

## **How to Pray During a Pandemic**

Ephesians 3:14-19

Jeremy Cagle, May 17, 2020

Good morning and thank you for joining us for another Sunday morning message here at our Grace Fellowship YouTube channel. If you are from our church family or if you're new to us, we want to say a special welcome to you. Some of you have found us on the internet, so you are new to our ministry here and we want to say that we're so glad you're here with us. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jeremy Cagle. I'm the teaching pastor of Grace Fellowship Church. We're a five-year-old church plant located in Chilliwack, British Columbia; and we've seen a lot of exciting things in our short time together, we've seen a lot of changes.

For example, we began meeting in the fall of 2015 in someone's home, we started in someone's living room much like this. And since then, we have had our first baptisms as a church. We've welcomed our first members, we've ordained our first elders and deacons, set up our first constitution and bylaws, done all these sorts of things, but we're now facing our first pandemic together.

This is our first worldwide catastrophe, which has made things interesting to say the least. It's made things exciting because pandemics don't happen that often. I mean, high catastrophes are pretty rare. They say you usually only get one every century or so; and that's all you get. And there's no manuals for them. There's no handbooks that say, "Here's five things to do when a pandemic comes; here's five ways to handle the catastrophe." So you're going to have to be creative and think outside the box. And that's what we're doing right now, as a church. That's what we're trying to do with ministries like this. We're stretching ourselves. I've never preached into a camera before; I've never spoken consistently without an audience. And many of you at our church are doing things you've never done before. You're being stretched in ministry as well right now, but we're doing that so we can keep blessing each other during this time so we can keep the work of the church going.

Because as this thing drags on it's creating a whole new set of problems that we need to deal with, such as an increased risk of suicide. Earlier this month, the major medical journal called JAMA, the Journal of American Medical Association, published an article entitled "Suicide Mortality and the Coronavirus. Is this the Perfect Storm?" In which they said that doctors are expecting the suicide risk to go up as a result of recent events. And they're expecting it to rise dramatically and in their own words, they said this, "One secondary consequence of social distancing may be an increased risk of suicide. Most experts believe that social interaction plays an active role in suicide intervention because suicidal thoughts are often associated with loneliness. Therefore, the ongoing result of the pandemic may be an increase in self harm." I think it's safe to say we all expected certain things to happen as a result of the Coronavirus; we

expected certain consequences of this, but we never expected that. We didn't think it would lead to suicide. And the article went on to say there's other problems that are being caused by this. There's other issues we're facing, such as an increase in fear and anxiety, such as anger. People are becoming angry as this drags on, and some other things like this. But the point is this thing is causing problems that no one anticipated. And while the world doesn't have an answer to those problems, I just want to tell you, the church does. While the world doesn't have a solution to some of these issues, or why it struggles to find one, the church does have an answer. God has an answer. And that's why we're continuing the ministry right now. That's why we're keeping the work of the church going in the midst of this time because we have answers to those problems.

The church may not have answers to everything, but it has answers to the heart problems – into the issues of the soul. One of the answers that we have, is to pray about it. Since God has the answer, one of the things we can do is call out to Him for help, and He will answer us because God is bigger than the Coronavirus, amen? I mean, God is bigger than anything that this pandemic would ever bring. He has seen things like this before and conquered them. He's seen issues like this and beaten them. And He'll do that with this as well. It's been said that when you pray, you talk to the One who loves you the most, and when you pray, you talk to the One who can help you the most, because He has the most resources, He has the most tools in his arsenal; God can defeat anything and therefore we point people to Him in the midst of this difficulty, which is what we're going to talk about this morning.

That's what I want to address with you today, so if you would open your Bibles with me, and turn to the book of Ephesians. That's the book we're in this morning, and that's what we're looking at. If you would take your Bibles with you and turn with me to the book of Ephesians. And we're going to look at a passage that talks about prayer. We're going to look at a passage that talks about how we are to go to God in the midst of our trials, and we're going to see this in Ephesians 3. If you would look there with me, I'm going to read Ephesians 3 starting in verse one. Paul says this,

For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to his Holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me, according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might be made

known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus, our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

If you notice, as you read that it sounds a little bit awkward, doesn't it? It sounds a little hard to follow, and that's because verse one says Paul was in prison as he wrote this. He was in jail as he was writing this down, which means this was hard to talk about. This brought up some bad memories for him, so he writes in this manner; but the point is very clear here, the idea is clear. And you see it in verse four, which says, "When you read, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ...to be specific that the Gentiles are fellow heirs." That's the theme of this passage; that's what this is about. Paul is telling us that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews; they're fellow members of the Church.

