**Overflowing**

Ephesians 3:14-21

***When is the last time your heart just sang?*** When can you remember your heart just feeling so full it was like you were going to burst with love and joy?

* Maybe the birth of a child.
* Maybe when you first put your faith in Jesus.
* Maybe when you finished a big project, like building a house or a deck.
* Maybe when you first met the person you would marry; or your wedding day.
* Maybe when you had a really special vacation.
* Maybe when you started a new job and were filled with optimism.
* Maybe when you recovered from an illness and were just grateful to be alive.

Look at the promise in the passage we just read:

“To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:19

In chapter five we are **commanded to BE FILLED** with the Spirit. Here in chapter three Paul shows us how, with this amazing promise that if we pray and if we learn how to really know and experience the love of Jesus we will be FILLED with ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD.

***What does that mean?*** All the fullness of God?

***It’s not just emotional, but it certainly affects our emotions.*** Ephesians 5 describes the results of being filled with the Spirit - “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Oh brother, sister - **may your heart sing** with the glory and goodness of God! May you come to not just understand this passage but to experience it regularly for yourself. “To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Today we will see **four gifts God offers us in Christ** - that correspond exactly to what we most desperately need from Him. Let’s dive right in.

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Power** of Christ

“That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” Ephesians 3:16

**A little context** here in this incredible letter to the church in Ephesus. This book is primarily about UNITY in a local church and in a region. Jews and Gentiles were having trouble integrating in the early church and this letter is Paul’s most eloquent appeal for them to get along as one church, loving and serving each other. Because Jesus has knocked down the dividing wall of hostility and made us all one - Jew and Gentile - let’s maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!

Here as Paul is ***praying for LOVE to fill the church*** he is thinking both vertically and horizontally. As we are rooted and grounded in love - for God and for one another - that is how we will know and experience the fullness of Jesus’ love for us. But in order to have this heart-rejoicing, love overflowing reality, we need the POWER of Jesus, and so we need to pray.

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Power** of Christ
   * So **Pray** to the Father

“That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” Ephesians 3:16

***Only God can provide this*** kind of experience and this kind of day-to-day reality - only according to the riches of His glory, only through His infinite strength and power working in us spiritually. And we only gain access to the glory and power of God when we PRAY.

**Prayer** is one of the great mysteries of life. If God knows everything (and He does) and if God has planned everything (and He has) ***then why do we have to pray?*** The short answer is that in God’s infinite knowledge and sovereign plan **He has willed it that we pray**. He has designed the most significant moments in our lives to “happen to” coincide with those times when we pray. This is part of the “riches of His glory.”

The best analogy we have in Scripture for prayer is ***a child asking his or her Father*** for something. Every good parent knows long before the child asks what that child both needs and wants. But as parents we want the child to come to us because we are much **more interested in the RELATIONSHIP than we are in the TRANSACTION**. In fact, if we sense that the child is just after a transaction, we will absolutely NOT grant the request. One of our key parenting principles when the boys were small was “We don’t negotiate with terrorists.”

We did not tolerate fussing and whining. Another phrase we used a lot was “fussers get nothing.” Oh, how much of what we call prayer is just fussing? We babysat a two-year-old one time for 10 days while his parents went to Africa on a missions trip. He had some speech delays so even at two he didn’t have any words. So, he would fuss and point. Day one with him we said, ***“Fussers get nothing.”*** And we refused to reward or even respond to his fuss and point routine. Now, we are not cruel heartless people. We didn’t let the little guy starve. We taught him the sign for MORE. Within a day he had stopped fussing and pointing and started signing. And boy did we reward THAT.

***Do you see the difference between fussing and asking?*** We could create a new approach to prayer with sign language - more please; more please! And if what you want is more of JESUS - you can count on the fact that He will answer that prayer.

