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We Are a Praying People

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Series: The Church and the Home
Ephesians 3:14-21

BIG IDEA – PRAYER CONNECTS US WITH THE PURPOSE OF GOD

What is your purpose? I mean, what are you living for? What provides the vision and the shape and even the direction for your life? I'll tell you what our God wants to do. He wants to connect your life's purpose with his global purposes, and he wants to do it in any new stage of life you find yourself.

I love Brian and Olga's story, that even with kids... Usually, we think kids are the "pause" button. It's like, "We'll push 'pause' and then be productive once they're grown." Even in that season, the Lord is providing for them, equipping them to go, but more than that, he's using that season uniquely, because when they go they're able to model missions for their kids, able to encourage their children.

So, I wonder, wherever you find yourself, whatever season of life you find yourself in, how is God calling you in your unique season to connect your purpose with God's global purposes? As we see in the book of Ephesians, we serve a great God who has a cosmic plan. He's uniting all things in heaven and on earth in Christ, and he's doing it through the church.

As we're reading Ephesians, it's so high level it would be easy to think Paul wrote it from some corner office with leather-bound books, or whatever else, but remember, he's in prison. He's in prison because he's at the tip of the spear of gospel advance. I mean, Paul is doing it, connecting his purpose with God's global purposes. Not only that. This book is not just some theoretical, floaty, fuzzy musings about big thoughts.

A lot of times, that's how we feel about theology. It's just big and floaty, big thoughts. "Paul is thinking big thoughts. Maybe we can think big thoughts." No. Paul is trying to do something in his preaching and in his praying. He's trying to do something in our

lives; namely, give us a vision of who God is and show us what God has done so that it captivates our hearts and gives us a vision for what he can do and he can do again.

As you turn to Ephesians, chapter 3, I'll be in verse 14 in just a second. I invite you to join me there. Let me give you a little preview of what I think Paul is praying for. He is praying that we would see that God has and wants to give us the Spirit of power and the love of Christ. Power and love. That's what God is about, and that's what God wants to do in you and through you. Let's look here. Ephesians, chapter 3. I'm going to read verse 14 down to verse 21.

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory 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—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that 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."

We should just close it up and head on home. It's so good. I love that even in such a grand and sweeping prayer, Paul starts practically. See that in verse 14? He practically tells us how we pray, at least how *he* is praying. How is Paul praying? ***"For this reason..."*** What does he do? He bows his knees. Paul is in prison, likely chained to a prison guard. I bet it's a unique experience. Paul starts bowing. The guy is like, "Oh, gosh! Down he goes again." It's like, "Let him be. I think it's fine."

In the Scripture, we see a bunch of different postures at least modeled in prayer. I'm not sure if they're exactly prescribed. I don't think there's one exact way to do it, but we see a bunch of ways modeled. We see Solomon. When he's dedicating the temple, he stands. We see David. When he is praying about his future and his legacy, he sits before the Lord. We see Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. He falls on his face.

What do we do today? We close our eyes and bow our heads. I'm going to tell you a little secret. I don't close my eyes, and I don't bow my head. So there. It freaks my kids out, probably because people at this church are telling them, "Close your eyes and bow your head." Whenever we're around the dinner table, especially, and I'm praying for them, they're like, "Daddy is not closing his eyes!"

I'm like, "Who are you telling on me to? I'm Daddy. Are you telling on Daddy to Daddy? It doesn't work that way. Daddy is not closing his eyes." You have to be

careful, though. If you're an eye opener, you have to be careful if you're praying with other eye openers. I was at the night of prayer and worship, praying in the Spirit, just in the Spirit. Then Pastor Dave and I lock eyes across the room, and I'm like, "Whoa! He's looking too." Just be mindful.

What's the point? What's the point of the standing, the sitting, the kneeling, the being on your face, and whatever else? The point is we are complex people. Jesus says our hearts, our souls, our minds, our strength... We have a lot of parts to us. The point is we connect all of those parts in prayer. So, if you're spiritually affected, you should be physically moved.

Maybe in a worship service you feel that. Something is happening, so your arm is up, or maybe both arms. Or maybe you're so burdened for your child to come to know the Lord that you are on your knees at their bedside. Or maybe you got some bit of news, some diagnosis, or whatever else, from someone close to you, and you're overwhelmed so you're on your face.

