

## **LIVING A FULL LIFE**

### **EPHESIANS 3:14-19**

Introduction:

“Full” or “empty”—which best describes your life?

“Fulfilled” or “frustrated”—which would you choose?

“Excited” or “discouraged”—which one do you choose?

“Full of energy” or “tired”—make a choice!

One man involved in ministry admitted, “I have not heard God speak or experienced His presence in six months!” Those who spend their time studying those of us involved in ministry do not use words like “full”, or “fulfilled”, or “excited” when they describe us. Oh, they may say that we are full of stress, full of anger, or full of frustration, or full of despair—but not full of God. They list us among the stressed out and the overworked.

If this is true of those of us leading the churches, what about those who make up the church? How are they faring in this stressful, secular world in which we live? Are they “full” and “fulfilled”? Or do they show signs of being “empty”, “frustrated”, and “defeated”?

My meditations on this prayer of Paul forced me to ask these questions. I have spent more time preaching from this prayer across the last five years,

than any other section of Scripture. However I have spent my time on the first petitions of the prayer, and have neglected the last petition. Why? While it is obviously the greatest and climatic petition in the prayer, I am not as comfortable with it as the others. When I begin to consider asking the Father to fill me with all of His fullness, I hesitate. I hesitate because of my knowledge of who He is and my knowledge of who I am. I am painfully aware of my fallen, broken condition as a finite human being, and I have become increasingly aware of the awesome nature of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is hard to conceive how the infinite, eternal God could fill me with all of His fullness! I am also hesitant because of what I understand being “filled” with God to mean—it means that my life will be completely under His control. Is this what I want for my life?

Did you hear what Paul asked of the Father in heaven? “That you may be filled with all of the fullness of God!” Every word in that petition is mind stretching. “Filled” means to be filled completely, to be filled to the point of overflow. It is an obvious petition that the inner life of the person may be filled to overflow.

But filled with what? With “all of the fullness of God!” Just to be filled with God is more than the mind can comprehend. But to filled with the fullness of God goes even beyond that, and then to be filled with “all” the fullness of

God is unthinkable. The “fullness of God” is a technical type of statement that has great theological significance. It means to be filled with all that God is in Himself.

But what does this mean? Some understand this to be a petition that the life may be full of all that God has provided—grace, love, faith, wisdom, hope, and life. But that is not what it says—it says to be filled with the fullness of God. Not the provisions of God, but with God Himself!

Is it then a prayer that we may become gods? Never! At no point is the possibility of humanity becoming divine ever seriously considered in this book. Humanity is never anything more than a creature made in the image of God. Rather it is a petition that we may be a genuine temple. This is what the context of the prayer would indicate. You will remember that the paragraph begins with “for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Actually this is a resumption of the prayer begun in the first verse of the chapter—“for this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.” Evidently Paul was ready to begin the prayer when he turned aside to talk about the mystery of the Gentiles being included in the New Covenant and his calling to share the Good News with them. What “which cause”? This takes us back to the last verse of chapter two, “In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the

Spirit.” So the petition for the life full of God is a petition that the Gentiles (and we are the Gentiles) may be in this age what the temple was in Jerusalem in the Old Covenant. You will remember those occasions where the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, and then later the temple in the Old Testament. It was an awesome, unforgettable moment—no one present would ever forget. The eternal Creator manifested His presence with a fullness in the houses that had been built in His name. Paul is praying that this same fullness fill this new house made up of redeemed humanity.

What can you say about this petition? First, let me emphasize that we should view the petition as a promise. Paul made this request under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so the petition started in the heart of the Father in heaven and was expressed under Holy Spirit direction by the Apostle. Each of the four petitions in the prayer is promise, and should be quickly and believingly seized by each believer, especially by you. This is what the Father wills for you—a full life, a life full of God.

Second, let me emphasize that the prayer is pastoral. This prayer came from the heart of a Spirit-filled pastor as he yearned over the people that God had given to him. The second personal pronouns in this prayer are plurals. The petitions are for the whole body! What do you pray for when you pray for

your church? What is the burden of your prayers? The prayers will tell much about the understanding you have of the will of God for your people. Many of us pray for the growth of our churches. Every true shepherd wants the flock to grow and prosper. But have you ever prayed this prayer for them? Do you pray that they may be filled with all of the fullness of God. It occurs to me that it might be easier to fill your church building if all of the church was filled with all of the fullness of God.

