

Ephesians 3:14-21 — Getting More Joy From The Gift Of The Son

December 16, 2018

When I was growing up, Christmas morning was always a good morning in our family. My parents made sure there were many presents under the tree. Our family tradition was to put gifts under the tree throughout the Christmas season so the pile grew larger the closer it came to Christmas.

I spent a lot of time checking out the brightly wrapped gifts under the tree with my name on them. I couldn't wait for Christmas morning. While there were always many fun gifts under the tree, I will admit that other gifts were deceptive, especially for an 8-year-old boy. Many of the gifts turned out to be socks, underwear and dress clothes for Sunday morning. It was not that I wasn't grateful for new underwear, but let's just say my parents were happier for the gift than I was. A package of white socks under the tree felt like a Christmas dud.

One of those deceptive gifts that I sometimes found under the Christmas tree was a U.S. savings bonds. Did anybody else get U.S. savings bonds for Christmas? At 8 years old, I wasn't sure what to do with them on Christmas morning. You can't play with them. You can't wear them. I knew that one day in the future they would be really valuable, but on Christmas morning all I could do was give them back to my parents and know that one day in the distant future I would appreciate it.

For the last few weeks, we are studying key passages about Jesus from the book of Ephesians. The goal of our study is to help us understand the greatness of what God did for us when he sent his son for us.

Two weeks ago, we learned from Ephesians that we are the most blessed beings in the entire universe because of Jesus. In eternity past, God purposed in his heart to put us and his son together. God sent his son to take on human flesh forever, so he can be one of us forever. Jesus didn't just take on a body to identify with us. He came to die in our places for our sins so he could bring us to God. We cannot be any more blessed than we are through Jesus. That is great news.

Last week, we learned that we are not just the most blessed beings in the universe but we are also the ultimate contrast in the universe. We were born spiritually dead in our sin. There was nothing we could do to help ourselves in our relationship with God. We were controlled by the values of the fallen world. We were puppets of Satan. We were mere brute beasts that lived just to satisfy our fleshly desires and lusts. We were slated for an eternity of just suffering in hell. There was absolutely nothing we could do about it.

But God chose us. When God the Father raised Christ from the dead physically, he raised us from the dead spiritually. He planned to give us the Holy Spirit in our hearts. The Holy Spirit begins to make us into new people from the inside out. The changes the Holy Spirit makes in us today are small compared to how the Holy Spirit will change us in eternity, where we will enjoy incredible privilege and blessing. We will literally be seated on Jesus' lap. Nothing else in the universe has that privilege of sitting on the lap of Jesus, just Christians. We don't just have the privilege of sitting on Jesus' lap, but we will also sit on Jesus' chair. Nothing else in the universe has the privilege of sitting on the lap of Jesus

in the chair of Jesus. That is just the beginning of the blessings God the Father will shower on us. For all of eternity, God's blessings will continually be increasing like the volume on a stereo getting turned louder and louder. The difference is there is no upper limit to the ever increasing volume of blessings that God will pour on us for eternity. Nothing in the universe is more blessed than we are through Jesus. This is mind-blowing. God's plan to make us the most blessed beings in the universe begins to unfold in this world when Jesus is born in Bethlehem.

The problem is that today all of the blessings God has for us through Jesus feel like U.S. savings bonds on Christmas morning. We know those blessings will be great in the future, but what difference does Christ make in our life today? Do any of the blessings God has for me through Christ take place today?

If that is your question, you came on the right morning. Our next passage in Ephesians will help us understand how God wants to bless us today so that we will get more joy from the gift of God's son.

Take out your Bibles and turn with me to Ephesians 3:14-21.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

This is the second big prayer in Ephesians. Paul's first prayer was in Ephesians 1:15-23. In that first prayer, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be able to understand the blessing that is theirs through Jesus. In the second big prayer in this book, Paul prayed the Ephesians would move from understanding who they were in Jesus to living out who they were in Jesus.

This prayer divides into three parts. The first is the introduction to the prayer. The second part is the prayer itself. Last, Paul closed the prayer and thanked God for the incredible work he plans to do in us through Jesus.

Introduction to Paul's prayer

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named... Ephesians 3:14–15 (ESV)

As soon as we read this verse, we are introduced to a question. Paul was offering this prayer, “For this reason...” The problem is, what is the reason? Let me tell you the reason and show you how I found it.

God's plan has always been to showcase his wisdom through Christ's church and Christ's people.

To find the reason for this prayer, we need to take our fingers a few verses backward and see what Paul was talking about just prior to this prayer. This is what we find.

...and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord... Ephesians 3:9–11 (ESV)

There are three reasons given in these verses. First, we see God had a master plan. He hadn't publicized it but had kept it hidden. Then God revealed his master plan. What did this plan involve? Second, the plan was that through the church God would display his wisdom to the world, even to the unseen spiritual world. Third, how would this plan take place? God's plan was realized through Jesus.

