



Understanding Prayer in the Light of Ephesians 3:12-21 to Experience God's love: An Ethnoscopic Analysis Approach

Hengki Wijaya¹, Philip Suciadi Chia², Queency Christie Wauran³

¹Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jaffray Makassar, Indonesia

²University of Pretoria, South Africa

³Evangelical Church, Thailand

ABSTRACT

Prayer is a spiritual bridge that connects humans with God, becoming a means for humans to express the deepest longings of their hearts. This study explores the meaning of prayer and the depth of God's love through the lens of Ephesians 3:12-21, using an endoscopic analysis approach to uncover hidden layers of meaning. The findings are that a diverse culture of prayer colours the prayer practices of Christians, reflecting multicultural diversity and prayer can unite diversity because of the oneness of God. Prayer is a deeply personal expression of the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as a unity for His people to experience the fullness of God. The implication for world missions is the role of prayer as a bridge of communication for others to bring unbelievers to God and experience the person of God. Education contributes to the spiritual growth of students and educators by enlightening the nation's life and knowing God and His will.

Keywords: Ephesians 3:12-21; Ephesian church; God's love; intimacy with God; spirituality

Article history

Submitted: Sep. 09, 2024

Revised: Jan. 13, 2025

Accepted: Jan. 22, 2025

Corresponding author: Hengki Wijaya (hengkilily1988@gmail.com)

How to cite this article:

Wijaya, H., Chia, P.S., & Wauran, Q.C. (2025). Understanding prayer in the light of Ephesians 3:12-21 to experience God's love: An Ethnoscopic analysis approach. *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*. 9 (1): 30-47. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v9i1.938>

This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license



The images or other third-party material in this article are included in the Creative Commons license unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. Suppose material is not included in the Creative Commons license article and your intended use is prohibited by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use. In that case, you must obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

INTRODUCTION

The life of a believer in Christ builds his spirituality through worship and prayer to know and experience God. Believers come to know God through learning about the attributes associated with the person of God in the Bible. However, knowing God through God's word alone is not enough if believers do not experience it. Believers grow in Christ through God's word, prayer, fellowship, loving each other, testifying about Jesus, and following Jesus' example (Wijaya et al., 2023). What has been mentioned above is an indicator of the spiritual growth of believers. Paul's prayer in the letter Ephesians 3:12-13 (ESV), "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So, I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory." Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus so that the believers in Ephesus would be firm in their faith in Jesus and would not look at Paul, who was in trouble because of Jesus. Believers need to see hardship as the glory of Jesus. Best (1998, pp. 330–331) says that Paul's distress is a joy for believers (Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 12:10; Col. 1:14). If Paul responded to distress as something bad, then believers would suffer and grieve over Paul's distress.

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 expresses his deep love for God's people in Ephesus. Paul's prayer is an example that reveals the depth of God's love and the power of prayer. Van der Werwe's (2022, p. 9) research shows how cooperation between the three divine persons presents the nature of divine love. The concept of the Trinity can be present in prayer and foster life experiences, according to Ephesians 3:14–21. Spirituality is understood as the lived experience of the divine trinity. The experience that listeners can feel when they hear this prayer or even when they say a similar prayer.

Researchers need to trace Paul's prayer based on Ephesians 3:12-21 to understand and experience how deep God's love is for believers. The approach used is the ethnosopic approach, which looks at it from various perspectives, such as cultural, biblical, missiological, and educational implications (Thigpen, 2023, p. 30). Through a literature review, the four approaches are discussed in terms of the theological and practical implications relating to the role of prayer in missiology and Christian education.

METHOD

Qualitative research methods introduce a new concept called ethnosopic analysis. This method is designed to examine cultural issues within the context of evangelism. Coined by Thigpen (2023, p. 29), "ethnoscope" is derived from the Greek words "ethne" (nation or society) and "skopein" (to see). As illustrated in Figure 1, ethnosopic analysis involves a multi-faceted approach. It combines ethnographic/ cultural analysis with the insights of Scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the principles of missiology and education. In this case, the author cites Figure 1, designed by Thigpen (2023, p. 30), to explain the method used in the manuscript.

