RESIDENCE

God offers believers strength by Christ dwelling in us.

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Sometimes, the simple presence of a friend makes all the difference. Most of us appreciate someone by our side when receiving serious medical test results or attending a legal proceeding for a family member. Strength to do the hard things in life can be found simply through a physical presence. “I’ll go with you, and we’ll face this together” may be some of the most precious words we ever hear.

*Recall a time when the physical presence of a friend helped you get through a challenging situation.*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Based on the great truth that, through His cross, Jesus created a new multi-racial community of faith comprised of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11–3:13), Paul offered a prayer for the Ephesian believers.

The apostle prayed to the Father to strengthen the Ephesians. The prayers of Paul, as inspired Scripture, represent more than an example of how an ancient believer prayed. They demonstrate God’s plan for every believer and, in this case, give a description of the new life brought into existence through Jesus Christ. This prayer represents clearly what it means to be “made alive with Christ” (2:5). The presence of Christ in our lives changes everything. With Him, a new life emerges for His glory.

After concluding his prayer and chapter 3, Paul began to set forth the particulars of this new life in Christ beginning in the next chapter. There is an observable pattern in Paul’s writings, not just in Ephesians but in other New Testament letters as well. He frequently begins with doctrine, with truth, with statements of reality that are grounded in God’s redemptive work. In Ephesians, we find this in the first three chapters. At the beginning of Chapter 4, there is the all-important conjunction “therefore” that marks the transition from doctrine to practice, from the indicative (already true) to the imperative (waiting to be made true). This reminds us of that which distinguishes Christian faith from all other religions. It is God-centered, not sourced in what human beings can do to merit salvation. Essentially, the lifestyle of a follower of Jesus is a reverent response to what God has already graciously done, not an attempt to reach God through human effort and right behavior.

Notice the specific requests Paul prayed for believers in Ephesians 3:14-21. How do these requests help us understand the character of God?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

PETITIONED (EPH. 3:14-15)

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

VERSES 14-15
Because of their status as the people of God—the church, the “one new man” created through the cross of Jesus (Eph. 2:15)—Paul prayed for the Ephesians. No doubt he was motivated to do so because of what he previously affirmed—that believers have access to God (3:12). So in this way we see the important connection between instruction and devotion, between Bible study and prayer. Both are vital in our growth as followers of Jesus. From Paul’s perspective, it was not enough to teach the Ephesians; he also felt impressed to pray for them. Information is important, but an openness of heart to receive truth is equally crucial.

We should take note that although Paul was under severe limitations in his prison cell, he could still pray for others. The adversary might stop us from doing many things through persecution. Our own physical bodies may hinder us at times. But as long as we have life, we can pray. Nothing can prevent us from lifting up others before the Father. We strengthen others by praying for them.

Paul’s reference to the Father prompted him to state a particular application of this divine characteristic. Every family derives its existence from Him. The meaning here is not so much what we might call the nuclear family but rather the sense of a group of people who have a common ancestor. (See Luke 2:4 for the same word usage.) We can see that it is family in a broader sense because it isn’t restricted to the earth but also heaven. It is a very comprehensive view of families that Paul had in mind here. His point was that every family, group, clan, or ethnicity originated with God the Father and Creator.

How might a person’s prayer requests for others reveal the requester’s understanding of God? How might a person’s understanding of God impact how they pray for the spiritual growth of others?
VERSES 16-17a

The familiar adage to avoid vague prayers and instead to pray specific prayers is evident in Paul’s example. He shared with the Ephesians four specific requests of his prayer for them: spiritual strength, abiding faith, awareness of God’s love, and the fullness of God. Each of these objectives merit our study and contemplation.

The familiar adage to avoid vague prayers and instead to pray specific prayers is evident in Paul’s example.

16 I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, 19 and to know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

INDWELLED (EPH. 3:16-19)

We can see in Paul’s prayer an example to emulate. First, in his kneeling (v. 14), there is humility before God. Next, Paul called on God as Father (v. 14), expressing an intimate relationship with the One who gave him life. Finally, this man of God recognized that prayer was not so much “claiming” something from Him, as it was receiving what his Father chose to grant him. This rightly expresses the humility required to come before God in prayer.

What Paul specifically asked God to grant to the Ephesians was that they would be strengthened with power inwardly. This divine empowerment in our inner being is through his Spirit. There is an obvious contrast of the inner being with the physicality of our existence. (See 2 Cor. 4:16.) Even when the externals of our existence are in peril, believers have an inner life on which to rely. This is where we experience and encounter Christ Himself.

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Father

He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise (Ps. 19:1-3).
The degree to which we can do so is in accordance to the riches of his glory. The more we grasp His greatness, the more we will experience His power.

The request that Christ may dwell in your hearts did not express a desire by Paul that the Ephesians might be saved. The Greek word for dwell carries the idea of abiding, of living somewhere for a long period of time. It describes the experience of a familiar relationship with Christ, not one characterized by long periods of silence and isolation. This was Christ’s desire for us. (See John 15:4.) This indwelling, since it occurs in the inner being of a person, is activated and sustained through faith.

What is the connection between being strengthened by the Holy Spirit and Christ indwelling a believer? How are they similar? How are they different?

