

Ephesians 3:14-21
Week 6 - "The Gap"
4/25/21

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Ephesians 3:14-21**. Pray. Let me set us up for today...

"**The funk**". A couple of times over the past few years I have experienced what Lindsay and I have come to refer to as "the funk". It's this season in my life that can last anywhere from a week to a couple of months where, for lack of a better way to describe it, **my heart just closes to the goodness of God**.

I get bitter, I get impatient, I get angry and anxious. It kind of comes out of nowhere and just sits like a heavy cloud over me. No repetition of truth seems to help me. No encouragement from another Cristian fixes it. No Bible reading or prayer can seem to penetrate the coldness of my heart. I just can't seem to shake it.

There is a disconnect between what I know to be true about God, and what I actually experience on a heart level.

There is a gap between my head and my heart.

Have you ever been there? Maybe you're in that season right now.

Affections and theology...
I know God is good but...

Have you ever walked through the gap?

Let me give you a few examples of how I've seen this play out and see if you can recognize the gap:

- **Community Group**. You just got done sharing your sin, your struggles. Someone reminds you of the good news of the gospel - Jesus in your place. Your gut or maybe even your vocal response is - "I know that's true, but...I just don't feel it right now."
- **Struggle with sin**. It's midnight, you should've gone to bed 2 hours ago. You're pressed with the temptation to get on your phone or your computer and look at porn. You know you shouldn't and deep down you really don't even want to. "I know Jesus is better, I know this won't satisfy....but I just can't stop myself."
- **Parenting**. Your kid won't sleep. 3rd night in a row. Just wailing from the other room. It's 6 am. You're supposed to get them up soon anyways. - "I know God is good. I know there's a redemptive meaning in this. I know God has placed me here for His glory and my good....I just find that hard to believe right now."
- **Church Planting**. You join a church plant called Citizens Church, ready and expectant and hopeful for God to move. "I know God is in the business of saving people, joining us together as a family....but I feel alone and no one around me is responding to the gospel...it's just hard to accept."

What do we do with the gap?

Our text today is a transitional section within the book of Ephesians. It serves as a summary and turning point. Ephesians splits right down the middle. In chapters 1-3, Paul outlines for us who we are in Christ and in chapters 4-6 we are told how we should live in light of who we are - and **sandwiched in between these two sections, what we're looking at today, is a prayer from Paul**.

In it, we'll find the greatest missionary who ever lived, a man who preached the gospel to so many, who suffered much for the spread of the good news, come to grips with the fact that in order for the gospel to take hold in our lives (not just one time for salvation, but continually for life with God), in order for the gap to be bridged, **the Lord must do an incredible work of grace**.

So here's where we're going today:

- I want to show us Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church and what we need God to do for us in the gap.
- I want to give us some steps we need to take ourselves in the gap.
- Then I'll close with some gospel encouragement for all of us in the gap now, or facing the gap in the future.

Paul's Prayer for God to Work

Let's start with Paul's prayer. In the prayer Paul will continually build kind of layer after layer. He's going to continue to say "so that...so that...so that..." But here's how I would summarize Paul's prayer for us:

Paul prays that God would give them power through the Spirit to know Christ's love and embrace His Kingship.

Let's look at it together:

Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

This is the first part of Paul's prayer:

Paul prays that God would give them power through the Spirit...

When we're in the gap, we need God's power. We need a work that only He can do. We need Him to bridge the distance between what our heads might acknowledge, but our hearts want to reject. We're stuck and we need what only God can do.

YMCA Bench Press. Let me tell you about one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. It happened to me a little over two years ago. During our time in Columbia, Lindsay worked at the YMCA, so through her job we got a free Y membership, I would go, get my elliptical on, no shame. And because of people knowing Lindsay, I got to know a lot of the workers there, it was great.