The word "mystery" appears four times in this passage because this was a mystery before; nobody knew about this in the Old Testament because for centuries, God only cared about one race of people. And that was it, or at least His main interest was, in one race, the Jews; and now it is on the Gentiles. Paul says that's changed now. And God is interested in every race in a different way. And he says he has been called to explain the mystery of that, he's been called to preach that, that's what you see in verse eight. In fact, he was so serious about this that he got arrested for it. He was so serious about preaching this, that he was thrown in jail. And what he goes on to say in verse 14 is that while he's in jail, while he's in prison, he prays. He offers a prayer.

If you look in verse 14, Paul says this, it says,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven on earth derives its name, that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

We're going to talk about this passage in a moment, but that phrase, "I bow my knees" means I bow my knees in prison. I bow my knees in jail because that's where Paul is at. He was in the worst place imaginable to remind you that if you can pray there, you can pray anywhere. If you can pray in jail, you can pray through whatever you're going through right now. You can pray through the Coronavirus. You can pray through this pandemic. It also means I bow my knees for you, before the Father for you on your behalf, so that you'll apply all the things that we've been talking about. That's what Paul's really getting at here. That's what he's really driving at. Paul

says, "I pray that you'll take this to heart. I pray that you won't just be hearers of the Word, but you'll be doers of it as well. That you'll live out what I've been saying." I can't say this enough, but this is the way you should respond to preaching. This is the way you should respond to hearing the Word of God. You should pray about it. You should ask for God's help to live it out. The Bible is not a textbook that you can read and forget about, it's not a storybook that you can say, "That's nice because it gives me a warm fuzzy It made me feel good." No, this is the Word of God. This is His very words, which means that you need to live this out. You need to obey what you've learned in the scriptures.

If you look in verse 16, Paul mentions strength and power. And that means the strength to obey and the power to change because that's what the Bible does for you when you read it. It needs to change your life. He also mentions the love of Christ and the fullness of God in verse 19, which refers to the same thing; it means the love that makes you change, the fullness that makes you obey.

You know, I don't know if you've ever thought about this before, but pastors preach the Bible every week because it has power. We preach the Bible every week because it has strength, strength to change you, strength to make you different. I don't have that in my own authority. There's nothing I can tell you to make you change. The Bible has that. We also preach the Bible every week because God knows what you need better than we do. He knows what will help you better than we ever could. But it won't do you any good if you don't pray about it. The Bible won't do you any good if you don't pay attention to what it says, and let it do its work in you and in order to do that, you have to pray. You have to ask God to help you because you can't do it on your own.

This is so important that Paul writes about this twice in the letter. This is so important that he mentions it on two separate occasions. He does it earlier in chapter 1:18 if you look back there, he says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." And he says it again here. He mentions prayer again at the end of chapter 3 because for Paul, prayer and doctrine go together. For Paul, prayer and the Scriptures are one and the same thing. They're best friends. In fact, this is how Paul wrote his letters. If you read through the New Testament, you'll see this is what Paul does. He often gives you some doctrine, and then he prays about it. And he gives you a little more, and then he prays about it again, it's like he just couldn't help himself. The prayer just sort of jumped off of him. Leapt off the page.

I remember talking to a buddy of mine in seminary, who said that one day he was studying for a test. He was studying for an exam in the book of Romans, and he was just pressed for time; he was in a hurry. But he said what he was learning affected him so much. It moved him so deeply that didn't matter about the time, he had to put his books aside and pray about. Time was no

issue. He had to stop what he was doing and talk to God. We should all do that when we read the Bible.

And we should all do that when we come to the Scriptures. I mean, the Bible is God talking to you. The Bible is God speaking to you, and the way you should respond to that is to stop and talk back to Him. You have to stop and speak to Him. Especially in a time like this, Amen? Especially in a time when the world has gone sideways or backwards or wherever direction. We need the help of God. That's why the church is so important friends. That's why we're here. Because we can offer the world something no one else can. We can offer them a connection to God. We can offer them a way to talk to Him. They can't get that anywhere else; you're the only one that can give it to them, which is why the ministry has to keep going in the midst of this time.

