

“EXPERIENCING SPIRITUAL POWER” **(Ephesians 3:14-21)**

J. Vernon McGee tells about going to the New Year’s Rose Parade in Pasadena one year, and watching one beautiful float after another pass by. One float was particularly spectacular – a huge float intricately designed and covered with various colors of roses – and suddenly, right in front of J. Vernon McGee – the float came to a dead stop. I’ve read that a team of people spend up to a year designing and building these floats, and to watch your float stop moving must have given the team a coronary.

Officials quickly ran up to diagnose the problem, and finding no apparent reason for it to stop moving, someone suggested that they check the float to see if it had gas. And sure enough – after months of planning and preparation – someone forgot to make sure it was filled with gas. As if that was not embarrassing enough, the float was owned by and represented the Standard Oil Company – the largest oil company in the world. They could have provided fuel for a billion floats, yet they were the ones who ran out of gas.

As we’ve made our way through the first three chapters of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul has masterfully described the vast spiritual resources that every believer possesses through faith in Christ. In Christ we have a limitless supply of power to rise above the circumstances of life and thrive as a Christian. Paul’s passionate desire is that the knowledge of all we have will sink into our souls and transform the way we think and live.

Yet despite our vast resources, many believers find themselves powerless and stalled out in their spiritual growth. Maybe that describes you – instead of rising above your circumstances, you are weighed down beneath them. Given all our world is going through, there are any number of things that can discourage you and cause you to lose heart. What you need is power – you need gas in your spiritual tank – and that’s why Paul ends chapter 3 with a prayer – one of the great prayers of the New Testament – in which he prays that we might experience spiritual power and put to use all that we have in Christ.

You might remember that Paul actually begins his prayer in verse one of chapter 3, but then he gets caught up in explaining his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Now in verse 14 he finally gets around to finishing his prayer.

I want to start by reading the entire prayer, and then dive into what Paul wants us to know. In verses 14-21 Paul writes... “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I 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. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 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.”

Paul says, “For this reason... because I don’t want you to lose heart... I kneel before the Father.” In the Bible when someone dropped down to their knees to pray meant that they were serious – they were humble – and they were passionate about what they were praying. On his knees Paul pleads with God to make real to believers the full measure of what they have in Christ.

He kneels before the Father “from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” God is the Father of all believers – both those who have gone on to heaven before us and are part of God’s heavenly family, as well as we who remain and make up God’s earthly family. What ties us all together is that we all call Him Father. As our heavenly Father, God knows all about our discouragement and defeat, and invites us to come before His throne of grace with confidence to find mercy and grace in our time of need.

Paul’s prayer focuses on the word “power,” which he uses three times. By power he’s not talking about power to call down fire from heaven or power to fly or power to snap your fingers and make a \$100 bill appear in your hand – he’s talking about inner, spiritual power to deal with a discouraged heart – he’s talking about not letting your circumstances own you – he’s talking to weak people who feel powerless to overcome what they’re going through. He wants believers everywhere to experience the supernatural power of God working in their lives.

The main idea of Paul’s prayer can be summarized in this statement: Spiritual intimacy leads to expanded spiritual capacity that results in experiencing spiritual power. This is the prayer in a nutshell. If you want to experience heavenly, supernatural power in your life, **you must first cultivate spiritual intimacy**. In verses 16-17a he writes... “I 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” (16-17a). Paul says that if you are to experience this power, there must be an inner connection. If you’re not connected intimately with Christ, then the flow of power can’t get to you.

It's like when your cell phone battery runs out and you have no power, and your whole world stops. Life cannot go on until your phone has power. You can yell at your phone – and you can push the buttons harder and try to get your phone to work – but nothing is going to work until your phone is plugged into a charger. Once it’s connected, power flows from the charger and enables your phone to get back up and running.

Spiritual power works the same way – it doesn’t come by trying harder – it doesn’t come by being more disciplined – it doesn’t come by thinking positive thoughts – power comes through the work of Holy Spirit in our “inner being.” The moment you’re saved, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit of God comes into your life, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life is evidence that you have truly been born again. With the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, you have a power you never had before. You might have been able to muster up some will-power now and then, but you weren’t connected the source of supernatural power. Now you are.

Notice that the power of the Holy Spirit works in our “inner being.” Our inner being is the spiritual part of us. The Bible teaches that every human being is created with a body and a spirit. The body is the outer, visible, material part of our being, while our spirit is the inner, unseen, immaterial part of our being. Our inner being is where we keep our thoughts – it’s where we form and make our decisions – it’s where deepest emotions, desires, and motivations lie – it’s the private side of us that no one sees, but determines all that flows out of us.

Our inner being is also the part of our us that enables us to have an intimate relationship with God – its where He communes with us. Jesus said, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). This means that we must pay close attention to our inner life so that we’re spiritually attuned to what the Lord is saying to us and wants to do in us.