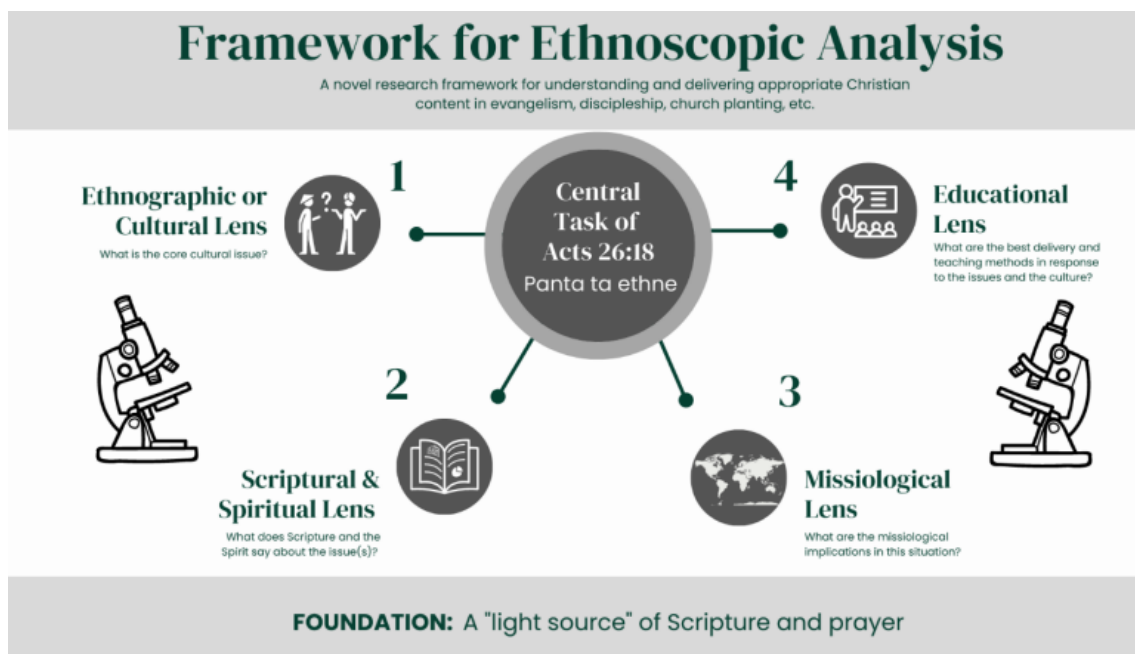


Figure 1. Ethnoscopic Analysis (Thigpen, 2023, p. 30)

Ethnoscopic analysis consists of 4 lenses: 1) Does the cultural lens describe the core issue of the cultural topic? 2) Scripture and spiritual lens describe what the scriptures and spirituality say about the topic. 3) The missiological lens describes the missiological implications of the situation. 4) The Educational lens describes the best delivery and teaching methods in response to the issue and culture.

Ethnoscopic analysis can be used for interpretation and not just understanding cultural practices because the Scripture uses a cultural approach to convey the message of truth. Truth does not negate culture, but understanding culture makes it easier to understand the Scripture in the context of culture and its implications in missiology and education.

Data collection is sourced from textbooks and international journals related to the writing topic. The use of appropriate keywords in searching for literature sources is needed to build a framework for ethnoscopic analysis related to prayer and the depth of God's love. Furthermore, the discussion also shows theological and practical implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Lens

Prayer, a combination of praise and supplication, is an exchange of spoken and heard words. Beyond the verbal aspect, prayer also involves a visual component, particularly significant in places of worship like churches, where ritual actions take center

stage. A classic prayer gesture in the ancient world was lifting the hands, a visual cue accompanying verbal expressions of praise and supplication (Calabro, 2013, p. 105).

Prayer in Jewish culture has a profound meaning and a variety of purposes. The positions of the body in prayer, such as standing, kneeling, and lying with the feet parallel and the face facing the ground, have symbolic meanings related to the human relationship with God. Philippians 2:10 and Romans 14:11 highlight the universal nature of bowing before God. Paul, who acknowledges God as the universal Father by bowing his knee, anticipates a future where all will bow before God's glory. This ultimate revelation of God's glory, as described in Ephesians 1:10 and 3:21, is a timeless and enduring reality (Shauf, 2018).

Prayer involves various expressions such as petition, thanksgiving, and contemplation as a form of communication with God. Based on Martin Buber's perspective, prayer can be seen as a dialogue that allows individuals to establish a deeper relationship with themselves, others, and God. The diversity of forms of prayer reflects the richness of human spiritual experience (Guilherme, 2012, p. 365). Humans interact directly with God through prayer, especially when facing difficulties. According to a study by Rabie-Boshoff & Buitendag (2020), humans can seek understanding, protection, healing, and hope in this space. In response, God will interact with humans personally and meet their needs.

Recent ritual theorists have argued that ritual function, in part, as a way in which people negotiate, mediate, and enact power in these relations. This ritualistic act is further amplified by its integration into a broader network of political relations, extending from the local to the international level. While acknowledging prayer's profound spiritual significance and personal experiences, this essay delves into its political implications and power dynamics Werline (2014, pp. 5–6). Prayer also involves emotions or feelings (Reif & Egger-Wenzel, 2015, p. 67). Prayer in Jewish culture is an integral part of everyday life. Through prayer, Jews developed a deep relationship with God, strengthened their faith, and transformed their lives. Each body position used in prayer has a deep symbolic meaning and a specific spiritual purpose.

Biblical Lens

God has designated prayer as the primary channel through which believers receive divine intervention. The actual evidence for this statement comes from the Scriptures. Matthew 7:7-8 (ESV), “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you...” This verse teaches that prayer is the key to receiving what we need from God. John 14:13-14 (ESV), “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” This verse shows that Jesus gave His followers the power to pray and receive answers. James 5:16 (ESV), “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another,

that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” This verse teaches that prayer is the key to receiving what we need from God.

