

Series: Life in the Body
Title: A Life Beating With Love
Text: Ephesians 3:14-21
Felt Need: Out of His love, God provides amazing strength for us to do more than all we ask or imagine.
Desired Outcome: God is a holy heartbeat, anxious to live in us, love us, guide us, lift us up and empower us into becoming a new people. God's impressive power beats inside us, able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope.
Key Word: (Immeasurable) **Strengths:** prayer...internal...mental...spiritual (Holy Spirit)
Image: Heart

CW Question: What are some ways in which we use the word, "Heart?"

When people hear the word "heart" they think of many things. Many would immediately see a heart that pumps blood throughout the body. Some think of any place that is at the center. For example, the city of Troy has a fountain in the heart of downtown. Others think of that vital or core part. As a former football player, I believe that the interior line is the heart of a football team. Others think of the emotional core of the human personality. People say he has a kind heart, or she has brave heart. Others would think of the rock band, "Heart" who sold thirty million albums world wide, with such hit singles as "Crazy on You, Magic Man and Barracuda."

People say, "Joe goes after my heart with his Wednesday night dinners." They mean that his cooking suits them just perfectly. When I was in high school I had a girl friend that broke my heart. People can have a change of heart concerning an opinion or position they had. Over twenty years ago I lost my heart to Melinda. We tell someone who is afraid to take heart. Here at Tipp City UMC we are committed to having the heart of Christ by growing in our love relationship with Him. It seems to me that the word "heart" often refers to life.

As we begin this series on “Life in the Body” we see that Paul refers to the heart, the core, the life circulating power of the Christian and the Church. In some ways, his letter to the Ephesians centers on how their “change of heart can change the world.” Because of Jesus’ love change is possible. Because of Jesus’ love, one person, one community, can make a difference in the world. Because of Jesus a life beating with love is available.

Some might ask, if God's loving power is out there, where is it? How do I get it?" How can I have a change of heart so that either my world will change or my view of the world changes?

Paul, reveals a spiritual strength which enable us to possess God’s greatest unlimited resource, love. It is the internal heart-beat of the Holy Spirit who wants to reside within.

Paul uses the phrase "*glorious, unlimited resources.*" God has it all. He owns it all. The Lord says, "*All the world is mine and everything in it.*" (Psalm 50:12) He can give you anything he wants—money, possessions, prestige, success, a life of privilege—he can give you His very best. So what does he choose to give you?

He wants to give us the ability to know the strength of His love. He takes love so seriously that he defines himself by it. The Bible says *God is love*. To experience the fullness of God in our life we must develop an inkling of the awesomeness of his love. In this lifetime we will only scratch the surface of understanding God's love. Paul said... "*May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully*

understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God." (v19)

His love is beyond comprehension. We will never *fully* understand it, but we can at least *begin* to understand it. August Hare said that "Love flows downward. The love of parents for their children has always been far more powerful than that of children for their parents. In the same way, no man has ever loved God with more than 1/1000th of the love that God has given us."

Think of children. Think of how totally dependent they are on the parents--how vulnerable, how helpless, and how the parents want to be everything in the world to them. There were times when they have to say no and the children didn't understand. There were times when the children had to be corrected, and they never like it.. And there were times, if you're like me, when parent's think, "If you just understood how much I love you, you wouldn't question why I think it's so important that you clean your room."

God loves you far more than any parent could love a child. As Augustine said, "*God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.*" Paul's prayer is that we will grasp it. God's love is so long that it extends beyond the length of our lives. His love is so deep that it reaches into the depths of discouragement, despair, and even death. His love is so wide that it covers the breadth of human experience. His love is so high that it rises to the heights of celebration and elation. Whenever we feel shut out or isolated remember that you can never be beyond the reach of God's love.

God's love is the heart beat of every relationship. Over twenty years ago I began pastoral ministry. The Lord sent Melinda & I to a small-rural congregation in North-central Kentucky. And though it was, overall, a valuable experience, I had the feeling that something was missing in my work as a pastor.