Now one day, I'm there, lifting weights, doing my thing, you know. And I decided today is max bench press day. Let's go for it. I'm feeling strong. Let's do it. Now typically when you do a max day, and you're trying to see how much you can possibly lift one time, you should have a spotter. Someone who stands behind you to help you in case you can't lift it so you're not stuck with a bench press bar and weights crushing you. (You can see where this is going). I'm too prideful to ask for a spotter. Put more on the bar than I've ever lifted before (which, don't be fooled is still not that much). Lift it up off the place where it's resting and...BOOM, comes crashing down on me, I get the wind knocked out of me, and I cannot move. Embarrassed, hurting, and worst of all...stuck.

Often the gap can feel crushing. No end in sight. No hope for reprieve. Will this ever lift? What can I do?

We must realize → **When we're in the gap, we need God. We need His power. We need Him to work.**

Paul prays that God would give them power through the Spirit...

Kneeling vs standing

But not just aimless power. There's a reason for the power. Look at how he continues the prayer:

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (We'll come back to that in a second)

—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,

Paul prays that God would give them power through the Spirit....to know Christ's love....

Look at how Paul describes the love of Christ. He says - breadth, length, depth, and height. Meaning the love of Christ is:

- **Broad enough to encompass all who would come to Him**
- **Long enough to last for eternity**
- **Deep enough to reach the most degraded sinner**
- **High enough to exalt that sinner to heaven**

This love of Christ - which is already theirs - remember Paul's writing to the church. They already have the love of Christ. They are followers of Jesus. But He prays for them that they would be able to comprehend and know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

In other words that the **bigness** of Christ's love would be grabbable, that they would seize it and embrace it as not just "out there" kind of love - but actually specific love for them.

One of the effects of the gap in our lives is we can begin to believe the lie - **God is not good**. His love is not for me. Or we can acknowledge that with our minds - I know God loves me. I know He cares for me - but we can doubt it in our hearts. "I'm not experiencing that love in my life. His love feels distant. It feels cold. It's not tangible to me right now. Maybe God is good, but it doesn't seem like He's good to me."

It's almost as if God's love is just this out there thing and we can't quite reach it.

Harper car seat. When we go on long drives with Harper, we'll give her like a stuffed animal, and a book, and other toys she can play with to keep her distracted. And she loves to throw them out of the car seat. But what she doesn't realize is that she's strapped in. So she'll throw all these things overboard, and then she'll spend so much time straining, reaching, trying to grasp what is unreachable.

The gap can make us feel that way towards God's love. It's out there. It's distant, I just can't quite get my hands on it.

Which is why we need the Spirit.

Dane Ortlund, in his book *Gentle and Lowly* has a chapter about the Spirit's work in this way. In it, he says this, **"The Spirit's role, in summary, is to turn our postcard apprehensions of Christ's great heart of longing affection for us into an experience of sitting on the beach, in a lawn chair, drink in hand, enjoying the actual experience."**

We need to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit so that the love of Christ, which feels like something we stare at longingly but never experience, which we want to kind of acknowledge but almost seems too good to be true, **becomes something we dwell in, we lounge in, we embrace fully with all of our affections.**

This happens by the work and power of the Spirit. We need the Spirit to show up here to bridge this gap. Paul says the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. It's impossible to comprehend on our own, but in a gracious act of love God helps us to understand what is not understandable - how much Christ loves us.

What do we do in the gap - when Christ's love feels out of reach? We get on our knees and beg God - I don't believe your love for me right now.

- Maybe it's because it doesn't look how I want it to.
- Maybe it's because of some sin I've let get in the way of our relationship.
- Maybe it's because of disbelief.
- Maybe it's because of an undefinable cloud of heaviness. I don't know.

But I need you to remind me. I need you to remind me of your tender heart towards me. I need Your Spirit's power to grasp your love. It's ungraspable. It's incomprehensible. Would you help me?

Paul prays that God would give them power through the Spirit....to know Christ's love....

Then he finishes the prayer. Let's look back at vs 17 and finish with vs 19:

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith
19 that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul prays that God would give them power through the Spirit to know Christ's love.... and embrace His Kingship.

Now, if you're a Christian, this is already true. Christ lives within you. But Paul is praying for something deeper than that. Not just Christ taking up some space in our hearts, but Christ ruling in our hearts.

Here's how we know that's what he means:

First, in the Greek culture in which Paul is writing, the "heart" was more just feelings. The heart was the driving center of a person's life. It is what determined their actions, their will → it was their "driving force".

