

Sermon Series: **Prayer Reformation** (This series is inspired by a message preached by Dr. D.A. Carson at Moody Pastors' Conference, Chicago, IL)

Father, Enable Us

Ephesians 3:17-19

What is the most powerful thing?

Natural forces
Human ingenuity
Military might
The pen

Evil is a most powerful thing, but is it *the most* powerful thing in the world? *The most* powerful thing in the world is _____. Not human love, but **the love of** _____ is *the most* powerful thing.

The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win:
His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin.

And we can have it; we can know that; we can experience it; we can experience its awesome power daily operating in our lives, conquering all our sin, and making us lovers of God and lovers of others.

In Ephesians 3, we are learning from one of the ultimate model-prayers of Scripture. And in the second request, Paul brings into play this *most powerful thing*. You will remember that the first request was for power.

The second request:

1. The prayer for _____.

Verses 17b-19a: This is a prayer that we may receive power concerning God's love toward _____. And the prayer request begins with the presupposition that as Christians, we're already "rooted and grounded" in God's love: "I pray," Paul says, "that you, [already] *being* [a present

and continuing reality] rooted and grounded in love, may now have power for something more.” In 1:4-6 he wrote, “God chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world... In love the Father predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself...to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us!” It’s a prayer for power for something that we already have had lavished upon us, God’s love, being eternally “rooted and grounded” in it.

2. The purpose for power:

✓ So you will _____ the love of Christ.

It’s one thing to be rooted and grounded in love, but it’s another thing altogether to have **the power to grasp** how wide and how long and how high and how deep is the love of God in Christ Jesus. It takes an enormous amount of power!

When Paul says, “what is the breadth and length and height and depth,” he’s metaphorically saying that God’s love is **immeasurable!** How do you express that in human language? We sometimes express the inexpressible best in our songs. Some hymns say it well.

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.
O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forever more endure— the saints’ and angels’ song.

And more contemporary worship songs tell it well.

How deep the Father’s love for us, how vast beyond all measure;
That He should give His only Son, to make a wretch a treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns His face away;
As wounds which mar the Chosen One, bring many sons to glory.
Why should I gain from His reward, I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom.

Just try to comprehend the incomprehensible! And yet it is a great prayer and a great pursuit. So Paul prays for God’s resurrection power so that we will comprehend what can’t be comprehended. And this isn’t

Lone Ranger stuff either: **Verse 18**. It's our whole church coming to a deeper comprehension of what it _____ to be loved by Almighty God in Christ Jesus our Lord; that we would plumb those depths together; that we would grow in it together.

✓ **So you will _____ the love of Christ.**

These are paradoxes: To comprehend *what cannot* be measured, and to know *what cannot* be known! And yet we may **know**, that is to say, we may **experientially and intimately connect _____ and know**, this love that surpasses knowledge! We may **experientially know** what is beyond mere knowing! How can we explain this kind of knowing? We can't. It goes beyond knowledge, and yet with God's power we can know this love that can lift us out of the lowest hell and raise us up beyond the highest star. **It is an experientially knowable love!**

The purpose of this prayer is for power: *that we would comprehend the incomprehensible and know what is unknowable apart from the awesome power of God!*

For people who grew up in homes where they didn't learn disciplined, generous, lavish love, it's impossible for them, apart from God's intervention, to *fully give* love and *fully receive* love in return. But, if allowed, God can break through anywhere, any circumstance, no matter how devastating it may be with gracious intervention and reform!

D. A. Carson's true story of Perry and Sandy Downs and their two foster sons, Darrel and Darnel—3-year-old boys who were terribly abused throughout their young lives...

There's millions of instances of disciplined, lavished love being applied in godly homes that transforms people from the inside. And Paul wants us to comprehend and know the power of love from God for ourselves.

Of course, not all children who have had similar experiences to those of Darrel and Darnel will respond so well to God's lavish love poured out through loving Christian parents. When children in their foundational years have had love withheld and had abuse imposed, it seems they can't (*won't?*) comprehend the glorious dimensions of God's love.

Instead, they _____ in the opposite direction as fast as they can away from God's love. But it's not just adopted children, is it? Often, it's us who have run away from God's love. Or, it's our own children who have been loved supremely in our Christian homes who run away from God's love. They, perhaps we, are defined as prodigal sons and prodigal daughters. We don't want what God offers; we don't strive after it; instead, we want to be independent of God and His love.

Christians who are separated from full goodness and godliness can't seem to have intimacy with anyone, certainly not with God ... until they finally come to an end of themselves. And in brokenness, they finally let God's love break in on them, and then they begin to comprehend what's incomprehensible and to know in greater measure that which surpasses knowledge. Listen, if Darrel and Darnel can know it, we can know it, our children can know it, you can know it, _____ *we and they and you will only believe and let His love break through.*

This is a great prayer!

Because of our sinful human nature, it takes enormous power to comprehend and know the love of Christ. And if you pray this prayer and mean it, and keep praying it, and keep seeking it, you will **grasp** and **know** the most powerful thing in the world. **1 John 4:10:** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He _____ us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). It's that love that will win the day, and save the soul, and transform the life!

Here is love, vast as the ocean, loving-kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our Ransom, shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember? Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten, throughout heaven's eternal days.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above;
Heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love!

Want that kind of love above all else. And in wanting it above all else, you will pray for it above all else. And, that greatest of all powers—God's love—will change you; will transform you; and "you *will be* filled up with all the fullness of God" in Christ Jesus (19)!