

Imagine God's love as the ocean and you standing on the shore with cup in hand. The cup is like our capacity to receive God's love. It can't come close to containing the ocean, but we can dip our cup into the ocean so that we are filled to overflowing with God's love. It is our choice to be filled or walk away with an empty cup. So be filled to the full with God's love.

Ephesians 3:20-21 NLT - 20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. 21 Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen

You've probably heard verse 20 quoted without knowing the context in which it was written. But now that you know Paul's prayer describe what you believe God's mighty power within us is doing and what God might accomplish through that work.

WRAP-UP

In his Roman imprisonment Paul was separated from the believers he loved. And through his letter to the church at Ephesus he shared his deepest longing for them- With God's power and Christ resident in their hearts, those who put their faith in Jesus should experience God's unfathomable love. This is what we should also long for and pray for our fellow believers. That they would experience God's love in such a way that they live fully alive in Christ.

MEMORY VERSE.

May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. -Ephesians 3:19 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN) Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life

Challenge.- Take time this week to drink deeply from the well of God's love. Spend time in His presence receiving the boundless, unconditional love of the Father.

“A Prayer for the Church” **Prison Letters- #3**

INTRODUCTION

From his prison in Rome, Paul poured out his heart for his dear friends and fellow believers in Ephesus. Paul had lived in Ephesus for years as he began this church and, in this letter, we hear how deeply he cared for them. In chapter 3 verses 14-21 he inserts a prayer for the church. If you have ever been separated from those you love, you can relate to this letter. Paul wants the best for these believers. He longs for God's goodness and love to be fully realized and received by the Ephesian church. And this should be our hope for all believers, but especially for those in our own church family. This is a prayer we can pray for one another just as Paul prayed for Ephesus.

Ice Breaker

Has there been a time you were separated from your family for a lengthy period? What were your greatest concerns while you were away?

Key Passage

Ephesians 3:14-21 NLT - 14 When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, 15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. 16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. 20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. 21 Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Recognizing Who God Is

Paul's prayer begins by recognizing who he prays to.

Ephesians 3:14-21 NLT - 14 When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, 15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. 16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.

How does Paul refer to God, and what qualities does he attribute to Him? What part does the Holy Spirit play in Paul's request?

At times we can fall into a routine with our prayers. When that happens, we tend to forget the incredible honor it is to come into the presence of the creator of the universe. As a reminder of the power of the one we address in prayer, read through the description below written by John in the book of Revelation, when he saw God on His throne in heaven, and let's recognize that this is the one we come before when we pray.

Revelation 4:2-3, 5 NLT - 2 And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. 3 The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones--like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. ... 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God.

How does Paul's posture in verse 14 demonstrate that his prayers brought him into the presence of God? How do you think that recognizing God's power impacts the way we pray? What are some ways to begin our prayers that demonstrate our deep reverence and awe for God?

2. With Christ in our Hearts

After the Father has empowered us through His Holy Spirit, Christ the Son now takes residence in our hearts. This is the trinity at work to do God's perfect will in His people.

Ephesians 3:17 - 18 NLT - 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

Paul says that Christ takes residence in us "as we trust in Him." The word for trust here is *pistis* and means assurance, belief or faith. It is the same word used in *Ephesians 2:8 -For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--*. When we place our faith in Jesus, we now have Him always present with us.

Paul didn't say our roots grow deep in our knowledge of God's word or our obedience to God's law, where does Paul say that our roots grow? What is the difference between being rooted in what we do versus what God does for us?

Apart from God, our experience with love has limitations. Human love is imperfect. But God's *Agape* love is unlike any other kind of love. In verse 18 Paul tries to convey the unbounded and unconditional love God has for us. He wants us to comprehend (*katalambanō*) which means to lay hold of and make it your own. We don't earn it, we can't increase it by what we do, neither can we lose it by what we do. God loves us – period. This is God's gift to you – lay hold of it, embrace it.

3. You've Got to Experience it

Ephesians 3:19 NLT - 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Poor Paul struggles with the limitations of our humanity. He desperately wanted the Ephesians to receive and embrace every bit of God's love, but he knows that we simply don't have the capacity to do so. As he says, "it is too great to fully understand." Paul longs for believers to experience the love of Christ in such a way that we are completely full of life and power from God. To be fully alive.