I took discipline very seriously. For me, proof of spirituality was found in consistency: daily Bible study, daily prayer, witnessing to at least one person a day, memorizing scripture, being involved in a weekly small group, and so on. This attitude spilled into my ministry. It was taught implicitly, if not explicitly. I urged my congregation to practice strict spiritual disciplines. However, I didn't go as far as some who equated mature spirituality with how clean ones house or car was, how well one maintained ones physical appearance and weight, and how sharp ones organizational skills were. In fact, some would go so far in saying that drinking soft drinks was considered as unholy.

Spiritual consistency is a key to growing as a radiant follower of Christ. Daily prayer and Bible study are essential to a dynamic spiritual life. Yes, it is best to keep the house clean and yard mowed and life organized. All these things are good...and yet I sensed something was missing from my ministry. I was learning and doing work that I love, but I had the nagging idea that, somehow, I wasn't doing enough....I wasn't really fulfilling the work of the church. I would think of other types of groups and churches—such as a winning sports team, or a successful business or a local county seat church that increased in average worship attendance by 160 people in four years. Such groups were

driven by hard work, discipline, consistency, and organization. It seemed to me that the *only difference between them and our rural church was the name on the sign.*

Something was missing.

One day at Asbury Seminary, I confessed this emptiness to a friend. He reminded me of these words from the book of Philippians, where Paul writes... *and this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.”*

(Philippians 1:9) At that moment this word was God’s clear Word. I realized that in the midst of all my good works there was a missing element in my ministry. It was love. Good, old-fashioned love.

Without love, we're just robots...organized, disciplined robots. Love puts us in a league of our own. It is the best thing we have to offer the world. Discipline, consistency, and organizational skills are great to have—but they are no match for love. Given a choice between having a staff member or ministry leader that is organized and having a servant leader that loves people, I'll choose the one who loves people every time. Pearl Bailey once said. "What the world really needs is more love and less paperwork." The Christian life is a life of love. Love should permeate every aspect of our life. Paul says, “...*Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.*” ^(v17,18) Rooted in love. Understanding his love. Experiencing his love. The heart of a Christ-follower is to be immersed in God's love.

The Franklin E. Robinson American Legion Post # 586 experiences a new surge of God's love. As the post's chaplain, Melissa Fowle brings God's love into this community. According to the Dayton Daily News, Post Commander Jim Vaughn says, "She is a diamond in the rough. She is very dedicated to what she does. She has a genuinely caring heart." Melissa offers God's love to Post members who are hospitalized or are in a nursing home. God is transforming this community's public image of a bar to a family gathering area by coordinating wholesome family activities. One wonders how this full time mom, American Sign Language Interpreter, active church volunteer in children's ministry has the time and energy to extend the heart of Christ to others.

You too may be asking: "How does that happen? How can I be filled with such a loving, unlimited resource that strengthens me to accomplish the unaccomplishable, to do the undoable, and to achieve the unachievable? Here are some simple steps: **First, accept that only Jesus provides us with this abundant and fruitful life.** Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.*" (John 10:10)

Second, believe that a Christian's self-reliance can be self-defeating. Those who rely upon themselves struggle with legalistic attitudes, impure thoughts, jealousy, guilt, worry, discouragement, a critical spirit, and frustration. Paul describes it this way, "*For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do...As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*" Romans 7

Third, call upon the Holy Spirit to deliver you from this bondage of self to freedom in the Holy Spirit. When one becomes a Christian the Holy Spirit comes into the believer. Christians must also call upon the Holy Spirit daily to direct, lead, and empower their lives. Jesus said, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”*

(John 7:37) Yield to the Spirit’s power by coming to Jesus and drinking from His life giving water. Let’s go and drink from streams of living water, let’s pray:

Benediction:

Repeat after me: He is able! He is able to do! He is able to do exceeding abundantly! Above all that we ask or think! Amen.