Third, surely the prayer is personal. If you ask God to fill others with His fullness, definitely you will want this for your life. If I want His best for you, I will want His best in my life.

What would happen if God answered this prayer? It would mean that you would have present in your inner life everything that you might need for living life in this world. Can you imagine—life overflowing with the inner reality of God! This means that there would no room for fear, doubt, unbelief, sin, hate, or any of those negative things that make our lives so miserable. But it would mean more! It would mean that God would be able to manifest Himself through our humanity even as He manifested Himself through the humanity of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is the supreme example of a Human filled with all the fullness of God. So this is the ultimate in Christ-

likeness! This is what it means to be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect!

Charles Hodges commented on this verse, “He is to be perfect as man, as God is perfect as God, and the perfection of man is his being full of God. God dwelling is so as absolutely to control all his cognitions, feelings, and outward actions.”

But how do we get there? We need to take a fresh look at the prayer as a whole. We need to take the four petitions as a whole prayer. While they are listed separately, they are intimately connected to each other. You will never know the fullness of God in your humanity until you know the things asked for in the first three petitions. These petitions could be considered as the path to fullness. Let’s walk this path with the Apostle so we too might begin to live in this fullness of God.

#### I. IT BEGINS WITH A STRENGTHING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN..

“That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” The “inner man” was sealed with the Holy Spirit when you became a believer (Ephesians 1:13). The first step involves the indwelling Spirit of promise imparting spiritual strength to the inner man.

You are aware of the distinction between the inner person and the outer person. While the outer person, or the body, is important in the Christian life, the inner person is the most important. “Inner man” includes the soul, the spirit, and the heart—the inner you is where important decisions are made, and you experience spiritual reality. So the burden of the first petitions is for the infusion of strength from the Holy Spirit in the inner man.

Too many of us are attempting to live our lives and do our work without any personal awareness of the Spirit within. We are like a windmill trying to draw water out of the ground without the blowing of the wind. The old windmill does its work only when the wind enables—so it is in the Christian life and service—the wind of the Spirit must blow on the inner person and thus impart spiritual strength.

## II. IT CONTINUES WITH A SURRENDER TO THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST.

The first petition leads to the second—“that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” In this type of context “Christ” indicates the exalted, victorious Christ Jesus who is seated in the heavens at the right hand of the Father, and is present with us through the ministry of the Spirit. “May dwell” means more than to be present. The little child can understand the concept of

inviting Jesus to live in the heart, and may offer such a prayer. I did at the age of nine. But this goes beyond this concept.

“Dwell” carries the idea of settling down and being at home in the heart. It means that Jesus Christ has found a comfortable place to live in our hearts—He is at home. It indicates that He has become the Lord of the house. He has a key to every room, and is free to make any changes that might please Him. Our heart has become His house.

Since there is a natural resistance to yielding our hearts to His control, we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit in doing this. It is only as the Holy Spirit strengthens the inner man that he will have the faith required to make such a surrender to the Lordship of Jesus.

The God-filled life is always one in which the Holy Spirit has enthroned Jesus as Lord. Do I dare press this truth home to those of us are involved vocationally in the work of the Lord? I do and I have good reason. I have been involved in the Lord’s work long enough to know that it extremely tempting to make what I do in the service of the church all about me. It becomes more an expression of my desires and gifts than of Christ who lives within.

Take this a step further and apply it congregationally! Is it obvious that Jesus is enthroned in the life of your church? Is it all about Him or is it all about

you? O that He might be comfortably at home in our hearts. Revelation 3:20 is a reminder that it is possible to attempt to be the church while the living Christ is locked out and standing outside seeking entrance.

### III. IT MOVES FORWARD WHEN WE COMPREHEND GOD'S LOVE FOR US..

Note the word “that” which connects the petitions to each other. They indicate that the petitions follow each other sequentially. One leads logically and experientially to the other.

What is the third step? “Being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” On this path to fullness we must be able to comprehend and to know how much God loves us in Christ.

