

8-SESSION BIBLE STUDY FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

CULTIVATING A FAITH THAT ENDURES



THRIVE

PAUL WORCESTER

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Content Editor

Kyle Wiltshire

Director, NextGen Ministry

Chuck Peters

Production Editor

April-Lyn Caouette

Manager, Small Group Resources

Karen Daniel

Graphic Designer

Lisa Olian

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Worcester serves as National Collegiate Director for the North American Mission Board (NAMB), where he encourages, equips, and inspires leaders in over nine hundred college ministries across North America. He founded Christian Challenge at California State University, Chico, seeing more than a thousand students make professions of faith during his time there.

Paul is also the founder of Campus Multiplication Network, an interdenominational coaching and resource ministry that supports leaders around the world. In addition, he co-hosts several podcasts, including the *GenSend Podcast* with Shane Pruitt and Lacey Villaseñor.

An experienced author and speaker, Paul has written multiple books for collegiate leaders and students, including *Five Leadership Principles for Collegiate Ministry* and *The Fuel & the Flame: Ignite Your Life & Your Campus for Jesus Christ*. He holds degrees from the University of Oklahoma and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Paul and his family recently relocated to the North Shore of Oahu, where they invest in emerging leaders through Good Soil Discipleship School. He and his wife, Christy—his closest partner in life and ministry—have two children and an adorable French bulldog named Ollie. When he's not working, Paul can be found surfing, skateboarding with his kids, or exploring the beach with Ollie in search of crabs.



INTRODUCTION

I am thrilled in anticipation for all God is going to do in and through your life as you participate in this Bible study. I believe that if you approach each session with a humble heart, the Lord will use it to help you build an enduring faith. I can say this because the truths you will discuss are not new or trendy. There are no quick fixes or magic formulas here. What you will find is rock-solid truth, straight from God’s Word, that addresses the most common issues college students face. I am not a chef, fixing up fancy food to impress you—I am just a waiter bringing God’s Word in the most direct way I know how.

We titled this study *Thrive* because a life rooted in the gospel is the key to thriving in every aspect of life. This study is less a look at hot topics that college students face and more a reflection on how the gospel affects each area of your life and how you can cooperate with God as you practically engage in the lifelong process of sanctification.

In addition to your group study times, I wrote three devotionals for each session that you can work through. These are not meant to replace your normal quiet time; they’re a supplement for going deeper. I am praying that God uses this book in your life and that you will be “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude” (Col. 2:7).

In Christ for the Harvest,

Paul Worcester

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study provides a guided process to help individuals and small groups thrive while in college. Eight sessions of study give a biblical framework and practical guidance to help students flourish during their college years. Through this study, we will contrast the way so many students spend their college years—lonely, conflicted, anxious—with what the gospel can do in our lives.

GROUP TIME

Regardless of which day of the week your group meets, each session of content begins with Group Time. Each group session is designed to facilitate simple-yet-meaningful interaction among group members and with God's Word.

Group Time is written in such a way that students can work through the content individually. However, this material will be most effective when it's completed with a group.

PERSONAL STUDY

There are three days of Personal Study that will help students go deeper into Scripture, reflection, and prayer based on the key topic of the session.



TEACHING TIPS

PRAYERFULLY PREPARE

Prepare. Review Group Time, read Scripture, and complete Personal Study days before your group meets.

Pray. Be intentional about praying for each person in your group. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

As best as you can, create a non-distracting environment. Students can be easily distracted, and if they are, they won't engage in the group experience. Do everything you can to help students focus on what's most important: connecting with God, the Bible, and one another.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

Cultivate a healthy small group experience by doing the following:

