

Ephesians Reading Guide

If you had the opportunity to offer words of encouragement and challenge, a divestment of wisdom, to a group friends and family, what would you say? More to the point, if you could take by the hand your brothers and sisters in Christ and show them what it means to grow as a Christ follower, how would you do so? Perhaps you would remind them of the very foundations of their identity in Christ, pointing them toward their indissoluble hope in Christ and the grace that is theirs because the God of the universe set his love upon them before they took their very first breath. Perhaps you would invite them to remember that a part of their new, resurrection life in Christ is to be inextricably bound to other believers, living with humble selflessness that reflects the very heart of Jesus. Perhaps you would exhort them to realize that this new resurrection life will produce in them holiness and love and an existence that speaks of their place as citizens of the *now and one day* Kingdom of God. Perhaps you would extol them to filter all of their relationships through the lens of their own gospel transformation. Perhaps you would warn them of the fact that their allegiance to Christ brings real, spiritual opposition, and preparation for battle looks like a maturing faith and an ever-growing intimacy with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul spent nearly three years investing in the Church at Ephesus, and his letter to the group of churches in and around the city is filled with these exhortations, challenges, reminders, and more. In what is his most general letter to any church, Paul offers a robust exposition of the resurrection life that is now to be the lived experience of these Christian men and women.

Despite the general nature of the letter, Paul isn't writing into a cultural vacuum. These are believers who daily feel the tension of living new lives in Christ in the midst of real opposition in the form of false gods, lustful hedonism, idolatrous worship of the state, and the various and sundry everyday challenges of living in one of the largest and most influential metropolitan centers of the entire Mediterranean world. And when we think of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in those terms, it's easy to see a resemblance with our world today. We would do well to humbly sit under the wisdom offered in these six chapters, ingesting each encouragement and challenge and reminder in turn, and live together as a people whose identity is defined by our union with the resurrected Christ.

Ephesians is not a command to white knuckle our way into a new kind of behavior. It isn't some campfire singalong call to a cheap sense of camaraderie. It's an invitation to believe that God's redemptive work in our lives changes us completely, it binds us together, and it produces a new existence in us that speaks of hope and joy and humility and love that resemble the life of our Savior. Ephesians is a call to believe God when he says that we are new in Christ and, from that believing, live differently, ever in step with the Spirit. And this resurrection life touches everything about us.

May we be enthralled with the mystery of the gospel. May we see the glorious vision of a gospel-transformed community of faith living with Christ-exalting, others-serving humility. May we be a resurrection people in a dying world.

Ephesians 3:14-21

Overview

There is tremendous depth to what Paul has said thus far in Ephesians. There have been big, meandering sentences that present a grand vision of who God is, who we are in Christ, and what this means for the Church in the world. But at the heartbeat of Ephesians there is still Paul, the pastor, desiring to shepherd this people for whom he bears great affection, inviting them to draw near to Christ and grow in their understanding of how God in the gospel changes all of life.

This passage pulses with that heartbeat. In this pastoral prayer, Paul, distracted as he's been speaking of all that God has done, finally gets around to telling the Ephesians what he's praying for them while he's in prison. And though there are layers here, there is complexity, there is also a gloriously practical sensibility to all of this. Paul wants the Ephesians to recognize that the power of God — the same power that created all things and bears authority over all things and reigns over all other beings and ultimately raised Jesus from the dead — is actively at work in their lives. He prays that they would be strengthened by the Spirit of God so that at the center of their lives, at the core of who they are, they would believe that they are beloved by God in Christ. He prays that they would be filled up to overflowing with God himself, and that they would trust that this same God who loves them will blow the doors off their preconceived notions because he's God and he is much greater than their minds can imagine.

Would this passage provide the language of our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and ultimately draw us into worship as we celebrate, with Paul, the glory of God.

***14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **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, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

***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, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Ephesians 3:14-21

Supplemental Passages

Psalm 147

Ephesians 3:20-21 is often referred to as a doxology, or a call to praise the Lord. There are many such offerings of praise, and perhaps nowhere is that more evident than throughout the Psalms. Psalm 147, in particular, calls on the people of God to recognize the power and majesty of God, much as we see in Ephesians 3:20-21, and respond in worship.

John 17

Just as Paul offers the contents of his prayer for the Ephesians, John 17 provides an example of Jesus's prayer for his followers. There are similar themes here as in Ephesians, namely in the unity amongst believers and the power of the Father as sovereign over all things. We would do well to allow the words of Jesus here, just as the words of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-21, to shape our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Suggested Songs

"How Great" by Corey Voss
"King of My Heart" by John Mark McMillan
"How Great is Your Love" by Phil Wickham
"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" by Isaac Watts

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) How does this passage echo what Paul has already said throughout this letter? For example, Paul earlier referred to Gentiles and Jews as members of the household of God (2:19), and here he picks up on that "family" language (3:14).
- 2) How does Paul's understanding of who God is shape his prayer for the Ephesians?
- 3) Why might it be helpful to allow a passage like Ephesians 3:14-21 to shape our prayers for others? How might it challenge the way that you normally pray for others?
- 4) Why is it important for our daily lives as Christians that we "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge?"
- 5) Paul reminds us that God is able to do more than we can imagine in 3:20. Do your prayers reflect that belief? Why or why not?
- 6) Based on this discussion, how might your prayers need to change and/or grow?