How the Spirit is moving in our hearts should play out how we're living our lives through our strength. The inverse is also true. You can use your strength, your body, sometimes to jump-start your heart. My father-in-law was a pastor. He would always be up front right before he stepped on the stage and preached. Every service, at some point, he'd be raising his hand.

I had thought, again, you raise it when the Spirit is moving. You're feeling it so the hand is up. I asked him one time, "How do you feel it every single service?" He was like, "You know what? There are times I certainly don't, but whenever I hear a truth that God's people are singing and encouraging me with, a truth of who God is and what he has done, I raise my hand so that my spirit catches up. I know this should be true, and if I don't feel it, I'm using my body to try to jump-start my heart to feel it."

I think prayer can be the same way. There's a book called *The Common Rule*. It's a guy who's writing a couple of habits...*Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*, he says...habits you can do with your strength, or your body, to jump-start your affections, your heart. One of his is kneeling prayer three times a day...morning, midday, and evening. Generally, we don't kneel anymore, right? By setting aside time to kneel, he knows he's trying to jump-start his affections, his heart, for the rest of the day.

So, that's *how* we pray. We're moving on in to *when* we pray. Maybe morning, midday, and evening is a helpful bit. We also see... First Thessalonians says, "Pray without ceasing." How does *that* work in the equation? I think it's kind of like... Tim Keller talks about two types of prayer. You have *kingdom prayer* and *communion prayers*.

Kingdom prayer is whenever you are doing work with God. Those are like your work boots, you know, the steel-toed kind. You're in somewhere, setting aside time, doing work with God that he would move. Then you have communion prayers where you're walking with God. You have your walking shoes on.

That's just during the day when things come up. Maybe it's a remembrance of somebody, a memory, or maybe you just see something that reminds you, or maybe something calls your attention, and you're just spending time with the Father...communion. I think to have both/and is what makes the relationship go.

We know this. That's the same way with our relationships. What do you try to do whenever the kids are home from school or you're home from work? You try to have your sit-down, your one-on-one, where you look in the eyes of your family and you catch up to see how the day was. You do work.

Then there are times throughout the day. Whenever you think about them, you send them a text, or something funny reminds you, and you want to share something with them. That's communion. That's relationship. I think both feed and fuel the other. We have some pillars in our day...maybe it's the morning, maybe it's the evening, maybe it's the midday...that ground us in prayer, and then throughout the day we pray without ceasing.

Now we get to the main point...*What do we say?* That's the *what* question. What do we say when we pray? The Bible gives us a surprising, maybe encouraging, answer that we don't know how to pray. That's what Paul says. Paul is one of the baddest apostles. I mean, he writes some of the highest-level, baddest theology books you've ever seen. You try to work through Romans and you're like, "Golly!"

Not only that, but in Romans, chapter 8, one of the most intense sections of that book, in verse 26, it says, "We do not know how to pray as we ought." Maybe you've felt that. Maybe there's a problem or a situation, a sin, a suffering, a temptation, or whatever else. It's so big you don't even know where to start. Or maybe you just kind of feel silly, if you're honest. Whenever you're asked to pray, you try to pray. You're not sure if it's working. This whole individual monologue thing doesn't really feel like it fits.

We usually learn to cover up if we feel self-conscious in prayer. We usually learn to cover up by learning how to pray by listening to other people. What I mean is maybe you grew up in a high church tradition, and they were like, "You want to learn how to pray? I'm going to give you a script, and you stick to that script. Here's what you pray before meals." You're like, "Got it. That's easy."

"Here's what you pray if you've sinned. Here's what you pray when you're going on vacation," or whatever else. "Here's your prayer." You're like, "Fine. I'll just learn to pray by sticking to the script." I think, for most of us, we learn to pray just by listening. Somehow, we all find ourselves saying the same things. I didn't realize this until my kids started praying back to me.

