

REFLECTION GUIDE

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.

Big Idea: Paul, as he's writing to the Ephesians, is praying that they (and us) would be strengthened in the depths of their inner being by the power of God's Holy Spirit. He desires that they would have a deeper sense of hope and expectancy for God to do far beyond anything that they could ask or think, for His glory and their joy. This year our prayer should be the same: that we as God's people might lean more on God's power and less on our strategies.

Expectancy for greater Communion with God

Paul's prayer is that God's people would experience and sense the love, presence, and glory of God in their lives. He wants God's people to have a greater awareness of God's love for them, His joy, His peace, and His mission that He equips them for.

This kind of communion with God comes from being, as verse 17 states, "rooted and grounded in love". Picture the roots of a tree planted in the James River. Imagine how deep those roots must be in order to support the pressure that the tree withstands. The roots serve as the foundation for the tree to be able to maintain strength and longevity.

This isn't just a prayer for the Paul's or Jonathan Edward's and George Whitfield's of the world who spoke of amazing experiences of their communion with God. (See their own words at the end) This prayer is for us, even as inferior and weak as we feel compared to these men.

What pressure feels overwhelming right now? Why?

What has your feeling of being overwhelmed taught you about yourself?

Have you been "grounded" in something besides God's love? What specifically?

Which are you having a hard time believing: God's willingness or ability? Why?

God's ABILITY to do what we ask.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think..."

Paul's intention in this prayer is to eliminate our doubt by replace our doubts with high thoughts about who God is and what He has done. "Now to Him who is able..." is said from the overflow of Paul's heart. This is the expression of his hope and confidence in God.

We have asked great things in our time; we remember when it seemed the greatest conceivable thing for us to say, "Father, forgive me." We asked a large thing when we requested the pardon of

all our sins, and an equally great thing when we prayed to be cleansed in spirit. When we felt our hearts hard, and our natures depraved, it seemed almost too great a blessing to expect the heart of stone to be turned to a heart of flesh! We did, however, cry for gracious renewal, and the prayer was heard! Full many a time since then, in deep distress we have sought the Lord for great deliverances; in abject need we have sought great supplies, and in terrible dilemmas we have asked for great guidance—and we have received all these again and again! (Spurgeon)

“Far more abundantly”

Some “gospel sauce” for you: This word that Paul uses - he makes up. Its a superlative on steroids. God can do over and above, more than necessary, exhaustless.

“If Paul were the pastor of this church, I think that every time he lifted his eyes to heaven he would see God saying, “I can do more in this church than you have yet asked or thought.” And so Pastor Paul would ask for power and then launch into a new venture of obedience. And then he would look up, and God would say, “I can do MORE!” (Bryan Chappell)

What are you hesitant to ask God for? What leads you to think He is unable?

What, implicitly, do you feel that God is unable to handle in your life?

(deep hurt in your past, anxiety, anger, hidden sin)

What does the gospel of God’s abundant grace teach you about God’s power?

God’s WILLINGNESS to do what we ask.

“according to the power at work within us...”

How can we know that God is willing to do far more than we can ask or think? How can we know that God is willing to strengthen us and change us? Because God’s power **is already at work in us**. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us already. (Ephesians 2) It is easy for us to look at ourselves and the Christians around us and conclude that God’s power must not really be at work. Its easy to conclude that God’s people are a mess. But God’s power is at work. Although imperceivable at times, it is at work in us.

**What in your life is leading you to believe that God’s power is NOT already working in you?
Are you struggling to believe in God’s power for an area in your life because of another believer’s failure?**

Why does God do this?

*“To him be GLORY in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever.
Amen.”*

Praise becomes the language of our heart as we are strengthened by the power of God, rooted and grounded in the love of Christ and experiencing real communion with God.

God’s working in our lives and in response to our prayers is for HIS glory...not ours. Does this free to ask and believe for more?

What audacious thing can you ask God to do in your life based on His ability and willingness?

George Whitefield In one of his journals he said, "... the freeness and riches of God's everlasting love broke in with such light and power upon my soul, that I was often awed into silence and could not speak!" He said, "Stop it, God. I have to get my rest. The love. It's too much love. My being feels like it's groaning under something insupportable. I had to ask him to stay his hand."

Daniel Steele was a British teacher of philosophy and in a letter to a friend he wrote:
"Almost every week, and sometimes every day, the pressure of His great love comes down upon my heart in such measure as to make my brain throb and my whole being, soul and body, groan beneath the strain of the almost insupportable plethora of joy. He has unlocked every apartment of my being, and filled and flooded them all with the light of His radiant presence. [...] The spot before untouched has been reached, and all its flintiness has melted in the presence of that universal solvent, 'Love divine, all loves excelling.' ... Jesus, the One altogether lovely ..."

Spurgeon preached a whole sermon on experiencing God's love from the prodigal Son on the phrase "and kissed him".

At one point in the sermon, he says, "Some of us know at times what it is to be almost too happy to live! The love of God has been so overpoweringly experienced by us on some occasions, that we have almost had to ask for a stay of the delight because we could not endure any more. If the glory had not been veiled a little, we should have died of excess of rapture, or happiness."

Jonathan Edwards, "Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception ... which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects."