

# Ephesians 3:14-21 - The Power of 4-D Love

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I'm excited to be back in Ephesians with you this morning. I've had a little bit of a break the last few weeks and I've been anxious to jump back into this with you. Before we dive into Ephesians, this is a good time, I think, to mention at least in part why we regularly, not always, but regularly preach through books of the Bible. Why is it that we often do that? There's at least a couple reasons why that's our regular habit here. The first is that it helps us to hear from God's Word rather than man's ideas. There's that temptation in all of us to just say the things we want to say. And it doesn't guarantee that that won't happen, but it helps us follow God's agenda and avoid our hobby horses and pet things that we'd like to talk about. A second reason is that it keeps us centered on preaching the text of Scripture. And when we do that, that's good news because it's always about Jesus, isn't it? Jesus tells us that. Every passage of Scripture that we turn to, it's going to be about Him. And in some way, it's going to teach us about Him. It's going to offer us good news. When we drift away from that, sometimes we can devolve into good advice or bad advice, but at best, good advice. And that distinction between good news about Jesus and good advice from a man is an important one that we talked about a few weeks ago.

So we're back in Ephesians this morning and excited about that. We're in chapter 3, in case you've forgotten, at verse 14. Ephesians 3 verse 14. Read with me God's inerrant, infallible word.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 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, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Pray with me. Father, we're opening Your Word and finding that we're talking this morning about things that surpass knowledge, things that are beyond our imagination. And so we're especially aware of our need for You to speak to us, for You to give us eyes to see, that we might wonder and marvel this morning at who You are, what You have done for us, at how You love us. Father, we plead that You would do that.

[ 3 : 30 ] This morning, in this hour, in Jesus' name. Amen. Haven't you always wanted to do something great? You know, something that really mattered, that lasted well beyond your life and really impacted people and made a difference, really matter long term? I've always wanted that. I've wanted to do something that really mattered, mattered even when I was gone. But the problem is that most days I really feel fairly ordinary, even small. I'm not really sure how I'm even going to get through the day or what the next thing I should do is. And as you read Ephesians, you realize that Paul has this grand vision for the church. He's writing to them and he says, there's great things that I want to see happen that I look forward to. He wants to see them doing pretty incredible things like having lifelong enemies live at peace with each other. To have spouses who are demonstrating to the world the incredible love of God as they love each other. To have liars become truth tellers. To have people be angry and yet not sin. To deal with their anger appropriately. To have the church reflect the glory of God in every aspect of life. That's Paul's vision for what's going to happen. Pretty big goals for sure.

And our passage this morning ends with that glorious benediction and doxology that promises those things and much more will actually happen. They will actually be accomplished in the church.

Look at verses 20 and 21. Now to him who's able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. He's going to do these immeasurably more things. He promises to do the inconceivable. God will do beyond what we could ever imagine and he'll do it in and through us. His people. His power is at work within us it says and his glory is going to be evident among us. It's going to happen among people who can hardly imagine doing something that lasts past their children or grandchildren. Among people who are barely getting through the next day. God's going to do inconceivably great things and transform lives.

Change the world. If you're anything like me that's exciting. I want that. I want to be a part of that. Of something bigger and greater than myself. But how? How's that actually going to happen?

Where would the power come from for that to occur? Stop and ask that question. What's going to change us and the world through us? I want you to picture in your mind the church that God would use like that in those incredible ways. Picture what does that church look like?

[ 6 : 36 ] It's probably got a pretty dynamic person or people leading doesn't it? The one in your mind right now.

They're doing pretty well on financial resources. They've got money they can do stuff can't they? If I'd given you a little longer you're Presbyterian enough there would have been at least a couple of committees formed to figure out how it was going to happen. There would have been a cool conference to go to. The church certainly would have hosted such a conference. And all those things that we think about. We think if people are going to change and the world's going to be impacted. We just assume it's going to involve new vision and plans and efforts on our part. And none of those things are necessarily bad. God often uses them. They may be a part of what He does. But none of them is essential.

Those things actually all trend towards things that we're prone to take credit for. Don't they? Think about those things. We'd probably take credit if that's what it was that happened. And God says verse 21 that the glory is all His. To Him be the glory. God says there's one essential thing that always happens where He does great things in an individual or a community. That one essential thing is this. It's an enlarged vision. A renewed experience of God's love. That's where the power comes from. It seems simple and it is but it's glorious too. A great vision of the love of God is what enables great actions for God. A big clear vision of His love empowers world-changing churches. That's always true, God says. Paul uses more superlative and super superlative words in this passage than you'll ever come across in one place. So to say the same thing with bigger words, this passage teaches us that God does the inconceivable as He helps us survey the immeasurable and learn the incomprehensible. His love. The way to the great things God promises is not first organizing better, working harder, or being cooler. It's renewing our vision of His love.