VERSES 17b-19

The fellowship of a believer with Christ is a residency of love. As we wrap our minds around the gospel—what has been done for us in Christ—our hearts are moved and a deep love for God is aroused within us. This love is the foundation on which we are firmly established. We are also to be rooted in this love, like the root system of a large tree. The love relationship between a believer and Christ is the means by which nourishment is brought to the inner being, strengthened to live out new life in Christ.

As Christ resides in us, strengthening and growing us, this in turn fosters a greater understanding of God’s love. Paul used a four-dimensional metaphor when he depicted God’s love in terms of its length and width, height and depth. No doubt his intention was to paint a vivid picture of its vastness. Nothing brings inner strength like an awareness of the greatness of God’s love.

True love not only waits, it also lasts.

The length of God’s love reminds us that it lasts forever. So much of the so-called “love” in our world is temporary. Frequently, people
commit themselves to another person in marriage not for the duration of life, but rather as long as the emotional fervency of love lasts. True love not only waits, it also lasts.

To talk about God’s love as wide calls to mind how inclusive it is, and how every person is the object of His care and concern. In the multi-cultural context in which Paul wrote to the Ephesians, perhaps this was an important application of the all-encompassing love of God. It is no less needed today in our divided world.

The height of God’s love may serve as a reminder that it raises us from the sin-ravaged squalor of this world to heaven itself. Certainly God’s desire for us is that we live forever where He is, in heaven (John 17:24). In the heartache of life, during those times in which we feel like we have hit the proverbial bottom, we can find His love to be even deeper, and His arms of care are always beneath us to lift us up (Deut. 33:27).

While this grasp of the vastness of divine love is a personal experience, it doesn’t occur in isolation. It takes place with all the saints. Living in biblical community with other believers creates the environment in which our understanding of God’s incredible love can grow. While I might be able to see how much God loves me in my personal devotional times with Him, it is in fellowship with other Christians that I come to realize how much He loves all of us. This insight will revolutionize your life.

All who have experienced Christ’s love in salvation still have more of His love to discover.

While it was certainly important for believers in Ephesus to increase in their knowledge about their new lives in Christ, Paul desired for them to know Christ’s love. He recognized that this was a paradox because such love surpasses knowledge. All who have experienced Christ’s love in salvation still have more of His love to discover. By praying for the Ephesians to know what surpasses knowledge, Paul was praying that they would continue to experience more of Christ’s love as they were growing in their faith through the presence of the indwelling Christ. Knowledge and experience of God’s love leads to love, and love leads the believer to the fullness of God. Those who love God want to please Him and live the way He desires. As believers grow and experience the indwelling Christ, they should be progressing toward complete maturity in their relationships with God.
How does grasping the depth of Christ’s love bring power to the life of a believer? How does the love of Christ change a person from the inside out?

HONORED (EPH. 3:20-21)

20 Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us — 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

VERSE 20

Paul’s bold prayer for the Ephesians culminated in a request for their saturation with the fullness of God (v. 19). It is hard to imagine a greater prayer than this. Of course, he understood that only God and His grace could bring such a thing to pass. Therefore, we see the logical conclusion to this prayer: a doxology of praise to the only One who can answer it. Furthermore, this great offering of praise is a fitting conclusion to the first half of Paul’s letter, with all of its descriptions of new life in Christ.

Paul made specific bold requests on behalf of the Ephesian church. He realized, of course, that God could do much more than he could even dream. God is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think. This is an incredible statement, given the fact that human beings sometimes have fertile imaginations. Even more incredible is the thought brought to light earlier that this power … works in us. (See Eph. 1:20.) It isn’t just that God can do feats of strength, but rather that He wants to do them in and through us.

How do people place limits on God in their prayers? What kinds of limits might they place on God? How do these limits compare to the way Paul described God?
The fame of God’s greatness spreads even apart from events that might make a big media splash.

**VERSE 21**

This verse is the natural response of grateful devotion to the truth stated in the previous verse. A God whose might exceeds our imagination should be glorified *forever and ever* and without restraint. This glorification of God comes from both Christ Jesus and the church. As Christ’s work of reconciliation continues through the church, God is honored and glorified. This is what He has called us to pursue in *all generations*. Certainly, the name of the Lord is exalted through our works of reconciliation. Yet the fame of God’s greatness spreads even apart from events that might make a big media splash. By simply allowing Christ—who lives inside us—to strengthen us for life and all its challenges, we reflect His glory.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary to better understand a word or phrase.*

Look up glory or glory of God in a Bible dictionary. Read Ephesians 1:6-18 and 3:13-21, noting when Paul used the word glory. What do you think Paul meant by the word glory? How is a person’s glory also wrapped up in the glory of God?
IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can strengthen others by praying for their spiritual growth.
- Believers are changed from the inside out by the indwelling Christ.
- Believers should honor God for demonstrating His majesty.

As a group, spend time evaluating the systematic plan your small group has in place to pray specifically for the spiritual growth of one another. What might the group do to strengthen the plan?

To what can you point in your life that indicates you equally value the development of your inner being along with the outward person?

How is Christ being glorified “in all generations” through your ministry? What adjustments need to be made to bring honor to God to a greater degree?

Prayer Needs