Second, when Paul prays "Christ may dwell", his word choice is important. There are two words he could have used in the Greek language. He could use the word for dwell in the NT that means "to inhabit, to take up space", but instead he uses the word that means "**to settle down**." It carries the idea of a permanent resident, not a short-term visitor.

Repairing a new home. Some of y'all are in the process of moving into new apartments or new homes that you just bought. All homes need some work when you first buy them. Over time you clean it up, repair it, you put your furniture in, you make it your own. Eventually you say - "This house has been shaped to our needs and taste and I feel really comfortable. This is my home." Even if the house is move-in ready, you still have to decorate it, get your furniture in there, make the house a home. When a person takes up long-term residence somewhere, their presence eventually characterizes that dwelling.

That's what Paul is praying by the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ would do within us. He would make our hearts, our driving force within us, His home that our hearts and in turn our lives would look more like Him.

But what does this have to do with the gap? There can be a temptation within the gap to settle. "This is how it's always going to be. I'm always going to struggle with this. I'm always going to be an addict. I'm always going to be a gossip. I'm always going to struggle with other people's approval. I'm always going to have an anger problem." Whatever it may be.

Man, hear me on this → if you're a follower of Jesus, **you're a sinner declared saint being sanctified.** You're in process. And some of you guys are your own worst enemy and you're absolutely killing the work of maturity God wants to do in you because you just stop at "You're a sinner." This is who I am. Yep, just a good ole sinner. Total depravity, etc. etc.

Can you hear me on this → Christ has also made you a saint! Which means you actually have the Holy Spirit inside of you who can help you say "no" to sin. It doesn't have to always be this way with this same old struggle.

Paul is praying in desperation for the Ephesian church, and we are invited into that desperate prayer → **Lord, will you help it not always be this way!?** Take residence in my heart. Take ownership of my life. I'm actually going to start believing that one day:

- This might not be a struggle.
- This might not be a temptation anymore.
- This might not be an addiction.

That you might actually redeem this.

- I may not always have anxiety.
- I may not always be so angry.
- I may not always need so much control.

I know Your Word says I'm being sanctified, I'm growing, I'm maturing. Bridge the gap, Lord! Be King! Take ownership. Make my heart, my driving center be like you and help me grasp your love!

Application

Paul prays that God would give them power through the Spirit to know Christ's love and embrace His Kingship.

That's Paul's prayer for this church. That's what we need God to do for us, especially in our gap. We need His Spirit, we need His power in our gap to help us grasp Christ's love and embrace His rule.

But here's the deal, we must also put ourselves in a position in which God can do these things. Think about it like a waterfall...The Spirit wants to work within us, the love of Christ is overflowing, we must put ourselves in a position to receive it.

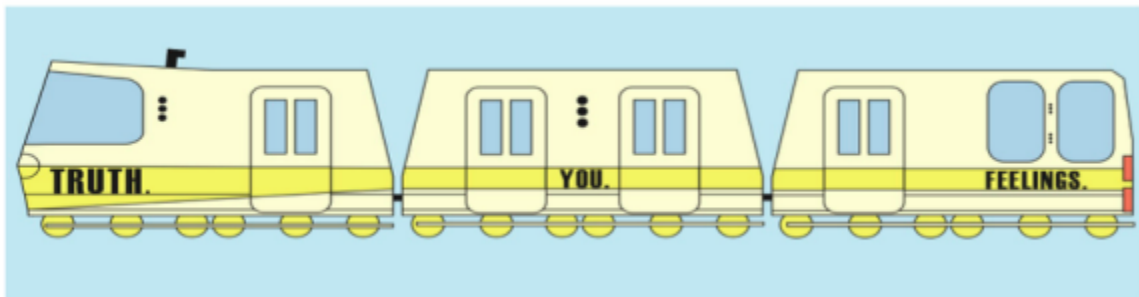
1. Get with God.