I read an interesting statistic this week that said that there are 650 recorded prayers in the Bible. There's 650 of them, and there's so many of them because the Bible was written during hard times. There's so many prayers because the Bible was written during a time of great suffering, so the people had to pray; there was nothing else they could do. They had to go to God for help, and that's where we're at friends. We're in the same place. We have to go to God for help. There's nowhere else we can turn.

In his great work on prayer, the author Ian Bounds said that prayer is the most important thing we can learn how to do as a Christian. It comes before all else, comes before Bible study, comes before evangelism. It comes before singing and taking our offerings to the Lord, comes before fellowship. It comes before the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Baptism because prayer is our direct connection to God. Prayer is the one thing that takes us straight into the presence of the Almighty. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

We're going to talk about the most important thing to do in the Christian life. We get our priority so backwards, don't we? We think all those other things are so much more important than this. This is it friends, this is it. Prayer is at the top of the list for you as a Christian. So let's talk about that this morning by looking at four prayer requests that Paul makes in this passage. That's our outline for today; it's pretty simple. It's what we're talking about in Ephesians 3:14-19. We're going to see four prayer requests from the Apostle Paul so we can learn from his example. So we can take what he did and copy it in our own lives.

You know, I don't know where everyone's at on this issue today. I don't know where you're at in your prayer life, but I want to say that if you're not praying now you need to start right away. If you're not taking time to do this, you need to take time to do this because this is what the Christian life is all about. To say it another way, and we really need to say this. and start off on this note, this is what separates the real thing from the fake. This is what separates a true believer

from a false believer and that is how you pray because you can't fake prayer. You can't trick God. You can fake your Bible study, and you can fake your singing. You can fake it when you fellowship and you can fake the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Baptism, you can fake all of that. But you can't fake this because God knows everything about you. Nothing is hidden from him, and so let's talk about this important subject.

We're going to look at four prayer requests from the Apostle Paul. The first one is a prayer for strength. The first prayer request that Paul makes in this passage is a request for strength, which means he prays for strength to apply all this. That's the connection here. He prays for strength to live this out. And if you read in verse 14, Paul writes this,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven on earth derives its name, that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man

If you notice, as you read that, that's a rich portion of Scripture. There's a lot of good stuff in here, but it all boils down to the one phrase at the end, "that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power." That's the prayer request here. That's what Paul is asking for. He's asking that we would be given strength, not just strengthened, but strengthened with power. You can see how this builds up. Not just strengthened with power but strengthened with His Spirit which is the greatest power on earth. There is no power greater than the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the very power of God Himself. In Genesis 1:2 it says the Spirit was hovering over the waters at Creation, so this is the same power that created the universe.

It's quite a prayer here. But just to walk you through this, when Paul says, "For this reason I bow," he means for this reason that I wrote about earlier, for the reason I've been talking about in Ephesians 3, since the mystery has been revealed, he says, "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven on earth derives its name." That's just kind of a long way of saying, "I bow my knees before a strong Father, I bow my knees before an almighty Father who rules heaven and earth, and as I do that," he says, "I pray that you would be strengthened with power through His Spirit and the inner man," which is a way of saying the soul. "I pray that you would be strengthened in the soul or the hidden part of you." This refers to the part of us that we can't see; the part of us that when we die leaves our body and goes to heaven. Paul says, "I pray for you to have strength there." Because if you think about it, our weakness as Christians, comes from a weakness of the soul, doesn't it? Comes from a weakness of the inner man. Our weakness doesn't come from a problem with our body, essentially. It doesn't come from a failure of the brain or the stomach or the hands and feet; it comes from a failure of our soul, or we might say our hearts, which is why you need strength there. Because you have a problem in that department.

You know, this is something that I don't know if believers today really get this, but if you study the lives of Christians in the past, one thing you'll notice is that they prayed a lot. They prayed a lot. They would go into the wilderness, they would go out in the desert, they would go out on a mountaintop and do nothing but pray for days, some of them for weeks at a time. They would leave their books at home, they would leave their stuff at home, they would leave their friends and their relations at home. And they would go out and pray because they understood that they needed help in this area. They understood that they needed strength in this department. Even the Lord Jesus, right, what did He do at the start of his ministry? He would go out and pray. He would pray all night, but we seem to have forgotten this.