God has a master plan for this world that will take place through the church, but it originated with and was empowered by Jesus. As Christians, we are part of that church. As Christians, we are connected to Jesus. If God has big plans for Christ and the church in this world, it means God must have big plans for you and me, because we are part of the church and are connected to Christ. God's big plans for us are not just in eternity. They are also here and now.

God is uniting people broken by racial and ethnic divides, and he is doing it through Christ and in his church. God is restoring people who are broken by sin. God is doing it through Christ and his church as he offers forgiveness.

We need to understand that since God's master plan for the universe is to display his wisdom through Christ and in the church, God has amazing plans for us here and now through our relationship with Christ and in the church.

This is why Paul closed these verses as he prayed for the Christians in Ephesus with these words:

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. Ephesians 3:20–21 (ESV)

He said God is able to do far more than we could ever ask or even imagine through us. God doesn't do these things by our strength but by the strength of Christ working in us. What will the strength of Christ do through us and in us? God will use his strength in us to do more than we could ask or imagine to bring glory to Christ in the church.

Paul's prayer was that we would be able to do far more abundantly than we could ever ask or think by God's power that works in us today, not just in the

future. This is the prayer Paul prayed for those he loved in Ephesus and the prayer is appropriate for us to pray for those we love as well.

Paul prayed on his knees, because he was serious.

Notice Paul said he got on his knees. Praying on the knees was not the normal prayer posture in Jesus' day. Most people prayed standing. In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18, both stood when they prayed. While kneeling in prayer was unusual, it did occasionally take place. In the Bible, when someone was kneeling in prayer, it meant there was an exceptional degree of earnestness in the prayer. They were serious. For example, when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, before being arrested and crucified, he fell to his knees and prayed, asking that if possible God would let this cup pass from him. "God, if there is another way to save your chosen people besides me dying for them, please let me know."

The Bible doesn't specify a posture for prayer. You can pray standing, sitting or walking. We do see people praying on their knees in the Bible, but when they were on their knees, that is because it was a particularly serious prayer.

Paul prayed directly to God the Father, because with Jesus, we don't need an intermediary.

Paul prayed to God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. There is a fair amount of discussion by scholars about what this means. I think most of the technical discussion misses the point. What we need to notice is the contract. Paul said he was praying to God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. Paul was speaking to God as his father. This is a personal, intimate term. Who is God the Father? He is the one

that all of humanity looks to as their creator. God the Father is also the one that all of the angels look to as their creator. Every living thing ultimately looks back to God the Father as the creator, yet here is Paul talking directly and personally to God the Father, the one who created everything. God the Father had his knee bended to listen to Paul's prayer. He has his knee bended to listen to our prayers. Notice that because of Jesus, Paul didn't need an intermediary to go directly to God and talk with him and to him.

Now that Paul put himself in a position of humility before God, he prayed for the Ephesians. He prayed that God did through their lives more than they would be able to ask for or imagine for the growth of God's kingdom and the glory of God's son.

As we study Paul's prayer, realize we can use this as a prayer template for ourselves but it may be best to use it as a prayer template for others, especially those we love. Paul prayed this for the Ephesians he loved. It is appropriate for us to pray this prayer for those we love. Let's dive into the prayer.

How should we pray for those we love so God will use them in ways beyond what they would ask for or imagine?

Pray that God would grow them strong and powerful for Christ in their inner being.

...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being... Ephesians 3:16 (ESV)

We will start in the second half of the verse. Paul's prayer was that God would give them the gift of growing strong and powerful by means of his spirit in their inner being.

The first thing to notice is that Paul prayed they would grow strong. This was not a prayer for instant spiritual strength. This was a prayer for growing spiritual strength and maturity. This was a prayer that they would become spiritually mature and strong over time.

Just as physical strength comes from exercising and challenging yourself over time, the spiritual strength that Paul prayed they would develop in their inner worlds was something he prayed would develop over time as they exercised themselves in knowing God and in knowing his Word.

In our Life Groups, we will spend more time looking at how the Bible talks about growing inner spiritual strength, but this morning, let's just look at one important way, which is spending time in the Word of God. It is keeping our fingers in the text which produces inner spiritual strength and maturity.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation...1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

The basics of God's Word produce spiritual growth.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

Paul told the Colossians to keep the Word of God in their thought lives. He told them to think about the Word of God all the time. This is what he meant when he told them to dwell on it richly. Read the Word of God when you get up in the morning so you have a bit for the day. Memorize God's Word so you can call it to mind when you need it most. Sit under the teaching of God's Word. Get involved in CrossWinds University classes and Life Groups so you are continually growing in God's Word.

