

On behalf of what Julie said earlier, I just want to thank you for the privilege of doing life together for 11 years. When we arrived here, our kids weren't young. They were 19 and 22, I believe. We're so blessed that we have a daughter, Katie, here from Wisconsin, and our other daughter, Holly, from Roseville. I'm honored that they're here, and we've had a good weekend. They're going to be out in the courtyard with us after the service as well.

I think of all the changes that have happened. They've graduated from college. They've entered into their professional careers. They've gotten married. They have given us three beautiful grandchildren so far, and we're enjoying them. I'm so happy that they're here, as well as our grandchildren, Harvey, Colton, and Gianna.

It just seems like a short time ago when Julie and I met at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. We ran into each other there and began a little friendship. Last week, we celebrated our 39th wedding anniversary. It flies by. We told our girls because next year's the 40th, they better be planning something really big for us.

I was thinking about the ministry opportunities that I had after seminary. The Lord allowed me to serve in a very small church. I was able to serve in a church plant. I had a season, a very difficult season, in a hurting church. One that was broken, one that was bleeding. He let me serve as a lead pastor in a larger multi-staff church, and then he brought me to CPC and allowed me to pastor here the community life and adult ministries.

If there is one thing that I have learned, there are several things, but one main thing I've learned in the last 30-plus years of pastoral ministry is that the local church is the hope of the world. All kinds of organizations are doing good, but the local church and our message and the power that comes through Jesus Christ is the hope of the world. I couldn't imagine myself doing anything else but being engaged and serving in the local church.

Back in 1984, Julie and I attended the Urbana Conference in Champaign, Illinois. It is a big missions conference with 50,000 plus college students gathered together between Christmas and New Year's. It was just a privilege to come together. I remember there was the preacher that started off the morning of every session. He was a Scottish preacher, and he was preaching through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I thought that this guy must be smart. He's Scottish, so he had that accent and rolled his R's as he spoke. We were all trying to roll our R's and imitate this guy.

We just ended up sounding like pirates. We weren't sounding like Scottish people.

He taught Ephesians throughout the conference; it became one of my favorite letters. I thought that's where we need to go. Kevin said I could preach on anything I wanted to, and I was thinking to myself, "What do I say when I feel like I've said it all?" I'm going to go back to just a wonderful passage in Ephesians 1 and 2.

Just to give you a little background. Paul reminds us of what God did that he brought to us a relationship with him through Jesus Christ. Paul describes to us over and over again in chapters 1 and 2 that we are in Christ. We are, in fact, in Christ. Paul uses those phrases in Christ and in him at least 15 times in chapters 1 and 2.

God called us, chose us, died on the cross for us, redeemed us, and forgave us our sins. Then he goes on to say that this call that we have came by grace, not because of our good works. This new identity that we have in Christ, this call to salvation, is for all people, Jew and Gentile alike.

Then, in chapter 3, he tells us that this good news of salvation, the gospel, had been previously hidden from us. It was a mystery, but through Christ, that mystery has been revealed. We now know that. It's been revealed to Paul, to the Ephesians, and to the church. It's been made known through the power of the Holy Spirit, and it's given to us, the local church, to share it with the rest of the world—the good news of Jesus Christ.

I shared with Julie that this is what I'm going to be preaching on, Paul's prayer. I asked her what she thought a good title would be for this message. She suggested, "Livin' on a Prayer." That's perfect. So thank you, Julie, and thank you, John Bon Jovi. I think what it does is bring together what God wants me to focus on this final Sunday as one of your pastors here at CPC.

So, the big idea here is living on a prayer. In other words, living on this prayer helps our life journey make sense. Living on this prayer helped my ministry over the years make sense.