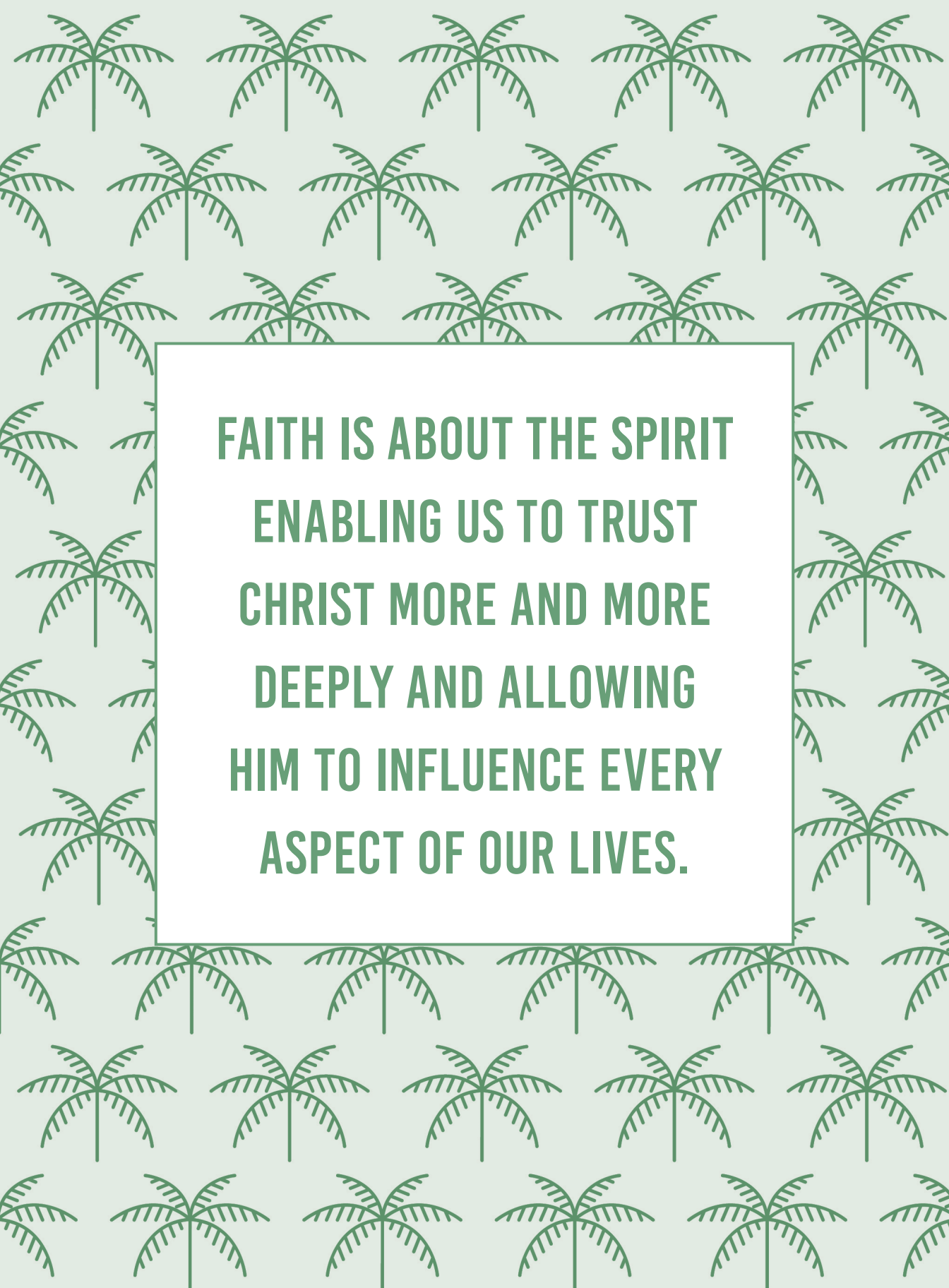
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Don't let anyone dominate the discussion—not even the leader.
- Don't rush students through their answers.
- Affirm students' responses and follow up on their prayer concerns.
- Keep God and His Word as the central truth over opinions.

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO PREPARE

Each session includes three Personal Study days. Encourage students to complete these before each Group Time. Also, to help students be prepared, look ahead to the next session and give students the Scripture that will be explored so that they can read ahead.

SESSION ONE

**FROM
CONFLICTED
TO
CONFIDENT**



**FAITH IS ABOUT THE SPIRIT
ENABLING US TO TRUST
CHRIST MORE AND MORE
DEEPLY AND ALLOWING
HIM TO INFLUENCE EVERY
ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.**

GROUP TIME

MY STORY. I stepped onto campus as a freshman at the University of Oklahoma with a conflicted heart and mind. I was raised in church and had a genuine relationship with Jesus, but I was drawn to the allure of being seen as “cool.” The newfound freedoms and temptations of college life were unlike anything I had faced before. That first semester, a daily battle raged for my allegiance. One moment, I was being encouraged at a Bible study; the next, I was compromising with sin. I grappled with uncertainty about purpose, identity, and God's vision for my life.