Without this supernatural assistance, living a life aligned with the gospel becomes unattainable. The distinctive qualities that set Christians apart from the world and elevate Christ are all manifestations of God's grace. Prayer is the conduit for this grace, emphasizing its central role in individual lives, families, and ministries (Whitney, 2014). In a profound act of devotion, Paul prayed and prostrated himself before the divine source of his earthly and heavenly family lineage (Ephesians 3:14b-15). This act of humility and reverence aligns with the central theme of Christ's reconciling work, as described in Ephesians 2:14-16. Christ, the embodiment of peace, has bridged the divide between humanity and God, reconciling through His sacrificial love.

The biblical narrative, marked by violence and conflict, finds resolution in the redemptive work of Christ. Kneeling, a common Jewish practice, signifies submission, devotion, and worship. While early Christians often prayed standing (cf. Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13), kneeling in the ancient world conveyed a sense of supplication before higher powers. In prayer, kneeling, particularly in Jewish tradition, symbolizes humility and dependence before the divine (Lincoln, 1990).

Paul transcends Jewish cultural norms to reveal God as the universal parent of all humanity. Recognizing God's boundless love, Paul prays for believers to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit and filled with Christ's love. This love, though surpassing human comprehension, is the ultimate goal of the Christian experience. Paul's prayer seeks a deeper understanding of this love, a love that transcends all dimensions and fills the believer's entire being. It is a love that defines the breadth, length, height, and depth of God's grace (Anstey, 2012, p. 454; Kamudzandu, 2021). It becomes more specific in the following verses, where the vision of human well-being is relentlessly Trinitarian and Christocentric (Seligman, 2011). Paul's prayer for believer centres on spiritual growth and the indwelling of Christ. He desires that believers may be empowered by the Holy Spirit and filled with the fullness of God through Christ. This divine fullness encompasses every aspect of a believer's life, transforming their minds, hearts, and souls (Anstey, 2012, p. 454).

In verses 18-19, Paul emphasizes the importance of comprehending the vast dimensions of God's love. While the exact nature of this love remains somewhat mysterious, it is clear that it exceeds human understanding. The apostle's plea is for believers to experience this love in its fullness, recognizing its transformative power in their lives (Peterson, 2015). The study of Poloma & Lee (2011, p. 143) uses statistics to measure prayer as a basis and investigates the relational aspects of prayer through the lens of divine love. Prayer involves a dynamic interplay of active and receptive elements, incorporating both prophetic and mystical experiences. These dimensions of prayer contribute to a deeper understanding of “knowing the love that surpasses understanding,”

as described by the Apostle Paul. The term receptive prayer is introduced through the writings of Poloma & Lee (2011). Receptive prayer is a contemplative prayer that focuses on the presence of God and involves a receptive attitude. Receptive prayer is a way of living and acting and can nurture and empower oneself. Receptive prayer involves learning to surrender to the Spirit of God, which can happen in and through the believer. In Ephesians 3:19, the phrase “the love of Christ” refers to Christ’s love for humanity, which transcends human comprehension. This love surpasses intellectual knowledge, emphasizing its spiritual and experiential nature. The Greek term “gnosis” suggests a form of knowledge that can sometimes lead to pride, as seen in 1 Corinthians 8:1 (Hultgren, 2009). Christians will never be able to understand the identity and character of God fully (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12, cf. 4:20). Christians will never understand the love of God as Paul expresses it in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as the *Familia Dei*, the love of God (van der Merwe, 2020).

The section concludes with a doxology that gives God glory (Ephesians 3:20-21). This glorification takes place “in the church and in Christ Jesus.” In other words, God is glorified in the fellowship of believers united with Christ. Such glorification is possible because the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23; 4:15-16; 5:30). Christ and his church are a deep and intimate unity (Hultgren, 2009). The passage concludes with a doxology that praises God for His glory, particularly within the church and through Christ Jesus. This glorification is made possible by the intimate union between Christ and His church, the body of Christ. Just as the Holy Spirit intercedes for believers, God is capable of working in us beyond our imagination (Kamudzandu, 2021; Shauf, 2018). We express gratitude for God’s ongoing revelation of His Word and His redemptive plan, which has been unfolding throughout history. We especially thank Him for including Gentiles in the promises of salvation, making them citizens of God’s spiritual kingdom, the Church (Eph.3:10) (Mare, 1965, p. 84).

Missiological Lens

The missiological lens emphasizes the practical implications of the relationship between prayer and the depth of God’s love in applying the Great Commission mission. The relationship between prayer and mission is very close. Prayer leads us deeper into an active relationship with the missionary God, and the inevitable consequences are worship, service, and mission, which are the three characteristics of the church. The Great Commission implies the integration of life God intended based on God’s nature. Paul’s prayer implies a deep relationship with the Lord Jesus through prayer. “And to know the love that surpasses knowledge. I pray that you may be filled with all the fullness of God,” (Eph. 3:19). Hjalmarson (2013) wrote that the story of Mary and Martha strengthens its meaning: contemplative life and active life. Both are manifestations of life lived in the Triune life of God, an integrated and whole life. The missionary community reflects the

Triune life, the single life of the community in mission with the Lord Jesus like Mary, but also serving fellow human beings like Martha. Both activities exist in the life of a believer. Thus, believers can understand and implement the love of God they experience and share God's love through serving others as a missionary church. They are challenged to restore and deepen the Christian identity of the church based on the mission of the Triune God in all creation. A missionary view of God offers rich resources for reimagining how disciples can be formed in the power of the Spirit's faithful participation in the Triune God's communal, creative, and reconciliation movement in the world (Zscheile, 2012). Pray under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, love Jesus, and follow the will of the Father towards the fullness of God.