As I go back to this chapter, this book that I love so much, I think about one of the changes that happened in 34 years. When I started preaching, I used an 11-point font for the manuscripts that I preached from. Then it went to 12. Now it's 13, sometimes 14! I think if you guys invite me back in five years, it'll probably be butcher paper with a Sharpie as I stand up here trying to read it.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name" (Ephesians

3:14). If you look back at the first verse of chapter 3, he says this same phrase. It's almost as if Paul was bursting into prayer at the beginning of this chapter, but then he takes a detour. It's like he gets sidetracked.

A commentator I read said Paul had such a busy mind that he literally got sidetracked and decided to go off into this mystery of the church in verses 2-13. Then he returns once again and says again, "For this reason I pray." He then gives us this prayer, and it's one of the most beautiful and most often quoted prayers in scripture.

It's a prayer for the church and a prayer for us. So the context is this. Don't be discouraged! The mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that was once hidden has been revealed to Paul, to the Ephesians, to us, and we've become new heirs of the inheritance that comes from Christ.

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 Lord's holy people, 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, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:16-21

In the light of this, Paul drops down on his knees. The idea of Paul dropping to his knees and praying might not seem worth discussing. Of course, that's what we would do. However, kneeling in prayer was not something customarily practiced by the Jewish people or the early church. The ordinary prayer position was standing.

We've had the privilege of going to Israel, and we went to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. They were not kneeling. They were standing in front of these walls and were rocking back and forth as they recited their prayers in front of the Wailing Wall—Orthodox Jews praying.

So, the idea of kneeling indicates that this prayer was especially passionate because of the time and because of the reason for the prayer. We think back to the Old Testament; Solomon, for example, knelt before all the people when he prayed at the dedication of this glorious temple. Jesus fell to the ground when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Paul makes this tearful goodbye to the elders, he knelt before them and prayed.

I'm bringing up something that is written in Acts 20, where this is what happened between Paul and his elders that led up to this letter being written. And I couldn't help but remember

Paul when it was his last Sunday with the elders in Acts 20. Think about me and my situation now. Paul was on his third and final missionary journey. He had spent three years planting the church in Ephesus, loving these Ephesian brothers and sisters, teaching them, sharing Christ with them, and establishing a strong church with elders. Acts recorded when he was ready to leave those beloved elders in Ephesians.

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship. Acts 20:36-38

It has been a couple of weeks of lasts: last meetings, last lunches, last dinners, last breakfasts with my church family here, last elder meeting, last lead team meeting, and last men's fraternity meetings, which they did a beautiful thing. I'm going to miss this family and serving together as we care for the people in our body. Jose took a selfie of us at our last elder meeting, which was last Tuesday night. I'm going to miss you guys a lot.

I'm filled with gratitude, some sadness, but some excitement about what's ahead. So, when I think about what the most emotional thing was that's happened in the last month for me in this ministry, it wasn't what you might imagine. It was communion at the beginning of the month. I was right over there, and this side of the room would come over to my table, and I would offer the words of the institution: This is the body of Christ given to you. This is the blood of Christ shed for you.

I wanted to see the hope in people's eyes, to see the liberating truth, the eternal truth, when I was able to hand them those elements. That was the most emotional I have been at church, and that's just such a privilege for any pastor to be able to be in a position like that in those special moments and to offer words of hope. Eternal words that reflect the glory of our Savior and his love for us.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name" (Ephesians 3:14-15). So, what he's saying here is there were Jews and Gentiles who all came to Christ under Paul's preaching, and they're now united in Christ and identified as followers of Christ. They identify with the same Heavenly Father in the present and on into the future for eternity forever and ever. Every person who believes in Jesus and seeks to follow Jesus will experience the rest of Jesus. The peace and assurance that comes from being under an all-loving God. The Fatherhood of God.

Paul knows his Heavenly Father loves him like his own. So he kneels before that Father. You see why was Paul so passionate about this prayer? I think it's a revelation from God to him that over those three years, he has been able to preach God's truth to the Ephesians, delivering the Ephesians from their former life.