Everything changed at a winter conference, where I reached a turning point. I decided to be one person, regardless of the setting or who was watching. Fully surrendering to Christ ignited a process that led me to the confident, passionate faith that I have today. This commitment not only gave me the strength to turn away from sin but also anchored me in a clear sense of identity and purpose. Though my struggle with sin continued, I found renewed confidence in Christ's grace and power in my life. As I immersed myself in Scripture and sought to obey what I read, I grew to understand the depth of Christ's love for me. Over time, this empowered me to resist temptation and live out God's purpose for my life with conviction.

How do you personally relate to this story?

Would you describe yourself as more conflicted or confident in your relationship with God at the moment? Why would you describe yourself this way?

THE ONGOING STRUGGLE

READ ROMANS 7:14-25.

The apostle Paul's letter to the Romans offers a clear explanation of the gospel, the role of the law, and the transformative power of faith in Christ. In Romans 7, Paul gives a deeply personal reflection on his struggle with his sinful nature, something we can all relate to. So much of the conflict we feel as followers of Christ comes from our continued struggle with sin. Paul reveals to us that we can grow in confidence through understanding the gospel and the work of Jesus on the cross on our behalf.

What do we learn about the ongoing battle with sin in the Christian life from this passage?

In what ways do you personally resonate with what Paul is saying here?

What hope does Paul point to in this passage?

When you experience struggle like Paul describes here, this indicates you have genuine salvation. If you are in Christ, your “inner self” delights in God’s law (see Rom. 7:22). The struggle we see in this passage is a reality for every believer. However, this should not discourage us; rather, it should be a sober reminder of the daily conflict we are engaged in.

Jerry Bridges explains it this way:

The moment we trust in Christ as Savior, we are made new creations in Christ. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us to animate and empower this new life. He comes to deal with those sinful attitudes and actions, but they don't disappear overnight. They must be, to use Paul's words, 'put to death' (Rom. 8:13, Col. 3:5). And that's when the guerrilla warfare begins. The flesh—that is, our persistent inclination towards sin, which we have from birth—that generates those sinful attitudes and actions begins to fight back. Romans 7:14-25 helps us understand this internal conflict with the flesh in a helpful way because it describes the experience of a growing Christian who is continually discovering the depths of sin still present in his or her life. For the reality is, the more mature we become, the more anguish we experience over the difference between desire and accomplishment in our efforts to put sin to death and to put on Christ-like character!

Continuing to struggle with sin is a normal part of every believer's life. Be encouraged by this reality, but don't let it serve as an excuse to keep on sinning.

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

READ GALATIANS 5:16-26.

Verses 19-21 list the “works of the flesh.” In what ways do you see these behaviors displayed today? Why do these same struggles continue, two thousand years after this letter was written?

Verses 22-23 list the “fruit of the Spirit.” Which of these qualities do you find most difficult to cultivate in your own life? How can you seek to grow in that area?

In verse 24 Paul says those who belong to Jesus “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” What does this mean? What is the role of Jesus in this? What is your role?

Christ’s death on the cross destroyed the ultimate power of sin, securing a decisive victory for all who believe in Him. Through faith, we are united with Him in His death and resurrection, sharing in His triumph over the flesh (see Rom. 6:3-5). This means the battle against sin’s dominion has already been won by Christ!

When we become a Christian, we get to claim His victory as our own, and we are transformed at the core of our being. Galatians 5 calls us to live out this new identity by actively relying on the Holy Spirit. The Greek verb for “have crucified” implies an ongoing choice to reject the pull of the flesh, not by our own strength but by embracing Christ’s finished work. Our daily calling is to walk in the power of His victory, empowered by the Spirit, finding freedom from sin.

In his classic book, *The Mortification of Sin*, puritan John Owen put it this way: “Be killing sin or it will be killing you. Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls.”² To “set faith at work” means to believe in the work of Jesus on the cross to give you the grace and power to overcome your sin. This means relying on Jesus not just for forgiveness but also for the power to kill sin in you.

How does the gospel help us to “crucify the flesh” (v. 24)? What does it look like practically to kill the sin in your life?

What does it mean to “walk by the Spirit” (v. 16) and to “keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25)?

MORE THAN A CONQUEROR

READ ROMANS 8:31-39.

How does knowing that God is on your side give you the confidence to live for Him?

Can you think of a specific situation you may face on a regular basis where it would be helpful to remind yourself that God is for you?

What does being “more than a conqueror” (v. 37) mean for you practically? How can you apply this identity to overcome a specific temptation you are currently facing?

