



Rooted in Love

Kicking It Off

What is one thing you tried to "manufacture" in your life (a goal, a relationship, a version of yourself) that did not turn out the way you expected?

Read

Ephesians 3:14-21

Summary

We spend a lot of energy trying to manufacture a good life. Find the right spouse, the right job, the right family rhythm, the right hobbies, and we will finally grow into who we are supposed to be. The world tells us this story constantly, and the strange thing is, we mostly know it does not work. Marriages collapse under the weight of being asked to carry someone's entire existence. Careers shift, kids grow up, bodies wear out. Anything we build our lives on, other than Christ, eventually gives way.

Paul writes from prison and prays for the church to be rooted somewhere different. Not rooted in better circumstances, but rooted in the love of God that the Spirit pours into the inner person. He kneels when he prays, which is unusual for him, because what he is asking for is heavy. He does not ask first for love. He asks for power, the kind of strength that only the Spirit can give, so that Christ would take up permanent residence in our hearts.

Here is the picture. There is a flesh in us that keeps saying, "you can do this on your own, you can manufacture it, you can earn it." And there is an inner person, raised with Christ, that knows only His work will last. Those two voices live in tension. Most of us, if we are honest, let the flesh do most of the talking. Paul prays that the Spirit would strengthen the inner person enough to push back, so that when Monday comes, when the gossip starts, when the temptation lands, the inner person has the strength to say, "no, that seat in my heart belongs to Jesus."

The love we owe our neighbors, and the harder ones we owe our enemies, is not something we summon. It is the love the Father has been pouring into us. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We hand the bill to Jesus. And what surpasses knowing

is not less knowledge. It is knowing the love of Christ in a way that fills us with the fullness of God Himself.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Paul speaks of an inner person and an outer person at war in every believer. Where do you notice the flesh speaking the loudest in your own life right now, and what is the inner person trying to say back?
3. The sermon described a heart with a hierarchy, where things like family, career, or comfort often slip into the seat that belongs to Christ. Which of those "good things" do you sense has been climbing into the seat of authority in your heart?
4. Paul kneels before he asks for anything, and he asks first for power before he asks for love. What would change in your prayer life if you began with asking for the Spirit's strength rather than for the outcomes you want?
5. The love that surpasses knowledge is not less knowledge, it is knowing Christ in a way that produces real grace toward people. Who in your life right now is hard to love, and what would it look like to ask God for grace toward them rather than reasons to cut them off?
6. Paul writes from prison and still describes himself as rooted and grounded. What circumstance in your life are you waiting to change before you feel free to live out of the love of Christ?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"You absolutely can grow into the thing God has made you to be, but it cannot be manufactured."

"Your heart has a hierarchy, a prioritization of what matters. And the seat that God has made inside of your heart is that He was meant to live in you, to dwell in you."

"I forgive because He forgave me. I'm passing the bill. I'm paying it forward."

"The Spirit is just as powerful here in Renton, here in Seattle, as He was in Ephesus. The question is, then, why are we not seeing more people learning about the grace of God?"

Sermon Notes***Ephesians 3:14-21***

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 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—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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.

Outline

1. Strength in the Inner Person (Eph. 3:14-16)
 - a. Paul kneels because he is asking for something weighty; standing was the usual posture for Jewish prayer, so the kneeling is a tell
 - b. He addresses the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named," the source of every form of belonging (v. 15)
 - c. The first petition is not for love but for power, the Spirit's strengthening of the inner person (v. 16)
 - d. There is an inner person and an outer person at war in every believer; the flesh wants to manufacture a good life, the inner person knows only Christ's work will stand
 - e. The strengthening is measured by the riches of God's glory, not by our merit, and no amount of moral effort can produce what the gospel asks for
2. The Saints Rooted in Christ's Dwelling (Eph. 3:17-18)
 - a. Christ takes up settled residence in the heart, not as a visitor but as the inhabitant (v. 17a)
 - b. "Rooted and grounded in love" fuses two metaphors, the agricultural (roots) and the architectural (foundation), insisting love is both the soil we grow from and the stone we stand on
 - c. The heart has a hierarchy, and many things we love (family, career, nationality, ability) try to sit in the seat that belongs only to Christ
 - d. A life built on those things is built on sand; storms will come, and what is built on the rock alone will remain
 - e. Comprehension of the love of Christ is corporate, "with all the saints" (v. 18), not a private achievement
3. To Know What Surpasses Knowing (Eph. 3:19-21)
 - a. The love of Christ can be known and yet always exceeds knowledge; cold orthodoxy is not cured by less knowledge but by the kind of knowing only the Spirit produces (v. 19)
 - b. The result is staggering: that we may be filled with all the fullness of God Himself
 - c. The grace we extend is grace we have first received; we forgive because we have been forgiven, and we hand the bill to Jesus
 - d. The same resurrection power that raised Christ is presently at work in the inner person of every believer (vv. 20-21)
 - e. The church is one of the two arenas where God's glory is being put on display, for all generations forever

