

gospelⁱⁿlife

Ephesians 3.14-21
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I. Connecting With One Another

What do you think of when you hear the word grow, growth, or growing? Your garden? Your children!?

II. Introduction to this Series and Study

This weekend we continue our fall series, "Gospel in Life." We read a lot about the gospel, we hear a lot about the gospel, we may even talk a lot about the gospel, but what *is* the gospel? And how does the gospel affect our daily lives?

This week we're discussing the growth aspect of our our mission statement: "Good Shepherd exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ who connect with God, grow in faith and serve in love," which will lead us into the following topics of Gospel in Life.

Remember: The week of Sunday, September 29th, these pastor-authored study guides will transition to a book-led study entitled, *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything!* If you're not involved in a small group, sign-up on the patio this Sunday!

III. Study the Text

- a. To get the context of this passage, read verse 7 through 13 where Paul describes his calling in light of the plan of God, noticing that his prayer in verse 14 follows these thoughts. Paul depicts his praying as "kneeling before the Father," which may have been somewhat odd in the first century, as it was customary to pray standing up (see, for instance, Jesus' parable in Luke 18.9-14).

Commentators note that, in the first century, kneeling – or bowing down – was a sign of worship. In a way, then, this passage is a helpful text to help us think about growing in faith, as it flows out of last week's study, connecting with God. Following last week's study and message, how do you best connect with God? How does that connecting with God draw you deeper into growing in faith?

- b. Reread verses 14-15. In Greek, the original language in which this letter was written, there is a close linguistic connection between the words "Father" and "family" not evident in English. Think verse 15 for a bit: The truth that every person, family, culture, and ethnicity have their origin in the Creator God!

Have you ever heard someone imply that God isn't the loving, gracious Creator of some person, family, culture, or ethnicity? Why do you think they thought that? How does this verse correct that thinking?

- c. In verses 16-17, Paul prays that the Spirit would strengthen their inner beings so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. How do you understand these verses?

A common phrase you've probably heard is "invite Jesus into your heart." Derived from this verse (and possibly Revelation 3.20?), this is certainly an important Christian truth. That said, a much more common theme in the New Testament is that we are in Christ. To be clear, the Scriptures include both... What do each of these truths mean to you?

- d. Paul continues in verse 18, praying that the Ephesian church would "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..." Commentators question whether this phrase was borrowed from the ancient understanding of the dimensions of the universe, or perhaps, if it was a reference to the cross of Christ. In a way, both analogies fit: That God the Son, who created the wide and long and high and deep universe, offered himself on the cross for our sins is the fullest revelation of divine love!

In this verse, Paul uses spatial dimension to engage the never-ending love of God. How would you explain God's love to a young believer? How do you pray for God's love to be shown to others?

- e. In verse 19, Paul prays that the Ephesians would know the love that surpasses knowledge, which is an interesting phrase, isn't it? Knowledge would have been of great importance for the Ephesian church, as they learned the key doctrines of saving faith in Jesus (see the first two chapters of the letter!). But, for Paul, knowledge isn't enough – there is a love that surpasses knowledge. How do you understand this?
- f. A couple other passages of Paul that engage faith and knowledge are 1st Corinthians 1.10-25 and 8.1-3. If you have time, read through those pericopes, seeing the distinction between faith and knowledge. How – if at all! – do these passages help you understand knowing love that surpasses knowledge?
- g. After praying that the Ephesians "may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God," Paul adds, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine." So, we can be filled to the measure of all God's fullness, yet God is able to do even more than that! Glory be to God!

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Paul writes that he worshipfully kneels in prayer. How best do you pray? Sitting? Standing? Walking?
- b. Can you recall a time when you made a decision for Christ, perhaps "accepting Him into your heart"? If so, how did God bring you to that place? How do you know that you're also in Christ?
- c. In what ways does our world prize knowledge? How could we not only learn Scripture, theology, prayer, and spiritual disciplines, but also allow these things to "root us in love"?
- d. What one thing could you do to grow (even more) in faith?

II. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Pray for the mission of Good Shepherd, that we would "make disciples of Jesus Christ who connect with God, grow in faith and serve in love,"
- b. Lift up our denominational discernment process, that God's Spirit would guide us,
- c. Ask God to help our children, students, families, adults and seniors to grow in faith!