Paul prays for the Holy Spirit's work in our inner being. Most of our prayer requests are for our outer being – something that's gone wrong with our bodies – and it's appropriate to pray for our bodies – yet Paul prioritizes praying for our inner being. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16... “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” This is encouraging because while our outer being is growing older and weaker, our inner being can grow stronger and stronger. I can't help but think of Joni Erickson Tada, the Christian author and speaker, who has been a quadriplegic for most of her life – who has no physical power – but spiritually is a dynamo. Spiritual strength comes from the inside-out.

In verse 17 Paul goes deeper to explain this. He says, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” The heart is another way to describe our inner being. Paul prays that the Holy Spirit will strengthen our inner being so that we might more deeply experience the presence of Christ in our life. Sometimes the Bible says the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and sometimes it says that Christ dwells in us. Perhaps the best way to look at it is that Christ dwells in believers by the Holy Spirit, so that the presence of Christ in you is manifested in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word “dwell” means “to make yourself at home.” Most of us have a welcome sign outside our door, and when people come to visit, we like to say, “Make yourself at home.” We say that, but we don't really mean it. We mean, “Make yourself at home by sitting where you want to sit, or grabbing something to drink from the refrigerator,” but we don't mean, “Feel free to sleep in my bed and go through my closets and wear my clothes.” We don't want people rummage through our filing cabinet or look in the closet where we threw all the junk to make the rest of the house look good. What we mean is, “Make yourself at home in certain areas of the house.”

When Paul prays that Christ may dwell in you, He means He gets run of the whole house. Most of us have in our lives “Jesus places.” These are the rooms of our lives that Jesus is welcome to go in because we have nothing to hide. But if you want power, Jesus must be free to go into every room of the of your life and rearrange whatever He wants, get rid of whatever He wants, and add whatever He so chooses.

He must be free to make Himself at home in your heart and rule over every part of your life – to rule over your thought life, to rule over your time, to rule over your money, to rule over your plans and goals. We call this the lordship of Christ which is giving Him ownership and access to every room in the house. If there are hidden sins such as lust or greed or envy or bitterness in our hearts, the power of God is not free to work in our lives – but when He is given free rein to deal with these sins, we experience His power.

So number one, if you want power, you must cultivate spiritual intimacy with Christ – if you want power, you must be connected to the source of power – otherwise you will live discouraged and defeated. When you have spiritual intimacy, this leads to the second principle for experiencing spiritual power and that is **you must expand your spiritual capacity**. Paul goes on in verses 17b-19 to say, “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Paul says, “You already have God in your life, but I want you to experience the fullness – the width and length and breadth and depth – of God in your life.” He says, “I pray that you will be rooted and established in love.”

The Bible says that God is love, and is the essence of true love. Love must have an object, and before God created people to love, He lived in a love relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Now that we've been brought into God's family through Christ, God wants us to experience the love of God, and in turn, love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The greatest sign of a life filled with God is love. John says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them" (1 John 4:16b). This gets back to the theme of intimacy and connection – if you're going to experience power, you must be rooted and grounded in love for God and love for others.

Once again Paul mixes his metaphors, using an analogy from agriculture – rooted in love – and from architecture – established in love. In order for a plant or tree to grow, it's roots must go down deep. If not, it will wither and die. When the storms of life come against a tree – like the storms we see so often here at the coast – trees that are rooted are resilient – they bend but don't break – and it's because they are rooted deep in the ground.

The same is true of a building – the taller the building the deeper it's foundation must be. The skyscrapers you see in big cities have a foundation that goes 50-75 into the ground – some up to 100. If it's going to withstand the wind and survive an earthquake, it's got to have a rock-solid foundation.

Paul prays that we will be rooted and established in love so that we have power to comprehend how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Paul pulls out every dimension to describe the immensity of God's love. God's love is wide enough to save the whole world – it's long enough to last into all eternity – it's deep enough to reach the lowest sinner, and high enough to lift them up to heaven.

The old hymn says, "The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen could ever tell – it goes beyond the farthest star and reaches to the lowest hell – could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made – were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade – to write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry – nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky."

Paul says, "I want you to know this love that surpasses knowledge." In other words, I want to you to know the love of God that can never be fully known. The love of God is inexhaustible and infinite – once we've been in heaven a 100 quad-zillion years we'll just be getting to know God. In heaven we won't be sitting around playing a harp, but full of action and learning – and each day our mind will be blown something new we learn.

Paul wants us to know God and keep getting to know Him. No matter how many times you've read the Bible, each time you pick it up there is something more to learn. No matter how deeply you have walked with God, there is more depth to be gained. It's like when you get married – no matter how many years you have spent together, there is more to learn and more to experience. So it is with God.