Prayer to God is a bridge in interfaith dialogue. Belief in Jesus is inclusive, not exclusive, meaning Christian belief applies universally (Karman, 2019). Because salvation is also intended for His people outside of Christianity, Paul emphasized that the gospel is not only for Jews but also for non-Jews. Christians can pray for others of different religions for the world's welfare, salvation, and peace. The context of Christian prayer can differ due to the diversity of ethnicities, cultures and attitudes to prayer. However, this diversity remains one because the prayers of believers are directed to one person, Jesus Christ. According to May (2023, p. 21), the dialogue of love within God himself is the basis for God's creation and interaction with humans. By understanding the Trinitarian dialogue, we can more deeply experience our calling to respond to God's love daily.

Educational Lens

The educational lens section highlights the practical significance of the connection between prayer and God's profound love in the context of Christian education. The study of Luhrmann & Morgain (2012, p. 359) investigated the correlation between prayer practice and unusual sensory and spiritual experiences. The results showed that individuals who pray regularly tend to report more intense mystical experiences. Drawing on various spiritual traditions, we argue that developing inner senses is a central goal of many spiritual practices. We also propose attention learning theory as a conceptual framework to explain how prayer practice can facilitate richer spiritual experiences.

Study of Luhrmann et al. (2013, p. 159) indicates that prayer groups experienced increased clarity and use of mental imagery, heightened attention, and more unusual sensory experiences, including religious experiences, though individual responses varied. These findings suggest a potential link between prayer practice and cognitive processes.

The results of Baesler (2002) show that the type of prayer a person does changes with age. Young adult tends to focus more on prayers of thanksgiving, while middle-aged adults are more likely to pray praise. However, regardless of age, the frequency and quality of prayer significantly influence a person's closeness to God. The implication for

education is that prayer is a means of building intimacy from a young age, seeking God's will, and being sensitive to the persons of the Trinity. Thus, when older, they grow closer to God. Paul prayed for the Ephesians to find God's will and experience the depth of the love of the Lord Jesus through personal fellowship with God.

In an educational context, educators who model prayerful practices and teach about prayer according to biblical principles can contribute to the spiritual, mental, and emotional growth of their students. By encouraging personal prayer and a deeper connection with God, educators can help students understand their purpose and God's will for their lives. The cultivation of a prayer habitus can positively impact one's spiritual, psychological, and mental health. The practice of prayer, particularly through imagination and a loving relationship with God, has been linked to improved health and healing from trauma and psychosis, as supported by research like Luhrmann's (2013).

Theological Implications

Dependence on God

Prayer, within the framework of practical theology, challenges theological theories that fail to fully consider the profound implications of God's invitation to prayer. This invitation bestows a new anthropological status upon those who pray, impacting their relationship with God, the world, and other believers.

Furthermore, prayer serves as a critique of existing practices in three ways: 1) Transformative Power. Prayer itself is an act of transformation; 2) Self-awareness. Prayer acknowledges its limitations in achieving transformation, leading to a critique of its methods and practices; 3) Hopeful Future. Prayer maintains hope for the transformation of existing practices, grounded in the promise of God's presence through the Holy Spirit. By looking beyond current practices and focusing on God, the faithful are called to continually strive and pray for the manifestation of God's Kingdom in the world (van Oudtshoorn, 2013, p. 285).

Prayer is the way believers draw near to God. By praying, believers depend entirely on God. This does not mean that prayer always solves what happens and the problematic struggles faced. Cocksworth (2023, pp. 22–23) explains that the negative theology of prayer does not present the expected resolution in prayer. Negative prayer discourse in the lives of believers is messy and can cause more significant problems. Therefore, praying to God does not mean forcing desires on God, but rather the will, longing, and depth of God that is prayed for, heard and done in the lives of believers. Paul's second prayer in Ephesians, preceded by the first Paul prayer (Ephesians 1:15-23), focuses on deepening believers' relationship with God. God desires believers to fully experience the spiritual blessings God has bestowed upon them (Hoehner, 2002). This second prayer builds upon the concept of unity in Christ, as explained in Ephesians 2:11-

3:13. Paul prays for both Jewish and Gentile believers to experience a deeper level of unity, marked by a shared love for one another, empowered by the love of Christ (Comfort et al., 2008; Hoehner, 2002).

Study of Krikac (2024, p. 57) argues in his letter to the Ephesians that Paul, in his two prayers, highlights two important aspects of the life of believers. The first prayer focuses on understanding the grace of God that has been given to them (indicative). In contrast, the second prayer emphasizes real action in living according to that grace (imperative). In other words, the first prayer invites the congregation to realize their identity in Christ, while the second prayer encourages them to live according to that identity.

