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## LIVING IN THE FULLNESS OF GOD: EPHESIANS 3:14-19

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On a recent trip to New York City very early in the Spring, I went to one of my favorite gardens in Central Park. However, I was a few weeks too early to see the garden as it began to bloom. Yet as I sat down, I began to notice that the buds on the trees had just a hint of green in them. From a distance they could appear dead and lifeless, but the trees, and plants and flowers were all very much alive. They were simply being prepared to properly bloom. In the same way God uses the various seasons of lives to prepare us for the full lives he intends all of us to live. When God chose us as His children he always intended for us to grow and develop into the fullness of all He has for us and the Church. In Ephesians 3:14-19 we find a beautiful prayer by Paul for the development of the church body. While he sent this prayer to the churches in the city of Ephesus and the southern region of Asia, this is a prayer we can all pray and take note of for ourselves and the global church.

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### PAUL'S LETTER TO EPHESUS

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The book of Ephesians is one of Paul's many letters to the churches he planted and discipled throughout his ministry. While Paul never met Christ, his conversion experience was so powerful that he became a primary apostle, church planter, and disciple of the early church. Most of the books or letters in the New Testament were written by Paul, and he played a major role in the development of the early church at its theology. His letters were often for encouragement, discipline, or to address a specific issue within the church, but Ephesians was very general. Although it was specifically titled to the church of Ephesus, most scholars believe that the letter was intended to be passed around to all of the churches in the region surrounding Ephesus. Ephesus was a major hub of the Roman Empire, similar to a major city like San Francisco, Los Angeles, or New York, and had a major influence on the surrounding areas. So sending this letter to such an influential place was very strategic. Paul also knew that the people of Ephesus and the surrounding areas would need this letter and this prayer so that they could withstand both the external and internal struggles that they would face. Please take some time now to read through Paul's prayer for the church so we can begin to discern what it means.

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### PAUL'S PRAYER - EPHESIANS 3:14-19

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1. Read through Ephesians 3:14-19 once. Then read it again taking careful note of words, phrases and ideas that stand out to you.
2. Write down the parts of the prayer that stand out to you, give you hope, or resonate with you the most.
3. What does Paul do before he begins this prayer?

There are two major parts to this prayer, but before Paul begins, he does something very significant, he bows his knees before the Father. There are many prayer positions that are mentioned in the Bible. Many Jewish prayers take place standing up, while others are mentioned lying prostrate on the ground in full surrender, and David is seen dancing and praying before God. Daniel, who prayed three times a day to the Lord while in Babylonian captivity, also knelt before God each time he lifted up a prayer. In The Salvation Army you may find our members and soldiers kneeling before the Lord at the mercy seat as an act of surrender and repentance, and

that is likely what Paul is doing here. Before bringing his petition before God, he knelt in surrender acknowledging his power and majesty. Paul also mentions that the Father is the source from which every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, to reiterate that Salvation is for everyone.

## PART 1 – EPHESIANS 3:16-17

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1. Read Ephesians 3:16-17 one to two times, to grasp all of its detail
2. List all of the things that Paul is praying for the church.
3. There are two portions of this prayer
  - a. Paul first prays that - according to the riches of God's glory that we may be strengthened in our inner being with power through the Holy Spirit. The main thing he asks is for the church/people to be strengthened in power, but how is that accomplished? First, we can see that the power is according to the riches of God's glory. Think for a moment about how powerful, vast, all knowing, and all containing God is. Imagine everything God has created and spoken life into. This is the same power that God is strengthening us with. Second, we are strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third part of the trinity and has always been present, but until the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we could not be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. And now Paul is praying for this power to fill us and strengthen us to do mighty works for the Lord.
    - i. Have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit
    - ii. Read Acts 1:8 to hear Christ speak of the power and purpose of the Holy Spirit.
  - b. Secondly Paul asks that Christ may dwell in the hearts of believers as they are rooted and grounded in love.
    - i. Read John 3:16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Luke 10:27 – what do these scriptures say about love?
    - ii. Why is it important that Christ Dwell in our hearts? Before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the presence of God only dwelt in a physical temple. During the reign of King Solomon in the Old Testament the temple, or The Tabernacle was built according to instructions from God so that His presence could dwell there. When King Solomon built the temple, the Spirit of God powerfully descended upon the temple, filling it and even overflowing out of it. But God's presence remained in the physical building accessible to only a select few. God is now offering us this same gift and presence. When Christ died the curtain that separated us from the presence of God in was torn in two, and it became possible for Christ to dwell in all of us. We, both individually and the church body, are now the temples or Tabernacles where God dwells, representing God here on earth. But we must be prepared for Christ to dwell within us, offering Him a Holy and surrendered place.
    - iii. Do you feel as though you are offering Christ a holy place to dwell in? If not, what changes can you make in your life to help you get there? (Ephesians 4:17-5:5 has some suggestions if needed)
    - iv. Why do you think it is important for the church to be rooted in love? Do you think Christians show love like we should?