Notes

We are so thankful for those who have given their lives for the sake of our nation, men and women who served in a way that was costly and self-sacrificial. There is something about the price of a life that the Lord uses in mighty ways. And it points to a deeper reality. We bear a message of love to our neighbors, and the message is worth more than our comfort. This series is not a mental exercise where you learn more and walk away the same. The church is in the business of making disciples of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, not assembling an audience. Disciples go out. Disciples share what God is doing in them. And if you feel ill-equipped, the elders are here to equip you, but the equipping has a purpose. It sends you.

Paul is writing to Gentiles, people who were not raised in the covenants and the promises of Israel, and he is telling them they are partakers of the same blessing. Through Christ, the covenants of God are available to those who were not born into them. That news cannot be contained. It is not something to keep to yourself. And the early church proved this. They went out, and they grew in the middle of suffering and persecution. They believed the truth of the gospel was worth their lives. There is a truth that is worth giving your life for, and the world will tell you the opposite. The world says the greatest truth is your life and your perspective and your individual experience. The argument has a real limitation, though. If all truth is only what you can perceive on your own, then your truth is very small, because it is only about you.

The enemy wants you to believe the only path to fulfillment is to focus on yourself. The logic sounds reasonable: in order to have a good life, you must take care of yourself first. Self-love and self-care have their place, but they cannot be the spine of a life. Most of us already know this. Parents discover that the giving of themselves to their children is where the deepest sense of meaning shows up. Spouses discover the same in marriage. Workers find it in vocation. There is real common grace in giving yourself to family, career, country, and craft. None of those things, however, is eternal. Your family is not eternal. Your marriage is not eternal. Your career is not eternal. That does not make them worthless. It means they are pointing to something more, and the more is what the Lord is offering.

Paul prays for the church to be rooted and grounded in love, and he uses two images at once. One is agricultural, roots running deep into soil. The other is architectural, a foundation laid on bedrock. They did not have concrete in his day, so when builders found a large stone base, they built on top of it because what was anchored to the rock would not shift. My wife and I have been learning, slowly, how this works in a literal garden at our new house. Plants need so much more than dirt and sun. Soil testing, acidity, nitrogen, phosphorus, every variety has its own needs. Life is like

that too. We all keep trying to find the right ratio of conditions that would build us into something stable. The world tells us we can manufacture the right soil ourselves, the right family, the right spouse, the right career, the right body, the right hobbies, and then we will finally grow into who we are supposed to be. The honest truth is that you can grow into what God made you to be, but it cannot be manufactured.

Paul kneels. In Jewish prayer they stood, and sometimes they fell on their faces, but here Paul kneels because the weight of what he is asking demands the posture. And the first thing he asks for is not love. It is power. "That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being." The Spirit is the agent. The inner person is the target. The measure of supply is God's glory, not our merit. Paul speaks elsewhere of an inner person and an outer person at war in every believer. The outer self, the flesh, is wasting away. The inner self has been raised with Christ into new life. The two live in tension. The inner person knows by faith that only the work of Christ is good and only that work will stand. The flesh keeps arguing back. The flesh says, "You can do it. Your work is good. Your work is what will make your life good. Your work is what will build your kingdom."

We profess Jesus as Lord with our mouths, and then in the flesh we keep insisting we can handle it. Paul prays for strength to come in the form of power for the inner person, so that the inner person can take a stance against the flesh and tell it to be quiet. The new self needs the strength to live in submission to Christ, because submission to Christ is not weakness. It is the most powerful posture a person can take. It says, "I have been given the ability to stand firm against my own flesh, against the powers of this world, against the devil who keeps telling me I can manufacture a good life on my own." If you feel no tension between the flesh and the inner person, it is not because you have arrived. It is most likely because the inner person has been quiet for so long that the flesh has stopped meeting any resistance.

The Spirit's strengthening is not the end of the prayer. It clears the room for someone else to take up residence. "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." The word Paul uses for dwell means permanent residence, not a visit. Christ is not a guest in the believer. He is the inhabitant. And your heart has a hierarchy. There is a seat of authority, and that seat was made for Him. When other things take the seat (family, marriage, career, ability, nationality, comfort) the building goes up on shaky ground. You can love your family deeply, and you should, but no spouse is strong enough to bear the weight of your entire existence on her shoulders, and no child is strong enough to carry yours. That is a burden they did not ask for and cannot carry. When a marriage collapses under the weight, the common refrain is, "marrying you was the

biggest mistake of my life," and the deeper diagnosis is usually that the marriage was being asked to hold a load only Christ can hold.

