

**Ephesians 3:14-21**  
**Being part of God's family!**

**Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21**

*14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Do you pray? If you do, how do you go about it? Is prayer part of your Sunday life, part of church being led by the minister's words, or saying the words of the Lord's Prayer? Is prayer part of your life on other days, with a form of words that you say every day, born out of something you were taught as a child? Or is prayer something that you tried, and it didn't work, so you parked it on the side-lines of your life, perhaps only to be brought out again for emergencies? Or is prayer part of your life in the same way as the air that you breathe? Lots of people struggle with prayer for all sorts of reasons: they struggle with what prayer is, or feels like; some struggle with the words to use and what we say to God; perhaps most of all, some struggle with the question does God answer prayer and what happens when He doesn't answer our prayers in the way that our hearts desire?

Paul has 2 prayers in his letter to the Ephesians; many of the other letters have one prayer, but Ephesians has 2! The first prayer is in chapter 1: there Paul prays for the Christians of Ephesus, giving thanks for their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for one another. Then, he prays for them, that they will have certain gifts and qualities given to them as a result of the influence of God's Spirit – that they may know God better, that they may have hope in their hearts, and that they may know the power of God at work in their lives, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Paul has an expectation that God will listen to his prayers and that God's Spirit will be at work in the Christians to strengthen them in their faith and help them learn to pray for themselves and for others. The second prayer in chapter 3 picks up some of these themes and lets us see something more about God and about prayer.

Prayer is a family thing: *"For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and earth derives its name."* (verses 14, 15) God is making a new family; everyone who comes to Him through Jesus is part of this family, children of the Father. This new family is diverse, coming from lots of different backgrounds, but we are one family with God as our Father. That family background gives us a clue about prayer and what prayer looks like: prayer is a natural outflow of a family relationship, a child coming to his or her father with some sense of need, looking for father to help them deal with it. I don't know how you spoke (or speak) to your dad, but I guess it would be intimate and personal; not many people address their dad by "Dear Mr Smith..."; most of us would address him by "Dad..." and then begin to unburden our hearts to him. Some people don't have that kind of relationship with their dads – they find him hard to talk to for whatever reason – but God is the perfect Father, the ideal Father; we can tell Him anything that is on our minds. We are free to

complain and lament, to grumble and moan, just as we are free to celebrate and rejoice and bring to Him the deepest needs of our hearts. We can tell our Father absolutely anything! Prayer is that kind of family-relationship thing!

The Father has 2 qualities into which prayer helps us tap. The first of these is power: *“I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power though His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”* (verses 16, 17) Paul has already told us that God’s power is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. That is how we measure what God can do; *“He is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine...”* (verse 20) God’s power gives us strength inside! That’s Paul’s focus. We pray for miracles, but so often the answer to our prayers is strength to help us navigate our way through difficult things. In chapter 6, Paul encourages the Ephesians to *“be strong in the Lord... stand firm then...”* (6:10,14): they were facing threats to their faith and troubled times ahead; the encouragement to be strong inside is based on this prayer, that God’s power would give them strength inside. It can be a real disappointment to us when God doesn’t do the miracle and maybe we hold a grudge against Him, or don’t speak to Him for ages, but then maybe with hindsight we look back and see the grace of God at work to give us inside strength for living life at a tough time. The power of God is at work in us!

The second quality into which prayer allows us to tap is love. *“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all God’s people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”* (verses 17-19) God’s love is enormous! Maybe you know the little song that we sometimes sing about Jesus’ love being wonderful: *“it’s so high you can’t get over it, so low you can’t get under it, so wide you can’t get round it...”* and then Paul adds the fourth dimension, it is so long you can never come to an end of it. God’s love is wide enough to embrace anyone, no-one need be excluded; it is long enough to last forever, never to be exhausted; it is high enough to lift us up to heaven; it is deep enough to reach us in even the darkest, blackest days of our lives. Paul, the man who writes these words, has been in prison, has been beaten up, has nearly drowned at sea, has realised the depth of his faults and failings, and is aware of his weakness and how much he depends on God. Still, he is able to tell the world how great God’s love is.

Some of you are keen gardeners; you will know this as well as me, if not better – for plants to flourish in your garden they need good roots. The plant needs to be well-rooted in order to flourish, to grow strongly and to give you a grand show of flowers or to bear lots of fruit. A plant can look good for a time on the surface, but without strong roots, it will weaken and die. I’m not sure how many of you have built your own house, but if you have done, you will know about foundations. If you want your house to stay standing in all weathers and through every situation, you need good, strong foundations. The Christian is *“rooted and established in love”*. The Christian’s strong roots and strong foundation are in the love of God. Our strength comes from a sense of being loved. There are times when that sense is stretched almost to breaking point and for some people beyond breaking point, but the Bible’s witness is that we are loved beyond what we can see and understand. The enormity of the love of God is seen in the cross; Jesus gave His life to save us, a gift of love and self-sacrifice. This is how we know that God loves us; this is the scale of love that God has for us; we are loved and knowing and understanding something of that is the root and foundation of our strength.

Prayer taps into both the power and the love of the Father. At its best, prayer connects us with the power of God to give us strength to deal with life; at its best, prayer connects us with the love of God to give us strength to deal with life. When we pray, we find strength from God to help us in all kinds

of situations and circumstances, times when God's grace has helped and supported His children in the face of great difficulty. There have also been times when that sense of power and love from God has been tested to the limits and beyond, times when it seems as if God isn't listening to us or is not answering us when we pray; these are usually at hard times in our lives, times that are made harder by a feeling that God has gone away. The Bible doesn't shy away from that notion, but the consistent witness of God's Bible children is that He sees everything about us and gives us everything that we need for life, even in the dark days.

There are no easy answers to some of these big questions; beware anyone who offers you easy answers or platitudes. But don't mistake easy answers for simple truth. The simple truth is that God is able to do far more than we ask or imagine; the simple truth is that God loves us with an enormous love. Prayer taps into that power of God and that love of God to help us find strength. It is prayer that connects us to the strength that God wants to give us; it is prayer that builds that family relationship with our Father and helps us. When we pray, we can express our grumbles and doubts; we can ask our questions and tell God what we don't like. That's what we do in families; we are open and honest with one another most of the time and we find support from one another most of the time. In God's family we can do that in a big way, with freedom and confidence, knowing that Father is able to help us, knowing that Father loves us with an enormous love. If you want to think some more about prayer, why not take away one of the Try Praying booklets from the box outside the building.

God is strong and able to help us; God loves us with an enormous love. Paul prays that God will make us strong inside.