



# Week 10: When the Task Seems Too Big

## Ephesians 3:14-21

### GOAL:

To deepen our experience of how to pray for our spiritual vitality as followers of Jesus.

## CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.
- Remind your group about serving at Viola's House this Saturday. Your group can plan lunch together after, if you'd like.
- Share the schedule for the next few weeks.
  - 11/24: 9:30 Grow Groups, 11:00 Worship
  - 11/25-12/1: Thanksgiving Break (no GG)
  - 12/8-11: Christmas Store Serve Week
  - 12/15-18: Final week of Grow Groups

### PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

*Father, show us how to pray for ourselves and each other in the way that Paul models – that we might be empowered by your Spirit in our heart and mind so that Christ is given full ownership of our lives. May the love of Jesus permeate our lives so profoundly that we are transformed more and more into your likeness – becoming a people who know deeply your love for us and who long to love others in the same way for your sake and your glory. Amen.*

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*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## CONNECT, COORDINATE, & PRAY

To catch up with each other, invite group members to share a joy and a challenge they are currently experiencing. Spend time praying for your group members and for your time together today.

Take time to coordinate details and plans for:

- Viola's House Serve Day - Saturday, November 23, 8am-12pm (details at [vrbc.net/events](http://vrbc.net/events))
- Grow Group Schedule for the remaining weeks of the semester:
  - 11/24: 9:30 Grow Groups, 11:00 Worship
  - 11/25-12/1: Thanksgiving Break (no GG)
  - 12/8-11: Christmas Store Serve Week
  - 12/15-18: Final week of Grow Groups

## DISCUSS

**Leaders:** *It is always good to set the context for the text we are focusing on. This letter of Paul to the Ephesians (and probably other churches) can be divided into two parts. Chapters 1-3 are more theological in nature as Paul gives his readers an overview of the gospel and how the Church has come to be as well as what God's ultimate purpose is for us. Chapters 4-6 are more ethical or practical in teaching us how to live out the implications of the gospel in our everyday lives. (We will study the chapters 4-6 throughout the spring semester of 2025.) Ephesians 1 begins with a doxology and prayer. Ephesians 3 ends with a prayer and doxology.*

**Read Ephesians 3:14-15.** – *For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.*

- What is the reason Paul is referring to? How does Paul describe the God he is praying to? Why do you think he uses these particular attributes in this instance? Why do these attributes matter to us today?

**Leaders:** *Remember that in 3:1, Paul begins a thought, presumably to say how he is praying for his readers. But then he takes a side road to expound upon the grace given him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He explains how the mystery which God had kept hidden is now revealed in Christ and how his Church (now made up of every nation) is making known the manifest wisdom of God, fulfilling his plan that he had from the beginning.*

*In verse 14, Paul now picks up the thought he left hanging in 3:1. He describes another way he is praying for them. Notice the words, "For this reason I kneel . . ." What is the reason? Have your group do a quick review of Ephesians 2:*

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So, what is this mystery? This "mystery," revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, involves the unification of all things—and all people—in Christ. Paul highlights that this truth, previously unknown to past generations, is now made clear: everyone, including Jews and Gentiles, can find unity in Christ and share in His grace and mercy. Remember Ephesians 1:9-10? "...he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."

Paul's reference to the "mystery" in Ephesians 3:1-13 often points to God's plan of salvation being revealed to the Gentiles through Christ. This theme appears throughout the New Testament, especially in Paul's letters. Here are some passages that expand on this "mystery":

- The Ephesians were once dead in sin, BUT GOD made them alive through the sacrifice of his son.
- They have been saved by grace through faith.
- They have been given purpose – work that he prepared in advance for them.
- Before, they were separate, excluded, without hope and without God, but now they have been brought near by the blood of Jesus.
- Consequently, they are now citizens of a "new society," being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Paul says he is praying to "the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." This implies he is praying to the one true God who lays claim to all peoples and who loves all peoples as his children – the One who created the universe and every living thing. "Father" implies that God is the origin of every human being. Later, Paul says he is "one God and Father of all who is over all and in all and through all" (4:6).

This description would have sounded strange to his readers. It was common belief in Ephesian culture that there were regional deities and the people groups in each region were under the care of and responsible to that deity. I believe Paul purposely uses these descriptions of God to further emphasize what he had already been teaching in chapter 2. There is ONE God and he has made a way so that all people can become his children through the grace and mercy of Christ. All may be included in the family of God through faith in Christ. The description "every family in heaven and on earth" emphasizes the cosmic scope of God's reign and purposes. This is the God Paul is praying to!

Why does this still matter today? We all have the same origin and access to God. Every person is created by God and loved by God. All matter to God and so all should matter to us. And of course, this is a death blow to racism – in Paul's day and in ours. It is a death blow to any kind of bias that would keep us from seeing all persons as God sees them and loving them the way he loves them.

**Read Ephesians 3:16-19.** – 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 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.

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- What particular things does Paul actually pray for? Why do you think he prays in this way for the church at Ephesus?

**Leaders:** Scholars group the phrases of Paul's prayer in various ways. Some think Paul is asking for 2 or 3 distinct things. While others say Paul is praying for one thing but expounds upon it in various ways. In his sermon, Pastor John summarizes the whole prayer as Paul asking for "more of Him." Then he picks out 3 phrases to unpack this big idea. No matter how you parse out the phrases, this prayer is powerful! Have your group list out the phrases of Paul's prayer (maybe write them up on the board if you have one). Then discuss.