***Think of the last time you brought something to the Lord in prayer.*** What was your approach? Was it a fuss and point situation? Eh, eh, eh - I wanna, I wanna, Gimme, Gimme… Paul Rudd makes a cameo in Parks and Rec and runs against Leslie Knope for local office. Rudd is a grown man in his 30s but he is from a rich family and is obviously used to getting exactly what he wants immediately. At one point toward the end of the campaign he meets up with Leslie alone and says, “Can’t you just gimme this one? I want the job, just gimme it. Come on. Just gimme it. I said please. Now give it to me. Gimme it.” It’s funny because it’s so sad to see an adult behaving like a non-verbal two year old.

Paul’s approach to prayer - entirely following the way of Jesus - is **RELATIONAL**. Look back at verse 14.

1. The **Power** of Christ
   * So **Pray** to the Father

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” Ephesians 3:14-15

We pray to ***“our father in heaven.”*** We bow before Him as our Father IN HEAVEN. And we know He hears us because He is our FATHER in heaven. Fatherhood is so central to God’s nature that Paul reminds us that God is the Creator and Father of every being in heaven and earth - the originator and head of every family. Not only did God create every family but He NAMED them as well - giving each of us a unique identity and custom designed family experience. Even the hard, messy stuff is part of God’s plan for you to draw you closer to Him.

Remember, **we come on our KNEES**, not defiantly demanding what we want - but humbly asking for what HE wants to give us, knowing HE is our good, good Father. The first thing we need from God and the first gift He offers us in Christ is POWER.

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Power** of Christ
   * So **Pray** to the Father

“That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” Ephesians 3:16

May our glorious and gracious heavenly Father give you deep and abiding spiritual power. May you increasingly experience that in your inner person, in your heart and soul. Secondly, we need from God:

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Spirit** of Christ

“He may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Ephesians 3:16-17

Isn’t this prayer ***beautifully Trinitarian***?

* We bow before the Father.
* We ask for the power of the Holy Spirit.
* So that Jesus Himself may dwell in our hearts through faith.

We need the POWER of Jesus in order to recognize and grow in our experience of the indwelling presence of His Spirit. **All believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit** at the moment of salvation. Jesus comes to take up residence in your heart as soon as you invite Him in. But we are still commanded to be FILLED with the Spirit as an ongoing reality - because it is possible for believers to grieve the Holy Spirit, to resist the Spirit, to quench the Spirit and otherwise NOT be filled with the Spirit.

Which is why we need to pray and ask for power and a greater awareness of and openness to the presence of Jesus.

***You DON’T need to pray “Be with us” kind of prayers.*** Jesus IS with us. He is with every believer, dwelling in your heart. And He is with us in group meetings in a special way. The “where two or three are gathered” line has to do with church discipline and authority to make decisions and correct people.

A better prayer is “***Lord, make us more aware of your presence***. Help us to remember that you ARE with us and to direct our hearts and minds to you. Help us to walk WITH YOU and not to walk ahead of you or to ignore you.”

John Mark Comer has a great one season podcast called **Fight Hustle, End Hurry** and one of the episodes they talk about the spiritual discipline of SLOWING DOWN. Ideas like intentionally driving the exact speed limit or choosing the longest line at the store, and not looking at your phone while in that line. Slowing down. Comer gave that analogy of walking AHEAD of Jesus. Have you seen people like that or maybe done that yourself sometimes? The husband or wife is 20 steps ahead and just charging along. Not a very relational walk.

But isn’t that often what we do with Jesus? We are so busy, so focused on our next task. Are we really walking WITH JESUS, or if we’re honest, ***are we constantly walking AHEAD of Him?***

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Spirit** of Christ
   * So Believe the **Gospel**

“He may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Ephesians 3:16-17

We need to remember and **rest in the truth of the gospel** - that we have become the temple of the Holy Spirit both individually and collectively. Paul tells the believers in Corinth to remember that “your body” - ***your own individual physical body - is a temple of the Holy Spirit***, so don’t use it for immorality or sinful worldly pleasures. And it’s also true that together we are living stones being built together into ONE holy temple for the Lord to dwell in by His Spirit.

