

# PRAYER

Ephesians 3:14-21

Our Focus and Assurance of Prayer

## Introduction

We continue in the second week of our “Prayer” series, moving from the model of petitioning that we contemplated last week in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6 to Ephesians 3:14-21 and the focus and assurance of prayer found there.

We do so as we are blessed to sit under the preaching of Rob Ogilvie, executive minister of the CBWC.

And as we move forward in this series, on this Pentecost Sunday, we simply want to ask:

*How goes your personal practice of our congregational rhythm of morning prayer?*

## Connection Group Study

### COMMENTARY STUDY

v. 14. Paul has, in Ephesians chapter 2 and in the first verses of Ephesians chapter 3, been expressing Christ’s peacemaking work uniting Jew and Gentile. This peacemaking work has torn down the wall of hostility that previously existed between these two people groups (2:14-16), resulting in the

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

v. 14. *Praise*: Based on the commentary notes (aside), start your fellowship time together by praising God for the unity of the body of Christ, especially at FBC. Praise God that we can all come together as fellow heirs and members of the same body (3:6)—all of us with the same

building of a new people of God in which Gentiles have become fellow heirs of Christ's promises (3:6), and in which Jew and Gentile are fellow citizens (2:19).

Now he prays that the same power which has brought Jew and Gentile together be manifest in full in the personal lives of the Ephesians. In other words, what is "this reason" that Paul bends his knees? It is the gospel of God's grace-filled, reconciling, wall-abolishing work in Christ, and Paul's ministry on behalf of this gospel.

v. 15. Paul engages in a Greek play on words in this verse and the previous one, using the similar sounds of "father" (*pater*) and "family" (*patria*), as in: *πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα πατριὰ* (*pros ton patera, ex hou pasa patria*). Paul seems to be emphasizing the truth that it is in God our father that we all draw our shared family identity—every family, not only in heaven, but on earth—including Jew and Gentile (see 2:14-16; 4:6).

vv. 16-17a. Paul makes clear here the substance of his prayer: that the Ephesians might be strengthened

"boldness and confidence" to approach God by the faithfulness of Christ Jesus" (3:11-12).

*Pray:* Return to last week's topic of study, the Lord's Prayer from of Matthew 6; but this time utter it together as a Connection Group by (if you are physically able) coming to God on your knees. Indeed, we must not be overly strict about any posture that we should adopt when we pray, as we can pray kneeling, standing, sitting, walking, and even lying; but this exercise is one in simple communal humility, as we kneel before our loving Father.

v. 15. *Pray:* Pray that FBC would be truly a community that reflects the multiethnic make-up of Vancouver, with individuals from "every family" across the earth.

*Discern:* What would it mean for your Connection Group to proclaim/live out to "every family" the truth that all families on earth are named by God our Father? In other words, if we are to proclaim this truth of God, it will inevitably require crossing boundaries and speaking in new "languages." To whom, then, outside your "usual circle" is God calling you, and what would it mean to reach out to that "family" in the language of those people?

vv. 16-17a. *Pray:* Ask for the strengthening power of the Spirit to inhabit every area of your life.

by the Father's glory and the Spirit's power, and that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. This, then, is a beautifully Triune prayer of the work of the three persons of our God rooting and sustaining us in the Christian faith.

Note that this is not the first time that Paul brings together Trinitarian language and the phrase the "riches of glory" with regards to our Christian growth and maturation: in 1:18, Paul prays that the Father of Christ will give the Ephesians the Spirit of wisdom to know the richness of his glorious inheritance.

*vv. 17b-18.* Our being strengthened by the Spirit and being indwelt by Christ has a purpose: to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, as we are rooted and grounded in love.

Note that, while here we are taking the most common translation of the Greek as "breadth, and length, and height, and depth of Christ's love" (a translation decision based on the surrounding verses), the Greek actually omits "of Christ's love." In other words, Paul leaves his thought incomplete, as if leaving his readers on edge, as the KJV makes clear. Various options beyond God's love have been

*Discuss:* We know that Christ dwells by his Spirit within every Christian believer. In what sense, then, do you interpret Paul's prayer here that Christ *may* dwell in the hearts of the Ephesians? What do you think Paul most likely has in mind in this statement?

*Meditate:* Note that the word for Christ's "dwelling" in verse 17 is κατοικέω (*katoikeo*), which most often refers to a permanent dwelling, as in a "settling down". Its, for instance, the dwelling of a person within her own home as against the staying of a temporary sojourner. Meditate quietly for a few minutes on this imagery. What thoughts, or additional images, come to mind as you meditate on Christ making his home in your hearts?

*vv. 17b-18. Discuss:* What do you think is the connection between being rooted and grounded in love, and comprehending God's love?

*Discuss:* As discussed aside in the commentary notes, Paul leaves the referent of "breadth and length and height and depth" undefined. Knowing what you might already know of Ephesians from our other studies in this epistle, do you think any other referent besides "love" might be possible?

*Reflect:* Are there any spiritual practices to which you might be called to help you grow in being rooted in Christ's love—as in Sabbath keeping, meditative prayer, practicing gratitude, fasting, regular service, regular confession, etc.?

*Pray:* Of this verse, John Stott writes in his commentary (p. 137): "We shall have power to

given: the Christian church, the temple, the mystery, of the cross, the wisdom of God, etc.

v. 19. "Fullness" is one of the key words of Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:22, Paul uses the same Greek word **πλήρωμα** (*pleroma*) to describe the church as Christ's fullness, in the sense that he fills the church. A similar idea is stressed here, as Paul calls us to be filled with all the fullness of God by knowing the incomparable love of Jesus. In this sense God's fullness, or perfection, becomes the standard as we seek to be filled with him.

vv. 20-21. If ever we were prone to doubt the Spirit's power to strengthen us, Christ's ministry to dwell within our hearts, and Christ's love to lead us into God's fullness, Paul's resounding doxology should put all doubt to rest: "The infinite ability of God to work beyond our prayers, thoughts, and dreams is the power at work within, us individuals and as a people" (Stott, 140).

comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love only *with all the saints*. The isolated Christian's grasp of Jesus' love is bound to be limited by his limited experience. It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God, all the saints together, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, black and white..."

Pray that FBC would *together* know deeply the incredible dimensions of God's love, and this in fellowship with all the saints in this city.

v. 19. *Pray*: Pray that God would make clear how you might draw closer to him along the path of discipleship, unto living into his fullness.

*Reflect*: In what way has Christ's knowledge-surpassing love been demonstrated in your life? Encourage one another.

*Confess*: In what ways in the last few weeks have you resisted being filled unto the fullness of God? Contemplate silently, and share, if comfortable.

vv. 20-21. *Discern and Pray*: If you could ask God "to do far more abundantly" than what you would be inclined to think, what would you ask, with reference to your own life, the life of your Connection Group, and the life of FBC? Share, and lift up these wonderfully hope-filled requests.

*Listen*: To close your time, listen to the song "Now to Him" by the Acapella Company.