PRAYERS OF LONGING: PRAYING WITH PAUL Water from Rock, July 18, 2017, Tim Smith

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” (Antoine de Saint- Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*)

THOMAS TRAHERNE ON LONGING

1. Thomas Traherne (1636 – 1674) was an English clergyman, poet, and theologian. C. S. Lewis described his book *Centuries of Meditations* as “almost the most beautiful book in English.”
2. Traherne wrote a lot about longing as God working in us and stirring a holy discontent with anything less than God. He wrote about our deepest longings as pointing us toward God.
3. Some key excerpts from *Centuries of Meditation*:

* “You must want like a God that you may be satisfied like God. Were you not made in His image?”
* “The soul is also inclined to possess all. Its longings cannot be satisfied by anything short of infinite. It must possess God or be dissatisfied.”
* “It is of the nobility of man that he is insatiable. For he hath a benefactor so prone to give, that He delighteth in us for asking.”

LEARNING TO PRAY WITH PAUL (Prayers of Longing #2) Ephesians 3:14-21

*14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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1. Note the immediate context of this prayer in the immediately preceding verse where Paul states his purpose in praying: *“I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.”* (3:13). Paul then begins his prayer, *“For this reason…”* He does not want them to be discouraged by his or their troubles.
2. In last week’s prayer (Ephesians 1:15-23) Paul is praying for **illumination**, but in this prayer he prays for **enablement**. He talks again about God’s power within the believer, but this time it is enabling power to comprehend the vastness of God’s love for us. The Ephesians 1 prayer centers of experiential knowledge (epignosis), the prayer in Ephesians 3 centers on love.
3. Paul prays for five things:

* for inner spiritual strength;
* for indwelling of Christ in their hearts;
* for the power to comprehend all the dimensions of spiritual realities;
* for power to know the unknowable love of Christ;
* to be filled with the fullness of God;

PRAYER FOR INNER SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

*“that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit”*

* Paul distinguishes between the inner and outer person; the inner is the unseen, true self, whereas the outer is the physical human being, visible to the eyes. See II Corinthians 4:16: *“So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.”*
* While we often pray for the outer person that is perishing, Paul prays for the inner person.
* It is our inner being or inner person that governs what we are and do.
* Our faith is sustained not by what happens to us, but what happens within us, the inner being.

PRAYER FOR INDWELLING OF CHRIST IN THEIR HEARTS

*“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”*

* “dwell” -- katoikeo – “to make one’s home,” “to be at home”
* Paul is praying that readers enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ.
* We cannot handle life unless we have a solid foundation, unless we are “rooted” and “grounded” – rooted and grounded in God’s love for us.

PRAYER FOR THE POWER TO COMPREHEND ALL THE DIMENSIONS OF SPIRITUAL REALITIES

*“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth”*

* Paul prays that readers would comprehend what he admits is beyond comprehension – the breadth, length, height and depth.
* Exploring God is like exploring the universe. The more we know of it, the more of it we find is still unmapped and unexplored.

PRAYER FOR POWER TO KNOW THE UNKNOWABLE LOVE OF CHRIST

*“to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge”*

* “No matter how much we know of the love of Christ, there is always more to know.” (Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*)

PRAYER TO BE FILLED WITH THE FULNESS OF GOD

*“so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”*

* To know the unknowable love of Christ is to be filled with the fullness of God; note the “so that” in his prayer.
* What fills God is love, and what we are seeking is to be filled with that love, and to fill the world the world with the fullness of God’s love.
* The fullness is not something we possess and hold, but rather we are filled for the overflow into the world.

DOXOLOGY

*21Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.*

* Lest we think we have dared to ask for too much, Paul assures that God is “able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine!”
* The glory of God “in the church” and “in Christ Jesus” is the manifestation of the perfections of God.
* Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* defines God’s glory as: “the created brightness that surrounds God’s revelation of himself.”
* When Moses asked God, *“Show me your glory, I pray,”* God granted his request saying, *“I will make all my goodness pass before you”* (Exodus 33:18-19).

CONCLUSION

Let us long to experience this prayer for ourselves! Let us ask God to fill us with a sense of His wonder, majesty and love. Let us thirst to know more and more of the unknowable love of Christ.