

Welcome! If you brought your Bibles with you, open with me to Ephesians 3. I was thinking this week about all the different life-changing events that people go through: graduating from high school, selecting a college, deciding on a vocation, what city you live in...all huge events that shape us, but at least for me, of all the experiences I've ever had that has shaped me, marrying Keren has made by far and away the greatest change. When I got married I had to get used to sleeping next to someone in my bed, picking up after myself, eating more vegetables, using fabric softener when I do the laundry. And of course those are just the superficial changes. Marrying Keren has changed me at a deep, internal level, too. Marriage has the ability and power to change our hearts. But marriage is not the only thing that can do that. Today, as we continue to study through the book of Ephesians, we are going to see that **God's love changes our hearts**. There are many things in the world that can change our hearts, but nothing nearly as powerful as God's love.

Let's begin reading in **3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.** (Let's begin by recognizing that Paul is assuming a unique position in prayer. He says he **kneels** before the Father. In the 1st century Judaism, the typical posture for prayer was standing. A person would stand and pray with your hands outstretched and your gaze toward heaven. Here Paul takes a posture not simply of devotion but of desperation. He is pleading his case before the God of heaven. And what does he pray? **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.** Take note of the trinitarian nature of Paul's prayer. He kneels before the **Father** and asks for the Holy **Spirit** to do a powerful work so that Jesus **Christ** may dwell in our hearts through faith. God the Father, God the Spirit, God the Son, all actively working together in our lives. And what does Paul pray would be accomplished? **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.** The last sentence in this prayer is so powerful! Look at what Paul is asking for: that you may be filled to the measure of **all the fullness of God**. This is a really important phrase. It is only used two other times in the entire Bible. And each time it is used it is in reference to Jesus himself, who lived among us in normal human form, and yet had all the fullness of God inside of him. Paul is praying that would be our reality, too. He wants us to be overflowing with the presence of God.

Think of it like having a glass that is full to the brim. (Pour a glass of water and demonstrate.) What happens when you walk around with a glass like this? The smallest of moves causes it to spill over. How beautiful is it when this represents the life of God inside of you. You are filled to the measure of all his fullness. Everywhere we go, every step we take, every interaction we have, every person we bump into, the presence and power and grace of God just spills out on! That's what Paul is praying for! And he is down on his knees, desperately pleading for this. He's asking each member of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit to accomplish this work in our lives, to fill us to the full measure, to allow our lives to overflow with the presence of God.

That's the prayer. But that leads to the all important question: how?! How will our lives go from being at the place they are at today to overflowing with God's presence?

If I told you I could take your golf handicap from a 30 to a 3, the golfers in the room would be ecstatic but you'd want to know how. If I told you I could take your GPA from a 2.0 to a 4.0 you'd be elated, but you'd want to know how. Paul is praying that our lives would go from the place they are at today, to a place where we are overflowing with the presence of God. How's that going to happen?! Paul tells us. It's actually right in the passage. If we want to overflow with the presence of God, it all begins by grasping how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. This word **grasp** is a very unusual word for Paul to use. This is the same word that was used to describe soldiers sacking a city. This is a word that was used to describe a wrestler mauling his opponent, pulling him to the ground and suffocating him. This is an immersive, encompassing word. What's Paul saying? He doesn't want us to just scratch the surface of Christ's love. He doesn't want us to read about it in a book or hear someone else talk about it and have a nice, clean, tidy experience. He wants us to encounter Christ's love in a complete and holistic way. Think of Christ's love like a pool of water. He doesn't want us just dipping our toes in the pool to check the temperature. He wants us running full speed, jumping off the diving board and doing a cannonball.

