



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

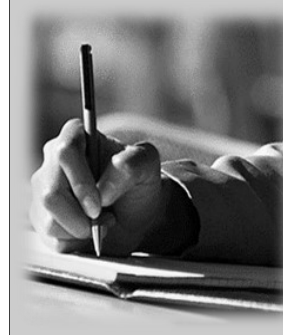


### HG181 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul Praying For Power

Ephesians 3:14-21

Home Group Study Notes

24 March 2019 - Pauline Woolnough



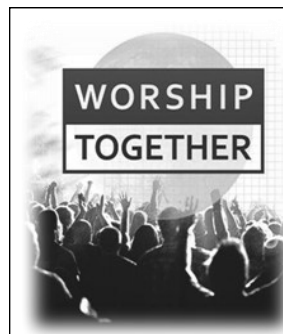
PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



### Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

If you had the power to change one thing about yourself what would it be?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...

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Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry



HG181 *Prayers Of The Apostle Paul*  
**Praying For Power**

Ephesians 3:14-21

Home Group Sermon

24 March 2019 - Pauline Woolnough

**Introduction** There are many different forms of power and many different ways to obtain it, in most cases the end result is someone having influence over an event, a person or people that allows that person to shape those events and people to their own needs and wants. Looking back over history and throughout the world today we can see that humanity has a problem with power, and not always using it for the benefit of others. Our idea of power and its uses is very different from God's. In our passage today Paul is showing us what it is like to pray in view of God's greatness and of our biggest human need, love, and he asks God to empower the Ephesian believers (and us) and grant them a greater knowledge of his amazing and extraordinary love for them. He is not praying that they themselves would love God more, he is praying that they would know how much God loves them. Who doesn't need to be reminded of that?

**Praying With Humility** In this prayer of Paul's, 2 main requests emerge - power and love. He began his prayer in Ephesians 3:1 and then seems to get distracted as we often do and began expressing his own gratitude leading him to contemplate again the riches of Christ. He is lost in wonder, awe, praise, amazement, he cannot fathom the depths of love the Father has for us, and as he reflected on the love and grace of God he becomes lost in worship and says... *"When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray."* He is stunned and overwhelmed by a God who loves and died for sinners and who unites them in His Son Jesus Christ making them a holy people, a temple where God himself dwells by his Spirit and so he *"falls to his knees and prays."* He is deeply humbled as once more the absolutely stunning realisation of the knowledge of God's love invades his soul and touches his heart anew, and he has nowhere else to go but down before his God. How often do we fall to our knees in prayer and in worship? We may be Anglicans but sometimes there is no other response to God's *"glorious riches in Christ."*

**Strengthened By Power** He goes on to pray that *"out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."* v16-17. We see the trinitarian character of Paul's prayer as he asks the Father that his Spirit would strengthen us so that Christ his Son would dwell in our hearts. Paul is praying that we may be strengthened with power on the inside, in our inner being. Whilst the world is interested and even obsessed with the outward body and appearance it is what is in the inside that Paul writes of here because God is most interested in our inner being, in our hearts and our souls.

Throughout our lives, outwardly we waste away as our bodies and physical strength decline but what ought to happen is that our souls keep growing.

4. Paul prays that we might be strengthened in our inner beings so that a place might be made for Christ to dwell suggesting that some de-cluttering is needed. What are some of the priorities competing with Christ for space in your heart?

5. What kind of prayer requests are brought up in your home group meetings? How are Paul's petitions for the Ephesians different?

6. If God truly is able to do immeasurably more than we could imagine how does that impact your thoughts and prayers?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Paul fell to his knees in humility and this glorious prayer pours out of him in desperation that the believers might know of and experience God's love. What prompts you to pray like Paul?

2. Are you overwhelmed by the love of Christ? Why or why not? What can you learn from Paul regarding gratitude for God's grace?

3. Have you experienced the love of God practically in a way that has influenced how you live your life?

Paul puts it more clearly in 2 Cor 4:16. *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."* The things that weaken our bodies and cause us in many cases to suffer may in fact be the very things that strengthen our inner selves. In her poem *Old Lace*, Karle Wilson says, *"Let me grow lovely growing old."* That's not usually how the world sees the elderly and in western cultures we do everything we can to stay young, especially looking young, but God sees beauty in us as we grow old and move towards him. Life may be a slippery slope leading to death but from a spiritual point of view it should be a journey, like climbing up a hill that leads us to the presence of God the closer we get to the summit. We don't need to fear growing old because the passing years bring us closer to God.

Paul prays that our inner beings will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in order that the Lord Jesus Christ may dwell in our hearts. Perhaps at first that is somewhat confusing as we know that as soon as we accept Christ as our Saviour he enters our hearts and takes up residence within us but the way Paul uses this verb *"dwell"* suggests Christ taking up residence, of staying put and making changes. D A Carson in his book *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* describes it like someone buying a house knowing that it is in need of a lot of repair but they overlook this because they can see the big picture, they have vision and plans and they know what this house can become. Over the years they tackle the decorating, install a new kitchen and bathroom and landscape the garden but this transformation all takes time. The years slip by and after a while they look around at their handiwork and they like what they see and feel rooted and content in their home. Carson says that this is what we are like when Jesus takes up residence in us. When he first moves in to our hearts we are a mess, a bit like the run down house and it takes a great deal of power to change us. Just as some improvement jobs are more difficult than others and take time to complete, some of the changes Christ needs to make in us also take time. Some of them are major and met with resistance and that is why Paul asks for and prays for power.