Let's go back to the beginning of this passage. I want to show you how Paul says this, not just me. Look at verse 14. He says, for this reason I kneel before the Father. He's coming to God pleading for something that's of utmost importance. Paul usually would have stood to pray.

So the fact that he's kneeling, he's saying, God, I'm pleading with you for this. What is it that I need to see happen in this church? And he prays that God would bring His glorious riches to them so that they'd be strengthened through His Spirit that's living in them and through the Son in whom they put their faith. He's calling all the members of the Trinity, the Father, the Spirit, and the Son, to this end that something would happen. It's that important that they're all going to work towards it together because Paul has great things in mind for these Jews and Gentiles united to each other in Christ. They're one body, one temple that God is building. He's going to say in verse 19 that they together need to be filled up with the fullness of God to be like a perfectly holy God in every way possible to live up to this high calling. And then right between verse 17 and verse 19 is the way that

[10:31] God will work for this to happen. All the members of the Trinity, Paul's pleading with them, come and do this. How is it going to happen? What's the key to his power enabling them to do great things? How will the mighty Godhead work in otherwise weak Ephesian believers? Look at verse 17.

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp what? How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. That's how this is going to happen, he says. That you'll know the dimensions of God's love. God's power working to give them the renewed and enlarged vision of God's love. It's width and breadth and height and depth. Let me give us an image for what this would mean.

Some of you lived when televisions were black and white. You remember that? Yep, some of you remember that. Some of us remember when there were color televisions with the little knob on the side where you had to turn the knob to change the 10 or 12 channels that you got, but it was color. You just didn't have a remote. Some of us remember the televisions that were big enough. It took three or four grown men to lift them off the ground just so you could get a good picture. But in the last few years, there have been a lot of developments, of course, in technology and in television. You've heard a lot about HDTV, high-definition television on a flat screen, right? A new development. And I remember when those started coming along, you'd see commercials about them all the time. And the commercials were interesting because what they tried to do was they were telling you not just something would be a little, you'd see it a little bit better. What they were telling you was you'd get a completely new experience, right? They would even start you inside the TV and some of them and come out and you would actually be in the living room, but you thought you were there in the midst of what was on the screen. You wouldn't just see the laces on the football a little bit better. You'd actually feel like you were in the stadium, right? You wouldn't just see the colors on the fish a little bit clearer and brighter. You'd actually feel like you were scuba diving in the ocean. That was the HD experience that was being sold, a new experience altogether. When Paul talks about grasping the dimensions of love or knowing love, that's what he has in mind. Not just something you might think about or see a little bit differently, but an enlarged vision, a renewed experience that transplants you to somewhere else, that alters your reality, that impacts everyday situations where you're living. But let's be clear on one thing. While that change that happens in your experience is a substantial difference, it's not because you're experiencing something different, is it? The HD experience didn't happen by changing the channel from cartoon to live actors, right? It was the same thing you were watching, just in a new and better way. And that's true for Paul.

Paul uses two metaphors in verse 17. Rooted, he says, that's an agricultural term, and established, that's an architectural term. Somewhat surprisingly, he left out the television metaphor. I'm sure he would have used it if he could. But an architectural one and an agricultural one. And what he says in both of them, he's saying, rooted and established in love. His prayer is not that the tree with its root in love needs something else in order to grow. It's not that the building founded on love will grow tall, built with something else besides love. It's actually sinking roots deeper into love. Building walls higher with love. That is his prayer, isn't it? He's not suggesting we move beyond the love of God that we sang about in Jesus Loves Me, and now we need to talk about something serious now that the kids have sat back down. What he wants us to grasp more fully and know more personally is that same love that we have known and found in Jesus. That's where your power source is, he says. Church, that's the only place that you'll find power for what God's talking about. That doesn't change. It's the same source of our power. It never changes. We don't need a new vision, a different plan.

Rather, we need an enlarged vision, a clearer HD picture of what we already know that will impact our lives. We need a 4D height and depth and breadth and width experience of God's love.

[ 15 : 52 ] Let's look at God's love in that way for just a few minutes this morning. What's the experience of love in 4D in Paul's terms? The width and breadth and height and depth. Most scholars agree that Paul's not getting at one particular thing for each of those dimensions. In large part, what he's communicating to us is how immeasurable and how far beyond our ability to conceive God's love actually is that it can't be contained. We're never going to describe it. All this passage tells us that, right? That it's surpassing knowledge. But let's flesh it out just a little bit. How big is it? Where does God's love reach?

In the book of Ephesians alone, we find God's love stretching all the way back to eternity past before creation, remember? He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined us to be adopted as sons. All the way back to eternity past, bringing us all the way through to a glorious inheritance in eternity future. In chapter 2, God's love is there in verse 4. His great love for us that does what? It reaches all the way down to hell and the grave where people are dead, chapter 2 tells us. And then in verse 5, it does what? Makes them alive. It takes dead people and makes them alive and not just alive for a little while, but exalts them all the way up to heaven from the lowest depths to the highest heights, verse 6.

And then in chapters 2 and 3, He keeps going and says, it's going to reach all the way over to these Gentiles way over here and bring them to people on the farthest end of the spectrum, the Jews, and it's going to bring them together, crushing the barriers that were between them. That's what His love is like just in Ephesians. Through all of time to plan our salvation, from the lowest depths to the highest heights to secure our salvation, smashing through the strongest barriers to unite former enemies, the width, breadth, height, and depth of God's love. Let's expand to the rest of Scripture for a minute.

In the Old Testament, we read of the steadfast love of God. His *chesed* is the Hebrew word used over and over. It's His faithful, covenant-keeping, loving kindness. Whenever you read words like that in the Psalms or the Old Testament, God's loving kindness, steadfast love, goodness, mercy, many of those, it's the word *chesed* for God's love. He's a God who pursues His people doggedly through some of the most heinous and grievous sins ever committed, His love pursues them. God's love, sometimes very firm in discipline, pursues them through exile to restore them to the promised land to a hope and a future. Just as He promised He would, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. *Chesed*, the width and breadth and height and depth, it's the reason that Sally Lloyd-Jones in her Jesus Storybook Bible gives one of my favorite descriptions of love. Many of you will recognize it. She calls it God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love. It's so expansive and beyond measure that Romans 8 tells us nothing at all can separate us from it. No matter where we go or what happens to us, we won't escape

God's love because it doesn't end. We can't be snatched out of His loving hand. Romans 8 at verse 38, for I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It never ends so you can't be separated from it. Let's look at it poetically in words nearly a thousand years old translated into English for us. A great old hymn. Could we with ink the ocean fill? Were the skies of parchment made?

[ 20 : 17 ] Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade? To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

I love that image of the ocean for God's love. If it were full, it couldn't contain God's love. It's a little bit when I think about that like looking at God's love through the eyes of a child and I think that's helpful for us because it helps us to think about it being beyond our comprehension more than we could imagine. And we talk to our kids about loving them like a hundred million elephants to use just big words and big numbers so they can't comprehend. We say things like right up to the moon and back. I love the ocean in that context that it's a picture of God's love stretching as far as the eye can see. Have you ever been out there where all you can see is ocean? We were standing on the shore of the beach a couple of weeks ago. One of my girls was next to me and she said, Daddy, how big is the ocean? I thought, how big is the ocean? And she looked down and from where we were, you could kind of see Panama City, I think is what it was, jutting out a little bit. And from our perspective, it looked like the ocean could have stopped right there where that land came out further than it did at other places.

She said, Daddy, is that where the ocean ends? And I thought, wow, I don't even know how to tell you how much bigger it is than that because that looks like as far as you can imagine. And yet it's not even a small bit, a small bit of how far the ocean stretches. God's love is like that. We'll never plumb the depths of it because it will never run out. None of His children has ever exhausted His love.

Isn't that good news? None of His children has ever exhausted His love. We've rebelled, and yet He still loves us. We've pouted, and yet He loves us. We've told Him we don't love Him, and yet He loves us. The width and breadth and height and depth of God's love. Because that's the beauty of it, isn't it? That it's not just poetical or theoretical, but it's intensely personal.

It is true for us personally. I want you to take a minute this morning and write something down for me. Seriously. You know, pen, paper, bulletin will work. I want you to write something down.

[ 23 : 04 ] I want you to think of just one way that God has showed His love to you. Just one. What is one thing in your life that reminds you of God's love for you? Write one thing down.

Now, I want you to write down one more thing. I thought about having you trade, but I didn't because I love y'all. I know you didn't want to do that. But I want you to write down one way that you've seen God's love for someone else. Have you seen God show His love to someone else? Preferably somebody in this room, but you may not know anybody else in this room. If so, that's fine.