This one sounds obvious, but it's so crucial to not move past or dismiss. We have to get time with God. Part of the temptation you'll experience in the gap is to pull away from God. Bible reading will feel dull and boring. Prayer will feel lifeless. God may feel absent. We're going to wonder - what's the point? Why do any of this? I'm not getting anything out of it. It's not helping.

You're really going to throw this Jesus juke at me - I'm in the gap and you're just gonna tell me - "hey, pray about it!"

Let me encourage you - **when it feels like the spiritual disciplines are helping the least, may be when you need them the most.** When spiritual practices feel like a box to be checked, check the box, don't give up.

Here's what's happening to you in the gap → Your feelings about Christ's love, about God's goodness, about the Spirit's power, about your identity in Christ → **THEY ARE LYING TO YOU.**



*Feelings are like toddlers.

- You don't stuff them in the trunk. That's bad.
- You also don't let them drive.
- You lock them in nice and tight and secure in their car seat in the back seat. They can let you know what they need, but they don't drive.

Don't let up. Keep pressing in to God. Keep practicing prayer, Scripture reading. Sabbath. Silence and Solitude. If you've never practiced some of these before, we have a ton of resources to help you from a sermon series we did in the fall - check out rhythmsandformation.com.

2. Get with other believers.

Look at what Paul says in vs 18, talking about being able to grasp and comprehend the love of Christ → **18 that you....may have strength to comprehend with all the saints**

We learn to grasp Christ's love in the context of Christ's people.

Bridging the gap is a community project.

We do this together. There are going to be times where I don't believe the goodness of God and the love of Christ, and I'm going to need you to remind me, even when I can't hear it. And there are going to be times where you don't believe the goodness of God and the love of Christ, and you're going to need me to remind you, even when you can't hear it.

Mountain Climbers. I heard one pastor recently talk about the journey of the Christian life in community like mountain climbers tethered together on the face of a mountain. When mountain climbers scale a mountain, they clip themselves not only to the wall, but also to each other. This helps them lean on each other. If one falls, they are secure not only because they are attached by rope and harness to holds in the rock face, but also because they are attached to other climbers who have secure grips at that moment.

The Christian life is dangerous. There are many trials, perils, suffering, and dangers between us and eternity with God. And we have a God who keeps us, who is near to us, everywhere we go we go with Him, but He has also seen fit to give us the gift of community. Other climbers on the mountain we can tether ourselves to, that when we lose our grip, when we lose our way, when we are smacked in the face by the gap, we can lean on each other, help each other, support and hold up each other.

*Serve someone

Don't isolate and bother believe the lie that no one loves you and no one cares.

Listen:

The gap is going to make you want to run from God...Please don't.

The gap is going to make you want to run from Christian community...Please don't.

****And....NEITHER OF THESE TWO THINGS ARE GOING TO BRIDGE THE GAP OVERNIGHT.**

3. Commit to the long game.

If you're a Christian for any length of time you're going to walk through some seasons of the gap. Some will be short - a few days, a couple of weeks - some might be a few years. The good news for us is that God is patient and Christian maturity is a long game.

This isn't redeemed overnight. This isn't solved in one prayer or one CG time. Paul doesn't pray this in Ephesians 3 and then all of a sudden everyone in Ephesus totally, completely, and forever comprehends the love and Kingship of Christ. That's not how it works. It's a long game.

Sanctification, growth in Christ is often 2 steps forward, a step and a half back. We have to be committed to the long game. To the ups and downs of life in a broken, fallen world. It's a marathon, not a sprint. Even if the season is long, it's just a season.

Part of maturity is learning to recognize → Life is full of ups and downs. We can't always live in the ups, and we won't always live in the downs.

Step by step, day by day → commit to the long game. Christ will redeem it. Even if not now, we know one day he will return, our sanctification will be complete, we will spend eternity in glorified bodies worshipping Him forever. Play the long game for that.

Don't believe the lie of the gap - that tells you to get away from God, get away from others, this is how it's always gonna be. Don't believe the lies of the gap.

Conclusion

Let me end with some encouragement, and then we're going to spend some time in prayer together.

