

## **Ephesians - Fullness: Strengthened Within. Filled to Overflow.**

**Dr. John Carmichael**

**[Eph 3:14-21 NASB95] 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him [be] the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.**

- What Is Holding You Up?
- A tree can look impressive above the ground while being dangerously weak beneath it. Green leaves do not guarantee deep roots. Sometimes a storm reveals what appearances conceal.
- People can be like that.
- We can keep showing up, fulfilling responsibilities, and saying the right things while becoming exhausted inwardly. We can know how to function at church without knowing how to receive strength from God.
- What holds you up when life bears down?
- Paul prays for believers facing discouragement. His prayer reaches beneath their circumstances into the deepest places of their lives.
- We rightly pray, “Lord, change what is happening around me.” This passage teaches us to pray, “Lord, strengthen what is happening within me.”
- God cares about the storm you are facing. He also cares about the person you are becoming while you face it.
- In Ephesians 2, Paul describes Jews and Gentiles reconciled through Jesus and becoming God’s dwelling place through the Spirit. In chapter 3, he explains his ministry of this gospel and urges believers not to become discouraged by his suffering.
- Then he kneels before the Father and prays for them. His prayer moves through inward strength, Christ’s indwelling presence, understanding His love together, and God’s fullness. It concludes with worship directed toward God’s power and glory. Ephesians 3, NASB95
- Notice the shape of the prayer: Paul approaches the Father, asks for strength through the Spirit, and desires Christ to dwell deeply in His people.

**How do we experience the fullness of the life God intends for His people?**

**Paul’s prayer calls us to receive the Spirit’s strength, put down roots in Christ’s love, pursue God’s fullness, and live for God’s glory.**

- I. Receive the Spirit’s Strength - Ephesians 3:14–17a [Eph 3:14-17 NASB95] 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love,**
  - a. Paul’s bowed knees express humble dependence. He comes to the Father as someone who knows that the church needs what only God can supply.
  - b. The source of this strength is God’s glorious abundance. Its agent is the Holy Spirit. Its location is the inner person.

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- c. This is more than determination or positive thinking. Paul asks God to accomplish an inward work that human effort cannot manufacture.
- d. The strengthening leads into his request that Christ dwell in their hearts through faith. Because Paul addresses believers, this is not simply an invitation to initial conversion. It concerns the deepening reality of Christ's presence in their lives.
- e. A helpful illustration is a house in which every room becomes available to its rightful owner. Ask whether your decisions, desires, relationships, and private habits are open to Jesus.
- f. 2 Corinthians 4:16: Outward hardship can coexist with daily inward renewal. [2Co 4:16 NASB95] 16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.
- g. Romans 8:13: The Spirit enables believers to put sinful practices to death. [Rom 8:13 NASB95] 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- h. The Spirit who empowers witness also strengthens believers for holiness, endurance, and obedience. We should seek His power at the altar on Sunday and depend on Him when obedience becomes difficult on Monday.
- i. You do not have to pretend to be strong to receive strength from the Holy Spirit.
- j. Application: Identify one place where you have been relying entirely on willpower: resisting temptation, caring for someone, navigating conflict, or remaining faithful through disappointment. Each morning this week, pray specifically: "Father, strengthen me through Your Spirit to obey You in this situation."

### **II. Put Down Roots in Christ's Love - Ephesians 3:17b–19a [Eph 3:17-19 NASB95] 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

- a. Paul combines two pictures: a rooted plant and a firmly founded building. Both communicate stability.
- b. The stabilizing reality is love. In verse 19, Christ's love becomes explicit.
- c. Paul wants believers to grasp its vastness and personally know what exceeds their ability to comprehend fully. This is not a rejection of learning. We can truly know Christ's love without ever exhausting its depths.
- d. Paul also places this discovery within the community of believers. Christian maturity is not a solitary project. We learn something of Christ's love as we worship, forgive, serve, and bear burdens together.
- e. The dimensions in verse 18 communicate immense scope; we need not assign a separate hidden meaning to each one.
- f. Romans 8:35–39: Suffering cannot separate believers from God's love in Christ. [Rom 8:35-39 NASB95] 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- g. 1 John 4:9–11: God's love is revealed in sending His Son and calls us to love one another. [1Jo 4:9-11 NASB95] 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God

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has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

- h. An encounter with the Holy Spirit should deepen our assurance of Christ's love and our willingness to extend that love. Spiritual intensity does not excuse relational cruelty.
- i. Your circumstances may shake your feelings, but they do not have to uproot your confidence in Christ's love.
- j. Application: Do not make your hardest week the final interpreter of God's heart. Begin with the cross. When you feel forgotten, name the feeling honestly, then bring it under the truth of what Jesus has done. Also, take one concrete step toward Christian community this week: ask someone to pray with you, receive help, or carry another person's burden.
- k. Love takes root as we receive it and practice it.

