

“How Does God Strengthen Us?”

Thank you for inviting me again to worship and to learn from the Bible together.
Today’s theme is ‘How Does God Strengthen Us?’

We may often say, “I will do my best,” to accomplish something. But what does God do for us?
We the preachers are to prepare the sermons well and preach good messages and the congregation is expected to listen carefully and put it into practice. Fine! But what does God do for us ?

Prayer:

Dear Father, thank you that you saved us when we believed in Jesus Christ. And You say that You strengthen us. Please let us know clearly how You actually do this.
I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Let me read today’s Bible passage **Ephesians 3:14-19 (ESV)**

**¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,
¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

1. Pray Before the Father v14-15

Ephesians 3:14

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

Here, Paul is kneeling before God to pray. We don’t have to kneel down when we pray. But Paul wanted to give himself in prayer. So he knelt down before God. I usually do not kneel for prayer.
But on the occasions I feel I really have to pray and I need God to change the situations, I kneel down and pray.

Story 1:

The first occasion I remember when I knelt down and prayed was about three years after I became a Christian. I prayed for marriage and I started dating my wife. We were members of the same church. I started dating her, I felt comfortable being with her and I felt like spending my whole life with her. But I was not sure if it was the will of God.

So I asked God to show His will. I knelt and prayed from the bottom of my heart, “I want to know Your will about marrying her.”

Then the next time I saw her at the church on Sunday, I felt God’s peace in my heart. I felt God is saying, “Yes, go ahead.” But I wanted to cling to God. I prayed, “It seems that it is Your will to marry her. But this is a very important decision. Is it really Your will? ” When I met her the next time. I felt God’s peace again in

my heart. But I prayed to God one more time. “Is it really, really Your will? Will you really help us accomplish our marriage?” For this third time, He answered with an abundant peace. So I said to God. “Now I know that it is Your will to marry her. You will guide us and lead us.” Then I proposed to her. And she said “Yes.” So we married.

Since then we have had so many disputes, confrontations and frustrations. But I never had a single doubt ‘I might have made a mistake in marriage.’ I have always felt, ‘Thank you God, You made us live together and You will lead us. So we do not have to worry about us. You will accomplish Your glory in our marriage.’

Story 2:

The second time I remember I prayed on my knees was about three years after I became a pastor. The church was having meetings at the rented rooms in the community center. We wanted to have a church building. The church had been raising money for years. We were thinking of purchasing a suitable property or buying land and building a church facility.

I did not have any good ideas on how to start out with such a project. So I thought I should pray to God. I wanted God to lead us. I decided myself to fast, for breakfast and for lunch and pray until before supper every Monday. This way, I prayed for several months. But nothing happened. Spending Mondays for several hours on prayer meant I had less time for other tasks as a pastor. It made me busier for the rest of the weeks and my schedule became tight. I had less time for message preparation every week. I had to preach with less preparation. I had frustration to God. I had thought that if I give myself for prayer, I would have felt God so close and felt heavenly peace. But it was not so in my case. I realized that I could not pray. I had thought ‘Prayer was easy. Just to pray. That’s all.’ I realized that I could not devote myself in prayer. So I simply prayed, “Lord, please do your will. Please just do your will. Because it is the best. Please do your will. Please do your will.” Several weeks later I stopped praying with fasting. Because I realized that I could not pray a prayer worth praying. I said to God, “I cannot pray a prayer that You think worthy to listen to.”

Then I felt that I could not take any step forward to acquire a church building.

At the end of that year, I was preparing for the message of the New Year’s Day service. I was reading Genesis Chapter 18, verse 10.

Genesis 18:10

¹⁰ The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.”

God told Abraham, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” Through this verse I realized that God now told me to my heart that “About this time next year, you will have a church building.” It was clear to me. So at the New Year’s Day’s service, I said, “Through this verse I believe that God told me, You (our church) will have a church building about this time next year.” On this occasion, I could not trust that God would do this by this time next year. But I could believe that God told me He would do this about this time next year.

Then I was encouraged and soon after the start of the new year, we visited some real estate agents. They showed us several different properties. But none of them was what we wanted. We then realized that to have a church building was not easy and we could do nothing.

Half a year had passed without any progress. Then a church member brought to us a handbill of a Japanese-style pub-restaurant on sale. I did not like it very much. But in a few months, the church decided to purchase the property and remodel it into a church. A church member recommended a good architect to draw a remodeling plan. We asked him to do the task. The architect introduced us to a very skillful carpentry company. We made a contract with them to do the whole work. We did not set any deadline for completion. But they worked very hard to finish this up by the end of the year. So we had the first worship service on the next New Year’s Day. I marveled at the accuracy of God’s Words. He told me to my heart that “You will have a church building about this time next year.”

