

Question: Have you ever prayed a prayer you thought was a bit too much. To grand. To nervy. Even impossible to be answered. It may have been for a personal crisis. The salvation of a loved one. The planting of a church in a difficult area. It could be a million things that we think are to difficult, to nervy to even ask for.

A. Well do I have a study for you. Here is our answer.

Eph 3:14–21 (ESV) 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.

Here is our passage this morning: ⁽²⁰⁾ *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ⁽²¹⁾ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

1. Paul ends his prayer with this great doxology of praise

- A. Honestly – how else could he end it
 - 1). He has prayed for things that are stunning - breath-taking
- B. After praying that we would experience the incredible love of God in a real way
 - After asking that we would be filled with the fullness of God
 - 1). You can't go any higher! You can't ask for anything greater than that
 - 2). So what else is there to do than praise the God who is willing to give that to us

Thought: I picture Paul writing this letter – he finishes this prayer God has inspired him to write
He stops – re-reads it – then leans back in amazement

- A. He thinks about Almighty God – holy and just stooping in such grace to sinners
 - 1). Perhaps he thinks about who he was when he was saved – his hatred for Christ
Personally hunting down his followers – to imprison and even put to death
 - 2). I'm sure he knew some who had even mocked Christ on the cross – who were saved
 - a). Maybe even those who had spit on him
- B. All this just floors Paul – What grace to underserving sinners – all he can do is praise God
 - 1). Remember he's writing under inspiration – so his writing is moving him too!
 - 2). He's been writing about the wonders of grace throughout the grace

Example: Eph 1:4-6 (NIV) For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love (5) he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- (6) to the praise of his glorious *grace*, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Eph 1:7 (NIV) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with *the riches of God's grace*

Eph 2:4-5 (NIV) But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, (5) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--*it is by grace you have been saved.*

- a). I'm sure it's been building until he can't contain it any longer
Finally his heart explodes in spontaneous praise

- C. He was just experiencing a foretaste of what it will be like in heaven

You see this in Rev 4:9–11 (ESV) And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ⁽¹⁰⁾ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ⁽¹¹⁾ “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

- 1). Do you think they had just taken a “falling down - casting crowns seminar”
“You fall face first – but be careful we don’t want any injuries now. Then take your crown off and throw it kind of like a frisbee towards the feet of God. You can do that before or after your on the ground. Just let the Spirit lead you.”
- 2). No! They fell before God in spontaneous praise and worship because they couldn’t help it
 - a). They saw Him – they saw beauty – majesty - love – their heart responded
 - b). But we don’t have to wait for heaven to experience that
 - 1a).

Thought: The Bible gives us enough fuel to ignite our hearts

- A. Where we see his kindness, grace, love and mercy that is the fuel that feeds devotion
- B. We see how He has reached down into the ugliness of our sin and rescued us
 - 1). Think of this. He has pursued us when we wanted to be left alone
 - 2). He has drawn us when we wanted him to stay away
 - 3). He has removed that hostility we had towards him and enables us to believe
- C. This is why I love good, solid theology – it gives God all the glory for our salvation
 - 1). Where would we be without him? Lost! Rushing towards hell! Clinging to the sin we love
 - 2). Heading towards that day of judgment with 1000’s of sins on the books
Looking into an eternity with no possibility of mercy – only unending misery
 - 3). But he came – he stood in the way – he bore our judgment and suffered our torment
 - 4). He adopted us to be in his family and promised to care for us
 - 5). He gave us the Holy Spirit as a down payment so we would know we’ll be with him
- D. What grace. What a salvation! What a Savior!
As I was studying I thought of this hymn *“Man of sorrows”*

“Man of Sorrows” what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim
Hallelujah, what a Savior

Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In my place condemned He stood
Sealed my pardon with His blood
Hallelujah, what a Savior

Guilty vile and helpless we
Spotless Lamb of God was He
Full atonement can it be
Hallelujah, what a Savior

Lifted up was He to die
“It is finished!” was His cry
Now in heaven exalted high
Hallelujah, what a Savior

When He comes, our glorious King
All His ransomed home to bring
Then anew this song we’ll sing