Look at the language Paul uses to describe Christ's love. How wide and long and high and deep it is. Some see the four directions spoken of here as a reference to the four directions of the cross of Christ, with beams going out wide and long, stretching both high and deep. John Stott says: **Christ's love is wide enough to encompass all mankind, long enough to last for eternity, deep enough to reach us in our lowliest state, and high enough to exalt us to heaven.** And it is grasping this love, diving into the deep end of this love that allows our lives to overflow with the presence of God. Listen to what Frederick Faber says about Jesus' love. **"We can exaggerate about many things, but we can never exaggerate our obligation to Jesus or the compassionate abundance of the love of Jesus to us. All our lives long we might talk of Jesus and yet we should never come to an end of the sweet things that might be said of him. Eternity will not be long enough to learn all he is, or to praise him for all he has done, but then, that matters not, for we shall be always with him, and we desire nothing more."**

The man most considered to be the most influential theologian of the 20th century is named **Karl Barth**. He wrote tens of thousands of pages about the faith. One time he was asked a question by a seminary student: "In all of your reading and research, what is the most profound theological truth you have ever discovered?" He thought about it for just a moment...and do you know how he replied? "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The love of Christ is the most elementary of all Christian doctrines, and at the same time the most profound of them all. And Paul is praying that we would be able to grasp that love.

I feel like being a first time dad has taught me more about love than I've ever known. Watching Keren carry a child made me love her more than ever, and then there in the hospital, holding this little life I helped to create and is entirely dependent upon us, it does something profound and indescribable to your heart. Sometimes I sit in my office and I'm writing a sermon or responding to email and I just get this urge, I have to see my boy. I facetime Keren and just have her put the phone up next to him. I rush home at the end of the day and I can't wait to hold him. When I pick

him up, sometimes I won't put him down for an hour. And whenever I hold him, I talk to him and sing songs to him. Here's a **picture** of the two of us from last Sunday on Father's Day, down at the canal. And when I look him in the eyes or hold him and rock him at night, what I say to him more than anything else is this: "We just love you so much. We just love you so much. We just love you so much." Being a parent teaches you something new about love. If you have kids and someone asked you how much you love them, what do you say? There aren't even words; it's beyond explanation. As impossible as it is to look at a parent and say, "Express your love for your child to me," it's a billion times more challenging for us to be able to grasp God's love. That's why Paul says he wants us to **know this love that surpasses knowledge**. The best of all human love is like rising one inch above sea level, the love of Christ is like the peak of Mount Everest.

So how are we supposed to go about this? How are we supposed to know love that surpasses knowledge? I think it begins by being **rooted** and **established** in love. Paul is taking botanical and architectural images and blending them together to talk about the importance of love in our lives. When I think about being rooted I can't help but think about all the work I've done in my backyard the last couple of years. The home we live in was built on land that had been farmed for the last century and a half. So it was perfectly flat and had a strange mixture of grass and weeds. Mostly weeds. Over the past year I've planted about 40 trees. **Here's a picture of one of the trees I planted last year.** Very nice, it's doing well. Red maple. **Here's a picture of another one of the trees I planted.** It's not thriving, but it's holding on. **Here's a picture of another one.** We are in late June and it still has no leaves! This tree is alive. If you scratch the limbs you see bright green, but it's not in great shape. These trees are all in the exact same yard. Same soil. Same water. What's the difference? I planted them myself. That first tree, I got the entire root system. The second tree, I got part of it. That third tree, I only got a little bit of it. Looking at the different trees in my yard I can tell immediately how strong the root system is. Paul says the same is true for our lives! He wants us to be deeply rooted in love!

That's the botanical image, but there is also the architectural, structural image. Paul says we not only need to be **rooted** but also **established** in love. This is the Greek word for the foundation of a house. **If you've ever seen a house be built**, they don't begin with framing. They don't begin with plumbing. They don't begin with roofing. They don't begin with painting. They don't begin with landscape. How do they begin? With the foundation. Dig it out. Make it flat and level, pour the concrete, lay the bricks. Just like every house needs a sure and strong foundation, so does every life. Paul is praying that our lives would have a foundation of love. So Paul wants us to be rooted and established in love.

Do you realize why this is so important? Do you see the significance and essentiality of this? Many people come to church and believe in Jesus. They are sincere believers. And they want a close walk with God, they want the intimacy that they hear others talk about, they want freedom and victory. They want to overflow with the presence of God, but it seems like no matter what they do, they keep spinning their wheels. It's like they are running with all their might, but they're just on a treadmill, expending all this spiritual energy but going nowhere. Why is that? Oftentimes it is because their life is not yet fully rooted and established in love. As always, Jesus provides the perfect example for us.

