

David Carter

Summer of Seeking / Prayer / Ephesians 3:14–21

I was talking to a pastor friend of mine, a few years ago, reflecting on the uniqueness of being a pastor, and he put something perfectly into words that I had felt for years: He said pastoring is uniquely hard because, unlike most jobs, you don't get to go home and see what you built or a completed task.

If you're a carpenter, you can work all day and at the end of the day you can see what your hands have built, and it's satisfying. You can be a web designer or a graphic artist and give yourself over to a project, and look back and see the finished work.

Pastoring is uniquely challenging because you labour emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually — and the fruit of your labour isn't always so apparent. You give yourself wholly to preaching God's Word, and some Sundays you wonder, did that make any difference? You invest in people's lives, and sometimes you wonder, are we making any progress?

Yet I think that's partly by design. I think the Lord wants us fully aware that if we're going to have any success in ministry, if we're going to make any impact on anyone, it won't be because of our human effort — it will only be by the power of His Spirit.

That's what keeps a pastor like me on my knees. Praying, Lord, if I'm going to say anything of any worth this Sunday, it has to be by Your Spirit. And if I'm going to have any impact on anyone, it's only because You're working through me. He alone gets the glory — not me, not anyone else.

That's why I think the fuel of pastoral ministry is prayer.

See, I thought we would end our Summer series with me sharing my heart with you — sharing what it is I pray for you. And I don't think it's any kind of unique prayer. It's a biblical prayer. It's the prayer of Paul for a church that he loved — a prayer I'd suspect of any faithful pastor.

What is my prayer for you? Simply this: My prayer for you is that you would be strengthened by the Spirit, rooted in Christ's love, and place your hope in the one who does far more than you could ask or think.

It's a prayer that finds its roots in our passage this morning.

[Ephesians 3:14-21.](#)

I so identify with Paul's prayer here, I feel the burden for it, my heart beats for it every time I read it.

But this prayer wasn't written in isolation. Paul starts out in verse 14, he says for this reason I bow my knees before the Father... for this reason.

We have to ask, for what reason?

There is something that is driving Paul to his knees as a man with a pastoral heart. And we need to see what it is that is driving him to his knees. Back up to the previous passage and we see a bit about what he's talking about.

Ephesians 3:7-10 ESV

⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

What's driving Paul to his knees? It's his calling to preach the gospel. He has been made, that is called to be a minister of the gospel, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, to share the unsearchable riches of Christ, he longs to bring this light to everyone, everyone that he preaches and teaches to the plan of the mystery of God.

Simply put Paul wants to be used by God to reach the Gentiles and everyone he meets with the gospel, and not just the gospel, but he wants to be used to make clear the plan, the purposes, and the unsearchable riches of Christ.

I think that's the hope, the prayer of every pastor, that every preacher longs for.

My prayer, my hope every time I share God's Word is that God would use it, that He would use me to make clear the gospel, that you would better understand God's plan and purpose, that you would see the unsearchable riches that are in Christ Jesus.

but that's not all, do you see what Paul says in verse 10? ***That through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities, in heavenly places.***

The purpose of ministry isn't for information alone, it isn't just for you to grow, but Paul is saying that I want the church to take what I've shared with them and be used to reach the world! To reach authorities, to proclaim the truth of God to even the authorities in heavenly places.

This is why we do what we do, why we preach, why we proclaim, and why we send you back out... This is why we gather, why we grow, why give, and why you go!

My hope for this church, for this ministry is that you come in here and you come to a life changing understanding of the truth of Christ and then you're sent back out into the world to proclaim to a lost world what God has revealed in His Word.

That's what Paul wants to see in the church of Ephesus, it's what I want to see here at Bramalea.

But here's what he knows... he can't do it alone. He feels so inadequate to do this in his own power and his own strength, he says ***though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given me.***

This isn't just about information, it's about transformation.

Paul can share the gospel, I can share the gospel, you can share the gospel, but we cannot make that gospel take root in your heart and transform your life.

I can tell you that God so loved you that He sent His son to restore the broken relationship with have with Him. That because our sin has separated us from God, God sent His Son Jesus here to reconcile you unto Himself. That Jesus died for your sin, but that God raised Him from the dead that by faith we might be forgiven and have new life in Jesus' name.

I can tell you that, but I cannot make you believe it, I cannot cause you to be so impacted by that truth that you go out and tell the world.

And so that's why we come to verse 14 and Paul says "for this reason." Because I don't have the power to make the gospel take root in your life, "I bow my knees before the Father."