We're at the dinner table. My eyes are open. I'm looking at them. No. We're at the dinner table. "I want to pray, Daddy." I'm like, "Go for it." Every time, they follow almost the same formula. "God, thank you for this day. We pray we have a wonderful time. Bless the food. In Jesus Christ, amen." Every time. I heard it the first time and didn't think much. The second time, third time... I'm like, "Wait a minute." I started listening. We all say those things.

Almost all of our prayers have, "Thank you for this wonderful time. We pray that we have a wonderful day. Bless the food. Amen." We all find ourselves saying the same things, but we don't know that we don't know how to pray until we get around somebody who prays. Have you ever been around somebody who's just doing work in prayer? You're like, "Dang! You're doing something different than what I do. Your praying is different than my praying."

That's how the disciples felt with Jesus. In Luke, chapter 11, they said, "Lord, teach us to pray." That's what prompts him in doing the Lord's Prayer. He's teaching them how to pray. Apparently, something in Jesus' ministry, a prayer, moved them to ask him, "Lord, teach us." They didn't ask him how to cast out demons. They didn't ask him how to teach. They didn't ask him how to preach or any of those things. They said, "Teach me how to pray." He was doing something different.

I think that's how we feel with Paul. Reading this prayer, you're like, "Man! Something is different than what I normally do." Paul is not just trying to give us a script, though that could be helpful. Just as an aside, a helpful place to start is to pray Scripture back to God. You can pray a psalm back to him or maybe even this prayer of Paul. That's so helpful.

But Paul is not just giving us a script. He's trying to give us a vision. He's trying to show us who our God is, what he has done, and what he wants to do through us, because prayer always starts with the *who*. It's always the *who* before the *how*. We have to know who we're praying to if we're going to get how we're praying or what we're saying right.

01 WE PRAY TO THE FATHER

So, let me ask you: Who is Paul praying to? Verse 14. He's bowing his knees before the Father. The *who* he is praying to is the Father. God is Father. I could spend a whole sermon on that, but I'm not going to. Not only is he *a* father but he is a specific type of father. Do you see that? ***"...I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named..."***

He's the one who sets the tone that provides the definition to all families. Not only that. Paul maybe is saying he's the one who sets the tone and provides a definition for all fathers. The word he uses there for *family* sounds very similar to the word he uses for *fathers*. That means God himself defines what it means to be father. Super important. This is what we call *revelation*. God tells us how it is.

Oftentimes, the way *we* work is with projection. What I mean by that is we look around about our experience, and we try to push that back or project that back up into God. So, whenever I say that God is Father, you're probably thinking about *your* dad, *your* father, and you're thinking about who he was or who he wasn't, and then you're trying to push that or project that back up into God. Lord, help my children if they do that.

One Sunday... It is always Sundays. Why is it that I always lose my temper on Sundays? We were in the car going to church. Usually, I'm fun, silly dad in the car. "Roll down the windows. Let's listen to fun music and sing." I was not fun, silly dad that day. My 4-year-old and 7-year-old, for whatever reason, didn't pick up on my social cues.

They were there for silly dad. They were there for silly time. They were laughing. They were hitting each other. They were pounding on the windows and whatever else. I'm telling you, I just snapped. I didn't just snap in general. I snapped at *them*. I got on them, and not in a good way. Then, you know, you go to service, and the Word is preached at you, and people are praying, and you're convicted of sin.

I'm like, "Here we go. I can at least repent to my children." So, I'm in the car on the way back. I'm like, "Guys, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I don't love you like God loves you. I'm sorry that I'm impatient. Our God is not impatient with us. I'm sorry that I'm unpredictable. God is not unpredictable. He's faithful. I'm sorry. I try to love you." From the back seat my daughter goes, "It's okay, Daddy. You try."

God is the Father. He does not try. He sets the tone. He provides the definition, and he shows us his love not just in floaty ways but, specifically, through his Son Jesus Christ. At the cross of Christ, the fatherhood of God is defined. When we see Jesus lay down his life, we know that our God *is* self-giving love. That's what John means, I think, in 1 John when he says, "God is love." We know God *is* love when we look to his beloved Son, Jesus.

We know that God is faithful. I think that's what Paul is saying in chapter 1 when he's talking about the *predestined* language. "You were predestined for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ." I think what Paul is saying is this is what he has been up to all the time. He has not changed. From the beginning he *has*, and now he is grabbing you with his love and giving you his Spirit so you can be in his Son.

