

"God's Powerful Love"

July 8, 2018

Scripture: 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 takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power 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, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.



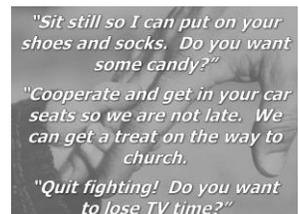
Do you recognize any of these tried and true parenting techniques?

"Sit still so I can put on your shoes and socks. Do you want some candy?"

"Cooperate and get in your car seats so we are not late.

We can get a treat on the way to church."

"Quit fighting! Do you want to lose TV time?"



(2nd and 3rd lines
are animated.)



I do not know about you, but bribery, threats, and time outs were staples of our parenting techniques as our children were growing up. True enough, there were times when we were sorely tested and when our tempers would rise. Hopefully we did not do any permanent damage. We all love our kids more than anything in the world and would do anything we could for them, but parenting is hard. It is tough stuff. There is so much we simply cannot accomplish that we wish we could and there are many things I'd love a do-over on. No matter how deeply we love our children, that love cannot make them sit still when we need them to or to cooperate all the time or to quit fighting. Along the same lines, no matter how much of our wisdom and advice we pour into them, we still cannot prevent them from making mistakes that hurt and from doing silly things that leave scars. We cannot magically turn them into responsible young people by any certain age or somehow guarantee that they always make good decisions. For most of us, parenting is a lesson in humility and in learning how little control we have over others and even ourselves at times. In terms of parenting, no matter how old or young your children are, love is always the primary emotion, the first guide in decision-making, and the main force behind the sacrifices we make.

When we turn to our passage from Ephesians 3, it centers around God's love for us. It is a love that is extravagant. It is a love that is vast. It is a love that is unending. It is a wonderful love. And it is a love that is difficult to comprehend. But Paul does a pretty good job of helping us to begin to comprehend God's love for us. Our passage today is a beautiful prayer that Paul writes on behalf of and for the Ephesians. Today, we are going to pray this prayer together.

I invite you to bow your heads and to repeat after me, like a wedding vow, this prayer found in Ephesians 3, verses fourteen through seventeen. Please repeat each phrase after me.

For this reason... I bow my knees before the Father... ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven... and on earth takes its name... I pray that, according to the riches of his glory... he may grant that you may be... strengthened in your inner being... with power through his Spirit... and that Christ may dwell... in your hearts through faith... as you are being rooted and grounded in love. Amen.

What a powerful prayer. "I bow my knees" as an act of reverence and humility. "According to the riches of his glory" – and what riches we find in the glory of Christ and in the blessings that God pours into our lives. "Strengthen our inner being" through the "power of the Spirit". Come, Lord Jesus, dwell in our hearts! And as Christ dwells in us, we become rooted and grounded in His love. Wow. What a prayer.

This prayer that we shared overflows with the Father's love for us. It is a love that seeks to bless us in ways that are beyond most human understandings of love. It is a love that seeks to bless us in ways that are both temporal and eternal. In this way, it is much like the love we have for our children. As I think back over my years in ministry, I do not think I have heard many pains that are voiced as deeply as the pain of a parent concerning a child that does not know Jesus. There is both heartbreak and fear in that voice.

As believers who have this hope that rests on the promise of eternal life, there is not a deeper desire that we have for our children than for them to have a saving relationship with Jesus and to live this life as a follower of Christ.

As we continue in our passage from Ephesians 3, we begin to gain a sense of God's love. Verses eighteen and nineteen are also a beautiful prayer. Close your eyes and listen to this prayer as I pray through it a few times.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We have been talking about family the last two weeks. As children, we first learn about love in our families. As parents, we try to model and teach our children about love and how to love others. As a church family, we seek to live as a community bound together by love. More on that next week. It is in our connection to God and Jesus and with each other, I think we gain our best understanding of love. Admittedly, it is a limited understanding. As I prayed for us using verses eighteen and nineteen, Paul first prayed for the Ephesians to have the power or ability to understand the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love. Secondly, the prayer was for us and for the Ephesians to know the love of Christ that also passes all of our human understanding. To me, this vastness of love is like looking at the stars at night or out across the ocean on a



crystal-clear day. No matter how greatly my vision is magnified, I still know that there is a vastness out there beyond what I can see that I cannot wrap my head around. To me, this is like the tip of the iceberg. It is just a beginning of understanding how great God's love is for us.

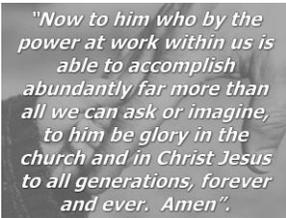
It also occurred to me that God's love is also like going out in a boat on the ocean. I am moving along and I think I am beginning to grasp God's love, and then something amazing happens and suddenly I discover that there is more love there that I had previously grasped or even imagined. In this way, understanding God's love is like that boat on the ocean. I could begin rowing tomorrow and could get quite far in a day. But I would still have vast amounts of ocean to cover to get to the other side. Like day after day of rowing, the longer I walk this road of faith, the more I come to know about the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love, the more I also understand that I haven't even begun to wrap my head fully around it all.



For the more seasoned individuals in the room, when you were a kid, can you remember when you thought you knew it all? If you are a young person and can be honest with us, do you think you know it all? Many of you do. It is not necessarily a bad thing. I think it is a product of adolescence and of learning to be independent. I kind of hate to admit this now, but when I was in high school and in my early college years, I can recall times when I thought that my parents were so dumb. I thought I had it all figured out. But then part way through the struggles of my

second year of college, one day it dawned on me. My parents are really smart. I just sat there in a kind mix of stunned amazement and profound respect as this realization dawned on me.

In our faith journey, we all come to this point with God too. Maybe it is when we are flunking out of parenting or maybe it is when we are flailing away at some other sinking endeavor or maybe it is when tragedy suddenly rocks our world. Sooner or later, though, we come to the realization that we cannot do this on our own. Even though we believe in God, we all will bumble along for a while telling ourselves that we are okay, that we have life by the tail. Some of us are there right now. But there inevitably comes a point where we must do the thing that none of us likes to do: surrender. In surrender, we must admit our need for God and we must be willing to yield the throne of our heart to God. We must allow God to be in control. And a funny thing happens. When we surrender to God, when we admit our absolute need for God, we discover a truth about God's love. Paul writes of this in verses 20 and 21:



"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen".

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“By the power at work in us” – that’s the Holy Spirit folks. “Able to accomplish abundantly far more” is a great description of the breadth and length and height and depth of God’s love. With the Holy Spirit, we are able to accomplish far more than we can ask for and far more that we can ever imagine. When we give God the control, we will be amazed by what we can accomplish when we surrender our lives to God and allow the power of the Spirit to go to work in our lives. This is what Paul wants us to understand. Let me repeat this. When we become humble enough to bow to our knees and are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to work within our inner being, then Katie-bar the door – God will accomplish more in and through us than we could ever ask for or ever imagine. Church, are we ready to surrender to God’s powerful love? Brothers and sisters in Christ, are we ready to submit to God’s will and allow the Holy Spirit to move in and through us? If so, watch out. Let us pray...

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What moment in your life can you identify as your “surrender” moment?
How can this be a part of your faith story?
- 2) Who do you know that needs to better understand God’s love for them?
Spend some time in prayer for them this week.
- 3) What work can you sense God wanting to do in and through you? What needs to die in you to allow the Spirit to be at work?