

# Hope for the Hopeless

## Ephesians 3:13-21

Turn with me if you would to the book of **Ephesians 3:13-21**. We are continuing on in our study of the book of Ephesians. There are different ways to teach the Bible – one way is to teach principles based on a specific topic, the other is to teach the Bible verse by verse thus building principle upon principle in order that one understands not only what God has to say, but the context in which it was communicated. When one teaches topically, they are able to directly address a specific topic for a specific time. However, when one teaches verse by verse they run the risk of missing out on teachable moments.

Today we find ourselves in the midst of one of the greatest catastrophe's in our nations history, the events of Hurricane Katrina. Yet, we also remember another event that is known as September 11<sup>th</sup>, the violent taking of life by terrorists. In the midst of such devastation, events that change all of our lives, we find ourselves discouraged wondering when life will become easier. You can't even turn the news on and watch the events and not feel some sense of hopelessness.

The cries for help of separated families, the destruction of one's home, and everything they posses. The loss of jobs and the normalcy of life. How can we find strength in these times? Instead of being overcome by these situations, how can we overcome our discouragement and be strength to those who are in need?

Today, is one of those times that teaching verse by verse connects specifically with the events of our time. What Paul has to say to us today, speaks directly to this sense of spiritual depression and motivates us to understand what we have and how others need the same.

Just this last week, as I was watching Larry King, he had on the show with him Dr. Phil and Rick Warren, author of the purpose driven life and pastor of the Saddleback Community Church. When asked by Larry King what people are to focus on in their time of need, Rick Warren answered, "People need to put their hope in something that they can't lose. People can lose their jobs, their homes, even their families, but the one thing they can't lose is their faith and belief in God."

Paul found the church in Ephesus in a very vulnerable place. They were losing heart because of what was happening to Paul. They were discouraged, risking giving up on their faith. The circumstances of life were becoming too overwhelming and they were losing their motivation. Look at his words in **Ephesians 3:13**:

*<sup>13</sup> So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.*

In fact, there are some here this morning who have gone through some of the most tragic things in life, and you could have very well let those circumstances get the best of you, and you could have walked away from your faith, but for some reason you didn't. You stuck through. You now find new motivation to move forward and you have found hope in times of hopelessness. Some of us may still be in the process. But what is Paul's solution for us? What does Paul teach the church so that their apathy and depression can once again become motivation, excitement and love? Look at our text this morning in **Ephesians 3:14-21**:

*<sup>14</sup> When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, <sup>15</sup> the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. <sup>16</sup> I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. <sup>17</sup> Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. <sup>18</sup> And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. <sup>19</sup> May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. <sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. <sup>21</sup> Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.*

Here we find Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. One of the things we learn about Paul is that he understood the ministry of prayer. He was never far from praying for those to whom he wrote his letters, or for those he was deeply concerned about. Paul understood that prayer was an essential ingredient to the solution of their problem. He needed their to pray for him, and they needed to pray for them.

**1. The place to begin when someone's faith is failing, or when they are cold and lethargic and dead in their spiritual experience, is to pray for them.** Some of us would think to mention people's names in a casual non-challant kind of way, but look at what Paul says in verse 14. He states that he falls to his knees.

Did you know that it wasn't customary for a Jew to bow down on their knees in prayer? The Jews normally prayed standing up with arms outstretched to God. But occasionally when something was of deep, intense concern, they would bow their knees and humble themselves before God. When was the last time you got down on your knees and cried out to God on someone else's behalf? **God wants us to pray for each other with a deep, intense concern and a humble attitude. We may even have to get on our knees.**

Paul prays to the "Father" the one from whom all things came from. Paul is not simply stating the origin of creation, but what he is talking about here is the idea that everything on earth that carries with it the title "Father" draws its characteristics from the ultimate fatherhood of God. God is not simply the origin of everything but **he is the one who originated the concepts of concern and provision and loving guidance and faithful training, of occasional firm handling, of increasing communion all done out of love.**

God wants to take care of us. When Paul prays to the Father, he is calling out to the one who wants to help us and can take care of us. Out of his character (his gory and unlimited resources) we have one who is a tender, concerned, loving father, who wants to be deeply involved with you, who wants you to grow, who is concerned about your welfare, and who will not leave you in some state of hopelessness.

What does Paul pray for? **2. How does God grant us hope in the midst of hopeless circumstances?** How does he snap us out of our spiritual depression? Look at verse 16, ‘That he will give you mighty inner strength through his Spirit.’

### **Step One: Receive Inner Strength Through God’s Spirit. (Spirit Awakened)**

The first step is to pray for and receive the strength of the Holy Spirit. Our spirit’s need to be strengthened – that part of us that is known as the sub-conscious, the deep-seated part of our lives. The deepest level which is filled with despair and hopelessness and it persists for hours and days on end. You break a person’s spirit, and you have set off the greatest of depression, even to the point that they can’t pull out of.

It is there that God wants to give us a fresh infusion of strength by his Spirit into our spirit. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

*But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we have been given one Spirit to drink.*

The Spirit of God refreshes us and revitalizes us. That strength starts down in our spirit and grants us a sense of reassurance that things are going to work out. It keeps us hopeful. This is something that one God can do and all we need to do is ask for it. The first step to keeping hope in the midst of hopelessness is to ask God to strengthen your spirit with his Spirit. **There is hope in knowing that I have God’s strength to hold me up.**

Paul goes on in verse 17 and states that “*God will be more and more at home in your hearts.*” That leads us to step two:

### **Step Two: God makes himself at home in your heart. (Faith Awakened)**

There is something about knowing that Christ lives within us. Having that sense of the personal presence of Jesus. Having an assurance that Jesus will always be there at your side to address any and everything that comes your way. It is one thing to feel like you are by yourself, but another to know that there is another who is always there watching your back.