And that might sound like a normal thing to do, to bow in prayer, but that's not how people usually prayed in Paul's day, usually they prayed standing, but Paul is bowing to show humility.

It is this humble dependence upon God in heaven, Lord I can't do this alone, I don't have the ability, I don't have the strength, the wisdom, the power, the intelligence.

I need you, I am bowing in humble dependence. It's why he says in verse 16. He is asking he says ***according to the riches of His glory.***

It's according to Your riches, God that I am asking you to answer this prayer, because my resources are limited, but Yours are unlimited.

According to Your riches, not out of Your riches. Like, if a billionaire told you they were going to give you some money out of their riches, that would be true no matter how much they gave you... they could give you a \$100 out of their riches.

But if he says I'm going to give you money in accordance with my riches, meaning according to how much I have to give, it's a number that matches his giving power, do you see?

And we want God to answer this prayer according to His riches not mine, my resources are limited, but I'm asking for this message to take root, I'm asking you to send these people out to be witness according to Your riches.

I so identify with Paul's prayer here for the people of the church in Ephesus, it's my prayer for you.

Let me share what my desire is for you, maybe this may be your prayer for someone you love.

My prayer for you is that you would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

STRENGTHENED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

My prayer echoes Paul's here starting in verse 16.

Ephesians 3:16–17 ESV

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...

Paul is praying for the strength of his people. And I bet that's a prayer we've prayed hundreds of times, Lord please give me strength. We've prayed that for ourselves, but I'm sure we've prayed that for other people.

Notice Paul is praying for a specific kind of strength, that they would be strengthened with power, through the Holy Spirit.

That you would be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's a divine kind of power, a divine kind of strength.

And notice where he's praying for this strength, he says in your inner being. It's so interesting isn't it?

You know, so often you might hear people talk about the strength within. They might say, "hey look within yourself and find the strength within," that's not what Paul is praying here.

He's saying that God has placed within us a strength you can't find in this world, a strength that we don't have on our own. God has placed within us His divine power, His Holy Spirit.

When you place your faith in Jesus, when you first receive salvation, the gift you receive is the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is none other than the fullness of God's presence.

In fact, Paul is praying a trinitarian prayer here, look closely at verse 16 and 17. Notice he is praying for the strength of the Spirit within us, that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith.

Those aren't two different prayers, they are one in the same. If the Holy Spirit is in your inner being, Christ dwells in your heart. And then in verse 19 at the end, Paul's prayer is that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Again, that is the result of us being strengthened by the Holy Spirit, if you have the Holy Spirit in your inner being, you have Christ dwelling in your heart and you are filled with all the fullness of God.

Think about that for a second, the kind of strength that is in you right now. If you are a follower of Jesus, if you have placed your faith and trust in Christ, you have the very presence of God, His divine power living in you.

Most of us don't even know, we don't even realize the strength that is within us. Not because we possess some inherent strength of humanity, no, humanity is weak and limited. But because we have been gifted the power of the Holy Spirit.

The same power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. Greater is He who is in you, then He who is in the world.

I mean, imagine for a moment buying a brand new, top of the line car, with all the updated technology. You name it, it has the ability to self drive, to self park, fully capable wifi, speed controls, sensors all around, music on demand with just the sound of your voice, you name it, it's got it, fully functional.

You've got this amazing feat of technology, but you never use it. You get in the car and simply drive back and forth to work, never using the amazing top of the line car to it's fullest or even half it's capacity. Not because you don't want to use it, but you don't even know how or what it's capable of.

I think that's how many of us live in the power of the Holy Spirit, we walk in the Spirit, without being aware of the power of the Spirit, without being aware of the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is praying, "oh that you would know, and walk and live and be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit" - because we need Him. We need His presence, we need His divine power.

So often we face problems in life that this world doesn't have answers to. So often we face obstacles we don't have the strength to overcome on our own. So often we stumble into conflict that we don't have the power to navigate or get over.

So often we feel the crushing weight of the world on our shoulders and if we don't have access to a power greater than ourselves, we can crumble under the weight of life.

It's why Paul prays that you would be strengthened in your inner being, because while there is chaos, and conflict and trials and pain going on around us, there is a peace, a strength, a power within us, holding us together, that we can't fully explain.

But it's also this divine calling that's been placed on all of our lives. Think about the calling of the Christian life... to grow in our understanding of the mysteries of God's will, to grow in His Word and His will, to grow in holiness and righteousness and Christlikeness.

We can't do that in our own strength, if we are going to understand God's divine will, we need His divine power, if we are going to grow to be more like Christ in His holiness and righteousness, we need Christ's presence living in us, we need the divine power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

We need His strength for our mission.