### **III. Pursue God's Fullness - Ephesians 3:19b [Eph 3:19 NASB95] 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

- a. This is the summit of Paul's prayer: that believers be filled to God's fullness.
- b. He is not praying that we become divine or possess all God's infinite attributes. He desires a people whose shared life is increasingly filled and shaped by God's presence and character.
- c. Ephesians 4:13 helps clarify the direction: maturity measured by Christ. Ephesians 5:18 later calls believers to be filled with the Spirit.
- d. The immediate connection matters: Paul moves from knowing Christ's love into fullness. We should never separate spiritual fullness from Christlike love.
- e. Ephesians 4:13–16: Christian maturity includes growth into Christ and building up the body in love. [Eph 4:13-16 NASB95] 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspects] into Him who is the head, [even] Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.
- f. Ephesians 5:18–21: Being filled with the Spirit finds expression in worship, gratitude, and relationships marked by submission to Christ. [Eph 5:18-21 NASB95] 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.
- g. We should eagerly seek fresh filling, spiritual gifts, and empowerment for witness. This passage, however, is not a detailed account of the initial evidence of Spirit baptism. Its immediate burden is the church's deep participation in God's life through strength, faith, and love.
- h. That gives our altar ministry a clear direction: seek an encounter that continues to shape our character and conduct.
- i. Make room for God in the places you have learned to manage without Him.

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- j. Application: Ask: What part of my life remains resistant to Jesus? Where is resentment crowding out love? What habit repeatedly dulls my responsiveness to the Spirit? Choose one specific act of surrender. Repent where necessary, receive prayer, and establish a practical step of obedience.
- k. Do not measure fullness only by the intensity of a service. Look also for growing love, gratitude, holiness, and faithfulness afterward.

### **IV. Live for God's Glory - Ephesians 3:20–21 [Eph 3:20-21 NASB95] 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him [be] the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.**

- a. Paul concludes in praise. God's ability exceeds the boundaries of our requests and imagination.
- b. Keep that promise connected to the prayer preceding it. God can accomplish more in and through His people than they can envision: strengthening them, establishing them in love, and forming them into a mature church.
- c. This passage invites bold faith. It does not guarantee that every personal ambition will be fulfilled exactly as we desire.
- d. The goal is God's glory in the church and in Christ, extending across generations.
- e. Ephesians 2:10: God creates His people in Christ for lives of good works. [Eph 2:10 NASB95] 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
- f. Matthew 5:16: Our good works should direct attention toward the Father. [Mat 5:16 NASB95] 16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.
- g. Acts 4:29–31: The church prays under pressure and receives fresh empowerment to speak God's word boldly. [Act 4:29-31 NASB95] 29 "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and [began] to speak the word of God with boldness.
- h. Pray boldly for salvation, healing, deliverance, and Spirit-empowered witness. Trust God's ability while submitting the outcome to His wisdom.
- i. At North Church, our desire should reach beyond having a powerful service. We want people transformed, relationships restored, believers equipped, and another generation taught to follow Jesus.
- j. Ask boldly. Obey faithfully. Give God the glory.
- k. Application: Identify one situation you have stopped bringing to God because it appears hopeless. Bring it before Him again. Ask for His intervention, and ask what faithful action He wants from you.
- l. Pray beyond your own lifetime: "Father, let what You do in us help the next generation know Jesus."

- **God strengthens us inwardly, establishes us in Christ's love, and fills us with His fullness so that our lives bring Him glory.**
- **"Father, strengthen us through Your Holy Spirit. Let the presence of Jesus shape every part of our lives. Establish us deeply in His love, and teach us to share that love with one another. Fill us with Your fullness. Work beyond the limits of our understanding,**

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**and receive glory through North Church and the generations that follow. In Jesus' name, amen."**