Pick anyone. Anyone besides yourself. How have you seen God show His love to them? You should have or might have at least two specific instances of God's love written down.

Imagine you stacked all of those up this morning. Imagine we passed them all in. We won't. Imagine we stacked all those up and just started reading through them. One after the other, after the other, after the other. Different unique evidences of God's love in His people's lives.

How much bigger would God's love start to feel to us? What if we added examples to our stack from all the Christians worldwide alive today? A little piece of paper with them. Just two examples and stack those in. What about those who lived in the last hundred years? Since Jesus, the Old Testament faithful? Can you imagine if we started building that stack? Ways that God's love has been demonstrated to people. One of my favorite phrases in this passage and in all of Scripture comes in verse 18.

[ 25 : 07 ] Paul prays that the Ephesians would have power together with all the saints to grasp the dimensions of God's love. You know what he's saying there? He's saying that you need to look back at the two ways you've written down to experience God's love. And I know you could come up with more, but you may never have seen the love of God in some other ways that it's true and that He's shown it to people.

You may have never seen the love of God build up a church in the midst of poverty. For you to appreciate that dimension of God's love and the power it has, you may need to hear from Justin Houston, one of our members and mission partners who's been in South Sudan. I got to talk to Justin on the phone a couple of weeks ago from Kenya. What a treat. And Justin, who was just recently then evacuated from South Sudan because of threats of violence in his very village there, called from Kenya and as we chatted he said, you know, one of the neatest things about being here is to see God work in the same ways in a different context. To see that the needs are the same, that people's idols are the same, their struggles are the same, and the answer is this.

God's love works here. It's what transforms things here too. You may never have seen the love of God work through your faithful and your failed parenting.

You may not have parented long enough. You may be struggling to hope for your kids. For you to appreciate that dimension of God's love and the power it has, you may need someone twice your age in your small group to tell you how they've experienced it, to tell you how it's played out in their lives.

You may never have seen the love of God grow the church in the midst of persecution. And you may be watching the news right now and thinking, where's God's love here? And for you to appreciate that dimension of God's love and the power that it has, you may need to learn from believers throughout church history to see where time and time again the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church over and over. You may never have seen the love of God overcome your sin struggle that seems to be there year after year after year, and it never goes away. For you to appreciate that dimension of God's love, the power that it has, you may need to talk to a recovering addict and hear his story. Or you may need to find yourself and experience a community that loves and welcomes you in the midst of your ongoing struggle to feel the welcome and love of God. Whatever the case is for you, and we could multiply those examples, you cannot appreciate God's 4D love the way He wants you to alone, by yourself. He wants you to begin to see its width and breadth and height and depth enlarged by seeing His love transform the lives of other believers. As you get a clearer vision of that, you'll begin, you'll start to survey the immeasurable a little bit more. You'll start to learn the incomprehensible a little bit better because you'll be able to touch it, to see it, to hear it, right in front of you. And that, when that happens, when you begin to get a handle on that just a little more, that's when, remember, God does the inconceivable in you. Is God's love growing in your mind this morning, even just a little bit? Has He pulled the curtain back for you to see just a little bit more of the dimensions of His love? Is it actually going to alter your experience tomorrow?

[ 29 : 06 ] Is it going to change reality when you wake up in the morning? Is it something that really matters where you are? Southwood, this is what we need. We need a renewed experience of God's 4D love.

That's the most important thing, right? Officers, be honest. What's more at the forefront of your mind as you lead this church? A strategic vision or a vision of God's love? Because we need not merely a vision for programs and finances, but more importantly, a vision of God's overwhelming love for us. Search committee, we need not merely a man with a plan, but more importantly, a man with a big vision of God's love in Christ. Congregation, we ought to be praying not merely for a man, but for God to give all of us a renewed experience of His love, a larger vision of His love in all of our hearts.

Because that's the thing God uses as His power works in us and through us to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. One last point of application there before we come to the table together, go back to where we started. Don't you want to do great things? Don't you want your church to do great things? Isn't that something you long for? When I read of a promise like that, of the hope of God doing immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, usually what I think of is extraordinary deeds, doing something nobody ever thought I was capable of, right? God can do immeasurably more.

Well, He can do extraordinary things. Starting a non-profit that saves thousands of lives around the world. Speaking to a football stadium full of people. Something extraordinary, right? And that's true. God's 4D love has the power to do the inconceivable, the immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine through things that matter a lot, and we're sure they would, but we can't imagine doing them. It does that. It takes people who think, I could never do that. And some of us in this room need to have such a grand vision of God's love that it moves our family overseas to share that love with others. That kind of extraordinary alteration of reality ought to happen for someone in here. I'm sure of it. In a room this size, God will move someone. His love is so great that those types of things will happen.