We seem to have lost this priority in our lives. I mean, we're lucky if we pray for a few minutes in the morning, right? We're lucky if we pray in the car on the way to work or on the way home from the grocery store because we think that's enough. We think that'll cut it. But what Paul is saying here is that's not going to cut it. That's not going to help you because you're too weak. That's not going to help you because you're too helpless, and you need all the power you can get. It's convicting isn't it?

You know, one commentator said there's several reasons for this. There's several reasons we need to pray and ask for strength. One is because we're tempted so badly. If you think about it, we need to pray because we're constantly tempted and attacked by the devil, constantly being fed lie after lie after lie from him. We also need help with this because we're so sinful and prone to give in to that. I've talked to quite a few people that during this time, they're just a nervous wreck right now. They're so anxious, because not only are they being tempted by the devil, but they're giving into it. And that's why you need to pray because we're all prone to give into sin.

Another reason we needed pray for this is because we're ignorant and we're in the dark. We don't know the things of God like we should; we know so little about eternity and things of eternity So Paul prays for this. This is how he starts off as prayer; he prays for God to give us strength in all of these areas in the inner man. My friends, maybe I could ask it this way, do you know you have an inner man this morning? I mean, do you realize that you have a soul? There is a part of you that you were created with, that needs to talk to God on a regular basis. There's a part of you that needs to go to Him. Daily, hourly, the Bible says constantly be praying to Him because you can have all this.

Verse 15 says he even prays according to the riches of His glory, which is a reference back to verse eight, where it says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." Now he says, not only am I preaching these unfathomable riches, but I'm praying you can receive them. I told you last week, the word unfathomable here means unsearchable; something that cannot be mapped out by human fingerprints. It's too large, it's too big to get our minds around. Paul prays you would be



strengthened according to that. He prays that's the kind of power you can have – strength according to his riches.

Just to encourage you in this, you know, you could say it this way. You can never ask God for too much. If you want some encouragement to pray, if you're realizing that you have a soul and you want to go to God, but you're afraid you're going to bother Him. What Paul is saying here is you can't bother Him. You can never ask Him for too much. You can overwhelm Him with your prayers. You can't stress Him out because He's God and He's not man. He's the Lord of heaven and earth, and He never runs out of His resources. Nothing tires Him. Nothing ever exhausts Him. Paul is telling you to pray to a God who cannot be overwhelmed.

I don't know about you but when I read a passage like this, I think the greatest problem with our prayer lives is not that we asked for too much, but we ask for too little, Amen? We ask for such small things from God. Our greatest problem when we pray is not that our prayers are too great, but they're too low, they're too small. Paul gives you five statements in here in this short passage to show you the greatness of God. Five statements to show you how big God really is. He mentions God's riches, His glory, His strength, His power, and His Spirit, all to remind you that you can never ask for too much from God. You can never wear Him out with your prayers, so pray to Him. Come to Him. Ask Him for these things. You can wear a person out by talking to them. You can wear your husband out. You can wear your wife out. You can wear your kids out, your neighbor. You can't wear God out; it can never be done.

You know, theologians say that God is omnipotent, which means He's all powerful. That means God can do whatever He wants to do. And they say that He is omnipresent, which means He's everywhere at once. He can go anywhere that He wants to go, and He can be everywhere to listen to your prayers at one time. He's omniscient, theologians say this, which means He's all knowing, He knows everything. There's no problem too big for His mind to fathom, so you can go to Him because He can handle it.

You know, young man once asked Charles Spurgeon to help him with his preaching, because he wasn't having an impact on his church. He wasn't seeing any results. To which Spurgeon asked him, “Well, do you expect to see results when you preach? Do you expect to see people get saved?” And the young man said, “Well, actually, No, I don't.” And Spurgeon said, “Well, that's your problem then. When you preach, you need to expect God to answer. You need to preach like you mean it.” And friends, you need to pray that way as well. You need to talk to God like you mean it as well because you serve a big God. You serve an almighty God, and you need to remember that. You come to Him that way. You know, we pray for God to save our children, and we need to do that. And we pray for Him to save our family and our loved ones, but friends, you can pray for God to save the world. And He can do that. You can pray for God to save the



whole country of Canada, the whole town of Chilliwack, that's not too big for Him. He can handle it. You need to make your prayers as big as He is.

Which leads to another point to consider this morning. Leads to another prayer request from the Apostle Paul. The first one is that he prays for strength. Paul's first prayer request here is to ask the Lord to give us the power to apply all the things he's been talking about in this book, and to live them out. Which brings us to a second point to talk about.