How does Jesus dwell in our hearts? ***Through FAITH.*** As we believe in His finished work on the cross, as we trust in Him personally and wholeheartedly. When we contemplate the love of Christ, we are reflecting on the gospel - the cost of our salvation and the wonder and beauty of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice. But our salvation is not just about the forgiveness of sins - it is also about being filled up with all of the fullness of God, as Jesus dwells in us.

In the parallel passage to this, in Colossians 3, Paul writes:

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Spirit** of Christ
   * So Believe the **Gospel**

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts… Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly…” Colossians 3:15-16

Jesus has reconciled us with the holy God of heaven - we have PEACE with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and His justifying work. ***So let that peace RULE in your heart.*** Don’t let sin rule. Don’t let worry rule. Let His peace reign in your inner person. And you will do that as you let His Word live in you, take root in you; as you get to know the voice of the Holy Spirit and grow accustomed to His presence.

**Believe the gospel: that Jesus now lives in you.** When Jesus moves into your heart He brings His Spirit, His love, His peace, His Word. Everything. Every spiritual blessing.

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Spirit** of Christ
   * So Believe the **Gospel**

“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love…” Ephesians 3:16-17

We pray for spiritual power to know and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, which will help us be rooted and grounded in the love of God for us which also connects us with one another. And that is our third gift from the Lord.

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Love** of Christ
   * So **Connect** with other Believers

“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love…” Ephesians 3:16-17

There is an intentional **double meaning** here with being “rooted and grounded in love.” Is that referring to the love of Christ or the love of other believers? Yes. What a picture of being deeply rooted, firmly established in love.

If we are rooted in the love of Christ, we will naturally gravitate toward other believers and seek connection with them. Jesus said, “You love me you will obey my commands and I have one command for you: love one another.” He boiled it down to that level of simplicity. Love each other.

***The love of Jesus is the root, love for people is the fruit.*** Are you rooted and grounded in love? Is that the soil your heart grows in?

To grow in this area, we first have to pray to our Father, remembering His great love for us. And we have to specifically pray for spiritual power and for the Holy Spirit Himself to remind us of His presence. As we pray along these lines the Holy Spirit will also start to show us PEOPLE who need love.

***Sometimes our heart soil gets hardened and the thing that softens it is LOVE.*** Mainly the love of Jesus but also the love of a person. Sometimes you need “Jesus with skin on.” You need a hug. You need a listening ear. You need a word of encouragement. You need some practical help.

***This also applies to outreach.*** It is becoming more and more true that non-believers are not likely to show up at church. But the thing that all people long for - regardless of religious background - is RELATIONSHIP. The best tool for evangelism is still HOSPITALITY. Open your home. Open your schedule. Slow down your pace and just listen to people.

Your love may be the thing that opens someone’s heart to Jesus.

In the same way, someone else’s love for YOU may be what opens you up to MORE of Jesus. That’s where this prayer lands, and it’s a powerful landing place that takes us to the fourth gift God offers us in Christ.

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Life** of Christ
   * So **Abide** in His Love

“That you, being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints…” Ephesians 3:17-18

As we are deeply rooted in love, and as we pray for help from the Holy Spirit, only then will we have the power to begin to comprehend the love of Christ.

Does this sound a little circular? The way to experience Jesus’ love more fully is to be rooted in His love more deeply? Yes. It’s all interconnected. And part of that inter-connection is us TOGETHER. Did you catch that phrase “with all the saints”? As we INDIVIDUALLY are rooted in the love of Jesus ***we will overflow into each other to create more of a CORPORATE experience*** of the love of Jesus.

1. The **Life** of Christ
   * So **Abide** in His Love

“May have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and

height and depth…” Ephesians 3:17-18

Now we begin to see the full dimensions of God’s love for us in Christ. But it is only a beginning. Of course, we know logically that **God’s love is INFINITE** - we can’t possibly know every bit of it. How could we? We can barely comprehend His love for us individually! How could we begin to process His love for 8 billion people right now and all the ones who came before us and will come after us!