Even if we think we cannot pray a worthy prayer, God listens to our sincere prayers and responds with God's sincerity.

Ephesians 3:15

¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

“From whom (the Father) every family in heaven and on earth is named,”

What does it mean?

< Show Diagram >

Greek:	patêr	⇒	patria
English:	father		family
ギリシヤ語:	パテール	⇒	パトリア
日本語:	父		家族

The Greek word for ‘father’ is ‘patêr’. And the Greek word for ‘family’ is ‘patria.’

The word ‘patria,’ which means ‘family,’ is derived from the word ‘patêr,’ which means ‘father.’ So, it says, “father is the father of the family.”

A father takes care of and feels responsible for everybody in the family. Of course a mother does. Here, ‘family in heaven’ means saints who are already in heaven, Old Testament saints and New Testament Christians who went to heaven already. ‘Family on earth’ means Christians now live here on earth. A father is the one who begot the family, the children, with the mother, and who is responsible for the whole family and is intent on the welfare of all the family. Likely, God, the Father, is intent to take care of all the family members, especially Christians now here on earth.

Matthew 6:31-32

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

Story 3:

When I was a high-school student, we lived in downtown Tokyo. Sometimes I went to Ginza just for walking and window shopping. It was not far from home. One day I went into a big stationary shop. I saw some inexpensive English typewriters. I wanted one of them. Then I asked my father to buy one. A few days later, gladly he went with me to Ginza to that shop and bought one for me. It was an encouragement for me to study English further.

God knows what is necessary for each one of us and He wants to provide everything for us. Because He is our Father.

Story 4:

Once a month I meet with a Christian for Bible study together. He deals with secondhand goods. He collects used articles still usable and sells them through the internet. So he needs a good size of wagon car to collect items for sale. Last year, his car broke down. He had to do the same task with his smaller vehicle. We prayed together so that he could get a good car at a moderate price. He asked his friend who deals with secondhand cars to look for a suitable one. Very soon, his friend found a good car at a car auction. The car was a little bit old. But it had the mileage of only 19,000 kilometers. It allows four-wheel drive mode. He needs it to drive in winter time. In addition to that, four winter tires were loaded into the car. His car dealer friend said, “I’ve

been doing this work for thirty years, but it's impossible that such a good vehicle comes out." God brought to him a very appropriate car.

2. Father Strengthens Us v16

Ephesians 3:16

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

How much does He strengthen us?

'that according to the riches of his glory'

God strengthens us not according to our efforts, nor according to our faith. But according to the riches of His glory. Then we do not have to try to inflate our faith to be strengthened by God.

So we need to just rely on God Who would do it.

How does God strengthen us, or what part of us does He strengthen?

'he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,'

Now what is our 'inner being' or 'inner self'?

2Corinthians 4:16

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Now, what is our 'outer self'? Our physical body? Yes, our physical body wastes away as we get old. But our 'outer self' is not only just our physical or visible part.

How about our mental part or the mental capacity? These also waste away. Our will power or vitality also become weak from time to time or as we get old.

So, if we go by 'I will do it,' we are living by our outer self.

Then, what is our inner self? It is being renewed day by day.

<Show Ephesians 3:16>

In Ephesians 3:16, '(it is) to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.'

So, our inner being is where the Holy Spirit works and strengthens us.

So rather than our trying to do our best, God wants us to trust and rely on Him and let God's Spirit work in our inner being.

How can we do that?

Story 5:

I have a daughter who works in Tokyo for a Christian publishing company. She lives in an apartment house by herself. Two years ago, she had a rupture of her brain aneurism (a knob on her blood vessel broke) which caused bleeding in her brain. She fell on the floor and became unconscious for more than a day and a half.

Her boss, a lady, visited my daughter's apartment and asked the owner to unlock the door.

The boss found my daughter on the floor. She woke her up and called the ambulance. And to make a long story short, my daughter was hospitalized.

I think I shared this story in my previous message. Let me mention again as my experience on that occasion.

We were informed by the hospital about our daughter. The doctor told us her condition was not urgent. We,

my wife and I, went to the hospital in Tokyo. We were told that a surgery was necessary by opening up a large part of her skull. The whole process would take for nine hours. On the day of her operation, we went again. While we were waiting, in about two hours, we were called by the operation room. We were told that our daughter had anaphylaxis shock to a medicine used in the process. Then her operation was postponed to the next week.