That's what the Spirit does. The Spirit takes what is Christ's and makes it ours. Do you remember Paul's whole "We don't know how to pray" section of Romans? "What's the answer, Paul, if we don't know how to pray? Is there any hope for us?" Yes, there is. Look at Romans 8:15. ***"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"***

Let me ask you a Bible question. Who cries out to God as "Abba, Father"? Jesus. Remember that in the garden in his time of greatest need? When he is laying down his life in love, he cries out to God as his "Abba, Father." Well, that's how prayer works. Why? Because when we have faith in Jesus, God's Spirit unites us to Christ so that we pray to *his* Father as *our* Father.

I think how we pray shows who we think God is. Most of us find ourselves on some spectrum of being religious. We have the far end of super formal. Maybe you say "thee" and "thou" and "thine" and use language in prayer you wouldn't use any other place in life. Or maybe you find yourself on the other end of some sort of "feely" prayer, where it's "Daddy God" or whatever else.

Neither of those extremes seem to hit home. Neither of them seem to be authentic. They don't fit with who we know God is or, really, who we know ourselves to be. Jesus (and Paul) is teaching us that in prayer we move from the religious to the real. This is how you really talk (or it should be) about your real problems, and you're talking to a real Father. That's Paul's answer.

When we find ourselves in our own Gethsemane, a time of trial or temptation or sin or suffering, or whatever else, and when we don't even know where to start, we can pray to our Father in his Spirit, and that love will bear us through and bring life. This Father, as we see, is one who, according to the riches of his glory... It's like, yeah, he's got it all, baby. "According to the riches of his glory."

What do we want this God who is full of abundance and riches to give us or what does *he* want to give us? As I said, I think he wants to give us two things: power and love. Maybe more specifically, he wants to give us his Spirit of power in resurrection and the love of Christ in reconciliation.

02 FOR THE SPIRIT OF POWER

Look at verse 16. **"...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being..."** Whenever we talk about God's power, Christians can get a little goofy. Maybe you've been around church long enough where people talk about having God-sized goals or dreams.

Somehow, we always connect it back to offering. It's like, "All right. This missions offering this year... We want to have a God-sized goal. We're going to take last year's total, and we're going to add 30 percent." You're like, "Thirty percent? God-sized? Why not, like, 30 million percent or 30 quadrillion percent?"

Or maybe your friends in the college admissions season are like, "I just want to have a God-sized dream. I want to get into a top-tier, prestigious university." It's like, "Get in? That's God-sized? Why don't you try to create a university out of the dust of the earth? That's God-sized."

This is not a floaty type of genie power. When we hear *power* we think of Aladdin. "Phenomenal cosmic power!" This is defined power, and it's defined by Jesus Christ. What God *can* do he *has* done in Christ. Look at chapter 1. Pastor Nate preached through the prayer in Ephesians, chapter 1.

What does he say in verses 19 and 20? In chapter 1, Paul is praying that we would know **"...what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places..."**

This is not a floaty power to accomplish our story. "All right, genie God. Make me a prince." No. God is giving us the power of his Spirit to accomplish *his* story, and his story is one of resurrection power. That's good news for us, because we need resurrection.

If we're honest with ourselves, I'm not sure if we are confident that people can really change. We think people who are close to us but far from God are really too far from God, or maybe they're too set in their ways, or maybe they're too skeptical and will always be wandering.

I think we're not sure if people can really change because we're not sure if *we* really change. Even if we're Christians, we're at the point in life where we're just going to make peace with whatever sin struggle that is. You know what I'm talking about, the

one you keep going back to, and you're like, "All right, Lord. I'll just try to live my next six days of the week to make up for that. It's just going to be what I do."

Maybe it's some relationship. You learn to settle in your marriage. "It's always going to be distant or tense." Maybe it's with your kids. "You know what? I'm never going to have a great connection with my children." Or maybe it's with your parents. "My relationship with my parents will always be weird and strained."

Sure, we get excited after a sermon. We all get excited, and we get in our cars and go home. That excitement to change maybe lasts about a day, 24 hours. This change often never works deeper than skin deep. It never gets to the heart of who we are. It never gets to change us from the inside out.