Paul's petition continues in verses 16–19 as a ladder along which he ascends ever higher in his aspirations for his readers in four steps. First, he prays that God will strengthen them through the indwelling of Christ by His Spirit. Paul prays to the Father that Christ, through His Spirit, will be allowed to dwell in their hearts and control and empower them from His throne. Second, Paul prays that they will be rooted and grow in love. They need the power of the Spirit and Christ to enable them to love one another despite their racial and cultural differences. Third, he asks that they may know the love of Christ in all its dimensions, even though that love “surpasses knowledge” (vv. 18–19). Stott says Christ's love is broad enough to encompass all humanity, long enough to endure forever, high enough to lift Him to heaven, and deep enough to reach the lowest sinner. Fourth, the apostle prays that they will be filled to the fullness of God. Such a prayer must be directed toward our final perfection in heaven. God expects us to grow daily as we are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (Stott, 2017, p. 51).

The four dimensions of length, breadth, height, and depth have been the subject of much discussion. While they could potentially refer to God's wisdom or power, it is more likely that they allude to Christ's love. This interpretation aligns with the surrounding context, as the previous verse (3:17) mentions Christ dwelling deeply in hearts, and the following verse (3:19) calls for believers to know Christ's love.

Furthermore, the spatial dimensions fit well with the agricultural (roots of a plant) and architectural (foundation of a building) metaphors used to describe being rooted in God's love. These four dimensions do not describe the completeness of understanding but rather the breadth of things that must be understood. Paul prays that believers will come to understand the deeper dimensions of Christ's love than ever before. However, mere knowledge of His love is not the end; instead, it leads to the ultimate goal of attaining God's fullness. However, the mere knowledge of His love is not the ultimate goal; instead, it results in the ultimate goal of achieving all the fullness of God (Comfort et al., 2008).

The mission of the Great Commission begins with laying on our knees to pray for the salvation of humanity. Paul sought Jesus' will by praying. In any circumstances, such

as suffering in prison, on land and at sea, the Bible records the story, especially the history of Paul's journey in the Acts of the Apostles. The experience of Paul's encounter with the Lord Jesus in Damascus changed Paul's paradigm of thinking in serving God. Paul prayed to know God's will and that God's people would discover God's love by following Jesus and preaching the Gospel to fellow human beings.

The Spirit's Indwelling

The apostles' prayer begins with a request for the presence of the Holy Trinity within us. Paul bowed down to the Father (verse 14) so that He (Jesus), according to the riches of His glory, might strengthen and confirm you by the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This prayer shows that the growth and development of the congregation exceeds knowledge (verse 19) (Brown, 2012). Romans 5:5 says, "And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

The Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of believers. In Him, His riches, His glory, and His power are revealed in the hearts of believers (Ephesians 3:16). Believers are strengthened and supported by the testimony of the believers with whom we worship. The Holy Spirit strengthens believers through what they see from life testimonies, acts of courage by their faith in the Lord Jesus, and the believer's past experiences. In addition, they believed because of the conviction of the power of God's word through preaching and teaching of God's word (Hultgren, 2009).

The Ephesians, primarily composed of non-Jewish converts, were envisioned as a "dwelling place" for God. Beginning in Ephesians 3:14, Paul implored God to "fill" this new dwelling place, the church. The enigmatic phrase "its breadth, its length, its height, and its depth" echoes Old Testament references to the temple's dimensions. Paul's prayer is for a church filled with God in every dimension, all for God's glory (Brown, 2012).

The Acts of the Apostles provide a prominent picture of the central role of the Holy Spirit in Paul's missionary journey. The Holy Spirit became a guide, an empowered, and a comforter for Paul when facing various challenges and obstacles in his ministry. Acts 13:2, "The Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 16:6-7, "As they went through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word of God in Asia. When they had come to Mysia, they attempted to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not permit them." The Holy Spirit also gave Paul a vision (Act 16:9; 18:9-10). Acts 20:22: "And now I am going up to Jerusalem, uncertain as to what will happen there. However, the Holy Spirit bears me witness in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me."

God's abundant grace

Paul emphasized in his letter, “I pray”, as a second confirmation (verses 16, 18). “I pray that you, together with all the saints, may understand how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is, and may know that love, even though it surpasses all knowledge,” (verses 18-19). God’s grace is not only vast in all its dimensions but also has a depth that is full of mystery and cannot be fathomed by humans. However, the depth of His love can be known gradually by communing with God through prayer (Stott, 2014, 2017). God’s love is unlimited. He continually pours out His love to His people abundantly, without stopping. No matter how big the mistakes of His people, God’s love is always ready to forgive and restore His people.

The first three chapters of Ephesians lay out a grand picture of God’s abundant and saving grace. This section concludes with a prayer and doxology, where the author prays for the church to be filled with a God who surpasses our imagination. The subsequent chapters, 4-6, then elaborate on the practical implications of this fulfilled life, guiding believers on how to live it out. The author’s vision of the church’s mission is stunning: “that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities, ruler in heaven,” (3:10). To carry out this mission, the church needs the strength, power, and presence of God himself; that is, the church needs this prayer, and He is the object of its closing doxology (Peterson, 2015). Paul emphasizes that praying opens the mystery of God and His will so believers can carry out His advice and teachings, which Paul later wrote in Ephesians 4-6. God’s abundant grace is expressed in the love of God for all humanity in all ages.