This, however, is an act of faith. Even though we don’t see him, even though there are times when we don’t feel him, we need to believe and trust that he is there. That’s why I wrote the song “You are there!” because there are times when what we feel or sense may not be the reality of our relationship with God.

When we invite someone over to our house and we tell them, “make yourself at home” we basically telling them to make themselves comfortable. God wants us to feel more and more comfortable with him living inside of us. He wants us to embrace him and live as if he is there all the time. Then **there is hope that we aren’t by ourselves.**

Paul goes on in verse 17 and speaks of being rooted in God’s love. The Revised Standard Version says, “being rooted and grounded in love.” This leads us to our third step to bring hope into hopelessness.

### **Step Three: Standing firm on God’s love. (Love Awareness)**

After one has been strengthened, after one has come to a realization that God wants to live in them, they cannot help but sense that their Father God is in love with them. In fact, Paul used two metaphors – Rooted and grounded. Plants are rooted and buildings are grounded. And what Paul is trying to paint here is an sense of security. The foundation of hope in our hopelessness is Gods love.

We can’t handle life unless we have a solid foundation, unless we are rooted and grounded in love. In assurance that God loves us, has accepted us, and that we are dear to him and precious to him. It is then that we know who we are and that gives us a sense of well-being. **Hope in knowing that God is in love with me.**

Paul goes on in **verse 18** and speaks of an understanding of love. He says:

*<sup>18</sup> And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.*

Paul is speaking about an understanding of God’s love, and being able to relate with others who have experienced the same. That leads us to our next step.

### **Step Four: Understanding God’s Love (Love Realized)**

We need to be a place where we can communicate with each other, how we have experienced God’s love in our day to day lives. There is power in the experiences of others and as we speak of how God has done things in our lives we are able to see that God’s love cannot be limited or contained. That is why I read testimonials, books, autobiographies of Christian men and women so I can see how God has shown his love to them. It helps me to broaden my understanding of the extent of God’s love.

Paul’s prayer is that the Ephesian Church would understand and realize the extent of God’s love – How long, how wide, how high and how deep. In fact, what Paul is referencing to here is what he has written about in the previous 3 chapters in the book of Ephesians.

- How Long. Paul is referencing to **Ephesians 1:18** when he wrote:

<sup>18</sup> *I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.*

The hope he has given those he called. The hope that began from the foundation of the world, in eternity past, reaches on through all recorded time into the unsearchable, limitless reaches of eternity to come. The whole length of God’s plan for us.

- How Wide. **Ephesians 1:18**. The “riches and glorious inheritance.”

ALL men will be gathered into the church without limitations or divisions. All humanity has access to the riches of Jesus Christ.

- How High. The place where we are raised with Christ. Risen to sit with him in the heavenly places, far above all principalities, all powers, all authorities in the age to come. Able to be freed from everything that would drag us down.
- How Deep. **Ephesians 2:3**.

<sup>3</sup> *All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.*

That fact that we were brought out of such depths of death. God’s loved reached all the way down to us, children of wrath, those deserving death and condemnation yet receiving Christ’s love and acceptance. Out of depth of death into the heights of God.

We come to understand God’s love as we relate with one another, as we see and hear of how God has revealed his love to them. There’s **hope in knowing how much he does love me**.

Paul goes on in verse 19 and gives us another step to turn hopelessness into hope. He states:

<sup>19</sup> *May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully.*

### **Step Five: Experience the Love of Christ (Love Received)**

This goes beyond mere intellectual facts but moves the emotions through an experience. Just as a baby knows and experiences the love of a mother, even through they don’t understand what love is, or the extent of that love, the baby experiences her love. Once we are able to grasp the extent of God’s love for us, the goal is to experience it in our everyday lives. **There’s hope in knowing that his love is always there.**

Verse 19 again:

*Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*

### **Step Six: Made Complete with All Fullness (Life of Meaning)**

This is the pinnacle of ones relationship with God. This is when you realize the purpose of your own creation. He made us to be vessels filled and flooded with God himself.

Here God possesses, controls, enriches, blesses, and strengthens us. Our faith is strong and vital, and we are reaching out and ministering to others. We become “God’s workmanship, who discover the good works that have been chosen by God, before time began, to do.” This is why I am here! **There is hope in knowing he has a purpose for my life.**

Can God put hope back into hopeless circumstances? CAN GOD PULL ME OUT OF A SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION? CAN HE BREATH NEW LIFE INTO MY LIFELESS OR BROKEN SPIRIT? Look at **Ephesians 3:20-21**:

*<sup>20</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. <sup>21</sup> Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.*

God can do more than you ask or think. What dreams are you dreaming right now? If you put them into the hands of God, if you commit to contend for spiritual renewal, if you pray and obey, then God, who in his great wisdom in all its variety, will allow all things in your life to lead you to a point of amazement, awe and wonder. At first, it may look tragic in nature, but he knows what we need and how to get us there.

God can take the tragic events of 9/11 or even Hurricane Katrina and use it to bring hope into the lives of people. Right now, all across the country, churches are stepping up and reaching out to these people, not only with food or water, but spiritual food and water that will never run dry from God who wants to take the most hopeless of people and give them hope again.

I believe that we will see a great move of God in this nation as events will drive people to find hope in Jesus Christ. I believe that people will find hope in something that they cannot lose, and that is in their faith in God. They need God, God wants them, and he wants them to understand and experience the vastness of his love for them. Let’s pray!