The reason Paul wants us to be rooted and established in God's love and to comprehend the vastness of His love is so, verse 19... "you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." The fullness of God speaks of His presence and power in our lives. We've already seen that God's love can never be fully comprehended, so how can we as finite beings be filled with all there is of God? Every day you and I get to look out at the vast Pacific Ocean – the biggest ocean in the world with more water than can ever be contained. When a child playing on the beach fills his bucket with ocean water, their bucket is full, but it contains only a tiny, tiny portion of the vast Pacific Ocean.

The ocean is full of as much water as you want, but you only get as much water as your container can hold. The larger your bucket, the more capacity you have to know God and His love. And your capacity is directly tied the spiritual intimacy you have cultivated in giving Christ full access to your inner life, and being rooted and grounded in God's love.

To be filled with God means to yield control of your life to Him so that you can be filled with His presence and power. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." When a person is filled with alcohol, they have yielded control to the alcohol and are under its influence, and the drunker you are the more your words and actions are under its control. The same is true when you're full of anger or worry or lust – it controls the way you think and act. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you're under His control and His influence, and the more yielded you are to God, the more your capacity is expanded to be filled with His presence and power.

If you want to experience spiritual power, number one, you must prioritize spiritual intimacy – you must make time to connect with God in prayer, in reading His Word, to giving Him free access in your inner being to make changes. Number two, when you have spiritual intimacy, your capacity to grow and be filled with God is expanded, and then you experience spiritual power.

Listen to how Paul ends his prayer in verses 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."

To those losing heart and beaten down by life, Paul says, "God's is able, by His power working in you, to do anything." If God created the entire universe by simply speaking it into being, then He has the power and ability to do anything – more than we can ask or imagine. There are many great stories of God's ability in the Bible...

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are about to be thrown into the fiery furnace for standing up for God. King Nebuchadnezzar said, "What God will be able to rescue you from my hand?" The three Hebrew boys tell him, "Our God is able to deliver us. I know you have us bound, and you have a fire ready to throw us into – all we have is our God and we know that He is able. We don't know if He's going to deliver us or not – and even if He doesn't, He is able."

A few chapters later, Daniel is thrown into the lion's den for publicly worshipping God. The next day the king went to the lion's den and called down to Daniel, "Was the God you talked about able to rescue you?" Daniel said, "He is able because I slept all night and had a lion for a pillow."

In Matthew 9 a blind man comes to Jesus for healing and Jesus asks, "Do you believe that I am able?" Jesus wanted him to recognize His power and ability.

Sometimes we think a relative or friend could never be saved, but Hebrews 7:25 says, "He is able to save completely those who come to God through Christ." That's why you should never stop praying for them to be saved because He is able. And once you are saved, 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, "God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in everything there might be an abundance." Not only that, but God is able to see you all the way to heaven. Jude 24 says, "He is able to keep you from stumbling and present you blameless before God." God is able.

But Paul goes even further... God is not only able, He is able to do “immeasurably more than you ask or imagine.” Just as the love of God is beyond what you can comprehend, so too is His power. It is unlimited and inexhaustible.

Those with discouraged and weary hearts hear this and say “Yes, yes, Lord you are able.” And yet some people pray for years to God to do something and it doesn’t happen. Just because it hasn’t happened doesn’t mean it won’t. He is fully able to deliver you from your circumstance, but sometimes God wants to deliver you in your circumstance.

Paul himself is a great example. He prayed three times – meaning he prayed repeatedly – for God to remove his thorn in the flesh, but God said no. God was fully able to do so, but He chose not to. He said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9a). God knew that if Paul’s request was granted and his thorn was removed, Paul would rely on his own power and ability, but with his thorn Paul would daily depend on the Lord, and Paul’s weakness would actually serve to give him more power.

Paul came to see that God’s power is displayed not only through answered prayer, but unanswered prayer. He goes on to say, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9b-10).

Paul got it. So did Joni Erickson Tada – no matter what life throws at you – and Paul writes these words while he’s in prison – no matter what circumstances you face – God’s power can enable you to grow and prosper and overcome. Sometimes God will miraculously deliver you from the fiery furnace, and sometimes he will allow your thorn in the flesh to remain. But in every circumstance, you can experience supernatural power in your inner being.

So then, coming full circle in this amazing prayer, Paul is saying, “When you cultivate spiritual intimacy with God, when you pay close attention to your inner life and make Christ feel at home in your heart, when you are rooted and grounded in God’s love – then your spiritual capacity will be expanded – as you draw close to God and grow to know Him more and more – God can fill you more and more with His fullness – and the more you are filled with God the more you will experience spiritual power – power to overcome whatever comes your way.”

Perhaps you come to church this morning discouraged and feeling powerless over what you’re facing. I encourage you to prayer this prayer from Ephesians 3 every morning this week, and let God’s words sink deep into your soul.