Rooted in Love

November 21 & 22, 2026 | Ephesians 3:14-21
Kevin Haskins, Executive Pastor

Henri Nouwen tells a story about a woman named Janet who lived at *Daybreak*, a community near Toronto where people with developmental disabilities share their lives with those who assist them.

One evening, shortly before the community gathered for prayer, Janet came up to Henri and asked, ***"Henri, can you give me a blessing?"***

Almost automatically, he reached over and traced the sign of the cross on her forehead. Janet looked at him and said, ***"No! That doesn't work. I want a real blessing!"***

Henri realized how little attention he had given her. He told her that when everyone gathered for prayer that evening, he would give her the blessing she had asked for.

Later that evening, about thirty people are sitting together in a circle. Henri says, **"Janet has asked me for a special blessing**." Before he can say much more, Janet gets up, walks over to him, puts her arms around him, and rests her head against his chest.

And Henri begins, "**Janet, I want you to know that you are God's Beloved Daughter.** You are precious in God's eyes. Your beautiful smile, your kindness to the people in your house … show what a beautiful person you are. I know you feel a little low these days and that there is some sadness in your heart, but I want you to remember who you are: **a very special human being, deeply loved by God and all the people who are here with you."**

Janet lifts her head and looks at him. Henri can see in her smile that she's heard him. She goes back to her place. Then another woman raises her hand. "Can I have a blessing, **too**?"

I suspect most of us here could give a rather good answer if someone asked, "How do you know God loves you?" We could quote John 3:16. We could take someone to the cross and explain what Jesus did there for us.

But think about a moment this past week when you were disappointed in yourself, or praying again about that thing you've prayed about for years. How readily did this thought come to mind: *Even here, Christ loves me*.

That's why the prayer Paul prays in Ephesians 3 catches my attention. Paul is writing from prison, and he's concerned that these Christians might lose heart because of what he's suffering for them. He's already told them that in Christ they have received every spiritual blessing. And then he gets on his knees to ask God to give them something they still need.

Question. If you already know God loves you, what more could you possibly need?

We need the Spirit's strength so that Christ is at home in us.

> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith …
> Ephesians 3:14–17a

Paul begins, "For this reason." For what reason? Earlier in the letter, Paul has been telling the believers he's writing to who they are and what God has done to bring them near. You were dead, and God made you alive. You were far away, and Christ brought you near. You who grew up Gentile were once strangers to the promises God had made to Israel. And now, you sit at the same table with Jewish believers because you are children of the same Father. Through Christ, in one Spirit, you both have access to the Father.

And what does Paul do with that access? He uses it. He bows his knees before the Father and asks Him to do for these people what Paul himself cannot do.

I find that moving. Paul can write them a letter. He can remind them of everything Christ has done. And we're still reading his words two thousand years later. But Paul knows there is something these people need that even the clearest explanation he could give them will never accomplish on its own. So he prays for them.

And look "who" he's asking. The Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." The One to whom every family owes its existence is the very One Jesus has given us the freedom to approach. Paul calls Him "Father".

Some of us learned quite early to pay attention to how we were doing before we asked for anything. Is this a good time to ask Dad? Have I done what he expects? Is he pleased with me today?

Paul doesn't ask the Father to check how these Christians are doing first. He doesn't measure his request by how their week has gone. He measures it "according to the riches of his glory." What gives Paul the confidence to ask so much for these people? He knows how generous their Father is.

And what does he ask Him for? Strength "through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

Now that seems like an unusual prayer for Christians. Doesn't Christ already live in them? He does. These are people who have trusted Him. And Paul prays that, by the Spirit's power, Christ would be at home in the very places where they make their decisions,

carry their fears, and bear their disappointments. Paul says this happens "through faith". We are still learning how to trust the One who has come to live in us.

What might it look like to trust Christ? Maybe there's a situation that comes to mind before your feet hit the floor in the morning. You've given it a great deal of thought. You've worked out what you'll do if things go one way and what you'll do if they go another. And if somebody asked, you'd say, quite sincerely, "Yes, I trust Christ." But it's been a while since you've spoken to Him about that situation.

Paul gives you a place to begin. *Father, You know how much of my attention this is taking. Strengthen me by Your Spirit. Lord Jesus, help me trust You here.*

That's the first thing Paul asks. And as he goes on, he asks for strength a second time. And this time, notice what he thinks it takes strength to do.

Together, we need to know the love we're already rooted in.

> … that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge …
> *Ephesians 3:17b–19a*

"Being rooted and grounded in love." Think of a tree with deep roots or a house on a firm foundation. Where are these Christians standing as Paul prays for them? They're already standing in Christ's love, and God is the one who put them there. Christ's love for them is as real on the day they can scarcely believe it… as it is on the day they're sure of it. And from that place, Paul asks the Father to help them take in just how deeply Christ loves them.

Breadth and length and height and depth. Look in every direction you can think of. Where is the edge of the love of Christ? When will you be able to say, *"Well, now I've seen all there is to see"?*

When Paul wants us to see how far Christ's love goes, he takes us to the cross. In chapter 2 he writes, "You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (2:13). Later in this same letter he says that Christ "loved us and gave himself up for us" (5:2). You could spend a lifetime with those words. The One who knew what bringing you near would cost Him… is the One who gave Himself for you.

And if you're here and you're still trying to work out what you believe about Jesus, that's actually where I'd invite you to begin. Maybe you've assumed that getting close to God depends on how much of your life you can get in order. Look at what Christ has already done to bring you near. You can trust the One who gave Himself for you.