Unity of the Church

The language employed in the opening phrase of this section, where all creation is urged to bow before God, underscores this unity. This specific phrase is “for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father,” (Ephesians 3:14, ESV), referring to the recognition of God by all people in the end times, occurring only twice elsewhere in Paul’s writings. The more familiar reference is in Philippians 2:10, which states, “...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...” Similarly, Romans 14:11 also employs this imagery. In Ephesians, Paul’s use of this phrase, in the context of acknowledging God as the Universal Father, points to the end-time vision where God’s glory will be fully revealed and all things will be gathered to Him, as outlined in Ephesians 1:10. This divine glory, as the final line of this passage (Ephesians 3:21) affirms, is an eternal glory (Shauf, 2018).

The church’s unity can be realized if we do not see differences in tribe, race and culture. There are no more differences between Greeks, non-Jews, and Jews. As described in Paul’s prayer, all are one, which states that the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one as believers; we see unbelievers as united in the love of Jesus. God’s love unites us with God and with each other in close fellowship. We become part of the body of Christ, where we love and support one another.

Practical Implications for Christian Mission and Education

A Deeper Understanding of God's Love

The author of Ephesians 3:16-19 offers a prayer seeking four specific blessings for his readers. First, he prays for them to be strengthened with power in their inner being through the Holy Spirit. Second, he desires that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. Third, he prays that they, along with all God's holy people, may grasp the immeasurable love of Christ. Lastly, he prays that they may know this love that surpasses knowledge and be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Hultgren, 2009).

Ephesians 3:18, Paul prays that all the saints may comprehend "breadth and length and height" and "What is the width, length, height, and depth?" Paul uses metaphors to talk about the multidimensional wonder of God, who is powerful (Ephesians 1:19), rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4), abundant in His grace (Ephesians 2:7; 3:7), and rich in wisdom (Ephesians 3:10). The NIV translation takes the liberty of interpreting the verse by adding the words to it: "I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high the heavens, and the depth of Christ's love," (Hultgren, 2009).

Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." This verse shows that the Holy Spirit can help us in prayer, even when we do not know how to express our feelings or needs. The believer's spiritual desires and longings are sourced in the Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts. The Holy Spirit himself groans, sighs, and suffers in us, longing for the final day of redemption (vv. 23-25). He pleads with the Father for our needs "according to the will of God," (vv. 27).

Understanding True Prayer to God

The question arises: Are these prayers addressed to God also the Word of God Himself? This concept may need clarification. However, it becomes clear when we recognize that true prayer originates from Jesus Christ, the Son of God who dwells among us. In His communion with God the Father, he has presented all human needs, joys, gratitude, and hopes before the divine throne. The prayers found within the Bible are, in essence, prayers we offer alongside Jesus Christ, with Him as our guide and intercessor, bringing us into God's presence. True prayer remains elusive without the mediation of Jesus Christ, for it is only through Him that we can genuinely connect with God (Bonhoeffer, 2022, p. 4).

The Church has also incorporated creative interpretations of Biblical texts into its prayers. In the story of the Emmaus journey, the Gospel writer made Jesus himself justify this practice, stating that "He [Jesus] had explained to them what was written about

Himself in all the Scriptures, starting from the books of Moses and all the prophets,” (Luke 24:27) (Tucker, 2013, p. 4). Abraham is a frequent figure in prayers that uses both explicit and subtle typological references. The near-sacrifice of Isaac is a particularly significant Abrahamic narrative that underlies these formulations. This story serves as a powerful illustration of Christ's obedient sacrifice and the subsequent sacrificial role of the Church, and His people. The Sarum Missal's collection of prayers for Pentecost Vigil recited after Genesis 22:1-19, emphasizes this connection (Tucker, 2013, p. 7).

The Bible provides numerous examples of how prayer is closely linked to victory in battles and overcoming threats. Jehoshaphat and his people prepared for a battle by praising God, and God miraculously granted them victory over the invading forces (2 Chronicles 20). Daniel and his friends prayed nightly to prepare for the threat of death (Daniel 2:17-23). Jesus, too, faced temptations while maintaining a prayerful lifestyle (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; Hebrews 5:7). Similarly, Paul was a fervent prayer, both day and night (1 Thessalonians 3:10) (Rosscup, 1995, p. 67).

Praying to the Lord Jesus is a deep desire of His people, not an obligation for believers. Pray to know His will and God to enable His people to carry out His commands and will. Prayer is not just gratitude, supplication, and intercession but also a deep, intimate relationship with the person of God Himself and The attributes that exist within Him.

The Impact of Prayer on Brain Health

Based on research on prayer, namely two types of religious prayer (e.g., intercessory prayer and petitionary prayer) are known to produce increased metabolic brain activity in the Prefrontal cortex (PFC) and anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) using fMRI technology (Leighton, 2021, p. 10; A. B. Newberg et al., 2015). Research by Newberg et al. (2015, pp. 214, 219) revealed that intense prayer, particularly when accompanied by a sense of surrender, was linked to decreased activity in the brain's frontal region. Conversely, research by Leighton (2021, p. iv) found no significant difference in alpha Cortical spreading depression (CSD) in the studied brain regions. While this study did not confirm activation in the prefrontal cortex or anterior cingulate cortex, it did show increased activity, expanding the theory of temporal lobe epilepsy and parietal junction involvement during religious practices. This suggests a need for more extensive research to delve deeper into the neurophysiological effects of prayer. Research of Dobrakowski et al. (2020) showed no significant differences in the frontal areas often noted in previous studies.

