

I Pray To God (Part 4) – Eph 3:14-21

➤ Let's turn in our Bibles to Eph 3:14-21. This is the 4th message in this series on prayer, with one more to follow next week. And I trust that God is using it in your life like he is mine. It's been good.

[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. (ESV)

The first prayer request we found, from v14, is our unity. I pray to God . . .

For our heart-felt unity (v14)

Second, was I pray to God . . .

That you pray fervently (v14)

On your knees and from your heart. Third . . .

That you trust his sovereignty (v15)

Having determined and defined every family, physical *and* spiritual, we can trust him.

4th, was I pray to God . . .

For your spiritual strength (v16)

5th . . .

That you are influenced by Jesus more and more (v17a)

And 6th . . .

That you understand the love of Christ (v17b-18)

Even though it's infinite, vast, and measureless.

➤ That brings us to v19 and two more prayers. Starting with this: I pray to God . . .

That you experience the love of Christ (v19a)

Not just understand it, as we found in v18, but experience it. Like a husband and wife experience marital love. They don't just know about it, they *know* it. They experience it. Personally. Intimately. Ongoingly.

V18. I pray, Paul says, that you *may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth* [that's the understand part], [19] *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge*. That's the experience part.

Talk about a big prayer. A tall order. He wants us to understand something that's infinite – with all its breadth, length, height, and depth – and know something that's unknowable. Something that *surpasses knowledge*. Something beyond our *ability* to know.

It would be like a teacher telling his students to count all the stars in the universe, and memorize their names while they're at it. That's impossible. It surpasses knowledge.

Or how about challenging a kid to explain the love between a husband and wife who have been married 50 years? Even poets fail at that. There are just too many facets. Too much irrationality when it comes to the attraction and commitment. Too many unexplainable connections. The love of long-term marriages surpasses knowledge.

How much more the love of Christ? Something infinite. Something that's always existed and always will. Something exceeding the number of stars that God actually knows and names. Not the love of Christ. It actually exceeds knowledge. Surpasses it.

➤ Which means the point of Paul's prayer here is that we would *experience* it. That we would know it *that* way. And *that* only happens, when we *feel* it and *treasure* it.

When I first met Becky, I knew she was special because she made me feel like no other person I'd ever met. I remember telling my brother. We were on the phone, I was pacing the floor in my dorm room, and he asked me how I knew she was the one. He hadn't met her; he hadn't seen her; he just knew I was head over heels about her. And without even thinking, I said "she makes me feel like no other girl I've ever met."

That's the kind of knowing *Paul* is getting at.

- **A love that's felt.** I pray to God that you experience the love of Christ at the level of your feelings. At the emotional level instead of just the mental level. Here (**heart**), instead of just here (**head**). In the *core* of your being.

You may not be able to fully *understand* the love of Christ, surpassing the limits of our knowledge as it does, but you sure can *feel* it. You sure do know it when you have it.

I pray to God for that. In all of us. Individually *and* collectively. That we would experience the love of Christ at the level of our emotions. That we would experience a love that's felt.

And, treasured. I pray to God that you experience . . .

- **A love that's treasured.** Treasured like Gollum treasured the ring. Linus treasured his blanket. Pooh his honey. You, your sleep.

Here again, long marriages *help* us. The older I get, the more I *treasure* the love Becky and I share, as well as *feel* it. So much so, I can't even imagine how much we'll treasure it 20 years from now.

But when we were young, I took it for granted. I did. I had no idea how *fragile* our love could be. How easily lost or squandered it is. How precious it would be after going through heart-rending difficulties. How much we would treasure our sweet companionship.

Same for Jesus. The longer you walk with him, the more you'll treasure him; and treasure his love. The more valleys you experience together, the more you'll cling to his faithfulness. The more mistakes you make the more you'll cherish his mercy. And passionate fidelity. And constant companionship.

I pray to God that you experience a love like that. A love that's felt and a love that's treasured. So much so that you never take it for granted, and never give it up. (**Summary**)

➤ Sometimes people ask me how they can be sure they're saved. And while I'm careful to emphasize the *truth* of God's Word, *knowing* his love never fails, I also speak of *feeling* it. We can't *always* depend on our feelings or emotions, but they're certainly a part of it. A part of our assurance. And a vital part at that.

Because a cerebral Christianity alone, is no Christianity at all. Where it's all fact and no feeling. Where you know Christ's love intellectually, but not emotionally. That's not salvation, that's deprivation. And self-deception.

You know you're saved if you know *about* God's love, and *experience* God's love. Both/and. You know you're saved if you *feel* the love of Christ just like you *understand* the love of Christ. You know you're saved if he makes you feel like no one else in the entire world, and treasure him accordingly.

➤ You say, "Pastor, I don't know if I can honestly say that. I don't think I *feel* the love of Christ, and I certainly don't treasure it."

If that's you, let me encourage you to do 4 things. Even as I speak.

1. Repent of your failure. Your failure to love and treasure Jesus like you should. Like he deserves. Repent of your sterile *intellectual* belief apart from your heart-*felt* belief. Your mental *assent* apart from your emotional *desire*. Confess it and turn from it. Treasuring him like the pearl of greatest price he is. Repent.

2. Refresh your memory. *Remind* yourself of Christ's love for you. His sacrificial love. His steadfast love. Immense love. Personal love. Refresh your memory. That's one of the reasons we observe communion regularly.

3. Open your heart. Give Jesus *full* access. Full control. When I was growing up my Mom used to play Little Marcie records. Songs for kids, sung by a woman breathing helium. If you've heard them you know what I'm talking about. But the words were spot on. Like, "open up your heart and let the sun shine in." There's nothing like opening the door of your heart and feeling the warmth of Jesus' love.