We went again. The operation lasted more than ten hours. It was quite successful. We were glad and came back. The next day the doctor made an inspection on my daughter's brain vessels. It showed another aneurysm. The doctor phoned me and told me another operation was necessary. So I went in the next week. It took more than nine hours for the operation. So I went to Tokyo three times for the operations. For each operation I had to meet the doctor to hear the explanation and sign the documents for approval three days earlier. Therefore, I had to go to Tokyo eight times in one month and a half until she was well and discharged from the hospital.

During that period, I had to preach every Sunday. Also, I had a class at a seminary every week. Usually, these two would make my schedule almost full. But this time, I never felt I had to work harder. I always thought that God would make me do whatever He wants me to do. So I did not have to worry.

This was because, I think, God strengthened me in my inner being by His Spirit. So, I did not have to stir up my faith or so. I just trusted God. I did not have to trust myself. This was much easier.

In the meantime, my pastor friend asked me to officiate a wedding for an international couple in their church. The bridegroom was from India and the bride was a Japanese. We met for preparation. I made a bi-lingual program, officiated the wedding and gave a message in English and Japanese. In the meantime, the bride was led to be baptised. God accomplished what He wanted to do.

3. Christ Lives in Us v17a

Eph. 3:17a

17a so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—

Christians believe that Christ lives in us. Because the Bible says so. If Christ really lives in us, He must affect us and somehow change us. If Christ really lives in our hearts, His presence must be sensed by ourselves and by the people around.

As a Christian if we believe that Christ lives in us, if we have this faith, then we ought to trust that Christ reveals Himself to us and even to the people around.

So, the Bible says,

4. Love of Christ and God Fills Us v17b-19

Ephesians 3:17b

17b that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

Several years ago, our friend gave us some branches of small roses. We planted them on the narrow strip by the house. After a flower season, we cut them back and only small stems were left. But by the next spring they grew again and the roses bloomed.

If we are rooted in His love, His love comes out. Not because of our efforts but because we are rooted and grounded in Christ's love.

Ephesians 3:18

18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

Here, Paul prays, “you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,”

We may think “how can we humans know or comprehend the great love of Christ? It is impossible.” What Paul maintains is different.

Paul prays. “you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth (The greatness of Christ’s love).”

So, Paul is saying, ‘all the saints, Christians, have the strength to comprehend the greatness of Christ’s love.

So, you and I can and ought to have strength to comprehend what is the greatness of Christ’s love.

When God grants us the strength to know Christ’s love, we can not only know the love but also be filled by His love and by God Himself.

Ephesians 3:19

¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

How can we know the love of Christ that surpasses our knowledge?

It is quite possible. Since God fills us with the fullness of God Himself.

This is far beyond our human knowledge. But God does this to every Christian.

This is what God does. This is what God loves to do to every Christian. So, we can simply ask God to do it.

Story 6:

Some years ago, a lady, a church member, sent an email to one of the board members a sad letter. The board asked me to advise her. I thought and thought and thought and sent an email to her. Then she felt a deep disappointment and stopped coming to the church regularly, especially when I preached. She talked normally with other members. But she never talked to me or greeted me. I thought, “Now I cannot do anything for her. She needs to repent. Not me.” She had been a Christian for many years. She had served for the church in different areas. But I had been thinking that I did not feel joy in her. To me, she had been a member who needed delicate care, so that she might not stumble. I had thought how could she have changed her attitude and could have been a joyful Christian. But so far, she had not changed. God’s love did not seem to be revealed in her.

Then I repented and knelt down and prayed “Why is it that her faith has not been seen growing? She is truly a Christian. But I do not feel Your joy within her. God, change her, change her. Give your joy and love her as you promise to all the Christians.” After that, when I thought of her anytime, I prayed and prayed and prayed. Then her attitude started to change. She tried to relate with others joyfully. I felt the love of God and joy in her. When someone needs help, she notices and thinks carefully and extends help. She was elected as a board member. I have a complete trust in her. Her trust in God and love is growing. We feel the joy of Christ in her.

Shall we pray.

Our Father, You provide us with what is necessary for us. Not only our physical needs but much more than that, You want to provide and fill us with Your love and Yourself.

Lord, let us ask You to reveal Yourself through us. So that Your glory might be seen through us.

In Jesus’ Name I pray.