His love is that great. But this verse works equally, I think, and perhaps even more so is intended in a different direction. Because God's the one doing the work, and His is the glory, and so I believe it mostly is talking about in the very ordinary deeds. The mundane of life. Changing diapers, and diapers, and diapers.

- [ 32 : 16 ] Repenting and forgiving daily sins. Disciplining children. Doing honest and excellent work. Something very ordinary. Something you already do, perhaps. And God's 4D love has the power to do the inconceivable, the immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine through things that we do that we already know we're capable of doing by His grace, but that we can't imagine mattering a lot or at all.

Have you been there? Have you ever feel you work so hard every day? You get nowhere?

What's really the point? What difference am I making? Could this possibly matter? God has called most of us in this room not to extraordinary deeds, but to ordinary faithfulness. His love is so great that it could motivate you to do something extraordinary, but it can also do incredible things with your ordinary, with where He's already placed you and called you. He can change the world through your faithful conversation with a neighbor or co-worker. He's that great. He can do it through the 50th load of laundry because His love is that big. Through the consistent presence of a forgiving spouse or friend.

Think of how He might do it in where you already are. And then realize that way you're imagining, that yes, someday possibly could God use this to do something. You know what? It's bigger than that.

- [ 34 : 01 ] The verse tells us He'll do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. So whatever it is you have in mind, His love can do more. His love is bigger. It can work beyond that. That's how great His love is.

That's how immeasurable its width and breadth and height and depth is. In the 1800s, the Napoleonic armies came into Spain. And as they conquered territory there, they came across a prison that had been used by the Spanish Inquisition.

They found the body of a prisoner still in one of the cells. Just a chain around his ankle identified him as a prisoner. And on the wall of the cell was a cross etched in the wall with the words for width and breadth and height and depth at the four end points of the lines of that simple cross. That he'd etched in the wall to remind himself in the midst of a very, very dull, disappointing, ordinary life where God's love was shown to him in its fullness.

He began to see it. And the cross was a visible picture for him of that. And we come to this table this morning to see in HD, as it were, the full dimensions of the love of God. Oh, we won't comprehend the whole thing. But God's actually given you something more effective than my coming up with descriptions or reading poetry or telling stories. He's given us this table yet again to come back and see his love in a new and fresh way that it would be bigger in our minds. Jesus came and God's word tells us that at that night where he shared the supper with his disciples, he began to show them the full extent of his love. He started by washing their feet. And then on his way to the cross, he gave them this meal. And he wanted them to celebrate it, to renew their vision of his immeasurable love for them. Paul records the institution of the supper this way.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

- [ 36 : 50 ] This is the Lord's table, not a Southwood or Presbyterian table. And so as we come to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, we're coming to proclaim and see again the dimensions of his love.



If you know that love for you, if you're part of a community where you're learning more of that love together with all the saints, then come. Come to this table and have its dimensions enlarged in your heart as you feast. Kids, many of you don't yet come and take and eat the bread and the juice when we have the Lord's Supper. For some of you, children, this will be your first time this morning because you've just recently joined the church. And so we're so excited about that. For those of you who don't, you'll get to do that yourself when you embrace Jesus for yourself and when you become a full member of the church. But listen, I want you to know, even if you don't take the bread and juice this morning, you can still come up with your parents. Because this is where we regularly remind ourselves and each other how much Jesus loves us. We do this for that and his love is for you too, not just for your parents. So come and watch them and listen as we talk and as we celebrate this together. Let's pray. Jesus, as we come to this table, we do proclaim your death.

We proclaim that it shows us your love in new and fresh ways. We ask, Father, that you would pull back the curtain this morning so that we could marvel again at your love. Use this as you promised to use it to strengthen us for doing more than we could ever ask or imagine. Would you take very ordinary elements and as you are so capable of doing, would you do extraordinary things? Would you take ordinary people with ordinary struggles and weaknesses and failings and would you do beyond what we could ever imagine? Father, feed us that you might use us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. The Lord Jesus, on the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. He broke it and gave it to his disciples as I ministering in his name. Give this bread to you. He said, take, eat. This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same manner, he took the cup after giving thanks as we've done in his name. He said, drink from it, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which was shed for many for the remission of sins. Drink from it, all of you. Host team members will usher you forward and back to these tables and we will celebrate God's love together.

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