Brain scan studies have shown that meditation strengthens specific brain circuits, including the prefrontal and orbital-frontal lobes, anterior cingulate, basal ganglia, and thalamus, which tend to deteriorate with age (A. Newberg & Waldman, 2009; Pardo et al., 2007). These circuits play a crucial role in various cognitive functions such as

awareness, clear thinking, reality perception, error detection, empathy, compassion, emotional balance, and anger/fear control. When these circuits malfunction or weaken, they can contribute to conditions like depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and schizophrenia. Incorporating prayer meditation into spiritual practices can help maintain health and improve the functioning of these vital brain circuits (A. Newberg & Waldman, 2009).

These studies demonstrate how awesome God is, the creator and owner of humans. God owns human minds with all their intelligence, but God's wisdom and will are His mystery; God wants to reveal it to His people through prayer and His word. Whatever you want to think, say, and do, always pray to Him. God wants to reveal His person personally to each of His people. The contribution of this writing provides a new understanding that prayer is not just asking, requesting, and seeking but also experiencing the dimension of God in the depth of His love. Believers cultivate prayer in the church community, mission, and study of God's word to understand, apply and experience the depth of God's love poured out on His people.

CONCLUSION

This study found that prayer is a way to communicate with the All-Loving God. Although humans have different backgrounds, all have the opportunity to experience a personal relationship with God through prayer. This prayer helps humans to express various feelings and strengthen their relationship with the Triune God. Prayer is not just a ritual but a deep relationship between humans and God. Therefore, through prayer, humans can express various feelings, thoughts, and profound hopes to God. In various traditions and cultures of prayer, the essence of prayer remains the same, namely communicating with the Creator. This diversity enriches the human understanding of prayer and reveals how vital the human need is to relate to God. Prayer becomes a unifying meeting point for believers with different backgrounds and cultures. All worship the same God, although in different ways—prayer as an expression of the heart to the Triune God. Prayer is communication with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The person of God provides strength, comfort, and guidance to His people. The application of prayer to the world of missions is to act as an effective instrument for evangelism missions. Through prayer, believers can ask for wisdom and strength to share the gospel of Christ with others and lead them to Christ. The goal is to experience the full and deep love of God. Christian education is essential in forming the younger generation through a healthy prayer life. Through learning about prayer and its consistent application, teachers and students can grow in faith and knowledge of God.

Competing interests

The author declares that no competing interest exists.

Author contributions

H.W. conceptualized and wrote the study and drafted the manuscript. P.S.C. and Q.C.W have reviewed, edited the manuscript, and participated in proofreading article writing.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

All authors contributed to this research, both in writing, collecting data and pouring it into writing articles.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

REFERENCES

- Anstey, M. (2012). 29 th July: Proper 12. *The Expository Times*, 123(9), 452–454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524612444088d>
- Baesler, E. J. (2002). Prayer and Relationship with God II: Replication and Extension of the Relational Prayer Model. *Review of Religious Research*, 44(1), 58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512157>
- Best, E. (1998). *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*. Bloomsbury Publishing (UK). <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472555991>
- Bonhoeffer, D. (2022). *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*. Broadleaf Books.
- Brown, S. A. (2012). *Commentary on Ephesians 3:14-21*. Working Preacher. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-17-2/commentary-on-ephesians-314-21>
- Calabro, D. M. (2013). Gestures of Praise: Lifting and Spreading the Hands in Biblical Prayer. In J. R. Chadwick, M. J. Grey, & D. R. Seely (Eds.), *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament (2013 Sperry Symposium)* (pp. 105–121). <https://rsc.byu.edu/ascending-mountain-lord/gestures-praise-lifting-spreading-hands-biblical-prayer>
- Cocksworth, A. (2023). When prayer goes wrong: A negative theology of prayer. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 76(1), 10–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930622000692>
- Comfort, P. W., Davids, P. H., & Hoehner, H. W. (2008). *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
- Dobrakowski, P., Blaszkiewicz, M., & Skalski, S. (2020). Changes in the Electrical Activity of the Brain in the Alpha and Theta Bands during Prayer and Meditation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(24), 9567.

