

# “Strengthened with power to grasp God’s love”: Ephesians 3:16-17

Third Sunday of Lent – March 7, 2021

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## Scripture reading – Eph 3:16-19

### Introduction

1. Last week, we reflected on the dimensions of God’s love for us - five features.
2. Today, we consider these curious phrases: that “you to be strengthened with power” and “that you may have strength to comprehend (or grasp)” the love of Christ. Why would we need strength to grasp the love of God?

### Why do we need “strength” to hang onto God’s love?

1. Short answer: someone is trying to steal it away from us. Our world is enchanted with other intelligent beings, some of whom are utterly malevolent. Paul alludes to this fact:
  - In this text: v.15 “whole family in heaven and earth”; v.18 “holy ones” – Gk. *hagioi* are human beings in NT; Heb. *kedoshim* are spiritual beings in the OT.
  - Explicit references to dark powers: 1:21 “ruler, authority, power and dominion” are corrupt *elohim*; 2:2 “prince of the power of the air” is Satan; 6: 10-20 is devoted to spiritual warfare. Ephesus was a hot bed of occultic spiritual activity.
2. So why do we need God’s strength? For the simple reason that these malevolent *elohim* want to “kill, steal and destroy” God’s good creation (cf. John 10:10).
3. They want to drive a wedge between us and God. They are unable to do it at God’s end (cf. Job 1,2). So, they attack at our end. They target our greatest vulnerability: our tendency to doubt God’s love for us.

### Following in the steps of our elder brother, Jesus

#### The Father declares Jesus’ belovedness (Luke 3:21-22)

“You are my Beloved, my Son, with you I am well pleased” (v.22)

- **“Beloved”** – a verbal adjective: “one who is loved, treasured, delighted in.”.Heb. *yedyd* (Deut 33:12; Ps 60:5;84:1;108:6;127:2; Isa 5:1; Jer 11:15; Solomon was *Yedydiah*, “Beloved of Yahweh” 2 Sam 12:25); Gk. *agapetos* used 62x in NT (eg: Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 4:14; 1 Thess 2:8; 1 Pet 4:12; 1 Jn 2:7; 3:2,21, et al.).
- **“Son”** – Jesus is the Father’s Son by nature: the two share the same essence; we have a different nature but are God’s sons/daughters by grace: we are made and re-made in his image and his spiritual “DNA” is in us through his Spirit (cf. 1 John 3:9).
- **“well pleased”** – *eudokeo*, “well pleased, delighted, utterly thrilled”. Totally stoked.

## **The enemy tries to steal Jesus’ sense of belovedness (Luke 4:1-13)**

**“led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (v.1)**

**“If you are the Son of God...” (v. 3,9)** – an attack on Jesus’ core identity

### **1. “command this stone to become bread” (v.3)**

- Temptation: “Provide for yourself!” If you don’t, no one else will. You’ve got to take care of #1.
- Jesus response: quotes Deut 8:3
- Satan attacks his identity as the beloved Son from the angle of provision (security)

### **2. “worship me, it [the kingdoms] will all be yours” (v.7)**

- Temptation: “Please yourself!” It can all be yours right now: no need to wait on God! Take this shortcut. You deserve it.
- Jesus response: quotes Deut 6:13
- Satan attacks Jesus’ identity as the beloved Son from the angle of pleasure (happiness).

### **3. “throw yourself down... he will command his angels...to guard you” (vv.9-10)**

- Temptation: “Prove yourself!” Show the people who you are! You’ll be a celebrity, loved and revered by all.
  - Satan even quotes two scriptures from Ps 91:11-12
  - Jesus response: quotes Deut 6:16
  - Satan attacks his identity as the beloved Son from the angle of pride (acceptance).
- How did Jesus stand so strong against these temptations? Two things:
    1. He was continually filling his mind/heart with the Father: memorizing and meditating on God’s Word, taking his thoughts captive, walking in the Spirit, praying without ceasing, etc.
    2. He was being continually being “strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in his inner being” (cf. Luke 4:1: “full of the Holy Spirit”).
  - By doing these two things, he was able to hold onto the knowledge that he was deeply loved by the Father.

## **Let’s apply the lessons**

### **1. God calls us—as he did Jesus—his Beloved, his child, and he is thrilled with us!**

- He loved us before time and predestined us to be his own, dearly loved children.
- We are, like Jesus, the Beloved of God! This is our core identity
- Jesus insisted that his belovedness define him
- We need to do the same. Until we do, we are a slave to our insecurities and preoccupations and the opinions of others
- You are the beloved of God! That is the single greatest datum that defines you and it is the greatest determining on the kind of life you live and the kind of person you become.

### **2. The enemy tries to steal that awareness away from us by using the same temptations he used on our older brother.**

- These are essentially the same temptations that he used with Adam and Eve in Gen 3:6 and the Apostle John warned against them in 1 Jn 2:16.
- **Provide for yourself!**
  - Satan says: “Don’t trust God to come through for you. He may not; the first of the month is coming soon
  - His goal is to create fear and undermine our security
  - Jesus says: Don’t worry about providing for yourself (Mt 6:25-34)
- **Please yourself!**
  - Satan says: “You have to seek your own pleasure. God wants you to be happy, so go ahead and leave that unhappy marriage, get drunk, do drugs...”
  - His goal is to play on our weaknesses and create discontent
  - Jesus says: “What shall a person be profited if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?” (Mk 8:36) and “Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you” (Mt 6:33).
- **Prove yourself!**
  - Satan says: You have to show off your abilities so others will accept you, respect you and love you. Tell people your accomplishments; drop a few names; seek their praise
  - His goal is to play on your insecurities and to get you to care more about what people think of you than what God thinks of you
  - Jesus says: “I don’t accept praise from people, but I know you: you don’t have the love of God within you, so you’re constantly looking for other people’s approval” (John 5:41-44).

### **3. We need hold tight to God’s love for us the same way our elder brother did**

1. Be continually filling your heart/mind with the Father and Son. Be proactive, memorizing and meditating on God’s Word, taking your thoughts captive, walking in the Spirit, praying without ceasing, abiding in Christ, etc.
  2. Be continually “strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in your inner being.” Eph 5:18: “be being filled with the Spirit”; Eph 6:10: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”
- As we do that, we won’t fumble the ball. We will discover our greatest joy is being the Beloved of God.

- Being God's Beloved can begin to define you. It happened to an ordinary fisherman named John: "the disciple that Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20).

## Lenten Exercises

1. Begin the practice of calling the Father "Abba", this Aramaic term of reverence and endearment. It is something like our term "Papa." Greet him in the morning with this name, say goodnight to him when you go to bed and speak to him throughout the day.
2. Look up the verses containing the word "beloved" in your quiet times this week. A few are given in this handout, above. Personalize them with your name.
3. Take time this week to think back on your life. What are some of the tangible ways the Lord has shown his love for you personally? Write them in a journal. Talk to the Lord about them and thank him for each of them.

## Recommended Resources

- Manning, Brennan. *Abba's Child*.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Life of the Beloved*.
- Nouwen, Henri. "Life of the Beloved" sermon on YouTube by Nouwen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWmeQ9cKRVE>
- Ortberg, John. *Love Beyond Reason*.