

# HEART OF THE MATTER

**TOOLBOX**

- THINK
- OBSERVE
- CLOSE-UP
- WRITE
- DISCUSS
- FEELINGS
- BRAINSTORM
- REFERENCE
- PASSAGE
- ARTICLE
- BIG IDEA
- CROSSROAD

**BEFORE**

For nearly 20 years with Campus Crusade for Christ, I was considered a "good" staff member. I knew and practiced the concepts we taught, had good Bible study, saw many of my prayers answered, succeeded in ministry, attained national positions, supervised many staff, and ran great conferences. Yet, if you asked me about my inner experience of Christ or His love, I would have skirted the issue, talked about faith not feelings, and discoursed on the danger of depending upon experience. In truth, I had little inner reality.

**DURING**

About six years ago, through experiences too complicated and personal to retell here, I was drawn to the Ephesians 3 passage (and scores like it), in which the person praying is primarily asking for one thing—the existential experience of the love of Christ inside. I finally worked up the courage to begin to pray this way (actually somewhat skeptically), "God, please show up, but I doubt You will."

**AFTER**

To my amazement, within four weeks there were more inward manifestations of Christ and His love in my inner person than I had ever known before. Not only that, I gained new confidence and new empathy for others. Feeling compassion ceased being a mystery. My joy was no longer dependent on circumstances or successes. To top it off (in light of our result-oriented culture), my ministry—which had certainly been adequate—took on many more flavors of both love and power. Since then, I have experienced, at deeper levels than I ever thought possible, the "rivers of living waters" in my innermost being—as well as more sorrow, pain and suffering. But, even these are all part of experiencing His love.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

The most common prayer requests in the Bible are not requests for what God gives, but requests for God Himself: to know and experience Him in one's life. Examples:

- Psalm 27:4
- Psalm 42:1,2
- Psalm 63:1-3
- Psalm 84:8-10



**REFLECT**

With which stage of Dan's pilgrimage do I most identify?



**DISCUSS**

What is my most common prayer request?

# Praying for the Inner Life Experience

**CONTEXT**

Paul's letter to the Ephesians can be divided into two sections: chapters 1-3 contain great truths about the believer, and chapters 4-6 tell how the believer should live. In Ephesians Paul records two great prayers for the Ephesian believers: 1:15-19 and 3:14-21.



**REQUEST #1**

"strengthened with power"

**KEY WORD**

Power: the ability to perform

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

14 For this reason  
I kneel before the Father,  
15 from whom his whole family  
in heaven and  
on earth derives its name.  
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.  
And I pray  
**THAT** you,  
being rooted and established in love,  
18 may have power,  
together with all the saints,  
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.  
20 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,  
21 to him be glory  
in the church  
and in Christ Jesus  
throughout all generations,  
for ever and ever! Amen.

*(emphasis added)*

**REQUEST #2**

"Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"

**KEY WORD**

Heart: the seat of man's personality; the innermost center of man

**REQUEST #3**

"may have the power to grasp . . . and know this love"

**KEY WORDS**

Grasp: to comprehend  
Know: to understand through experience

**REQUEST #4**

"may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

**KEY WORD**

Fullness: all that God is in all of His attributes

  **DISCUSS**

"Now to him who is able . . ." (3:20,21)

How does Paul's conclusion relate to these four requests?

What is the difference between the Christianity of the early church and ours in the twentieth century? To us, Christianity is primarily a performance. To them, it was primarily an experience.

J. B. Phillips

Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to him . . . .

And he is inviting you—and me—to come home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created. His arms are stretched out wide to receive us. His heart is enlarged to take us in . . . .

We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the living room of his heart, where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of his friendship, where chatter and batter mix in good fun. He invites us into the dining room of his strength, where we can feast to our hearts' delight. He invites us into the study of his wisdom, where we can learn and grow and stretch . . . and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of his creativity, where we can be co-laborers with him, working together to determine the outcomes of events. He invites us into the bedroom of his rest, where new peace is found and where we can be naked and vulnerable and free. It is also the place of deepest intimacy, where we know and are known to the fullest.

The key to this home, this heart of God, is prayer. Perhaps you have never prayed before except in anguish or terror. It may be that the only time the Divine Name has been on your lips has been in angry expletives. Never mind. I am here to tell you that the Father's heart is open wide—you are welcome to come in. Perhaps you do not believe in prayer. You may have tried to pray and were profoundly disappointed . . . and disillusioned. You seem to have little faith, or none. It does not matter. The Father's heart is open wide—you are welcome to come in.

—Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding The Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper Collins), pp. 1, 2.

Will this make a difference?



### CASE STUDY

Ed had been a Christian for a year but confided in me of a tremendous struggle he had with sex. Though he'd been taught the truth of Christ regarding sex and knew the consequences of ignoring it, he found himself still drawn into the old patterns whenever he went out with a woman.

I asked him what he'd done to help himself, and he mentioned several important things, but stated that these still had lessened neither his temptation nor his ultimate yielding to it. I asked him if he had tried praying that God would lessen his sex drive. He said he had. I suggested it probably had not worked. He laughed and agreed. Then I shocked him by saying God does not intend to lessen it—he is not going to “neuter” people.

Then, I drew his attention to Ephesians 3:14-21. We talked about it and discussed some rudimentary ways he might learn to pray to experience God's love more and to extinguish his need to seek satisfaction in illicit sex. We prayed through the passage together, asking for a deeper experience of Christ's love for him, especially when he felt tempted. I left him, assuring him that I would be praying as well.

In the weeks that followed, I received from Ed two wonderful letters about how Christ had “shown up” on the inside in response to his prayers, how he was having a new encounter with the love of Christ, and how, even in sexual temptation, he had been able to say “yes” to God and “no” to sin.



### DISCUSS

Why did Ed experience change?



## PAUL'S PRAYERS

Romans 15:13  
 Ephesians 1:15-23  
 Philippians 1:9-11  
 Colossians 1:9-14  
 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 5:23  
 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17; 3:16  
 Philemon 4-6

*Come and help us, Lord Jesus. A vision of your face will brighten us, but to feel your Spirit touching us will make us vigorous. Oh, for the leaping and walking of the man born lame . . . May a holy exhilaration take possession of every part of us; may our mouths be filled with laughter and our tongue with singing.*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon  
 1834-1892

*I beg you, O Lord, that the fiery and sweet strength of your love may absorb my soul away from all things that are under heaven, that I may die for love of your love as you deigned to die for love of my love.*

Francis of Assisi  
 1181-1226

*Open wide the window of our spirits, O Lord, and fill us full of light; open wide the door of our hearts that we may receive and entertain you with all our powers of adoration and love.*

Christina Rossetti  
 1830-1894

*A sampler of prayers from those who have desired to experience Christ's life and love.*

*God, of your goodness, give me yourself, for you are sufficient for me.*

Julian of Norwich  
 1392-1416

*O Lord, you who are all merciful, take away my sins from me and enkindle within me the fire of your Holy Spirit. Take away this heart of stone from me and give me a heart of flesh and blood, a heart to love and adore you, a heart which may delight in you, love you and please you, for Christ's sake.*

Ambrose  
 339-397

*Eternal God, my sovereign Lord, I acknowledge all I am, all I have, is yours. Give me such a sense of your infinite goodness that I may return to you all possible love and obedience.*

John Wesley  
 1703-1791



## YOUR TURN



## TRY THIS

In biblical times and throughout history, many believers have found it helpful to write out their prayers. Try keeping a notebook/journal in which you record your prayers.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.