How should the certainty of God’s unchanging love impact the way you live? How does it affect the way you fight your sin?

After exploring all three of these passages (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:16-26; Rom. 8:31-39), we see that our confidence does not come from our own goodness, our ability to obey, or mustering up our own grit and determination against sin. Our confidence comes from what Jesus did on the cross, the Holy Spirit who lives in us, and the unconditional love of God He has lavished upon us.

Have you personally experienced the forgiveness of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the love of God in your life? If you are not sure, you can repent of your sin and trust Christ for salvation today. Your group leader and other members of your group can help you make that decision to follow Jesus right now!

Take a moment to reflect on this study. What is your top takeaway from this session? Are there any specific applications that you would like to make? How can we keep each other accountable for these applications?

Close by taking a few moments to pray together, thanking God for His love and asking Him to help you fight sin and to live confidently in His love and for His glory.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 1

IDENTITY

READ EPHESIANS 1:1-14.

Where does your confidence come from? Many people seek confidence in their accomplishments or in their social status. We think that if we can achieve a certain level of success or can be accepted by the right group, then we can be confident. But while these things may give us a temporary jolt of confidence, eventually the high will wear off and there will be a crash, leaving us worse off than before. Attempts at building confidence through worldly achievement and self improvement are shallow at best.

The good news is that if you are in Christ, you can be one of the most confident people on the planet—not because of what you do, but because of who you are in Him. If you are a follower of Christ, everything in Ephesians 1 is true about you. You are a “saint,” and you have “every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (vv. 1-3). God chose you and adopted you into His family according to His glorious grace and love (see vv. 4-6). You have redemption through His blood and forgiveness from all your sins (see vv. 7-10). You have received an eternal inheritance (see v. 11) and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as a down payment on that inheritance (see vv. 13-14). All these things were given to you through God’s incredible grace and for His glory. This is more than you will ever need to walk in unshakable confidence and lasting joy for the rest of your life!

Why, then, do so many followers of Jesus lack the confidence that understanding our identity in Him should produce? There are many reasons, but one is that we simply forget in the chaos of life. The enemy whispers lies, tempting us to chase after the validation of others or to give in to a sin that promises a quick fix. We get caught up in the daily grind, measuring ourselves by what we do rather than resting in who God says we are. If we are not intentional about fighting this drift, our joy and confidence in Christ can quickly fade.

We can fight this tendency to drift through daily Bible reading and through slowing down enough to reflect and journal on key verses that highlight who God is or who we are in Christ. Making Scripture practical is essential, but if we only focus on obedience and never on our identity, then we can easily slip into legalism or discouragement. The



apostles never apologized for simply reminding believers of the gospel. In 2 Peter 1:12-13, the apostle said, “So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body.” So, memorize key verses that remind you who you are in Christ and quote them out loud when you face discouragement or temptation. Being involved in community is also essential so that you can be reminded and remind others of God’s grace and love. The more you reflect on your identity in Christ, the more confident you will become.

REFLECT / APPLY

What stands out to you from Ephesians 1:1-14 and today’s study? What encourages you the most?

On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate your level of confidence on an average day? Why do you give yourself that rating?

How can reflecting on and reminding yourself of your identity in Christ help you build confidence?

What habits will you adopt to remind yourself of who God is and of who you are in Christ?

Take a moment to pray, thanking God for all He has done for you in Christ. Use today’s passage as a guide by praying over each section, thanking God for what He has done.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 2

THERE IS MORE

READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23.

This is one of the most powerful prayers in the whole Bible. It is aimed at those who are already faithful followers of Christ. No matter how strong your faith is, how passionate your prayer life is, or how much Scripture you know, there is always more. Since God is inexhaustible, there is always more of God to experience, more of His truth to grasp, and more of His power to walk in.

Paul prays that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened. Much more than mere intellectual understanding, the goal is to see, savor, and experience all that God has for you. This enlightenment is something that only the Holy Spirit can give you. True knowledge of God only comes through divine revelation, not natural reason. Puritan Thomas Watson put it this way: “Every grace is a divine spark lighted in the soul by the Holy Spirit.”³

Ephesians 1:19-20 always amazes me: “. . . and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength. He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens.” It’s easy for me to believe that God has immeasurable greatness in Himself, but this power is also available “toward us who believe.” The same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead is available to you and me. That is a mind blowing amount of power! It’s more than enough power to help you overcome any struggle with sin and any insecurity you might face. God not only wants you to survive the challenges of life; He also wants you to thrive.