But Paul wants more for these people than the right answer. He wants them "to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." Jonathan Edwards said there's a difference between knowing that honey is sweet and tasting it. These people already believe that Christ loves them. Paul asks the Father to help them know the love that they believe in. And however deeply they come to know it, there will always be more.

And notice who Paul expects them to learn this with: "with all the saints." Think about the people who first heard this letter. A Jewish believer could look across the room at a Gentile believer whose home he might never have entered before. Now that man is his spiritual brother. Imagine hearing this prayer read out loud and realizing, *Paul expects me to learn something about the love of Jesus beside this man. And Paul's praying that this brother of mine will come to know Christ's love beside me.*

That's a lot to ask. Some of us find it hard enough to receive love from people we already like.

I see this in myself. I love to teach. I can talk about the love of Christ for an hour. But let someone in this church tell me they're grateful for me, or tell me they love me, and something in me gets awkward. I want to make a little joke or change the subject.

Somewhere along the way I decided my job is to love, not to be loved.

I wonder if that's one reason I need those four words in Paul's prayer: **"with all the saints."** Because sometimes I'm asking God to help me know His love, and someone from this church is standing right in front of me trying to tell me that they love me. And I'm already changing the subject.

Here's one place I think I could begin. Someone asks me after church, "Kevin, how can I pray for you?" I can usually think of somebody else who needs prayer. And sometimes that's a good and loving answer. But sometimes there's something I would actually like prayer for, and it costs me a little to say it. What would happen if I stayed with the question long enough to give an honest answer? And when they say, "Could I pray for you now?" what if I let them?

Maybe for you it isn't the question, "How can I pray for you?" Maybe it's the meal someone offers when you're sick, or a word of encouragement that you brush aside before it can land. Where is someone in this church trying to love you right now? What would it look like this week if you let it reach you?

Do you remember what happened when Janet went back to her place? Somebody else in the circle raised a hand. "Can I have a blessing, too?" I wonder who might find the courage to ask for prayer, because they heard *you* ask.

And where does Paul hope all of this will lead? He tells us at the end of verse 19.

<u>God fills His people, and His love begins to show in the way we live together.</u>

> … that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19b

I would have thought that Paul had asked for enough. Strengthened by the Spirit. Christ at home in our hearts. Knowing together the love that took Him to the cross. And Paul keeps going. As we come to know how deeply Christ loves us, Paul asks the Father to fill us in such a way that His love shapes how we treat one another.

How would we recognize an answer to a prayer that big? Suppose God were answering it here at Valley. Where would you look and what would you see?

In the next chapter, that same word, *fullness*, shows up again. Paul says the church is growing toward "the fullness of Christ." And one of the first places he tells us to look for that growth is the way we put up with each other: "**…** with patience, bearing with one another in love" (4:2).

I find that wonderfully specific. I might have looked for the answer to Paul's prayer in a particularly moving weekend service. Paul gives me reason to look for it on Tuesday afternoon, in a conversation with somebody I wish would grow a little faster.

Think of a father whose little girl is learning to tie her shoe. Picture it… She's sitting on the bottom step. He's got his coat on. She gets the first loop, loses the second one, and starts over. That father could reach down and have the shoe tied in two seconds. And some mornings, I imagine, he does. But this morning he kneels down beside her. He stays there while she tries again, and again, and again.

Now think of somebody whose pace of change has begun to wear on you. Perhaps you've had the same conversation several times. You know what you think they ought to do. You may even be right. What begins to happen in you as you realize you're going to have the conversation *again*?

Here's the question that helps me. *How has Christ treated me in the places where I have been slow to grow?* How many times have I come to Him with something He and I have talked about before? What kind of welcome have I received from Him there?

Paul says, … be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us … (5:1–2). Notice the order. **Beloved children. Then, walk in love.** The patience I have received from Christ begins to shape the patience I can offer somebody else.

So think again about that person who came to mind a moment ago. **What would it look like this week, instead of grabbing the laces, to simply kneel beside them?**

That's something worth asking God to do in a church. And perhaps you have some sense of how much power it would take for Him to do it in you.

And then Paul can't help himself. He breaks into praise.

> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
> *Ephesians 3:20–21*

"According to the power at work within us." Did you hear that? The power Paul asked for at the beginning of the prayer is already at work in the people he's praying for. And back in chapter 1, when Paul wanted them to understand the greatness of God's power toward those who believe, he pointed them to the resurrection of Jesus.

So when Paul kneels before the Father and asks Him to do something as extraordinary as filling an ordinary church with His fullness, he knows whom he is asking.

And where does he expect God to receive glory? "… in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations …" In a church where people who once kept their distance now call each other family. Where a man who has spent years praying for other people finally asks somebody to pray for him. Where someone on the receiving end of Christ's patience finds herself able to stay beside a person who is still learning. God receives glory <u>there</u>.

Maybe you came in today quite sure that Jesus loves you. Maybe it's been a long time since those words felt true. What encourages me is that Paul knows what to do for people like us. He gets on his knees and asks the Father to give His beloved children what they need.

Valley, let me pray that prayer over you.

Father, You have brought us near through Your Son, and so we come to You together.

I ask that, according to the riches of Your glory, You would strengthen these friends of mine, Your people, with power through Your Spirit in their inner being, so that Christ may be at home in their hearts through faith.

You have rooted and grounded them in Your love. Give them strength to comprehend, with all the saints, how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus. Give them, even in those places where it has been hardest to trust You, the gift of knowing firsthand this love that surpasses knowledge. **And fill them, fill <u>us</u>, with all Your fullness.**

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

And everyone said… ***Amen.***