PEOPLE THE GOSPEL CREATES · WEEK 3

Rooted and Filled with Christ

October 11, 2026 · Ephesians 3:14–21 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

God desires more than occasional improvement; He wants every part of us rooted, filled and governed by Christ.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **Ephesians 3:14–21** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud. It's a prayer, so try praying it, too. Last week we heard Paul's call in Ephesians 4:1 to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received," with humility, gentleness, patience and unity. This week steps back a few verses. Before Paul tells the church how to live, he prays about what God must do within them.

Where this passage sits

Ephesians 1–3 tells what God has done in Christ; chapters 4–6 tell how to live because of it. This prayer is the hinge. Paul has just described the "mystery" God revealed to him: that Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members of one body (3:6). In 3:1 he started to pray, "For this reason I, Paul . . .", then broke off to explain his ministry. In 3:14 he picks the prayer back up: "For this reason I kneel before the Father."

Most Jews prayed standing (Mark 11:25). Kneeling showed unusual earnestness. Paul wrote Ephesians as a prisoner, so this is a man in chains on his knees, praying for people he loves. His prayer has three movements, and each reaches further than the one before: Christ dwelling in us, roots going down into His love, and God's fullness filling us. Then comes one of the great doxologies in Scripture (3:20–21).

A few words worth a closer look

"Inner being" (3:16)
The inner self, the place of desires, motives, loyalties and will. Paul cares about behavior, but he prays first about what's beneath it.

"Dwell" (3:17)
A word for settling down and making a permanent home, the opposite of staying as a guest.

"Rooted and established" (3:17)
Two pictures together: a tree with roots deep in the soil (farming) and a building on a firm foundation (construction). Both mean stability.

"Wide and long and high and deep" (3:18)
Paul isn't measuring four separate things. He's saying Christ's love is bigger than any direction you can look.

"Surpasses knowledge" (3:19)
You can truly know Christ's love without ever reaching the end of it.

"Fullness" (3:19)
In Colossians 2:9–10, "all the fullness of the Deity" lives in Christ, and in Him we "have been brought to fullness." Fullness is found in Christ.

"Immeasurably more" (3:20)
Paul piles up words here, something like "super-abundantly beyond." Read in context, it's about God's power to transform His people.

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1 Let Christ take up settled residence

READ Ephesians 3:14–17a, Ezekiel 36:25–27 and John 14:23

Pastor Bart started with home repairs: you plan a fresh coat of paint, and then you find bad wood underneath. Anyone who has renovated a house learns that you can make the surface look better without dealing with what's under it. We can treat our spiritual lives the same way. We see something that needs to change, our temper or the way we talk when we're frustrated, and we work on it. That's good; Scripture calls us to obey and resist sin. But we can mistake improvement for transformation. Anger may have resentment underneath. The need to win every argument may be about pride. Anxiety about what people think may show how much of our identity still depends on their approval. Not every struggle has a hidden cause; sometimes sin is simply knowing what God says and refusing to do it. But the Christian life is more than managing a collection of bad habits.

So Paul prays that God would "strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." Notice who does the strengthening. The Christian life involves effort and obedience, but the power for real change comes from God. He promised this long before: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you . . . I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees" (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

The Spirit strengthens us "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." That raises a question. Paul is writing to Christians who were already "marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (1:13). Why pray that Christ would dwell in them? Because the word means to settle down and make a home. Jesus used the same language: "My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23).

When someone really moves into a house, they don't stand politely inside the front door holding a suitcase. Their clothes end up in the closets and their food in the refrigerator, and the whole place starts to show that this is where they live. Be careful with the picture: Christ doesn't become Lord because we finally give Him permission. His claim

already reaches every part of us. Paul's concern is that Christ's presence would shape more and more of the person who belongs to Him. That keeps holiness from turning into a self-improvement project. Paul doesn't tell the Ephesians to renovate themselves and then invite Jesus over to inspect the work. He kneels and asks the Father for strength. That doesn't make us passive, as the commands in chapters 4–6 make clear, but those commands grow out of what God is already doing inside us.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever started a simple repair that turned into a much bigger job? What did you find underneath?
2. What's the difference between improvement and transformation in a Christian's life?
3. Think of a visible struggle, such as anger or worry. What might sometimes lie beneath it?
4. Paul prays for believers who already have the Spirit. Why would they still need Christ to "dwell" in them?
5. In the house picture, which "rooms" of a life are hardest to let Christ into?
6. How can we take obedience seriously without turning holiness into a self-improvement project?

2 Put down roots in His love

READ Ephesians 3:17b–19a, Jeremiah 17:7–8, John 15:9–12 and Colossians 2:6–7

Paul changes pictures. The house gives way to something growing: "being rooted and established in love," may you "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." A tree with deep roots and a building on solid ground both stand firm. What gives these believers stability is Christ's love.

Most Christians know the right answer to "Does Jesus love you?" Of course He does. We know John 3:16, and we know the cross shows His love. Paul is praying for something deeper than the right answer. He wants them "to know this love that surpasses knowledge." That sounds like a contradiction, but it isn't. Christ's love can be truly known and never used up. We can build our lives on it and still keep discovering how much bigger it is than we thought. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love for God and for others grows out of His love for us. Jesus tied that love to obedience: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love," and in the next verse, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love" (John 15:9–10).

