

Ephesians ¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

- ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches **he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
- And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ 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**, ¹⁹ **and to know this love that surpasses knowledge** –
- that you may be **filled to the measure of all the fullness of God**.

²⁰ 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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Introduction

This service has been called a service of *healing and wholeness*. Well if we are going to be made whole, we can be sure that will be closely connected to the answer to this question: **What is God's deepest longing for you?** He is your heavenly Father who created you, who knows you inside out and who loves you. Any loving father longs for the very best for his child. How much more so is that true of God?

This passage **Ephesians 3:14-21 (look up)**, gives us an insight into what that longing means: it contains one of the greatest prayers in the Bible as Paul expresses his deepest desires for the Christians in and around Ephesus.

Paul prays to the *Father from whom His whole family derives its name*.

He is confident that what he is praying for, is what the Father wants to give to all his children and of course that includes you and me. Three things: that we might be filled with God's power, God's love and God's fulness.

Filled with God's power

v.16 Naturally we are weak

We might have great strength physically, mentally, emotionall

We may have a position of power and influence in the world

but spiritually we are weak.

David Pawson's interview with senior airforce officer

Imagine them sir in their vests!

If we are honest, we all know what it means to be weak in the face of temptation, or spiritual attack: doubts, depression, despair

So where do we need to be strengthened? In our inner being.

God does not promise to make us powerful outwardly – we are not going suddenly to become like Superman – muscles bulging out of our lycra suits – but inwardly

Look at Jesus: Gethsemane **Luke** *an angel came and strengthened him*

Not outwardly: no great display of power when arrested

no great rhetoric, no easy running up the Via Dolorosa to the hill of Calvary with the cross on his back

Outwardly – only weakness

But inwardly the strength to reach out and heal the temple guard's ear,

to remain silent in the face of his persecutors, to endure the mocking and scorn of the soldiers, the crowds even his fellow prisoners,

Jesus was given the strength to go on loving, to pray for their forgiveness and to promise paradise to the penitent thief.

He was given such inner strength, that when he died, the hardened veteran, Roman centurion says: Surely this man was the Son of God.

That same inner strength and power is available to us by His Spirit

Such power is not limited by our weakness or smallness because it

out of His glorious riches

God who created the galaxies, oceans and the mighty mountain ranges,
who one day will send legions of angels to destroy Satan
whose resources are infinite can give us far more than we will ever need.
God wants to strengthen us, not just because we are weak but
so that Christ may dwell in our hearts

I am not an engineer – but I understand that the more powerful an engine, the stronger its housing has to be, otherwise danger of whole thing falling apart. *viz. jet engine or space shuttle*

Think how strong a housing we will need if Jesus, the all-powerful Son of God, is going to live in us

To be filled with God's love

Rooted and established in love

Trees must have deep roots to weather storms, survive droughts and bear fruit. The soil provides the nutrients that enable it to grow and flourish.

So God longs for us to put our roots deep down into the soil of his love so that we can draw and feed on that love and then produce the fruit of that love.

Martin Lloyd-Jones “*A man who knows the love of Christ in his heart, can do more in one hour than the busy man in a century*”

Similarly a building must have deep foundations to remain secure

The Vicarage built on marshy land has foundations 9 metres deep

There is no firmer foundation for our souls than the love of God.

People are desperately looking for love – the very well-being of our souls depends on it we have the greatest foundation of all in the love of God

Sadly, sometimes even as Christians, we are not aware – or lose sight of - just how much God loves us

and so Paul says he prays that *we may have power, ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,*

Love so wide that it embraces Jew and Gentile, Paul the Pharisee and Mary Magdalene, the Roman centurion and Simon the freedom fighter, humble slaves and the poor from the back alleys of Ephesus to the Roman Emperor, the poorest refugees in the Lebanon to the Queen and the Archbishop of Canterbury

Love so long that it is from before you were knit together in your mother's womb, from before the creation of the world and will last for all eternity

Love so deep that Christ went to death on the cross for us, that however low we sink, even if like Peter we deny Jesus, His love goes deeper

Love so high that it is higher than highest mountain. However high a mountain we might feel we have heaped up of failures, or worries, or problems, or sins, the love of Christ is higher.

So high that it carries us into the very presence of the God of all creation; so high that it raises us up as sons and daughters of God; so high that it will transform us into the glorious beings that God created us to be.

No wonder Paul says that the only way we are going to have the power to grasp the enormous dimensions of God's love is

together with all the saints –with all God's people

We are the ones who are called to express God's love to one another. It is through one another, that God's love instead of just being a theoretical belief, a bit of theology, actually becomes something we can grasp and experience. In the words of a poem by A S Wilson:

Not merely in the words you say, not only in your deeds confessed,

*But in **the most unconscious way** is Christ expressed.*

Is it a beatific smile, a holy light upon your brow?

Oh no, I felt His Presence while You laughed just now.

For me 'twas not the truth you taught -to you so clear, to me still dim

But when you came to me you brought a sense of Him.

*And from your eyes, He beckons me
And from your heart, His love is shed,
till I lose sight of you and see the Christ instead.*

We need to learn to recognise that *any* experience we enjoy of love – whether through friends - Christian or non-Christian, through parents, children, husband or wife – is a tangible expression of God's love for us and to see Him as the one behind that love.

And if in turn we want to be channels of God's love to others, that is only going to happen as we grasp the enormity of God's love for us, not just with our minds, but in our hearts. That we know Christ's love for us in our guts

To be filled with God's fullness - v.20

How is this remotely possible? We are limited, human, finite beings and God is infinite, bigger than the universe.

First, it helps to remember that Paul said of Jesus *Coloss. 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,*

Jesus was a human being and yet all the fullness of his infinite Father could be found in Him. He showed it *is* possible

Amazingly just as God filled *Christ* His intention is to fill *us* with all his fullness. To fill us to the same extent with His love, His Spirit, His wisdom, His compassion

Secondly *God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine*, because it is not according to how good or spiritual we are, but *according to his power that is at work within us.*

In fact the reason Paul says *to him be glory* [first] *in the church and* [2nd] *in Christ Jesus*, is that it is precisely by transforming ordinary people like you and me, that God will reveal the true glory of Christ.

A Father is someone who wants his child to be everything he meant to be.

So yes our heavenly Father wants us to be whole but that wholeness means being filled with the fullness of Christ. The wonderful thing is that He is able to make that happen.

The question is do you really want it? For yourself? For our church?