I'm reminded of a story I read as a kid. It's a series of books, *Sideways Stories From Wayside School*. There's one in particular about a classroom of kids where, one day, a new kid came to class. If everybody was honest with themselves, he seemed a little off, a little strange. He sat by himself, didn't talk to anybody, and he wore this huge overcoat. It was raining outside. It wasn't a problem.

The next day, when the sun was shining, he was still distant and strange and weird and kind of mean and still in his overcoat. The teacher was like, "Hey, you can set your coat over there." Whenever anybody talked about or reached out for his coat, he lashed out. They couldn't figure it out until, finally, day after day after day where he kept being distant and strange and kind of mean, the teacher had enough. She was like, "All right. Give me that coat."

She took it off. There was another one underneath it. She took *that* one off and there was another one and another one and another one and another one. She was just piling these coats in the corner of the classroom, trying to get to the bottom of it all. At the bottom of it all, this new kid Sammy was a sewer rat. There was a reason his circumstances were the way they were. Underneath all of it, he was a rat.

I think what happens in prayer is, so often, we're praying for change, "God, change *this*" or "Change *that*," but we're praying for change for our circumstances. Maybe we think it's the boss' fault. You think it's your job's fault. You think it's your kids' fault. I don't know...your spouse's fault. We don't realize God doesn't want to change the circumstances; he wants to change us.

As Paul puts it, he wants to change us, strengthen us with power, in our inner being, at the sewer rat level. He wants to change you *there*, from the inside out. Not just take off a jacket but to change who you really are, resurrection power to the very core. Remember, this is the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead. No one is too far

gone, no one is too set in their ways, and no sin is too deep. This is the Spirit of resurrection power.

It's interesting. You don't have a resurrection without dying. Paul Miller is a pastor who wrote a book called *A Praying Church*. In it, he says that often we think the formula for prayer goes something like this: we pray, the Spirit comes, and brings us power. It's kind of like the genie God to accomplish our dreams. We think that we pray, the Spirit comes, and brings us power.

What he says is when the Spirit comes, he brings not only the presence of Christ (he's truly with us) but he brings the pattern of Christ so our lives are shaped to look like his. What does he mean by that? He means that when we pray like Jesus, we lay down our lives so that, like Jesus, God will raise them back up again.

Do you remember Jesus' "Abba" prayer in the garden of Gethsemane? What did he do in his praying? He walked on the path of his dying, because he knew that God would raise him up again. I think we know this. Let's take your relationship with your spouse for example. Maybe it's a tiff. Maybe it's a blowup. Maybe it's just a pattern of whatever else.

If you're honest, you don't really want to pray, maybe about it yourself, personally, but especially not with them, because you know that at the point you start praying, you're going to have to start dying. You know that to take that step across the room is actually a step of repentance, and you know to get on your knees, either individually or together, you might actually have to change...not them and their circumstances, not you and your circumstances, but *you* in your inner being.

Or it could be the same again at your workplace or with your kids. It could be your future, your finances, your relationships, or whatever. Like Jesus, in our prayer we lay our lives down, knowing God will lift us up in due time with resurrection power.

03 TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Paul not only prays for power. He also prays for love. Specifically, the love of Christ. Verse 17. We're strengthened with power. ***"...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..."*** Whenever we talk about Christ in our hearts we think about us having a little heart locket. Have you ever seen those little necklaces you can open up and put a picture inside?

We want to open up our little individual interior heart lockets and have Jesus pour chicken noodle soup right into our souls. We want the warm fuzzy feelings, and we

want it inside of us and for us. Like, "Pour it in," and then we close our heart locket and go about our day.

This is neither internal, nor is it individual. Let me give you the Southern translation. Paul is praying that Christ may dwell in y'all's hearts. What does it say in verse 18? **"...that [y'all], being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints..."** This is all y'all. That's how Paul is praying here, because love is a team sport.

There are any number of sports I try to follow. It gets harder with kids. One is baseball. In the last 20 years or so, this wave of analytics has taken over the game. For good or worse, I don't care. The point of analytics is that they can use technology to analyze almost every individual facet of the game. Not only to analyze it but hopefully to pick it apart and even to project future performance.