When the Spirit makes room in your heart for Christ, your life stops being built on those other things. You can still have a family, a career, a culture, a calling. The difference is that Jesus is the foundation, and the rest is built on Him. Your roots run down into Christ and draw their nourishment from Him. The death of Christ becomes your spiritual food. No matter how dark a season gets, you know God loved you so much that He died for you, and that holds. Paul writes from prison and is still rooted. Cast out of his community, separated from family, he still says his life is in the Lord's hands and he will praise His name forever. The house built on sand will be washed away when the storms come, and the storms always come. The world has nothing to say to that except, "build your sand castle while you can." The church has something better to say. There is real estate that is not sand, and the joy of being a believer is knowing that what is built on the rock will remain forever.

Then the prayer reaches further. "To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Paul writes a paradox on purpose. The love of Christ can be known, and the love of Christ always exceeds what can be known. This is the answer to the church that is informed but not loving. The cure for cold orthodoxy is not less knowledge, it is the kind of knowing that exceeds knowledge, and only the Spirit can produce it. The result is staggering. The fullness of God Himself fills the believer. The believer does not become God, but the fullness that belongs to God is the fullness the church is being filled with. The ceiling of Christian experience is set very high.

This is why the sermon cannot end with you simply agreeing with the ideas. It is easy to nod at the truth that the inner person needs to be strengthened so the flesh can be told to be quiet. The question is what you do when Monday comes and the flesh says, "let's get drunk today," or "let's join in on the gossip," or "let's just cut that person out of our life because they are not worth our love." Will the inner person, strengthened by the Spirit, with Christ on the throne of your heart, stand up and answer? You hear gossip in the room, the flesh wants to join in because it feels like acceptance, and you know the right answer. Knowing the right answer is not the same as doing it. Fall on your knees with Paul and ask for the strength to stand. Ask the Spirit to clean out your heart. And when you stand, do not stand in legalism toward the gossipers. The love that surpasses knowledge will turn even your refusal to gossip into prayer for them. You will see them and remember that they are sinners loved by Jesus, just as you are.

The world cannot make sense of unconditional forgiveness because the world is built on a meritocracy. You forgive people who earn your forgiveness, you love people

who deserve your love, you cut off everyone else. There is a way that is better, and it is the grace of God. The grace did not start with you. You received it. And because you received it, you have the freedom to extend it. You forgive because He forgave you. You hand the bill to Jesus. When you should have gotten angry, when the world told you to cut someone off, something in you (the inner person strengthened by the Spirit, Christ seated on the throne of your heart, you in the will of the Father) says, "I am going to give them the grace of Christ, and it will rock them." This is what the early church did. The Spirit who carried Ephesus is the same Spirit at work in Renton, in Seattle, in us. The question is not whether He is strong enough. The question is whether we will ask, and whether we will let what fills us spill out toward the people God is putting in our path.

Blog

Paul wraps up the theological first-half of Ephesians not with a summary but on his knees in prayer. He has spent three chapters showing us what God has done for us in Christ. He has named the blessings, prayed for our sight, explained how the Spirit raised us from death, how the cross destroyed the dividing wall of hostility, how the church is the showcase of God's wisdom. And then, when he is finally ready to call us to walk worthy of all of it, he stops to pray.

This posture tells us something about what Paul is teaching. Standing was the standard posture for Jewish prayer, and Paul almost never describes himself kneeling. The weight of what he is about to ask is heavy enough that his posture reflects his words. He is asking for something the church cannot manufacture on its own.

He addresses the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (3:15). Every form of belonging in the universe takes its name from the Father, the source of fatherhood itself. We are asking, in other words, inside the family He invented.

What Paul asks for first is not love. It is power. "That according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being" (3:16). The measure of the supply is set by the riches of God's glory, not by the size of our need. Paul piles up the language of strength, asking for the kind of strength only God can give, delivered by the Spirit to the deepest part of who we are.

Many of us get the order wrong here. We assume the Christian life works like a self-improvement project. We learn what love looks like, we resolve to do better, we try harder, and we wonder why we run out. But the trouble runs deeper than effort. The trouble is that our reasons for withholding love are usually good ones. When I have

wanted to give up on someone, the case was airtight. They hurt me. They let me down again. They made me feel less than. Cutting them out was the sensible thing to do, and I could have defended it to anyone. There is a logic to walking away, and most of the time the logic is correct.

That correct logic is exactly what the gospel contends with. It made sense to hate our enemies. It made sense for God to cut His losses with us. Instead He loved us while we were still sinners, while we were His enemies, against every reason He had to do otherwise. So Paul does not pray for the Ephesians to try harder, and he does not pray for them to find better reasons. He prays for the Spirit to strengthen them in the inner person, because everything that follows happens there. The inner person is where Christ meets us, where He works, where He dwells. If that place is not fortified by God, no amount of moral effort and no amount of good reasoning will produce what the gospel calls for.