When you think of God’s love, ***how big is the box?*** Is it like a wedding ring size? Or like stadium size? Planet size? Galaxy size? How wide, how long, how high, how deep?

Whatever you imagine, the truth is bigger. And it’s bigger because:

1. The **Life** of Christ
   * So **Abide** in His Love

“**To comprehend** what is the breadth and length and height and depth and **to know** the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge…” Ephesians 3:17-18

Paul uses two different words for knowing: to comprehend and to know. Synonyms for sure, but the second one, translated here “to know” is more experiential, more personal. It goes beyond understanding, and it has to because the love of Jesus surpasses knowledge.

***So how do you know an unknowable love?*** You have to experience it for yourself. Paul is showing us the steps to get there. First, you have to pray. Second, you have to ask the Holy Spirit to make you more aware of His presence. Third, you have to have other believers around you to help you understand and experience this love, “together with all the saints.”

When we follow these steps, look at the result:

1. The **Life** of Christ
   * So **Abide** in His Love

“To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:18

Here is the **fourth gift God offers us - Himself**; His own life and love and power and goodness. Just pause for a second and let this sink in. YOU can be filled with all the fullness of God. If you have put your faith in Jesus, then you ARE filled with all the fullness of God, since the Holy Spirit lives inside of you.

But you can and should experience MORE of this. Here is our summary for today:

**What you need from God:**

1. The **Power** of Christ
   * So Pray to the **Father**
2. The **Spirit** of Christ
   * So Believe the **Gospel**
3. The **Love** of Christ
   * So **Connect** with Believers
4. The **Life** of Christ
   * So **Abide** in His Love

What we need from God is precisely what He offers us in Christ. **First, power**. We need spiritual strength to even begin this process. So that is where we begin: on our knees before our loving heavenly Father.

As we pray for spiritual power, we need to remember the Holy Spirit lives in us both individually and corporately. We need to **believe the gospel** that Jesus died not just for our forgiveness but for our fullness and our fruitfulness.

Third we need **the love of Christ**, and to be rooted and grounded in His love we need to be connected with other believers. Then as each of us knows Jesus and experiences His love, that love will overflow to the people around us.

And so we will be filled with all the fullness of God as we learn, more and more, to abide in the love of Christ and to do so TOGETHER.

Do you see how the individual experience comes from and pours back into the corporate experience? You need other believers to experience this result, and they need you.

And this brings us to one of the greatest benedictions in Scripture.

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21

Paul prays for the believers and by extension we are called to PRAY for this, ***knowing that God can do far more than we can ask or even imagine***, because it is HIS infinite power at work within us. And so all the glory goes to Him as He builds His Church and the Name of Jesus is lifted up in us and through us from one generation to the next and from one people group to the next until all have heard and we all come together around the glorious Throne to worship King Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

George Whitefield story. (I ordered a bio on him, so the quotes below are likely to change.)

CONVERSION:

“[What! Get to heaven on your own strength? Why, you might as well try to climb to the moon on a rope of sand!](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/590190)” George Whitefield

CONVERSION:

“[I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed and drink indeed to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light and power from above.](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/759217)” George Whitefield

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/george-whitefields-love-christ-and-sinners>

MINISTRY:

"The love of Jesus Christ constrains me to lift up my voice like a trumpet. My heart is now full; out of the abundance of the love which I have for your precious and immortal souls, my mouth now speaks; and I could now not only continue my discourse until midnight, but I could speak until I could speak no more." George Whitefield

INVITATION:

“Your sins will be no hindrance, your unworthiness no hindrance; if your own corrupt hearts do not keep you back nothing will hinder Christ from receiving of you. He loves to see poor sinners coming to Him, He is pleased to see them lie at His feet pleading His promises; and if you thus come to Christ, He will not send you away without His Spirit; no, but will receive and bless you.” George Whitefield