I like the way Paul talked about God's Word. He said the Word of God is what we use to teach and correct one another. In other words, God's Word teaches us how to think correctly and corrects us when we drift into bad thinking patterns.

Paul said we don't just read and study the Word of God but we should sing the Word of God. We sing songs, hymns and spiritual songs. This is why the worship portion of the church service is important. It teaches us the Word of God through singing. This is why it matters what you listen to on your iPhone when you go for a run. Use worship songs to let God's Word dominate your life so you grow spiritually strong and powerful in your inner self.

The key parallel here is between physical strength and inner spiritual strength that both are grown over time and both take work to develop. Of course, all spiritual strength ultimately has its origins in God alone, but to the degree that we read God's Word and study God's Word, we participate in the the spiritual growth and strengthening of the inner man.

While there are many similarities to strengthening the outer physical man and our inner spiritual being, there are some differences.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV)

Over time, our bodies age. Our bodies grow weaker. Our bodies waste away. I find myself discouraged in the gym because I don't have the strength I used to have. I don't have the endurance I used to enjoy. While more diligent training will bring some of that back, because my body is aging, it cannot bring all of that back. Spiritual strength is different. It doesn't weaken over time. It grows

over time. Our spiritual strength, which comes from God, is renewed by God every day. This is incredibly encouraging.

You can demonstrate this to yourself. How many of us that have walked with Christ for years find ourselves physically weaker but spiritually stronger? We prove to ourselves that we have experienced spiritual maturity by simply asking if we are still struggling with the same sins and temptations we faced as Christian teenagers. I expect that most of us will say we have grown beyond those temptations and are not as vulnerable as we once were because we are now stronger in our inner beings. We are now more spiritually mature.

So while our bodies grow weaker over time, our spiritual maturity should continually grow stronger over time.

This is the first step in living a life that does more than we can ask or imagine for Christ and his kingdom. It involves growing strong in Christ in our inner beings. We do that by spending time in God's Word, in prayer, with other Christians in the church and letting Christ mature our inner beings.

Pray their hearts, which are Christ's home, would be comfortable places for Christ to live.

...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... Ephesians 3:17 (ESV)

After we seek to grow strong in Christ, Paul said we should seek to have Christ dwell in our hearts through faith. This can be confusing. When we ask Jesus to save us, the Bible tells us that Jesus comes into our hearts. Why pray for this happening a second time if it has already happened to every one of us when we trusted in Jesus?

The key to understanding this is the word *dwell*. Dwell in the Greek means to settle down and live comfortably in a house. The Greek word for dwell even has a special Greek modifier in front of it to intensify what it being said. Paul's prayer was that Jesus Christ would be really settled and extremely comfortable in their hearts as he dwelled in their lives.

When I began as a senior pastor, I served at a church in Michigan. We didn't own a house. We lived in a parsonage next to the church. In many ways, the parsonage was a blessing because we couldn't afford a home of that size. In other ways, the parsonage was strange because it never felt like our home. It had orange carpet in the basement, but since it was not our home, we couldn't change it. Don't misunderstand me. We were very thankful for the home, but the home in some ways didn't feel like a place that was comfortable.

That is exactly what Paul was getting after in this phrase. Christ comes into our lives when we trust him as our savior, but how comfortable is Christ in our hearts? What would make Christ uncomfortable in someone's heart?

Years ago there was a book called My Heart, Christ's Home. It likened our hearts to houses. The author talked about Jesus living in our hearts and the importance of letting Jesus have access and control to all the rooms in our hearts, his home. The author's point was that until Jesus could travel freely into all the rooms of our hearts, he wasn't comfortable in our hearts.

The author talked about the importance of letting Jesus into the library of our hearts. You know the book is dated because none of us have a library at home. We have a computer. The author's point is still applicable. The library of

your heart is where the data is stored in your heart. We call it the brain. What data do you put into your brain? Trash, smut, porn, materialism, or violence? Remember that Jesus is watching it with you. If Jesus is watching what you are watching, is he comfortable with the things you read and watch on the Internet? Is he settled down and comfortable in the library of your heart?

The author then talked about the dining room in the home of our hearts. The dining room is the place where we satisfy our appetites. The author's question was, "Is Jesus comfortable with the appetites in your life?" Is what you are dreaming for in your career making Jesus comfortable? Is what you are longing for sexually putting Jesus at ease? Are your financial dreams putting Jesus at ease? Is Jesus comfortable in your heart when he looks at your appetites and how you are trying to satisfy them?

The author then talked about the family room of the home. The family room is a place for relationships. You bring people over to your home and entertain them in the family room. His point was, is Christ comfortable with the relationships you have in your life? Which relationships do you have that don't put Christ at ease in your heart? You know when you have a relationship that is pulling you in the wrong direction. We know when Jesus is not at ease because of the company we keep but we keep it anyway because we are afraid to be alone. Is Christ comfortable with the relationships you are keeping in your life?