Pilgrim's Progress. I remember the first time I experienced this "funk", this gap, as a married man. Lindsay and I were living in Louisville at the time and we had just started our first ministry jobs, working with college students at the University of Louisville. And I was just getting beaten down. Lindsay was seeing so much beautiful fruit in her ministry, and I just kept experiencing setback after setback. I was frustrated with my studies. And this cloud just sort of moved in and hovered over me. It felt disorienting, I felt numb.

And it was during that time where I was assigned in class to read a book called ***The Pilgrim's Progress***. If you've never read or heard of the book, it's a Christian classic written in the 1600s by a guy named John Bunyan. It's I think the 6th most popular book of all time.

The whole book is one big allegory for the Christian life. The main character, aptly named "Christian", walks through this journey on the way to his forever home in the Celestial City (which represents eternity with Jesus - new heaven and new earth), encountering all of these perils along the way which represent our struggles in the Christian life - the valley of the shadow of death, the secular ethics of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, the rules of Mr. Legalism, all these characters who represent the trials and temptations we face as believers on our journey to our forever home.

There's a part of the story I was reminded of the past two weeks in preparing for this sermon. **Christian** and his traveling companion named **Hopeful** get locked away by the **Giant of Despair** in his **Doubting Castle**. The Giant of Despair, which represents our gap, these clouds that sit over us, tortures Christian and Hopeful. He lashes away at them with the rod of depression, sorrow, disbelief. They've given up hope. Christian resigns himself to thinking he'll be locked in the **Doubting Castle** by the **Giant of Despair** forever.

And then one night, Christian and Hopeful begin to pray. They pray from midnight until dawn. And at dawn Christian remembers - I can get us out of the **Doubting Castle** and away from the **Giant of Despair**. Hopeful is like - you can? How? Christian says → **I have the Key of Promise.**

**I was reminded of how desperately I needed that 5 years ago. Feeling beaten down by life, cloud sitting over me - locked in doubting castle, doubting the goodness of God. Trapped by the giant of despair.

What did I need in that moment? What do we need for our gaps?

The promises of God!

That He is good. That is tender-hearted towards us in Christ Jesus. That everywhere we go we go with Him. That He is kind and patient towards us. He is making all things new. This is not the end of the story - Christ will return.

And the ultimate promise of God → **Christ Jesus. In whom (2 Cor 1:20) all the promises of God find their yes and amen.**

What is the good news for our gap??? CHRIST JESUS.

I've talked for 30 minutes just to get you to this point - you need Jesus.

I've been wrestling with this sermon all week. Some sermons are done on like Tuesday, some are done on Sunday at 2pm. And I was wrestling with this so much, because when I'm in the gap, I want a quick fix. Read this, pray this, do this. Tell me what to do to get me out of this.

But get this, when we're in the gap:

- We don't need a solution, we need a Savior.
- We don't need a rescue plan, we need a Rescuer.
- We need a King. We need a Redeemer. We need the promise → Jesus Himself.

What's the good news for our gap? Not a what, but a who → JESUS!

And that's what Paul leaves us with in verses 20-21. Maybe you've heard these verses before:

20 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, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We cheapen this verse in Christian culture. This has nothing to do with God blowing up your career, padding your wallet, making your life worry-free, struggle-free, pain-free - easy and #blessed forever.

Paul is saying:

- You know this gap that seems overwhelming and permanent?
- You know the love of God that feels so distant and out of reach?
- You know all of the ways you still struggle, you are wrecked with guilt and shame?
- You know the cloud that just won't seem to go away?
- You know how you've given up hope?

Let me tell you about Jesus. Let me tell you about the one who has more power than you can even imagine. Let me tell you about the one who can bridge the gap. Who can take this "surpassing knowledge love" that feels distant, far off, like a postcard and put us in the middle of it. Let me tell you about our God, who can take our cold hearts towards Him and make them burn again with fire.

It's Christ who unlocks the doubting castle, Christ who subdues the giant of despair, Christ who bridges the gap.

We need Him! May we wait on Him. May we get with Him, may we get with other believers, may we commit to the long game. **May we wait on the Lord.**

Pray.

Communion + Intro into prayer: Maybe you need to stand, maybe you need to kneel, maybe you need to go to the back and have someone pray for you and your gap.