## PART 2 – EPHESIANS 3:18-19

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1. Read Ephesians 3:18-19 – slowly and sit and bask in the depths of God’s love and power.
2. This is the second part of Paul’s prayer and in it he illuminates the majesty, power, might and glory of God. Why do you think it was important for the church fully comprehend, experience and know the breadth, length, height and depths of God’s love and power?

Earlier it was mentioned that Paul wrote this prayer to help strengthen the church from both internal and external factors that would come against it. Ephesus was a major influential city in the Roman empire, and it was also a center of Pagan worship. Ephesus was deemed the guardian of the temple for the pagan god Artemis, and many of the converts to Christianity used to practice some form of pagan worship. Which meant that they purchased icons and statues, and spent money on other forms of worship. And when they stopped buying those items, the people that profited from their sin became very mad. So mad that an angry mob chased Paul out of the 25,000 seat stadium in the temple for Artemis several years before he wrote this letter. While Paul left, the churches and Christians who had converted had to remain in this hostile environment every day.

In addition to the people in and around Ephesus, Paul knew that the church would also have to live through the persecution of the Roman government. Paul was writing this letter while sitting in a Roman prison for preaching the gospel, and many other Christians had already been tortured, imprisoned, and even killed for preaching the gospel. The Romans saw themselves as gods, and any devotion that came before devotion to Rome was a threat to them and Pax Romana, or Roman peace and control. And the Ephesians and south Asia would not be spared from their violent rule.

Lastly, Paul prayed this prayer so that the church might be unified where there once had been discord. Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles, but many Jewish people had converted to Christianity and were not always welcoming to the Gentiles. Prior to Christ there was a lot of hostility between the Jews and Gentiles and this did not disappear once they were converted. Some Jews thought the gospel was just for them, while others expected Gentiles to continue to uphold strict Jewish rules and principles in order to become Christians. Paul had to remind them that they were one in Christ, brothers and sisters under a new Covenant. They were under one God and one Church, and that the old had to pass away as they became a new family.

And this new family, this new church of believers needed a prayer and a reminder of the all powerful, all knowing, expansive God that they served. They needed to know in their minds and hearts that their God was bigger and more powerful than any human or pagan god could ever be, and that they needn’t worry about these earthly attacks. There was no government authority, ruler or business person that could stand a chance against their God. They needed to live and breathe that truth from the depths of their being so that they could withstand the trials and tribulations they would face. They also needed to deeply know and experience the love of Christ in a way that would make every division amongst them fall away. Because when you act out of the overwhelming love of Christ it changes you. Paul reminds them that the love of Christ is so vast that we will never understand it, but we must try. Especially when it concerns our brothers and sisters in Christ. And Paul reminds us that we can and must pray for these things.

3. What are some of the issues facing the church today? How can this prayer help them?

4. Take some time now to contemplate the vastness of God's power and love. Sit in it, reflect upon it, experience it in a mighty way. Let it overcome and overwhelm you until it cannot be contained. Let this love be your driving force as you grow deeper and deeper in Christ.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & SUMMARY

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1. As you read through this prayer again, what one thing stands out to you the most?
2. After reading this prayer, have you realized areas in your life that need to change? Have you been influenced by the world too much lately? Are you letting outside forces weaken your faith? Are you upset with another brother or sister? How can you take these to God in prayer?
3. How can you pray specifically for our country and the Church to be more loving and kind, more filled with the power of God, and a true place for Christ to dwell?

It is my prayer that as you read these verses the power of the Holy Spirit will come upon all of you in a mighty way, illuminating God's path and will for your life. I pray that Christ would flood your hearts with his love so that you seek more and more and more of it each and every day. I pray that God's love would be your guide, pushing you forward and filling you each day as you encounter the troubles of this world. Allow yourself to be enveloped by the power and presence of God each passing day, as Christ richly dwells within you.