The author talked about other rooms in our hearts, Christ's home, that we need to give over to Jesus if he is going to be comfortable residing in our hearts,

because he has full access to our hearts and can then remake our hearts to be pure and holy for him.

This is what Paul was talking about. The first step to being used by God in ways we can't even think of or imagine for Christ's kingdom and in his church is we need to grow strong in Christ in our inner beings. We may get physically weaker over time, but through God's Word we can grow spiritually stronger. The second step to being used by God is we need to give God free access to every areas of our hearts, so Christ can settle comfortably in our lives, which are his home. This is not speaking about perfection. You and I know what it is like when we have part of our lives we keep to ourselves and away from Christ. We know what it is like when we have areas of our lives that are not pleasing to him and we need to address them. This is what Paul was praying for the Ephesians and what we should pray for those we love.

We pray that they would give Christ free reign in their hearts so he will be comfortable in their lives.

Having begun a relationship with God by his love, pray God would supernaturally expand their hearts to better comprehend the love God has for them and for his church.

...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... Ephesians 3:17-19 (ESV)

The third step to God using our lives to do more than we could ask for or imagine for his kingdom and his church is that we would grow in understanding God's love. As we have been rooted and grounded in God's love for us, we need

to have God supernaturally expand our capacity to understand the incredible amount of love God has for us and his church.

Everything about our relationship with God is based on God's love for us that we don't deserve. That is why Paul said we are rooted and grounded in love. The next great step that makes us being useful for Christ in his church is that we don't back away from God's love for us but we grow in our capacity to understand God's love for us.

This is not knowledge we learn in books. This is something the Holy Spirit supernaturally enables us to understand as he works in our lives. Paul said we can't even begin to get our arms around the dimensions of God's love for us. It is too wide, too long, too high, too deep.

You see, the more we can comprehend God's love for us, the more God's love for us changes us.

The vast amount of love God has for us enables us to love people that are hard to love.

We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19 (ESV)

When we begin to understand the incredible amount of love God has for us, it enables us to forgive people that are hard to forgive.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8 (ESV)

Since everything about our relationship with God begins with his love for us, greater spiritual maturity and usefulness for Christ and his kingdom happens when we have an expanded capacity to understand the amazing amount of love God has for us and his church.

The result of these things is they will be filled with the fullness of God.

...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19 (ESV)

What does this mean? It means we have grown strong in our inner beings through God's Word. It means our hearts are open to Christ and Christ is settled and comfortable in our lives. It means we have grown to have greater understanding and appreciation of God's amazing love for us. The that happens, we are in the position where God can use us in ways beyond what we could even ask or imagine for his kingdom and in his church.

Why is this the position of usefulness that Paul prayed for the Ephesians he loved and that we pray for those we love? It is the position of usefulness because this is the place where the fullness of God dwells in us. We are in the position of God having the greatest amount of control and influence in our lives. That is the place God wants us to be. When we are filled with the fullness of God, we are most like Jesus and are most useful to God, just like Jesus.

God is able to do more with us than we ask for or think but what he does with us is according to his power at work in us.

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. Ephesians 3:20–21 (ESV)

Paul said God is able to do far more than we ask for or think, but what he does with us is according to his power at work in us. In other words, the more we grow strong in Christ in our inner beings, the more comfortable Christ becomes in our hearts, his home. The more we pursue having the Holy Spirit expand our

hearts' capacity to understand Christ's love for us, the more the fullness of God lives in us and the more God will use us for Christ's glory in the church.

Conclusion

We began talking about how so many blessings that are ours through Jesus feel like they are a U.S. Savings Bond on Christmas morning. They are good for the future but don't help us right now. Today, we learned that God's blessings for us through Jesus are not all for the future. God desires to use our lives right now in ways we couldn't even ask for or imagine. For that to happen, we want to put ourselves in positions where God can use us.

How should we pray for those we love so they are in a position where God can use them in ways beyond what they ask for or think?

1. Pray the ones we love would grow strong and powerful in Christ in their inner beings as they learn to immerse their lives in God's Word through studying, singing, praying, and church.
2. Pray that Christ would be comfortably settled in their hearts, which are his home. Pray they would open all areas of their lives to Christ so everything in them is pleasing to him.
3. As they began their relationship with God based on God's love, pray the Holy Spirit would open their hearts to begin to comprehend the immense amount of love God has for them and for his children. As the Holy Spirit supernaturally opens our hearts to understand God's love for us, which is more than words can comprehend, our relationships with other people become known for love.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

© You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided (1) you credit the author, (2) modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web address (www.Christ2RCulture.com) on the copied resource.

