how his will may be accomplished?
- Pray that the Trinitarian God would make his presence real in the character of your spiritual brothers and sisters.
- How has Christ’s love for you impacted your life since becoming a Christian?
- What steps will you take to make God’s glory your ultimate concern in your prayers?

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