



Do you need prayer today? In Ephesians 3, Paul prays for Believers. He asks God for four things on our behalf: (1) that we would be strengthened spiritually, (2) that Christ would "dwell" in our hearts, (3) that we would comprehend the expanse of God's love for us, and (4) that we would be filled with the fullness of God. In this study, we will break down Ephesians 3 and pray these four points over ourselves.

1. Context

a. Paul at Ephesus

- i. **Acts 19–20** records Paul's visit to Ephesus.
- ii. Paul spent three years in Ephesus, discipling the Believers there.
- iii. However, a riot ensued because some of the unbelieving Ephesians were upset that the revival led to fewer people worshipping Diana.
 1. Diana was the Greco-Roman goddess of the hunt.
 2. The decline in Diana worship led to a decrease in the number of idols the merchants sold.
 3. People tend to respond to the preaching of the Gospel in one of two ways, riot or revolt, and Paul experienced both.
 4. Paul was eventually run out of town.

b. The author and recipient

- i. Five years after Paul left Ephesus, he wrote to the Believers there.

c. The theme

- i. Paul wrote to encourage the Ephesian Believers.
 1. Paul knew Christians living in the first century Roman Empire needed encouragement.
 2. Emperor Nero was so opposed to Christianity that he dipped Christians into tar and lit them as torches in his garden.
 3. Paul's encouragement to the Ephesians can also encourage us to live out our faith in an increasingly hostile culture.

2. Paul's two prayers

a. Paul prayed for Believers to know God better in **Ephesians 1**.

- i. No matter how long we have been Believers, we can always increase our knowledge of the Lord and grow closer to Him.

b. Paul would pray again for Believers in **Ephesians 3:14**.

- i. **Ephesians 3:14–21** – "[14] For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [15] from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, [16] that He would grant you, according to the

riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, [17] that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what [is] the width and length and depth and height—[19] to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [20] Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, [21] to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

- ii. Paul said he bowed his knees in prayer to show surrender and submission to the Lord.
 1. Solomon bowed his knees to pray in **1 Kings 8:54**.
 2. Ezra bowed his knees to pray in **Ezra 9:5**.
 3. Daniel bowed his knees to pray in **Daniel 6:10**.
 4. Peter bowed his knees to pray in **Acts 9:40**.
- iii. Others in the Bible stood to pray.
 1. Hannah stood to pray in **1 Samuel 1:9**.
 2. The whole congregation of Israel stood to pray in **2 Chronicles 20:13**.
 3. Job stood to pray in **Job 30:20**.
 4. Jesus’ words imply some Believers stand to pray in **Mark 11:25**.
- iv. There is no right prayer posture.
- v. Paul’s posture is mentioned to emphasize two things:
 1. The earnest care with which Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus.
 - a. **DISCUSS**: Do you desperately call out to God, interceding for others? Is prayer a priority in your life?
 2. The reverence held for God, to whom we address.
 - a. **DISCUSS**: Has your posture ever changed mid-prayer? Have you noticed that your prayer posture affects your attitude when coming to God?
- vi. Paul’s second prayer included four requests on our behalf:
 1. That we would be strengthened spiritually.
 2. That Christ would “dwell” in our hearts.
 3. That we would comprehend the expanse of God’s love for us.
 4. That we would be filled with all the fullness of God.

3. Paul prayed that we would be strengthened spiritually.
 - a. Paul prayed that Believers would be strengthened in “*the inner man*” (**Ephesians 3:16**).

- i. *"The inner man"* is our soul.
- ii. We often focus on strengthening the external man, caring for appearances and obvious results.
 1. **DISCUSS:** What reminds you of the importance of strengthening your soul in the Lord? How has God strengthened you?
- b. Our souls need strengthening because we can grow weary of this life's trials.
- c. The Bible records Believers feeling discouraged.
 - i. Paul's trials brought him despair.
 1. Paul's trials led him and his companions to be *"burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life"* (**2 Corinthians 1:8**).
 2. Though he did not desire death, Paul desired to be with the Lord because *"to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord"* (**2 Corinthians 5:8**).
 3. Paul wanted to be faithful to bless God's people until God, in His timing, called him home (**Philippians 1:23–26**), but he understood despair.
 - ii. Elijah grew weary after Mount Carmel.
 1. God showed up in an amazing way to prove the prophets of Baal and Asherah were false gods.
 2. The Jewish people had a national revival.
 3. But Jezebel, the wicked queen, sought to have Elijah killed. Elijah fled in fear from Mount Carmel to Beersheba—almost 900 miles—and asked God to let him die.
 - iii. Jonah wished to die.
 1. God called Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, whom he hated.
 2. Jonah disobeyed, heading the opposite direction until God sent a storm and a fish to swallow him.
 3. Jonah finally agreed to go to Nineveh, hoping that the people who used their enemies' skins as wallpaper would perish.
 4. When the Ninevites repented, God showed them mercy, so Jonah said, *"Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"* (**Jonah 4:3**).
 5. **DISCUSS:** Do you recognize that Christ died for your sins as well as the sins of your enemies? Do you pray for those who hate you?
 - iv. The writer of **Psalms 42** mentioned he was cast down three times.
- d. History records Believers growing weary of this world.
 - i. Martin Luther struggled with depression most of his life.