It brings us to a second prayer request Paul makes here, and that is that he prays for Christ to dwell in our hearts. The second prayer request that Paul brings up in this passage is that he prays for Christ to dwell in our hearts, which means he prays for His strength to stick around for a while. He prays for the power to stay inside of us and dwell there and never go away. And if you read on in verse 14, it says,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven on earth derives its name, that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

As Paul goes on to describe his prayer, he starts off verse 17, with the words “so that” which is a preposition of purpose or intent. It means that this is why Paul prayed for strength. This was the purpose of the prayer so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. He isn't praying for salvation there. He's not praying that Christ would dwell in our hearts for the first time. He's praying that we would feel the effects of His dwelling there on an ongoing basis. He's praying that we would live like Christ is there. When you're saved, when you become a believer, the Holy Spirit enters your heart. The presence of Christ dwells inside of you, you become His temple; but what Paul is praying for here is that he wants you to live like it and feel it. Experience it on a daily basis. I mean, you talk to heaven because a piece of heaven is inside of you. You go to God because God's already come to you.

The word “dwell” here means to live inside of something or to inhabit it. And it gives the idea of an ongoing thing. In other words, Paul doesn't pray that Jesus would just visit our hearts or drop by for a few days, he prays that He would live there permanently. He would set up camp. It's one thing to have somebody come over to your house for a day or two and then leave. It's another thing for them to move in permanently, and that's what Paul is praying for here.

And it's really a prayer for purity by the way, this is prayer for personal holiness. Because in order to do this, you're going to have to be holy in order for Christ to dwell in your hearts. You're going to have to get rid of some sin in your life and make some changes because you can't invite

the second person of the Trinity into your heart like it is; it's going to have to change some, so these two things are tied together.

In his booklet, *My heart, Christ's Home*, Robert Monger pictures the Christian life as a house through which Jesus goes from room to room. In the library, which is the mind, He finds trash and all sorts of evil things which He throws out and replaces with His Word, replaces it with the Scriptures. And in the dining room of the appetite, He finds many sinful desires in there, which He replaces with the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. In the living room of fellowship, He finds worthless companions that He gets rid of and puts good ones in their place. In the garage, He finds useless toys that he burns in order to make room for better ones. But this is what Paul is referring to here. This is the request. He prays for Jesus to come inside of our hearts and clean house. He prays for the Lord to dwell inside of us and change us, which goes back to what we said earlier.

Prayer is so important because you can't fake it. Prayer is so important because you can't hide who you are when you pray. The realest part of you comes out when you talk to God. You have to open every part of your heart to Him. You have to invite Jesus into every room. You can't say, "Lord, you can go into the library but you can't touch the dining room. You gotta stay out of there." You can't say, "Lord, you can go into the living room but not the garage." That's not the way this works. Jesus is Lord of all or He's not Lord at all, and you have to open your heart wide open to Him. There's a lot of talk today about inviting Jesus into your heart. But what Paul is praying saying here is even as a believer you invite Him in daily to dwell there, to make sure that He lives there.

That's what Paul is praying for us here, that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith. That means the way that we do this is through faith, not through works and being a better person and that sort of thing. This is all done through faith.

Which leads to another point to go along with this; another prayer request Paul mentions here, and that is that we would be rooted and grounded in love. A third prayer request that Paul makes for us is that we would be rooted and grounded in love, which is another way of saying that we would be stable. He prays that we would be consistent on an ongoing basis; we would invite Christ into our hearts regularly. And if you look on in the passage, Paul says in verse 16,

That He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love.

As you can tell, just by reading this, this is some figurative language here. Paul is using some word pictures. But after praying that Christ would dwell in your hearts through faith, he now

prays that you would be rooted and grounded in love. And the word “rooted” here is an image from plant life. It's an expression from the world of plants and it refers to the act of putting a seed down into the ground, way down into the soil so that it will grow and be stable. So that as it grows, the wind won't blow it over and knock it down, so to speak. And the word “grounded” here, it's from the world of buildings. Skyscrapers are a structure; it goes down into the soil. The foundation is deep, deep down so that it won't blow over either. It rests on solid ground. In fact, if you could think of a tall oak tree or a skyscraper, you get the picture here; those things are stable. And they're stable because the roots are deep. That's what Paul prays for us here.