Many followers of Christ live defeated and spiritually dull lives because they don’t fully grasp the power that is available to them through the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is not about trying harder in our own strength. It is about tapping into the unlimited power of God through the Holy Spirit. One of the greatest adventures of life is learning how to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily life. We are commanded to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16) and to “not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19). Charles Spurgeon put it this way: “Value above all things the



Holy Spirit. Put your entire dependence on Him. Pray for fresh grace. Venture not into the world without a fresh store of His hallowed influence. Seek to be filled with that blessed Spirit.”⁴ Experiencing the Holy Spirit starts with an attitude of surrender and is activated by courageous faith. So, don’t waste another moment spiritually asleep! Pray Ephesians 1:19-20 for yourself, asking God to wake you up to all He has for you. There is more!

REFLECT / APPLY

What stands out to you most from Ephesians 1:15-22 and today’s study?

List the things that Paul prayed for in verses 18-19. Which of these is most encouraging to you right now?

How does the fact that God’s unstoppable power is always available to you encourage you to live with more confidence?

In what specific areas of your daily life do you find it challenging to “walk by the Spirit” rather than trying harder in your own strength? What steps could you take in those situations to cultivate more humility and surrender to the Holy Spirit?

Pray through Ephesians 1:15-23 one verse at a time, asking God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and to empower you to become and accomplish all that He has for you. Repent, surrender, and commit to do whatever He is putting on your heart.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 3

ROOTED IN LOVE

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21.

College life can feel like one long audition. You're constantly surrounded by professors, peers, leaders, and even family members who each have their own set of expectations for you. Not only is there pressure to engage in sin, there is also always another achievement to pursue, another club to join, or another social expectation to meet. I have talked to many students who confess to getting sucked into the "rat race" of campus culture because deep down, they just want to be accepted and loved. I believe that for many, this desire for approval is the primary driving force beneath the surface of college life.

This prayer by the apostle Paul, if realized in your life, would change everything. Paul is on his knees, pleading with the Father for the church to experience Christ's transforming presence and love. The Holy Spirit is the One who supernaturally fortifies our hearts as we grow deeper in our relationship with God. This is done so that Christ can "dwell in [our] hearts through faith" (v. 17), meaning that Jesus takes up permanent residence in our life and never leaves. This is not a momentary spiritual high we might experience at a special worship service or summer camp—it's a daily reality to experience at the core of our being. When Christ dwells in our hearts, He becomes the defining influence in our lives.

It's important to note that Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 is for believers who have already had a true salvation experience. The phrase "through faith" (v. 17) implies that the experience of Christ's indwelling presence is sustained by a daily trust in Him. Faith is not a one time act but an ongoing reliance on Christ's person, work, and promises. This is about the Spirit enabling us to trust Him more and more deeply and allowing Him to influence every aspect of our lives. When Christ dwells in our hearts, He is not a guest who is merely tolerated, but a King who reigns.

In verse 17 Paul also prays for believers to be "rooted and firmly established" in love, like a tree with deep roots or a building with a solid foundation. This foundation is the launching pad for us to more experientially grasp the unfathomable depths of God's love for us in Christ. This love has absolutely no limits and we could never fully



understand it—yet Paul prays that we would know it more and more. When our lives are rooted in the love of Christ and surrendered to His lordship, we can be free from the expectations of others and can expect God to work in ways far beyond what we can ask, think, or imagine.

REFLECT / APPLY

What stands out to you most from Ephesians 3:14-20 and today's study?

In what ways are you currently most tempted to seek the approval of others in your life?

How does understanding the deeper meaning behind Paul's prayer "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" encourage you?

How does God's limitless love free you from the pressure of the expectations of others?

Spend time praying Ephesians 3:14-20 over yourself, phrase by phrase. Take your time and reflect on each line as you bring it to God in prayer. If time allows, pray this over a friend or family member as well and send this person a text saying you prayed this for him or her.

FAITH THAT ENDURES

For many young adults, the college years begin with excitement but, over time, devolve into something else. Bad choices, temptation, and misused freedom often lead to sin, doubt, anxiety, compromise, shame, loneliness, distraction, and burnout. This is not what God wants for these crucial years in a young adult's life. He offers a life of confidence, faith, peace, consecration, freedom, connection, discipline, and zeal. God doesn't want college students just to survive—He offers a way of life that endures. He offers purpose, hope, and love. His Word shows the way to thrive during the college years!

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