Everything Jesus did flowed out of the love of God! As he was beginning his ministry he went to the Jordan River and was baptized. When he was baptized, the heavens parted and this is what God the Father spoke over Jesus, “**This is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased**” Matthew 3:17. The Father didn’t speak these words on the cross, after Jesus lived a perfect life and finished everything he set out to accomplish. He spoke these words at the very beginning of his ministry before he did anything at all. The love of God the Father was the grounding, foundational reality of Jesus’ life. And if we want to overflow with the presence of God, this has to become the grounding, foundational reality for our life, too. So much of the Christian life is simply about learning to listen to and agree with this voice. The voice of love, the voice of identity and affirmation and delight coming from our Father.

C.S. Lewis wrote about receiving this kind of love. Not just hearing about it or understanding it but about allowing it to penetrate deep into your soul. He said most of us, when we hear about love, we let it cover us the way a coat of paint covers a wall. It changes the look. It’s undeniably obvious, but it’s also only on the surface. He said the ultimate goal is receiving the love of God like a dye or stain that soaks right through us, to the core of who we are. Think about that analogy. God wants his love to soak into us and change every fiber of our being. He wants it to get into our bones.

I have a nephew and niece who are **twins**. They are two years old. Laurel and Tucker. Recently they were misbehaving and their dad put them in time out in their room for five minutes. He told Laurel he wanted her to spend the time thinking about not fussing, and he told Tucker he wanted him to think about being nice to his sister. He came back a few minutes later and asked his little girl what she had been thinking about, “Not fussing.” He asked his little boy what he had been thinking about. He was quiet for a few seconds and then said, “Meatballs.” Classic! It is so common to hear the message of God’s love and know that we need to press into it, but then get distracted and focus on other, seemingly more pressing matters. We have to come back to the depths of God’s love again and again and again.

**Bernard of Clairvaux** was an influential Benedictine monk from the 12th century. He wrote about the love of God and said that the Christian life is about maturing in the object and the motivation of love. He said the natural way of life is **Love of self for self’s sake**. This is where we put ourselves first and look after our own needs because we have a constant and unwavering commitment to our own good. He said that when we hear the gospel, a message of hope and salvation and respond to it, it leads us to **Love of God for self’s sake**. Instead of loving ourselves and putting our needs first, we love God and we put his needs first, but why do we do it? Because loving God is the way to the forgiveness of sins, loving God is the pathway to a better life, loving God is the pathway to heaven. We love God, but we do it for self-motivated reasons. He’s not saying that’s bad; he’s saying that’s the natural order. And we typically begin our Christian life focused on self. But he says some Christians take an incredible turn, and there is **Love of God for God’s sake**. This is where you love God for who he is, not what he can do. You praise him and adore him not because he’s useful, but because he’s beautiful. And even if there was never any personal benefit to you, you would worship him the same. You love him just because of who he is. Some Christians never make it there. But there’s a final step in this progression. Do you see where it’s going? **Love of self for God’s sake**. This is where it comes full circle. This is where you’ve learned to surrender entirely to the will of God and you’ve

learned to love everything that God loves. And since God loves you, you learn to agree with him and love yourself, as well. And you don't love yourself for any of the reasons you used to. It's not because of a biological, pre-wired condition to advance your own ends. It's not based upon your beauty or intellect or success. It's based on being a treasured child of God, the object of his love. This is revolutionary. Stop right now and think where you might be on the journey. Be honest. I don't know where you might be...but God wants us to progress on this journey. And this is the place he wants us to end up...Where our hearts are perfectly aligned with his. When you meet someone who is living in this realm, it's unmistakable. These people walk with a grace, humility, confidence, a resilience that defies human explanation. They shine with an inner luminescence and radiate joy. They have a deep and profound peace. They've entered into a different realm. Being around them is so life giving. Because they have truly entered into a state of belovedness, they are able to extend the gift of belovedness to others, as well. This 4th expression is rare. But I'm believing and praying that in God's grace, this becomes our normal reality here.