The strengthening is for a specific purpose. "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (v17). The word for "dwell" is not the word for a temporary stay. It is the word for permanent residence. Christ is not a guest in the heart of the believer, He is the inhabitant. The Spirit's work on the inner person is not the end of the prayer. The Spirit fortifies the room so that the Son takes up His settled home in it. The Father sends, the Spirit prepares, the Son dwells.

The hinge of the prayer is the next line. "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" (3:17-19). Paul fuses two metaphors. The first is agricultural. The roots of a tree go down into soil and hold it in place against wind and storm. The second is architectural. The foundation is laid into bedrock, and the building rises on it. Trees and buildings do not usually share an image. Paul fuses them on purpose. Love is both the soil we grow from and the stone we stand on.

Love is not the achievement of the mature Christian. Love is the medium the mature Christian grows in. We do not produce love by an act of will, and we do not arrive at it by working out the math. We are rooted in a love already given. The gardener does not manufacture the sun. The wall does not pour its own footing. The Christian who is finally able to love a person who has earned none of it is not a Christian who summoned more affection from her own reserves. They are a Christian whose roots have gone deeper into a love the Father has been supplying all along.

The comprehension Paul prays for is corporate. "With all the saints" is not a decorative phrase. The dimensions of Christ's love are too large for any individual to grasp. Paul names a magnitude without naming an object, because the love is too big to

be reduced to a slogan. The church, together, takes hold of what no one of us could hold alone. That is one of the reasons we are not Christians in isolation. We are saints comprehending with all the saints.

Then Paul asks that we would "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (3:19). The paradox is intentional. The love can be known, and the love always exceeds what can be known. The believer who thinks she has mapped the love of Christ has not yet begun. This is the answer to the church that is informed but not loving. The cure for cold orthodoxy is not less knowledge. It is the kind of knowing that exceeds knowledge, the kind only the Spirit can produce. We have all met Christians who know the doctrines but do not love the neighbor. The diagnosis is not too much theology. The diagnosis is too little of the knowing Paul prays for here, the knowing that comes through faith and ends in fullness.

"That you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19). Paul's language reaches its ceiling. The same God who in 1:23 fills all in all now fills His people. We are not asked to imitate God from a distance. We are asked to be filled with His own fullness, supplied by His own Spirit, on the basis of His own Son's indwelling. Counterfeit love runs dry because it draws from a finite supply. It can only love as far as the reasons reach, and the reasons always run out. The love we owe our neighbors and our enemies draws from the fullness of God Himself.

This is why the love that stays inside the bounds of what makes sense will always collapse on itself. It starts with our energy, our resolve, our resources. It runs on the kindness we can summon and the case we can make. Paul prays for something different. He prays for a love that is given before it is shown, for a strengthening that precedes the action, for a Christ who dwells before He sends. The church that loves the world well is not the church that tries hardest, it is the church that asks.

None of this means we are called to be doormats. Even Jesus did not let people treat Him as one. But what Jesus always does is leave room. He leaves room for forgiveness. He leaves the door open. The love Paul prays for does not require us to pretend the wounds did not happen. It frees us to say, yes, I have been hurt, and by the grace of God I leave the door open anyway.

Paul closes the prayer with a doxology that catches the same fire. "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" (3:20-21). Paul piles up the language of excess because ordinary speech cannot carry the weight of what he is invoking. The God being asked is the God who does more than the asking. And the power Paul has been praying for is not theoretical or future. It is already at work within us, right now.

The doxology has two arenas, the church and Jesus. The local congregation is not a side stage. It is one of the two places where the eternal glory of God is being put on display. Every Sunday gathering, every act of love that exceeds what we thought we had in us, every reconciliation that should not have been possible, is a flash of that glory in the only arena history has been given. The church matters because the glory of God matters, and the glory of God has chosen the church as one of its dwellings.

This prayer asks something of us this week. It asks us to stop manufacturing. It asks us to stop equating Christian maturity with having the right answers about love, and to stop trusting the logic that tells us who is worth our love and who is not. It asks us to bow our knees and ask the Father to strengthen us by His Spirit in the inner person, so that Christ would dwell, so that we would be rooted, so that we would know what surpasses knowing. The work in the garden does not produce sunlight, it positions the plant to receive it. The work in our hearts is the same. We do not summon affection for the difficult people in our lives, and we do not reason our way into it. We bow our knees with Paul and we ask the Father to send His power. The love that will spill from us toward the world is the love that first filled us with His fullness. Anything less is counterfeit.

The Spirit is already at work within us, and the One who hears this prayer is able to do far more than we know to ask. Bow your knees with Paul this week. Ask Him.