And my dad was a city planner for several years, and he went to school to learn how to build cities. And when we visited New York for the first time, it was kind of fascinating for him, because he'd studied the city, that particular town. And he told me that it was all possible because the city was built on solid rock. If you've ever visited New York before, one thing you notice is it's made up of huge buildings. They're enormous. And he said, that's all possible because it's built on a firm foundation. You couldn't do that in Los Angeles or San Diego, because the ground is too soft there. It's too mushy. But you could do that in New York because the ground is hard, and that's what Paul is praying for here. That's what he's asking for us. That we would be settled on solid ground. That we can rise high because our roots are deep.

Verse 17 says that we would be rooted and grounded in love. And that means the love of Christ, or the love that Paul has been describing in the book of Ephesians. He's praying that you would stand on all this stuff you have learned in chapters 1-3 and be stable. I think we've all known people who didn't get this. We've all known people, even Christians whose lives were unstable. They were very up and down; their lives were like a roller coaster. They were here today, gone tomorrow. But they live that way because they don't have a firm foundation. They live that way because they don't have a firm place to stand. Their roots are not deep into the soil, so that when the winds come and the waves blow, the house topples over. That isn't what Paul wants for you. That isn't what God wants for you. God doesn't want you to topple over. He wants you to be stable and consistent. I tell you, I've counseled people that are in that state of life, and it's a miserable place to be. It's terrible. That's not what God wants for us.

The story is told of a young man who wanted to grow in the Christian life. He wanted to be closer to God and experience more of His peace. And so, he took out a piece of paper, and he wrote down all the things he would do for God. He just listed them out one by one, and they were some pretty amazing things. He said he would give up all his money to the church, he would sell his possessions, give up his way of life and move to Africa, and become a missionary. But he said, to his surprise, it didn't help him grow. To his surprise, that list and those things didn't give him peace. And so, he went to an older man, an older believer, and he asked him about it and the old man said, “Here's what you need to do. You need to throw the list away. Here's what you need to do if you want peace, you need to get rid of it. And stop thinking about

yourself and start thinking about God.” He said, “You need to stop thinking about what you will do for Him, and you need to remember what He has done for you.”

Because friends, that's where your peace comes from. That's how you grow in the Christian life, by remembering what Christ has done for you. That's what Ephesians 1-3 is all about. That's what the whole first half of this book is talking about. This is all about what God has done for you. You didn't give yourself the blessings in chapter one, you didn't give yourself the new life and the change in chapter two, you didn't bring yourself into the church as fellow heirs in chapter three. All of this is done by the Lord. And your strength comes by remembering that.

To say it another way, that young man was struggling because he was standing on the wrong foundation. He was struggling and falling to pieces, because he was being planted on the wrong thing. The Christian life is all about God, it's not about us and what we do for Him. You know, Robert Murray McShane once said that, “If I knew that God was thinking about me in the next room, then I would not fear a million enemies, I would have enough power to conquer the world.” And friends. That's what the Bible says. That's what you read about over and over again in here. Your strength comes from thinking about Him. That's what motivates us to pray. That's what motivates us to live the Christian life.

It leads to one more point to consider this morning. One more prayer request from the Apostle Paul on this passage, I think it'd be safe to say at this point, we could even stop and just close it all because this is our hearts are full already. Amen? This is a wonderful passage. But just to review these other ones before we come to the final one. The first prayer request Paul mentions is a prayer request for strength. Paul asked God to give us the strength to apply all of this to our lives because we can't do that on our own. We're too weak and helpless, so he prays for that. Then second, he prays for Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith, which means he prays for Christ to live in us; and stick around and not just pop in for a visit. Brings us to a third prayer request, and that is he prays for us to be rooted and grounded in love. Which means he prays that we would stand firm on all of this, that this would go deep, deep down into our hearts, like a tall oak tree, so that when the winds and the waves and the troubles come, we don't fall over. We can stay consistent and stable in the Christian life. And that brings us to one more thing to talk about; one more prayer request Paul mentions here. And that is that we would know the breadth of Christ's love.