4. Express your love. Your love *for* Jesus, *to* Jesus. Your devotion to him. Your commitment. Your desire to live for him. Failing to tell Jesus you love him is like a husband who never tells his wife. Not that Jesus depends on it like your wife does, but that there's something about saying it, that leads to feeling it. And receiving it. And treasuring it. **(Summary)**

Repent, refresh, open, and express. So that you *experience* the love of Christ, instead of just knowing about it.

Prayer – Lord, we're sorry for taking your love so lightly. And treating you so casually. Refresh our memory of your amazing love, and flood our heart with it. We love you, and want to experience *your* love more and more. In Jesus' name, amen.

That's the first point. I pray to God that you *experience* the love of Christ.

➤ And then, as if knowing the unknowable isn't enough, comes this mind-boggling, mind-bending phrase in v19b. I pray, Paul says, *that you may be filled with all the fullness of*

God. Filled, with all the fullness, of God. All.

That's like saying, "I hope you fill up on the fullness of the **ocean** when you go to the beach." Or, "I hope you capture all the grandeur of **Mt. Everest** when you see it." Statements like that are not only hard to understand, but seem impossible.

And yet that's exactly what Paul prays (**blank point**). *That [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God*. All the fullness of the creator and sustainer of the universe. All the fullness of the one who raised Jesus from the dead. All the fullness of the one whose glory is blinding and presence overwhelming.

So I've begun praying it too.

That your cup runs over (v19b)

I pray to God that your cup runs over. The cup of your soul. Straight from Ps 23:5 – "My cup runneth over." My life overflows.

That's at least *part* of what Paul's getting at when he says I pray *that you may be filled*. It's a prayer that our lives would brim with God. Full up, pressed down, and running over.

The other part is that we would be *controlled* by God. That our cup would overflow . . .

• **With his influence and control.**

I say that, because *filled* is often used in the Bible to convey exactly that. Like Paul says in Eph 5:18 – *Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*. Don't be influenced and controlled by wine he says, but be influenced and controlled by the Spirit. Overwhelmed by *him*.

Or how about Acts 2:4 at Pentecost. Where *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [other languages] as the Spirit gave them utterance*. They were under his influence and control.

So to be full of God, or filled with all his fullness, means that you're thoroughly impacted, thoroughly affected, by his presence and sovereignty.

Can you think of a better prayer for one another? That the cup of our lives would overflow with the influence and control of God? And that we would desire such a thing more than anything in all the world? I pray to God for that. For myself, for you, for all of us. That's the first part of the phrase.

➤ The second, is his *fullness*. I pray, Paul says, *that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*. And this is where it gets difficult. Difficult to understand and difficult to imagine. Because what exactly *is* the fullness of God, and how can we possibly be *filled* with it? How can finite beings, be filled with the infinite?

The best I can explain it, is that *the fullness of God* is the sum total of his attributes, in their entirety. Or, all of God's goodness and greatness. All the love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, and kindness you can imagine. All the truth, compassion, mercy, and grace you'd ever want. All the knowledge, wisdom, and power found in the universe. And then some. That's the fullness of *God*.

And impossible as it seems, to be filled with it, that's exactly what Paul prays. That our

lives would overflow . . .

- **With all of his goodness and greatness.**

I pray to God that your cup overflows with all of his goodness and greatness. All that God is and all that he does. Which is about as amazing as it gets. That we get more and more of his goodness and greatness, the more we live for him.

Like the goodness of his *love* that Paul's just been talking about. His sacrificial, unconditional affection and devotion for you. I pray to God that your cup runs over with that.

And the greatness of his *power*. Like we saw in [v16](#). I pray that God *may grant you to be strengthened with power*. Power to lead you, protect you, provide for you. I pray that your cup runs over with that.

Not to mention his wisdom, passion, faithfulness, and every other attribute of his being. I pray that your cup runs over *with all the fullness of God*. The sum total of his attributes, in their entirety.

➤ But the question of “How?” remains. As encouraging, and inspiring, and amazing as this is, how can we, finite beings, actually be filled with the infinite? Two illustrations and one Scripture.

Being filled with all the fullness of God is like dipping the cup of your soul, in the lake of your dreams, every time you're thirsty. And then doing it again, and again, and again, thirsty or not. You may not drink in all the lake water all at one time, but after a lifetime, you'll go a long way. And after an eternity, you'll be full. Filled, with the fullness of God.

Or how about the air we breathe? Another way to look at it. Like the fullness of God, the air we breathe is plentiful, life-giving, and indispensable. Go without it for more than a few minutes and you'll die. Breathe stale air and you'll weaken. Breathe too little and you'll faint. But breathe plenty and you'll run. Breathe it fresh and you'll flourish. Breathe it *fully* and you'll live. And yet, you can only be *filled*, one breath at a time. 2 illustrations.

➤ But here's how the Bible says it. **Col 2:9-10**. *In him [in Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, [10] and you have been filled in him*. In union with Jesus, in him, we are *filled*, with the *fullness*, of God. We have it. It's “at hand.” **(Summary)**

And I pray to God that you will experience it more and more. That your cup runs *over* with his goodness and greatness. And that you will experience the love of his Son because of it.

Prayer – Father, will you do that? Will you fill us with your goodness and greatness both individually and as a church? Will you influence and conform us as only you can? Find us receptive to all you give. And refresh us now with your love. We pray, in Jesus' name, amen.