We've been sent out into the world, to be vessels of God Word, of His will and gospel and we cannot reach this world in our own strength, in our own power. People cannot come to saving faith because we convince them or persuade them, we need the power the strength of the Holy Spirit working through us and working in their hearts, convicting the world of sin and righteousness.

And as we go, we face battles of spiritual warfare, we fight in a spiritual war and we need spiritual strength.

Oh how we need to be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in our inner being and so I pray for you, I pray that you would know the power of the Holy Spirit, live that power, walk in His power, that you would be strengthened.

But Paul's prayer doesn't stop there, it's what the power of the Holy Spirit produces in their lives.

Paul's prayer isn't just that these believers would be strengthened by the Spirit, but that they would be rooted and grounded in Christ's love.

ROOTED AND GROUNDED

We see that in verses 17-19.

Ephesians 3:17–19 ESV

¹⁷ ... 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,

My prayer for you church, for each of you is that you would be rooted and grounded in Christ's love.

What does that mean, rooted and grounded? Well Paul is using two different kinds of metaphors here. He's using an agricultural metaphor of a tree. For a tree to grow and bear fruit, it derives its life from deep running roots. The taller and stronger the tree is the deeper the roots run.

Grounded is about architecture, and building a strong building. You can build a building as tall and wide and beautiful as you want, but that building is only as strong as the foundation that it is built upon.

So you can begin to see what this prayer is about. My prayer Lord is that your people, this church would be rooted in the love of Christ, that His love wouldn't just stay on the surface but that the roots of their lives would run deep, that it would be the very source of life they build their life upon, that Your love would bear fruit in their life, the fruit of love joy peace patience and kindness and gentleness of faithfulness and self-control.

And not just that their roots would run deep in Christ's love but that they would build their lives upon it, that the love of Christ would be the very foundation of their lives, strong enough to hold them no matter what may come their way, strong enough that nothing shall separate them from your love in Christ.

How does this happen? Well it can only happen if we know the love of Christ.

Look what Paul is praying there in verse 18 and 19 again, he prays that you and I would rooted and grounded in love...

Ephesians 3:18–19 ESV

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.

Notice the tension in that verse? He prays that we may know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.. think about that for a second. How can we know something, better yet how can we have knowledge about something, that surpasses knowledge?

How can you answer that? Well, because there is a knowing that doesn't come from information alone. There is a knowing that only comes by experiencing something.

And that's what Paul is getting at here, he isn't praying that you and I, that this church, would just grow in intellectual knowledge of Christ's love, but my prayer is that you would understand the breadth, the length, the height, the depth of Christ's love because you experience it every day.

Maybe the best way to explain it is thinking about the Grand Canyon. The only way you can truly understand how utterly massive the Grand Canyon is, is if you've been there, you've seen it for yourself.

Someone could tell you how massive it is, you could see pictures of it, you could even have someone give you comparisons about the size of it, but the only way to truly understand how massive the Grand Canyon is, you've got to go there and see it for yourself, you have to experience it.

That's Paul's prayer here and that's my prayer for you church... that your life would be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, not because you've read about it, not because you've heard about or sang songs about it, but because you live and walk in the life changing love of Christ every day.

See, the danger is that we limit Christianity to understanding core doctrines, we limit it simply to coming to church on Sunday, we limit it to singing songs, or emotions that we feel in a moment. We think that the love of Christ is simply something we sing about, talk about, write papers about, or write sermons about.

But the question isn't can you explain the love of Christ, but do you know it because you live in it, that your life is rooted in it, it's the very source of life, so much so that your whole life is grounded in it, you've built the very foundations of your life on the love of Christ.

I'm convinced that most of the struggles of the Christian life come down to this — a misunderstanding, a lack of knowledge, of Christ's love for us.

Why do we struggle with sin? In that moment of temptation, you're not choosing between right and wrong in the abstract — you're choosing between two loves. What sin is offering you, and what Christ has already given you. And too often the lesser love wins, because in that moment, it feels more real to you than Christ's love.

Why do we struggle with fear, with anxiety over life, why do we worry so much about tomorrow? Because we don't fully understand the love of Christ. If we did, we would trust Him. We would trust His love. Knowing how much He loves us, we would trust His goodness, His faithfulness. We struggle to trust because we don't fully understand His love.

Why do we struggle to love one another? Because we don't feel secure in Christ's love, and when you don't know how secure you are in Christ's love, you treat other people's love as something you have to earn, manage, guard.