A fourth prayer request Paul makes in this passage, he prays that we would know the breadth of Christ's love. Which is another way of saying that we would know the vastness of it or the greatness of it; and Paul prays here, he kind of summarizes all of these things, and says that he prays that we would know the scope of how much Christ loves us. And if you look in verse 17, Paul prays,

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

I kind of love the way that this whole passage ends because when Paul mentions being filled up to all the fullness of God, in my mind, I've got the image of a pitcher that's being filled higher and higher with water. And it gets to the point at the end of the passage that the water is spilling out the top of it. That's how Paul writes this here; filled up to the fullness of God. But as he's wrapping this prayer up and bringing it to a close, Paul gives us what some have called the most powerful verse in this book. The most recognizable passage. And just to explain this to you, it starts off with the word "comprehend." Paul prays that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints in that word, comprehend is *katalambano*, which means to lay hold of something or to calculate it. It's a mathematical term, which means to add something up. And Paul prays that we would be able to do that with Christ's love; we would be able to add it up and calculate it. And to highlight that, he mentions that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height and depth of it, which are geographic terms. These are terms of direction because it's another way of saying, Paul wants us to know the love of Christ from every angle. He wants us to know about it from every conceivable direction. He wants you to know Christ's love from this way and from that way, and he wants you to know Christ love from here and from there. Because that's what the book of Ephesians is all about. That's the point of it.

This is telling you about the love of Christ from every conceivable direction. He prays for you, to help you to understand this, because nothing will change your life like this. Amen? Nothing will change your life like the love of Christ. I will tell you if you are a Christian this morning, the one thing that changed your life more than anything else, the one thing that rearranged and totally changed the direction of it was Christ's love. More than anything else, the fact that Christ would love a sinner like you, the fact that Christ would have mercy on a on a wretch like you. That's what took you in a different direction.

And Paul prays for you to realize that he prays for us to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. You see the word "full" repeated twice there because that's what Paul wants you to experience as a result of this. He wants you to be full of the love of Christ. Not to know a little bit of it, but to know a lot of it. Not to know a portion of his presence, but to know all there is to know. He wants this to overwhelm you. That's what you're kind of picking up on as you're reading this and you're getting more and more into this passage. It's as if the words are overwhelming Paul, and he just runs out of words.

Friends, have you ever prayed and experienced that? Have you ever prayed and gotten to the point where you were just too overwhelmed to speak? The groanings that are too deep for words,

that kind of thing. You know, so many times our prayer lives are weak, because we're too full of ourselves, aren't we? Sometimes our lives are so pathetic as Christians, we're so unstable, because we're too full of sin. And it's all about "me, me, me" all the time and "I want, I want, I want". And Paul says the answer to that is to fill ourselves up with God. Paul says a solution to that problem is to fill ourselves up with thoughts of Him.

You know, if you're wrestling with a sin right now, if you're dealing with some kind of issue that you can't get over, I just want to ask you the question, how often are you thinking of God in the problem? How often are your thoughts being full of Him? Because if your thoughts are full of Him, there's no room for you. If your thoughts are full of the love of Christ, and you can't fit in there. He will take care of you.

This last week, one of our elders, Quentin Smith, and I did a video called "The Church under Quarantine," in which we talked about all the issues that the church is facing right now. And one of them is the media. One of them is all the stuff coming out on the news because the church is being bombarded with it. I mean, we're being harassed with it on a daily basis. I haven't talked to anybody since the Coronavirus happened that hasn't been saturated with the media. And we said that the best way to handle that is to put a filter on it. I mean, the best way to deal with that is to take in less of it and read your Bible instead because you need to be careful what you're filling your mind with. You need to be careful what's coming into your soul and your heart because you need to be filling your mind with the thoughts of God. You need to be filling your mind with the thoughts of His word. Nothing wrong with watching some of the media and nothing wrong with taking in some of it, but you don't need to fill your minds with that. Fill your minds with the good news, the good news of Jesus Christ.

You know that Paul probably might not have had a problem with that here. Paul did that here because it was easy for him because he was in jail. I mean, he didn't have anything in there but his pen and his Bible, but I think some of us need to get back to that this morning. Some of us need to go back to some simpler things. We need to put the other stuff on hold for a minute and focus on this.

The hymn writer, Isaac Watts, once wrote about this in his hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," because the first verse starts out and says, "When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died, my riches gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride." And Isaac Watts' point was that when you look at the cross, all the other things vanish away in the distance. When you look at Calvary and how much Christ loved you there, everything else just pales. In comparison, your riches gains are but loss in light of that. And we need to get back to that today. We need to go back to what the cross should mean in our lives.