He was impacted by that privilege. He was emotional about the privilege of being able to teach consistently and accurately to them. He was emotional that God had appointed him to deliver the good news, the true good news of Jesus, to all the known world. He was emotional because he saw that God had truly worked powerfully in their lives in the three years he spent with them in Ephesus.

I attempted, as I was cleaning out my office, to count the number of sermons I delivered over the years. I had a lot of paper in my office, but I think it was roughly 1,200 sermons that I was able to provide as I was able to open God's Word, study it, write a sermon, and preach it accurately, first to myself and then to whoever was there to hear it.

When Julie and I take the time to think about what's most important in our lives, our first topic after what's for dinner is our children and our grandchildren. We brag about our grandchildren, saying that they are the most beautiful. We congratulate ourselves on their being the most brilliant and beautiful grandchildren, haha. Then, we shared our prayer concerns about our family because the truth is, as a mother, grandmother, father, and grandfather, we love our own. So I encourage you that your Heavenly Father loves his own.

Paul knew he was loved, and that put him down on his knees with three prayer requests. So, living on this kind of prayer will help us make sense for our journey ahead. The first one is this prayer for a growing inner strength that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will see that strength increase in us. *"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"* (vv. 16-17a).

Just as someone who is physically sick may need to be outwardly strengthened to take on all the physical aspects of life, so we need to be strengthened inwardly, strengthened to take on all that God desires for us in our inner spiritual life. So, where does the inner strength come from? It comes from, it says here, God's glorious riches.

So if our prayer for strength is moving and our prayer is passionate, but when we're asking a God who isn't infinitely rich, how does that give us any confidence and hope? Paul clarifies here that it's like he's saying, "Okay, a rich man on earth gives of his riches, but then those deplete over time, but we don't pray to a depleting God." He's saying here, a better translation in the original language, is that our infinitely rich Heavenly Father gives according to his riches, not out of his riches. That means that when the Father gives us his riches, they are infinite and never deplete.

The role of the Holy Spirit in all of this is to provide inner strength. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16, one of my favorite verses, *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are*

wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." For those of us here who are maybe feeling a little frail physically, know that out of his riches, our outward bodies may be coming frail, but we can be filled inwardly with his divine power.

So living on a prayer is a beautiful upward spiral of more and more inner strength that we can appropriate more and more of God's strength in our lives. May that help our life journey make sense.

His second prayer request is a prayer for love. A prayer for a growing understanding of God's unfathomable love.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge— Ephesians 3:17b-19a

Rooted is an agricultural term. We get the idea of roots being established. That's a building term. He mixes his metaphors here, but he's Paul; he can do that. He can get away with it. Like a tree, to be healthy, our lives are healthy when we send down roots deep and wide into the soil of God's love. And like a strong building, our spiritual house is strong when its footings, foundation, and walls are reinforced.

One commentator, Donald Gray Barnhouse, points out that love is deeply connected to all the fruits of the Spirit that Paul lists in another one of his letters, Galatians 5. The nine fruits of the Spirit begin with love. The greatest is love, he says in 1 Corinthians 13.

Growing in love helps us make sense of everything else on this journey. Paul prays that our understanding of this love would grow because loving one another helps our life journey make sense. I've had the best job in the world at CPC to help create space for love to happen, for people to connect with one another and experience the love of the body of Christ in this family. When we are with each other, loving one another in safe places, loving others, and being loved help us make sense of life's journey.

Paul then turns to the vertical aspect of love. He prayed that we would, "being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—" Theologians have called this the four magnitudes of God's love. It's an attempt to understand and comprehend something that's impossible to fully comprehend. We will never do it because love is infinite. But he never stops. He wants us to keep seeking to grasp this love in all of its dimensions.

I love how Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains it. God's love is broad enough to cover anybody! Long enough to go beyond any barrier! High enough to take us all the way to glory and beyond! Deep enough to touch any need, any sin, or any hurt! Swindoll