- <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17249567>
- Guilherme, A. (2012). God as Thou and Prayer as Dialogue: Martin Buber's Tools for Reconciliation. *Sophia*, 51(3), 365–378. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-011-0282-0>
- Hjalmarson, L. E. (2013). A Trinitarian Spirituality of Mission. *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, 6(1), 93–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/193979091300600109>
- Hoehner, H. W. (2002). *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Baker Academic.
- Hultgren, A. J. (2009). Commentary on Ephesians 3:14-21. In *Working Preacher*. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-17-2/commentary-on-ephesians-314-21-2>
- Kamudzandu, I. (2021). Commentary on Ephesians 3:14-21. In *Working Preacher*. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-17-2/commentary-on-ephesians-314-21-5>
- Karman, Y. (2019). Abraham Inklusif: Sebuah Titik Temu Trialog Agama-agama Abrahamik. *Jurnal Jaffray*, 17(2), 185. <https://doi.org/10.25278/jj.v17i2.321>
- Krikac, K. T. (2024). *Pauline Ethics And Prayer In Ephesians: Paul's Prayers In Theological And Paraenetical Perspective* [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School]. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/f7c48f238672da6a4fd0ba5f8904a2ed/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Leighton, J. S. (2021). *The Effects of Different Types of Prayer on the Neurophysiological Functions among Evangelical Christians*. Grand Canyon University.
- Lincoln, A. T. (1990). *Word Biblical Commentary 42: Ephesians*. Thomas Nelson Inc.
- Luhrmann, T. M., & Morgain, R. (2012). Prayer as Inner Sense Cultivation: An Attentional Learning Theory of Spiritual Experience. *Ethos*, 40(4), 359–389. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2012.01266.x>
- Luhrmann, T. M., Nusbaum, H., & Thisted, R. (2013). “Lord, Teach Us to Pray”: Prayer Practice Affects Cognitive Processing. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 13(1–2), 159–177. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685373-12342090>
- Mare, W. H. (1965). Paul's Mystery in Ephesians 3. *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 8(2), 77–84.
- May, A. (2023). God in dialogue with His creation. *Khazanah Theologia*, 5(1), 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.15575/kt.v5i1.20197>
- Newberg, A. B., Wintering, N. A., Yaden, D. B., Waldman, M. R., Reddin, J., & Alavi, A. (2015). A case series study of the neurophysiological effects of altered states of mind during intense Islamic prayer. *Journal of Physiology-Paris*, 109(4–6), 214–220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jphysparis.2015.08.001>
- Newberg, A., & Waldman, M. R. (2009). *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist*. Random House Publishing Group.

- Pardo, J. V., Lee, J. T., Sheikh, S. A., Surerus-Johnson, C., Shah, H., Munch, K. R., Carlis, J. V., Lewis, S. M., Kuskowski, M. A., & Dysken, M. W. (2007). Where the brain grows old: Decline in anterior cingulate and medial prefrontal function with normal aging. *NeuroImage*, 35(3), 1231–1237. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2006.12.044>
- Peterson, B. (2015). Commentary on Ephesians 3:14-21. In *Working Preacher*. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-17-2/commentary-on-ephesians-314-21-3>
- Poloma, M. M., & Lee, M. T. (2011). From Prayer Activities to Receptive Prayer: Godly Love and the Knowledge that Surpasses Understanding. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 39(2), 143–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164711103900205>
- Rabie-Boshoff, A. C., & Buitendag, J. (2020). Jesus: Divine relationality and suffering creation. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 76(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6128>
- Reif, S. C., & Egger-Wenzel, R. (Eds.). (2015). *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions*. DE GRUYTER. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110369083>
- Rosscup, J. E. (1995). The Importance of Prayer in Ephesians. *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 6(1), 57–78.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. Free Press.
- Shauf, S. (2018). Commentary on Ephesians 3:14-21. In *Working Preacher*. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-17-2/commentary-on-ephesians-314-21-4>
- Stott, J. (2014). *Christ the Controversial (Kristus Sang Kontroversial): Meneladani Pelayanan dan Pengajaran Yesus yang Radikal*. Literatur Perkantas Jatim.
- Stott, J. (2017). *Reading Ephesians with John Stott: 11 Weeks for Individuals or Groups*. InterVarsity Press.
- Thigpen, L. L. (2023). How a Novel Research Framework Resulted in Fruitful Evangelism and Discovery : Introducing Ethnoscapy and Spiritual Patronage How a Novel Research Framework Resulted in Fruitful Evangelism and Discovery : Introducing Ethnoscapy and Spiritual Patronage. *Great Commission Research Journal* Volume, 15(2), 25–43. <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol15/iss2/2%0AThis>
- Tucker, K. B. W. (2013). Scriptural Typology and Allegory in Liturgical Prayer. *Liturgy*, 28(2), 4–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2013.746904>
- van der Merwe, D. G. (2020). The Christian spirituality of the love of God: Conceptual and experiential perspectives emanating from the Gospel of John. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 41(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2130>
- Van der Merwe, D. G. (2022). The 'lived experiences' of the love of God according to a

- prayer in the letter of Ephesians. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 43(1).
<https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2421>
- van Oudtshoorn, A. (2013). Prayer and Practical Theology. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16(2), 285–303. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2012-0018>
- Werline, R. A. (2014). Prayer, Politics, and Power in the Hebrew Bible. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 68(1), 5–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964313508738>
- Whitney, D. S. (2014). *Spiritual disciplines for the Christian life* (Revised an). NavPress Publishing Group.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=703439>
- Wijaya, H., Sumigar, R. E. B., Lele, A. F., & Frederik, H. (2023). Virtual Worship and Spiritual Growth in Digital Church Era. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Theology, Humanities and Christian Education 2022 (ICONTHCE 2022)*, 333–340. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-160-9_36
- Zscheile, D. J. (2012). A Missional Theology of Spiritual Formation. In D. J. Zscheile (Ed.), *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation* (Missional, pp. 1–28). Eerdmans. https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/302