You keep score. You withhold grace because. But when you know — really know — that you are loved without condition, you have nothing left to protect.

We love, because He first loved us.

Church my prayer for you is that you be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, rooted and grounded in Christ's love.

My prayer for you is that you would place your hope in the one who is able to do far more than we could ask or think.

HOPE

Paul ends this section in worship, words I'm sure you've heard us use to end some of our services here.

Ephesians 3:20–21 **ESV**

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.

These are monumental prayers that Paul has here, not simple requests, but monumental prayers.

He is praying for God to move in powerful ways, life changing, life transforming ways in the hearts and lives of God's people.

But Paul's confidence is in the one who is able... I mean notice he closes, the same place he starts. Looking to the God who has unlimited resources, unlimited power. Remember?

He started bowing in prayer, coming in humble dependence, praying that God would pour out on His people according to His riches, the riches of His glory.

Paul's ending with his eyes set in worship on that same reality.

To the one who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.

He's coming full circle in worship, crying out, "Lord you are able." And often that's what we know when we come to Him in prayer, for monumental things. God we're coming because You're able and we are not. We're coming because You have the resources, and we don't. You have the power, the wisdom, the might, the strength, the authority, and we don't.

But we struggle to understand because He is able to do all that we ask, but sometimes He doesn't. We struggle with that don't we? Like often my prayer when I come to the Lord and I'm praying for something monumental is Lord I know you are able, but my prayer is that You are willing.

That's the key, it's the key that if you've been listening over these weeks that we've been talking about prayer, that keeps coming up. That this calling to pray and trust and is not a call for a blank check from the Lord that we can get whatever we ask, but the question isn't about God's ability, but His will.

And that's the key part of understanding this thought about God being able to do far more abundantly than we could ask or think, like He is able to do far more abundantly not just because of His power, but of His wisdom.

He can see, what we can't see, He knows what we don't know. Sometimes what we're asking is harmful, dangerous, disastrous. Sometimes what we're asking is sinful, selfish.

Far more abundantly sometimes means that God's not answering the prayer that we want, He's answering the prayer we need, even though we can't see we need it, even though we don't know we need it.

But I'm also convinced that more times than we might think, the problem isn't that our prayers are too big, the problem is our prayers are too small, too narrow, too self-focused.

Think about what fills most of our prayer time. "Help me get through this day." "Help this meeting go well." "Give me a good report at the doctor." And listen — those aren't wrong prayers. Bring Him your day, your health, all of it. He cares about the details of your life.

But if that's the ceiling of your prayer life, you have to ask — is that "far more abundantly than we could ask or think"?

What if we actually believed this verse? What if we prayed like the God we're praying to is able to do far more than we could ask or think?

What would it look like to pray not just for your own comfort, but for revival in your own home? Not just "help my kids have a good day," but "Lord, raise up a generation in this church who will love you more than we ever have." Not just "give me peace at work," but "Lord, use me to bring the gospel into that workplace." Not just "help our church," but "Lord, do something in Brampton that only You could get the glory for."

Maybe that's the real application of "far more abundantly." It's not just a promise for when we're desperate and asking for something monumental — it's an invitation.

An invitation to stop praying safe, small, self-focused prayers, and start praying prayers big enough that only God could be the one who gets the glory when they're answered.

That's why Paul ends this the way he does, ***"to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations..."***

That's the key to praying to the God who is able to do far more abundantly than we could ask or think, its praying prayers that bring Him glory and not us.

Put your hope this morning in the God who is able to do far more abundantly than we could ask or think.

Church family, this is my prayer for you, this is the work I long to see God do in your lives.

That you'd be strengthened by the Spirit. That you'd be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. That you'd place your hope in the God who does far more than you could ever ask or think.

But here's what I want to leave you with as we close: That this doesn't just stay *my* prayer for you. That it would become *your* prayer too. That you wouldn't just pray this for yourself, but that this would be how you pray for each other, how you pray for those you love.

Like, that's what this whole Summer series has been about, "Lord teach us to pray." Looking at God's Word and learning what it looks like to pray.

Not just learning what prayer is, not just learning to pray boldly, not just learning to pray the Word, not just what happens when we pray together, not just resting in the truth that Jesus Himself is praying for you even now — it's been all of that, building to this: learning to pray this kind of prayer over the people you love.

So pray it. Pray it over your spouse tonight. Pray it over your kids. Pray it over that friend who doesn't know Jesus yet, that coworker, that person sitting next to you right now.

Strengthened by the Spirit. Rooted in His love. Hope in the God who does far more.

Let's pray it together right now.