It's been said that as a Christian, I won't fear of the world when it has been nailed to the cross. Because why should I? There's no reason to fear the world if it's been crucified there with my Lord? It can't hurt me anymore. I've also heard it said that I won't question God's love for me when I look at the cross because God gave everything for me there. He held nothing back. Which is why we pray. We come to him because God gave everything for us at the cross.

Friends that leads me to a question, that leads me to kind of probe your heart a little bit, probe your soul some. Does the cross mean that much to you? Does it lead you to pray? Does it lead you to praise and worship because it reminds you of how much God loves you? Do you look to the Lord? Or look to these things? And does it make you put your books aside for a moment and go to Him? And if not, why not? If it doesn't have an impact on you, what's holding you back? Is it because you're filling your mind with other things? Is it because you're saturating yourself with the media and the newspaper and the world around you? Because if that's so, maybe you need to cut some of that out right now. Maybe you need to put a filter on your mind and block out the things from the world.

To ask this another way as you read this passage, and as you study this in the book of Ephesians. Will you remember that this is the most important thing you can do in the Christian life. Will you remember this comes before all else. You need to pray. I mean, all the other stuff we do is for nothing if you don't pray. You can read your Bible from now until eternity, it won't help you all if you don't pray. The devil reads the Bible. If you remember when the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he quoted scripture, he knows scripture, but he never prays. Friends, this comes before everything. Jesus died for this purpose. He went to the cross for this purpose, to bring you into the presence of God; but it's all for nothing if you don't take advantage of it and pray.

You know, in the 18th century, when Napoleon Bonaparte army was conquering Europe, it came across a prison that was used during the Spanish Inquisition. It was used to torture Christians and as they explored it, they found the remains of a cell that held an old man in there. They found his bones there and they could tell what had happened to him. He had been tortured, he had been severely beaten and killed there; but he never gave up. The old man never lost hope, because on the wall of his cell he had drawn a cross, you know, just a normal cross on the wall. And on the four corners, he wrote words over it. And at the on one side, he wrote "breadth" and on another side, he wrote "length" and at the top, he wrote "height" and at the bottom, he wrote "depth." And he did that to say that even though I'm in this cell, I'm not alone, even though I'm locked away and they're torturing me, I'm not forgotten because Jesus remembers me. I'm not forgotten because He still cares and I can go to Him, no matter what I'm going through, I can still pray.

The cross reminds me of that. Friends, does it do that for you today? Whatever you're going through, however bad this pandemic is for you personally. Do you remember this? And no matter what you're going through, you can pray. Christ is there for you. He went to the cross so



you can do this, and may we take these words to heart this morning. Friends, this is a passage that should impact all of us deeply; and let me pray that it would do that today.

Let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Father, I don't think words can express what a text like this shouldn't mean to us as believers. I think Paul did run out of words here. I think he did come to the end of verse 19, and he just had no more he could say because that's how we should all respond to what You've done for us.

Lord, You have loved us when no one else ever would, and You've loved us in a way that no one else ever could. We all need to take a lesson from that.

Father, this should change our lives. I pray for our my church family, I pray for the believers who are watching this right now that they would be changed as a result of the things they're studying in this book. That they would learn these things and not go away the same. Lord, we want to be different people. We want to be closer to You, closer to Christ, closer to heaven, as a result of what we have talked about; and not farther away. And Lord, I pray particularly, I pray specifically that trials like this pandemic would do that in our lives. I pray that the anxiety would die, the fear would die in us, the panic would die, the anger and all those things we talked about a moment ago, all that would go away, because all we can see is the cross where He has been crucified.

God, we need to be different from the world in times like this, and that's what I pray for Grace Fellowship Church today. That's what I pray for all the churches here in Chilliwack, and across Canada. You are God big enough to bless all of them, all the ones who hold firm to the truth. And that's what we pray for today, Lord, that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ would ring out and save the world. Because You can handle it. And we believe that firmly today.

Lord, would you bless us the remainder of this week? Would you help us to be doers of the Word as we've talked about, not just hearers. Thank you, Father for the gospel. Thank you for Christ. We pray this all in His name for His glory. Amen.

Well, thank you for joining us this morning. If you would like to find more resources from us, you can find us on YouTube. Just type in Grace Fellowship Chilliwack. Also, you can find us online at [www.gracefellowshipchilliwack.com](http://www.gracefellowshipchilliwack.com) The Lord bless you; and have a wonderful day.