They use it in scouting. They can look at a batter, for instance, and they can track and analyze this batter's bat speed, the exit velocity of the baseball, the launch angle he uses, and they can decide whether or not this player can be the next great player, or whatever else...make it in the league.

It's fascinating. I was reading a story how one guy, one unknown dude, which is kind of strange, because usually they know about everybody... One unknown dude sent a video of him batting to a professional organization, and they were blown away, because he had provided the real-time stats on the screen of those things everybody is looking for. His stat range was exactly where he needed to be and even above it.

So, the executives got in a plane, went to his house, and sat down with him to see if he could be the next great whatever. The only problem was he had never actually played baseball. He had only been by himself in a batting cage, getting his personal statistics down, but had never played the game. Spoiler alert. I don't think he made it.

I think that's what we can do in our Christian lives. We can take us and Jesus, go to the batting cage, and try to get our personal statistics down, but if it's just us and Jesus, we have never actually played the game, because the game is love. Not just love into heart lockets...love for all y'all, love in the church, where God is taking what is different and uniting it together.

Remember Ephesians 2? The love of Christ tore down the dividing walls of hostility and united us together in one new man. God is displaying the manifold wisdom through his church. That's Ephesians 3. Manifold wisdom. It's different. It's diverse. It's manifold. It's like a stained-glass window. He's displaying all of those differences and the glory of it through the unity of the church.

I hear more times than I want to, so I'm assuming you do, that our nation is more divided and polarized than ever and [blah, blah, blah]. That probably is true in some places. Maybe that's true in a lot of places, maybe in all places. I don't know. I'll tell you where it's *not* true. It's not true in my Community Group, because in my Community Group, we have a man bun, a power lifter, a former D1 athlete, a Chick-fil-A operator, an expat, and a pastor all in one breakout group, and that's just the guys.

We come from all over. We've been through all different things, and we are *going* through all different things. No, our group is not always candy canes and sunshine. Yeah, we have crazy schedules and crazy families. Yeah, we're all dealing with some level of social anxiety and selfishness.

Sure, there are little tiffs and people are all for whatever else, but it's the discipline of community where God shows us the love of Christ. It's a discipline. You have to make a choice to be there, and not only to be there but to *be* there when you are there, if you know what I mean.

When you begin to live out love, the love of Christ dwells in y'all's hearts. What does he say in verse 17? We are rooted and grounded in love. Let's do a mental exercise. Imagine with me if you will. Can you think back to a time in your life when you were the closest to God? I bet that in that season, when you were closest to God, you were also closest to Christian community.

The inverse is also the truth. Can you think back to a season when you felt farthest or *were* farthest from God? I bet that at that time you were also farthest from Christian community. It is hard to doubt God's love when you are rooted and grounded in community.

Rooted. That's tree language. Think about Psalm 1: the blessed man who is like a tree planted by streams of water. There are any number of reasons to have a rootless life. Maybe it's your kids, your job, your work, your parents, yourself. I don't know. At every stage, we have reasons to be rootless, but what does God do? He roots us in Christ as a community.

What about the *grounded* language? *Grounded* reminds us of a temple. In Ephesians, chapter 2, Paul is talking about how we are a household that's being made into a house. We are a family that is so rooted and grounded it's like we're a building. This family is stable, stuck together.

Grounded on...what? He says on Christ the cornerstone and on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles (that's God's Word). *Together* we are grounded, like a temple. If you are tired of being rootless, if you are tired of being listless, come to

Christ through his Word and with his people and be rooted like a tree and grounded like a temple.

04 AND BE FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD

That *temple* language, *grounded* there... The temple is never just for us, whoever the *us* is. It's never just for individuals to feel the presence of Christ in our little heart lockets. It's never just for the church to enjoy the presence of Christ together. Really, that temple language is to go outward.

Verse 19: "***...to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***" How are you supposed to know something that surpasses knowledge? How are you supposed to experience something that is so spiritually profound? You do it when you put skin on it.