Jeremiah gives a picture of what roots do: the one who trusts in the Lord "will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes . . . It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit" (Jeremiah 17:7–8). Jeremiah doesn't describe a tree that never faces heat. The drought still comes. The difference is where the roots have gone, and the most important part of that tree is mostly invisible.

And Paul says we grasp this love "together with all the Lord's holy people." Christian maturity was never meant to be entirely private. We experience much of Christ's patience, forgiveness and sacrificial love through life with His people. That prepares us for chapter 4's call to humility, patience and unity.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What's the difference between knowing the right answer about Christ's love and being rooted in it?

2. How can you know something that "surpasses knowledge"? Has your sense of Christ's love grown over the years?

3. Read Jeremiah 17:7–8. Why is it important that the tree still faces heat and drought?

4. When pressure comes, what does it usually reveal about where your security comes from?

5. How have you experienced Christ's love through other believers?

6. What practices help your roots go deeper into Christ's love?

3 Be filled with the fullness of God

READ Ephesians 3:19b–21, Ephesians 2:19–22, Exodus 40:34–35 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

Then Paul reaches the high point: "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." He could have prayed that they'd be more disciplined or mature, and he wants that. He goes much further.

This language has roots. At the end of chapter 2 Paul described the church rising "to become a holy temple in the Lord," "a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (2:21–22). When Moses finished the tabernacle, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34). When Solomon dedicated the temple, "the glory of the Lord filled his temple" (1 Kings 8:11). God's dwelling was marked by God's presence. Now God's people are His dwelling, and Paul prays they'd be filled with Him.

That doesn't mean Christians become God. He remains the Creator, and we remain His creatures. But the New Testament uses strong language for what grace does. We "participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4): God shares His life with us so that His character begins to shape ours. And the fullness is always found in Christ (Colossians 2:9–10). Paul isn't describing a vague higher spiritual state.

Does this mean Christians reach a point where temptation and failure are impossible? Paul doesn't say that. The Wesleyan tradition speaks of *entire sanctification*, a term drawn from 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through." It doesn't mean immunity from temptation or the impossibility of failure. It means God's grace can reach the whole person, so that love for God and love for others increasingly govern the heart and life. Paul doesn't put a small ceiling over what grace can do, and neither should we.

That's why the next verse matters: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." People often quote it as if God promised to make our wildest dreams come true. In context, the astonishing thing God can do is transform His people from the inside out. Paul ends where a prayer like this should end: "to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations."

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would you have expected Paul to pray for here? What's surprising about "the fullness of God"?
2. How does the tabernacle and temple background help explain what Paul is praying for the church?
3. What does it mean, and not mean, to "participate in the divine nature"?
4. How would you explain entire sanctification to a friend in your own words? What questions do you still have about it?
5. How does reading Ephesians 3:20 in context change the way you hear it?
6. Is there an area of your life where you've put a "small ceiling" on what God can do?

Pray Paul's prayer

READ Ephesians 3:14–21

God cares how we live, but His work goes deeper than the outside. That raises some deeper questions than "What do I need to fix this week?"

Is there some part of my life where I'm resisting Christ's rule? It may be obvious, or no one else can see it: an old resentment we think we have a right to keep, or an area we don't want Christ interfering with. He doesn't stay politely inside the front door. His presence eventually reaches the places we'd rather leave alone.

What are my roots actually drawing from? The heat didn't create the roots of Jeremiah's tree. It revealed where they had been growing. We may say our identity is in Christ, but what happens when someone's disapproval shakes us, or life moves beyond our control?

Have I become satisfied with improvement when God wants something deeper? "At least I'm better than I used to be" may be true, and we can thank God for every real change. But better isn't the same as finished. We can get used to things in ourselves that God still intends to change, and say, "That's just who I am." Paul's answer isn't simply to try harder. He prays.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of the three questions above is hardest for you to answer honestly?

2. Where have you said, “That’s just who I am”? What would it mean to bring that to God?

3. How could your group pray Ephesians 3:16–19 for one another this week?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	Ephesians 3:14–16 and Ezekiel 36:25–27. Ask the Father to strengthen you by His Spirit in your inner being.
☐	**Tuesday**	Ephesians 3:17 and John 14:23. Ask Christ to make Himself at home in a part of your life you’ve kept closed off.
☐	**Wednesday**	Ephesians 3:17–19 and Jeremiah 17:5–8. Notice where your roots are drawing from when pressure comes today.
☐	**Thursday**	Ephesians 2:19–22 and Exodus 40:34–38. Pray for Pathway to be a dwelling filled with God’s presence.
☐	**Friday**	Ephesians 3:19–21 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24. Thank God that He is able to do more than you ask or imagine.

Try this

Pray Ephesians 3:16–19 for yourself every day this week. Read it slowly and turn each phrase into your own words. Then be willing to listen when God begins showing you where that prayer needs to go, and pray it once for someone else by name.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You that Your grace reaches beyond what anyone else can see. We confess that sometimes we manage what shows on the surface while holding on to things we'd rather not place in Your hands. Through Your Spirit, strengthen us in our inner being. Let Christ become more deeply at home in us, shaping our desires and the way we live. Root us in His love, so that when pressure comes we draw our security and strength from Him. Where we've decided, "That's just who I am," give us faith to believe Your grace can still change us. Fill us with Your presence, and may our lives and Your church bring glory to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/rooted-and-filled-with-christ** for the video, this guide and Pastor Bart's blog post on this week's message.

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