***I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,***

- It's important to notice that Paul is not praying for particular circumstances to be changed, fixed or addressed. Paul is praying for their spiritual vitality.
- Paul is asking God to strengthen them in their "inner being." In Paul's day, this "inner being" idea refers to a person's mind and heart. The heart was not viewed as the seat of emotion as it is today. The heart was the seat of a person's character and will. Another way of putting it is that the heart was considered the seat of the spiritual life – soul, mind and conscience.
- Our inner being is not strengthened by osmosis! We need regular prayer, reading, thinking and discussion. We need to create space for the Spirit to strengthen us in the ways only he can.
- We often think of the Holy Spirit as the source of power to make great things happen externally. But what if his power is less for great deeds than for great understanding from which godly living flows? What is required of us is openness, willingness and attentiveness to his work in us.

***so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.***

- "So that" implies that this phrase is a result or the natural parallel to the first idea. Pastor John talked about the meaning of "dwell" here as "taking up permanent residence." There is no vacillation. Instead, Christ remains the fixed center of our being and the source for all of our life.
- "Through faith" – faith is full confidence or trust in the truth about God to which we surrender our lives resulting in a different way of living.
- Paul uses the phrase that we are "in Christ" many times; yet here he speaks of Christ dwelling in us. What is the difference? Paul is simply trying to get at the idea of intimate communion. Think of Jesus' image of the vine: we are "in Christ" as we, like branches, are attached to the vine. But Christ is also in us in that the life-giving sustenance of the vine gives life to the branch.

***And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.***

- Paul prays that his readers would see how the love of Christ encompasses their total reality.
- Pastor John spoke to how being rooted (agricultural) and established (architectural) imply the idea that you are held fast, you cannot be moved or shaken. His love creates stability no matter what the circumstances.
- Col. 2:6-7 expands on this idea: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

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- *Paul is using poetic imagery with the words “wide, long, high and deep” to speak of the infinite love of Christ. One commentator expounds on it this way: “God’s love is total. . . It reaches every corner of our experience. It is wide—it covers the breadth of our own experience, and it reaches out to the whole world. God’s love is long—it continues the length of our lives. It is high—it rises to the heights of our celebration and elation. His love is deep—it reaches to the depths of discouragement, despair, and even death. When you feel shut out or isolated, remember that you can never be lost to God’s love.”*
- *Paul is praying that God would give them power to mentally comprehend the love of Christ – the supernatural strength of mind to grasp what is so wildly beyond human understanding!*
- *Don’t miss the phrase “together with all the Lord’s people.” We cannot fully comprehend the love of Christ in isolation. Life in the body of Christ brings the multifaceted, brilliant love of Christ into living color. Paul will speak much to the this in chapters 4-5. Being a part of the church is not optional for a follower of Jesus. We need each other! We need each other’s prayer, insight, encouragement, worship, love and accountability. Life in the body enables us to grasp the love of Christ.*

***that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

- *Here is another phrase that implies a result. As we grow more and more in our ability to comprehend the love of Christ, we will grow up! We will transform into the likeness of our Father. And remember that God does the filling, not us!*
- What does Paul’s prayer teach us about how to pray for ourselves, for each other and for VRBC?

***Leaders:*** *You might ask you group to list the kinds of things you typically pray about for each other in the group. Then notice how that prayer list is similar or different from what Paul prays for the Ephesians. Don’t misunderstand! All prayer for each other is good! But Paul’s example expands our vision of how to pray for ourselves and one another. Our prayers can tend to revolve around intercession in regard to our external circumstances. Do we pray for the “inner life” of each other? Do we pray for each other’s spiritual growth? Do we pray, as Pastor John puts it, for “more of Him”?*

*Ask your group to imagine what would be different in their own life and the life of our church if we prayed for the kind of things Paul prays for in this passage. Discuss this together.*

*Paul’s prayer invites us to pray on a higher plane than we typically do. And yet if we were to consistently pray for such things and then engage with God’s Spirit in welcoming and surrendering to his work in our lives, the result would be incredibly transforming!*

***Read Ephesians 3:20-21.*** – *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.*

- How does Paul’s doxology encourage your own praise of God? Do we tend to view God as too small? Is God being glorified through VRBC?

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**Leaders:** Paul closes with a doxology that points us once again to God. When we grasp the greatness of God, worship and transformation follow. The Greek words Paul uses here are where we get our prefixes “hyper” and “mega.” God is “hyper-mega able” to do more than we can ever comprehend or dream up!! But notice the relationship – God is able and yet this power is demonstrated within us.

*This is the only doxology in the New Testament that includes a mention of the church. Last week, we talked about how the manifold wisdom of God is being made known through the church (3:10). This does not mean WE are accomplishing it, but GOD is accomplishing it through us. Is God being glorified through VRBC? How can we be more faithful to give him glory and make his name great?*

## PRAY

- Suggestion: Ask everyone to commit to pray this prayer of Paul’s for each other and for our church. This commitment could be for every day this week or perhaps once a week until the end of the year.
- Closing prayer: Have your group stand and read this prayer in unison as a prayer for each other. Be sure to read the doxology (verses 20-21) with gusto! (This may require you to plan ahead a bit to make sure everyone has the NIV text to read from. Many will have an NIV Bible either in book form or on their phone. The sermon notes sheet that is distributed on Sunday mornings will have it printed out. Or you can just print a few copies of the text to have handy for those who need it.)