We are not naturally “able” to lay hold of God’s love for us! There are many reasons for this—but a primary one is the nature of the world in which we live. The violence and pain in our world seems to contradict the idea of a good and loving heavenly Father. Then to compound the problem the more we learn about ourselves the less loveable we feel. We have often experienced rejection from parents, from siblings, from a spouse, maybe even from our children, from teachers, from peers—if these who have

known us best do not love us, why should we believe that a God we have not seen loves us?

I remember hearing Charles Stanley tell of his struggle in this area. He grew up without knowing love and affirmation from the significant people in his life so even as an adult he was still attempting to earn love. This was even basic in his relationship with God and his service for God. When your service for God is an attempt to earn God's love, you are on a path to certain misery. The misery in the life of Dr. Stanley became so intense that he called together a small group of trusted friends, and they met him in a hotel near the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. There in an atmosphere warm with the love of men who knew him, this useful pastor was able to give up his pursuit of God's love and to just open his heart to experience His love.

Take a careful look at the words the praying pastor uses in the petition!

“Comprehend” means to lay hold of, to apprehend. It does not mean to earn! It does not mean to create. Again, the word “know” does not mean to earn or create. Rather it means to experience.

Paul assured the Romans that such an experience is possible through the Holy Spirit. “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For

when were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

(Romans 5:5-6)

Are you experiencing this in your life? Is the indwelling Holy Spirit filling your heart with a fresh awareness of just how much God loves you? Or do you find yourself driven with a compulsion to earn His love? Those lives that are filled with God have learned by faith through the Holy Spirit to live by grace. Their walk and service is a reaction to be loved by the Father and the Son with a love that defies our knowledge rather than an attempt to earn His favor.

#### IV. IT CONSUMMATES IN A MANIFESTATION OF THE FULNESS OF GOD IN OUR HUMANITY..

And then there is the fullness! “That ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” This brings us back to where we began.

Charles Hodges commented on this verse, “He is to be perfect as man, as God is perfect as God, and the perfection of man is his being full of God. God dwelling is so as absolutely to control all his cognitions, feelings, and outward actions.”

What will this mean? Do you remember that bush that caught the attention of Moses on the back side of the desert? God was in that old bush that was

native to the desert. His presence in the bush set it aflame with a fire that did not consume it. Rather from within the bush the presence of God manifested itself in an outward glow that attracted the attention of Moses, the shepherd. Everything around that bush became “holy ground.”

This should be a reminder to us that any old bush will do! All that is needed is for the bush to be filled with all the fullness of God. Those who come near a life that enjoys the fullness will soon become aware of Holy God!

We will never attract this secular world to God with our buildings and programs, but we might succeed if we begin to live in the fullness of all that God is in Himself.

Remember the prayer is a promise!

Remember the prayer is pastoral! Do you dare to have a smaller vision for your church?

Remember the prayer can be personal! Do you dare be content with less?

We must not be like the old veteran of the Civil War who became a nuisance to everyone in the small town in which he lived in the Midwest. He was always broke and was approaching those who knew him for help. He had suffered injury in the war that made employment difficult. Yet he was always boasting about a special relationship with Able Lincoln. He never tired in telling about a personal meeting with the Civil War president.

Finally one day one of the men in the small town confronted him. He chided him about his claims concerning Abe Lincoln. He told the old veteran, "I do not believe that you ever knew Mr. Lincoln!" The poor veteran said, "I can prove that I knew him!" He pulled a worn billfold from his pocket, and removed a well-worn piece of paper. He handed it to his critic, and said, "Look at this!"

As the critic looked at the paper, the signature of Abraham Lincoln was obvious at the bottom of the page, but as he read the contents of the page, a look of amazement came to his face. The document signed by President Lincoln gave the old veteran a life-long generous pension because of his bravery in the service of the country. The veteran had been living as a pauper when he had the right to all of the financial help he needed for life. His inability to read had kept him from realizing what Mr. Lincoln had given to him.

Could this be our situation? Are we living live like spiritual paupers and beggars when we are heirs to a life of fullness? Are we filled with shame and fear when we could be filled with the fullness of God? May the Lord help us to begin to live up to our true position and potential in Christ Jesus.