1. Martin Luther described this with words like “melancholy,” “heavy,” “dejection of spirit,” and “sad.”
- ii. Charles Spurgeon struggled at times with deep depression.
 1. The depression began coming upon Spurgeon when he was 24 years old.
 2. In 1858, Spurgeon said, “My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for.”
- e. All Believers go through seasons of discouragement, and we must find strength in the Lord.
 - i. **Isaiah 41:10** – *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*
 - ii. **Psalms 28:7** – *“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.”*
 - iii. **Isaiah 40:28–29** – *“[28] Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. [29] He gives power to the weak, and to [those who have] no might He increases strength.”*
 - iv. **DISCUSS**: How is God the strength of your soul? Who or what did He use to strengthen you?
4. Paul prayed that Christ would “dwell” in our hearts.
 - a. Paul wanted Christ to “dwell” in the hearts of the Ephesians, even though they were already Believers.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:1b** – *“To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.”*
 - b. Paul was not speaking of Christ dwelling in people upon salvation.
 - i. The word “dwell” is translated from the Greek **katoikeō**.
 1. **Oikeō** means “to dwell.”
 2. As a prefix, **kata** adds emphasis to the word that follows it.
 3. **Kata** means “completely” or “thoroughly.”
 4. Paul’s hope was that Jesus would be so comfortable in Believers’ lives that He would feel at home with us.
 5. **DISCUSS**: How comfortable would Jesus be with watching your shows, searching through your phone, and hanging out where you hang out?
5. Paul prayed that we would comprehend the expanse of God’s love for us.

- a. **Ephesians 3:17–19a** – “. . . [17] *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what [is] the width and length and depth and height—[19] to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.*”
 - i. Paul prayed Believers would know the unknowable love of God.
 1. The love of God is intellectually incomprehensible.
 2. However, we can know the love of God experientially when we humble ourselves before Him.
- b. Karl Barth was a Swiss theologian who died in 1968.
 - i. Karl Barth used to lecture universities in Germany until the Nazis made him leave the country for refusing to swear allegiance to Hitler.
 - ii. Karl Barth published over 600 writings.
 - iii. Barth was writing a 13-volume, 9300-page book but died before publishing it.
 - iv. When asked to summarize all his great learning into one sentence, Barth recited a song he learned at his mother’s knee: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”
- c. God’s love was manifested:
 - i. Sacrificially
 1. **Ephesians 5:2** – “*Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*”
 - ii. Demonstrably
 1. **Romans 5:8** – “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”
 - iii. Generously
 1. **1 John 3:1a** – “*See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God.*” (NASB)
 - iv. Unconditionally
 1. God’s unconditional love does not mean we have a pass to sin and remain unrepentant.
 2. God’s unconditional love means we do not perform to earn God’s favor.
 3. **DISCUSS**: How has God taught you with love and discipline?
 4. The devil tries to remind us of our past to convince us we are beyond God’s love.
 5. God does not love our sins, but He loves us despite our sins.
 6. **DISCUSS**: Do you trust that God loves you? What Scripture do you use to remind yourself of God’s love when you’re tempted to doubt?

6. Paul prayed that we would be filled with all the fullness of God.
 - a. We must be full of God, not of ourselves.
 - i. The flesh tempts us to make life about gratifying and glorifying self.
 - ii. God calls us to die to self and live for God and His glory.
 1. **John 3:30** – *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”*
 2. In Jeremy Camp’s song “Empty Me,” he said, “Holy fire burn away my desire for anything that is not of You and is of me.”
 3. **DISCUSS**: How has God pointed out areas where you are self-willed? What is He calling you to crucify?
 4. **DISCUSS**: What does it mean to be full of God? How has the Lord satisfied the barren places of your heart?

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)