Remember, this is not a feel-good, self-help, everything is nice and wonderful pep talk. Paul is on his knees, praying that we would overflow with the presence of God, and in order for that to happen we have to be rooted and established in love. God wants to take you deeper and deeper and deeper. In order for that to happen we have to be rooted and established in love, and one more thing. Look at that passage one more time: **And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 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, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.** If we want to grasp this love, we have to share our lives with other people. This doesn't take place on our own, in a vacuum or on an island. It takes place in community.

I have a friend in my life group that has been going on this journey. He's been at this church for 30 years, but in just the last 18 months or so his life has become more rooted and established in love than ever before. I asked him to write about the journey. Listen to his words. I always struggled to believe that God really loves me. After all, I thought, "How could he?" I carried so much shame and pain from my past. I came from an abusive home, I was bullied by peers, my sister died when I was 17, I partied too much, and I had a pornography addiction. I was an angry and depressed person. At one point, I thought it would be better if I took my own life. I committed myself to Christ when I was young and tried to grow as a Christian, but most of my efforts were motivated by overcoming failures and escaping shame. I was consistently trying to earn God's love and prove my worth, which left me exhausted and frustrated. Less than two years ago, shortly after my wife and I joined a life group at The Creek, my perspective began to change. As our group spent time with one another and studied the Word together and grew in our love for one another, I came to see I was depriving myself of the riches of God's love because of how I viewed myself and not how God viewed me. This shift of focus allowed me to live as God's beloved son. God chiseled away at my calloused heart and joy began to fill my life in increasing measure. My life has been radically transformed by learning to receive God's transforming love.

Did you hear those words? My life has been radically transformed by learning to receive God's transforming love. And how did he learn to receive God's love? In community. Remember what Paul prayed! That we would have power, "together with all the Lord's people!" If we are going

to grasp the love of Christ, it's going to come in community. You don't find this going off in the monastery somewhere. You find this in your life group. You find this around the dinner table and the living room. John Stott says, "**It takes the whole people of God to grasp the whole love of God.**" That's been my journey. I went to school to learn theology for years. I learned the Greek language. I've memorized thousands of verses of Scripture. I've fasted a lot of times. I've been on a lot of prayer retreats. All of those things have mattered. But if you were to ask me how I learned to grasp the love of God? I'd give you the names of people. People like Randy and Julie, Max and Margarete, B and Kelly, Spencer and Tracy, Jeremy and Cassie. And its people who are in my life group presently. People who know me, who I see at least once a week, often times much more, and with the influence and voice they have in my life, they speak his love again and again and again. Henri Nouwen wrote and said, "**Isn't that what friendship is all about? Giving each other the gift of our belovedness?**"

Earlier in the message I said that the best love in the world is like being one inch above sea level, and the love of Christ is like summiting Mount Everest. Do you know that there are actually a group of people whose only job is to help people summit **Everest**. They're called Sherpas. They live at incredibly high elevations in the Himalayas. They are expert Mountaineers. And they make their living helping people make the world record climb. What if we committed to making that the goal of every relationship? Every person you ever meet is in need of better understanding the love of God. What if you said, "I hope my presence in their life assists them on that journey. My presence in their life helps them make the climb and ascend the heights of God's great love." That's what we want this place to be about: That we would have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!

There are two practical things I want to point you to: **Rooted!** Groups launch this August. Sign ups start in a few weeks. Don't miss out on this. We sent hundreds of people through Rooted in the Spring. The testimonies were incredible. Here is one of my favorites: "We've gone 10 years at The Creek without a life group. After ten weeks in Rooted, we are finally connected." We want you to get connected, too! Connection will help you grasp his love!

**All night prayer and worship!** Next month, July 19<sup>th</sup>, come spend the entire evening with us in prayer. We are becoming a people who are passionate for God's presence. Jesus spent the night in prayer! He met with God. Every time I have ever given up a night of sleep and prayed all night, my eyes are heavy come morning time, but my heart is filled with the love of God! Join us for his, and let's grasp the love of God, together along with all of his people.