We may want to hear about how the power of the Spirit can heal the sick and raise the dead, but it takes power to change a wilful heart, it takes power to transform a life, and it takes power to provide a place where the King of Kings feels comfortable to dwell in. That is no less a miracle that the blind man seeing or the deaf hearing.

**God's Glorious Riches In Christ** Paul prays, that *"out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit."* It takes power to change us and it is out of God's glorious riches that the power comes from. In Phil 4:19 Paul says, *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* Everything that comes to us from God comes through Jesus. Everything has been completed in and through Jesus. He cancelled our sin, won our pardon and reconciled us to God. All these blessings and more have been won for us through Christ's death and resurrection, our *"glorious riches in Christ,"* and just as the Father lavished these gifts on us through his Son so he has the same reserves of power, (Eph 1:19-20), to lavish on us still, using it to transform us into the likeness of his Son. This should surely bring us to our knees in humility but also with confidence because of who we are in Christ, it is because of his reconciling work and our union with him that we have access to the Father. 3.12 says *"Because of Christ and our faith in him we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence."*

**Power To Understand God's Love** It's never long before Paul turns again to his favourite subject and prays for power that we would be able to grasp the limitless dimensions of God's love and although he writes to Christians knowing that they had knowledge of God's love for them, he also knows that this cannot purely be an intellectual knowledge. He does not want them just to become more articulate in expressing God's love, he wants them to experience his love. He prays that they would be "*rooted and firmly established in God's love*" that they would have "*the power to understand how wide, long, high and deep his love is*" that they would "*experience the love of Christ*" and "*be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God,*" v18.

God's love is rooted in history and nowhere is his love more magnificently seen than at the cross but head knowledge of his love is not enough, we need to experience his love for us as individuals and to help the Ephesians and us understand the limitless dimensions of God's love Paul uses the expressions, width length, height, and depth.

The greatest longitudinal extent of the Pacific ocean measures some 12,000 miles between the coasts of Colombia in South America and the Malay Peninsula in Asia but 12000 miles is nothing compared to the measure of God's love for us. The mighty R Nile is 4,132 miles long - it's not a patch on God's love for us. The peak of Mount Everest is 29,035 feet above sea level, but that doesn't come close to the height of God's love for us. The deepest part of the ocean is in the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean. At its deepest part it's just under 7 miles deep, God's love for us is deeper. His love is wide enough to reach the whole world and every corner of our experience, it is long and continues the length of our lives, his love rises and reaches the high points in our lives that we celebrate yet it is deep enough to reach down with us when we are in despair and face death. Paul prays that we might "*Know this love that surpasses knowledge.*" He is asking that we might know something that we cannot understand by ourselves because his love "*surpasses knowledge,*" it is limitless and boundless and beyond our understanding and although we might try to understand it, it takes power to fully do so. "*When I think of all this I fall to my knees.*"

**Power To Experience God's Love** However many of us are wary and suspicious of this word, experience. For some it sparks a fear in them of the thought of losing control, for others they fear that experiences of the work of the Spirit is too open to abuse, and that too much reliance can be placed on experience without measuring it against scripture. Paul knows that it God's love for us that we need to experience and that scripture itself demands it. In Romans 15.13 he prays, "*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" This does not suggest merely intellectual comprehension.

Paul wants us to experience for ourselves the love of God that rescued, saved and redeemed us and we can only do that through the power of his Spirit. I know that there will be some us who find the intellectual knowledge of God's love for them difficult enough to grasp without Paul praying that we actually *experience* it. There may be others who say that what Paul prays here sounds good but they never experience anything but unless we do, we will never "*be made complete with all the fullness of life*" 3.19. In other words we will never grow up, our faith will never be mature and we will never grow into Christ's likeness.

It is as we understand and experience the fullness of God's love that we grow in spiritual maturity and are filled with "*all joy and peace ..and overflow with hope,*" (Romans 15.13) and transformed to be all that God wants us to be.

Reading this scripture should spark a desire in us to know more fully how God loves us but how do we receive power from the Holy Spirit in order to experience it when the question we're more likely to ask is, "*how on earth can he love us?*" After writing chapters 1 and 2 of Ephesians, Paul was so overcome by the love and grace of God that he strayed from his trail of thought and got lost in gratitude and wonder and fell to his knees in prayer and worship before he could continue with his letter and in order to fully experience God's love we need to follow his example and do what we all find most difficult to do. We need to STOP. Be still. Look up. Marvel at God's love in Christ and rest and delight in our freedom and his forgiveness and the power of his Holy Spirit will do the rest. (Read ch 2.1-10). It may take time but we *will* be changed.

**Pray With Great Expectations** Paul ends in worship with the doxology in v 20-21 "*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*" God is able to do more than we could ever think of or dream up or imagine. He is omnipotent and nothing is too difficult for him. He is able not just because he is powerful but because he is good and generous and to think of him in any other way suggests we don't know him. We cannot get our heads around what he is capable of and at times we are too unbelieving, sceptical and afraid to ask. As a result we have made him too small. As we move towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday and look again at the cross where He raised his Son Jesus Christ from the dead, victorious over all the powers of darkness and placed him as the head of the church let's remember that the same power that raised Christ from the dead dwells in us, (Ch1.19-20). Just as we see how he worked through all those extraordinary heroes in the bible, so he can work through us and it is his will and pleasure to do so, why ... because he loves us.. and so that he might be glorified. "*according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*"

God is Sovereign and will be forever glorified in Jesus Christ the Lamb that was slain. He put aside his own free will and laid down his life for us so that we might be reconciled to the Father. And he *will* be glorified in us, he *will* be glorified in his church as he dwells in our inner beings and "*For this reason I fall to my knees and pray.*" Amen

## Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,  
we have fellowship with one another and the blood  
of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7