You know the love of God that surpasses knowledge when you know that love through God's people. Again, there's a difference between the fullness of God's presence and God's omnipresence. Have you ever wondered why we pray for God to be here, wherever *here* is, when God is everywhere? Like, "God, be here." It's like, "He is here." Why are we doing that?

Well, think about it. If you are cursed in your work to work with Microsoft Excel... Let's just say you're by yourself, staring at your screen, doing some Excel spreadsheet. God is there, truly, with you and Microsoft. But what's the difference whenever you are with God's people and he is there?

Think about the night of prayer and worship we've had. What's the difference between you and your computer screen and Microsoft Excel and our Night of Prayer and Worship? The difference is God's people come together, expecting God to move, so he brings his Spirit of power (bringing dead things to life), he brings his reconciling love (uniting what is different together), and he brings the fullness of his glory.

Again, not just for us, because the temple is supposed to be a light to the nations, and, no, not just for the church. The church is supposed to be a city set on a hill. We are supposed to take God's fullness, his abundant, overflowing love, and ourselves overflow. God is inviting us to something far beyond our little vision of what we want. What we want is often what we pray for...your wish list.

Listen. It's a good thing. It's a good thing that we pray for our families to be safe and successful and healthy and happy. Sure, it's great that we pray for our marriages to be nice and for us to get what we want or whatever. Yeah, school... I get it. You want

to make good grades. You want to win ball games. You want to have friends. Yes, I guess, we want our church to get bigger and better and whatever.

What does Paul say in verse 20? ***"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us..."*** See how that's different? God is taking our little desires and blowing up that box and giving us a vision, a vision of who he is and a vision of what he has done. He is calling us to look backward and to dream forward.

I think praying and dreaming are connected. When we see what God has done and we catch that vision, then our prayer lives and our lives are changed. What shapes our lives, the vision that provides direction, is changed. Our purpose, then, begins to become connected to God's purpose, and we begin to pray, "Lord, do it again."

In the 1940s, there was a group of college students, a bunch of kids. They wanted to take a fun tour, a class trip. They went to England. If you've been to England... Maybe you have or maybe you haven't. They have there Christian Heritage Tours. These are tours throughout the city and surrounding areas of London where you can see relics of revival. It's like, "Look at how God moved, and now we have this building," or whatever.

One of the last stops of the tour in London was the house of John Wesley. You may have heard that name or you may not have. It doesn't matter. Just know that John Wesley was one of the people who, in his generation, God used to create a movement of his power and love and change the world.

In Wesley's house, the tour culminates in his bedroom. They stepped into the room, and the tour guide pointed to his bed and said, "Do you notice beside his bed those two spots on the floor, the two marks in the carpet?" He said, "Those are still there from all of the long hours Wesley spent on his knees in prayer."

Remember, this was his college-age home. Wesley was just a college kid. He caught a vision for God and spent so much time praying for revival to break out that he broke in the floor. The tour concluded, and they got all of the students and herded them back to the bus. The leader noticed one of them was missing. Where was he? They went back through the house, trying to find him, calling his name.

When the leader walked into Wesley's bedroom, he found him with his knees on those spots in the floor, praying. As he walked up behind him to put his hand on him and let him know it was time to go, he heard that student praying, "Lord, do it again. Do it again. Do it again." That student was Billy Graham, and the Lord did it again.

When we hear that name, we think of stadiums filled with thousands of people. We think of an international ministry. We think of an evangelist the worldwide over, but remember, at that season, Billy Graham was just a college student, just an old boy from North Carolina, but he caught a vision of who God is, of what God has done, and he said, "Lord, do it again."

So I wonder. If this is who our God is, this is what our God loves to do, why can he not do it at your school, at your program, at your office, in your neighborhood, in your apartment complex, in your family, in your house, in our church, in this city? When God's people come together, expecting him to move, he brings his Spirit of power, he brings the love of Christ, and he does it again. Let's pray together.

Our Father, if we're honest, we're tired of our small prayers. We're tired of living our "blah" routines, just trying to survive. Lord, we want a vision. Open our eyes to see who you are and what you do. Lord, grab hold of our hearts with the truth that you want to do it in Christ and through your church. Lord, we've seen you move. We pray you do it again, that you'd do it in us and you'd do it through us. We pray in Christ's name, amen.