Hallelujah, what a Savior

Transition: With that said let's start to dig into this wonderful doxology

- A. Paul is praising God but there are some things here that are so vital for us to understand
 - 1). He is going to once again bring before us the thought of the power of God

I. THE POWER OF GOD

1. One of the primary themes of Ephesians is God's power

- A. We find this in Paul's first prayer

Eph 1:18-19 (NIV) I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, (19) *and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,*
- B. When we went through this we saw why Paul used the resurrection as an example of power
 - 1). Hell knew if Jesus Christ rose from the grave it was over – that was their certain defeat
 - a). Therefore we believe that every demon in hell tried to stop the resurrection
 - b). But God easily defeated the combined power of hell
 - 2). We pointed out – if the combined power of hell couldn't stop Christ – it can't stop you
 - a). The resurrection was easy for God – no contest against all the power of hell
 - 1a). The Satanic forces arrayed against you are nothing in comparison
 - 3). I know Christians who are so afraid of the devil – devil this - devil that
 - a). Quit focusing on him – gaze upon the beauty of Christ instead
 - b). The devil's a loser – he's been defeated soundly – easily – no contest
 - 1a). The one who is in you controls him with a simple word
 - c). He can only touch your life when God gives permission (Job 1)

And God will only give permission if he's going to use it for your good (Rom 8:28)
- C. Here is comforting truth - If all the power of hell couldn't stop the resurrection of Christ
 - 1). The devil is not going to be able to stop your resurrection – you will be with God

Thought: Paul longs for you to know the amazing power of God available to you – IN YOU
- A. if you can understand this and believe it you will never stagger in unbelief in any circumstance
 - 1). What could hold you back from attempting great things for God

Dan 11:32 (NKJV) ... the people who know their God shall be strong, *and carry out great exploits.*

 - a). Those who understand his sovereignty and great power – what can stop them who can stop them – they step out in confidence

Josh 1:9 (NIV) Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, **(WHY?)** for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Transition: So he describes the power available by using the resurrection as an example in chapter 1

- A. But here in chapter 3 he describes it in another form

2. Paul struggles here to define the undefinable

- A. He knows what he wants to get across – but it is beyond human vocabulary
 - 1). The incredible blessings in this prayer – and the power necessary to bring them about
 - 2). It's almost as if he buckles under the weight of this truth
- B. So he tries to bridge the gap between his words and this reality by piling one superlative upon another

NKJV puts it this way: Eph 3:20-21 (NKJV) Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...

I can imagine him writing this:

- 1). To him who is able to do *exceedingly* above all things – no not enough
 To him who is able to do exceedingly *abundantly* – getting there – but still needs more
 To him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly *above* – better
 - a). To him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above WHAT?
- 2). All that we *ask* – no not enough
 All that we ask or can even *think* or *imagine* – better
 - a). Each superlative adding more to the magnitude of this truth
- 3). Here is one of the reasons Paul started with the Spirit isn't it
 "You strengthen them in the inner man – you give them understanding – I'll give it my best shot but all I have is words – human words – please take my words and enlarge them."

Question: Why does the Apostle want us to get this so badly?

- A. Why not just say he's almighty God and leave it at that?
 - 1). Here it is – ready? Because his prayer was so bold – we could doubt its possible
- B. He wants us to see the willingness and the power of God to answering our prayers – this prayer

The Question I started with: Have you ever prayed and thought your prayer was to daring – to bold – to nery – to impossible?

- A. Paul doesn't want you to think that way about this prayer or any prayer
 - 1). So he says - God is exceedingly, abundantly able to do more than we can ask or think
 - a). What I'm asking for you in this prayer is not to daring – not to nery
 God is both willing and capable of doing this

3. The lesson: There is nothing to big to ask God for

- A. I love people of faith – I love those old saints that just trusted God for great things
 - 1). You see this in John Newton's great hymn

 Thou art coming to a King,
 Large petitions with thee bring;
 For His grace and power are such,
 None can ever ask too much.
 - 2). John Newton bids us when we ask to remember who we are asking of
 - a). Our Father who loves to answer our prayers
 - b). Our Father who is King and owns everything in this world and has the resources
Deu 10:14 (NIV) To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.
Psa 89:11 (NKJV) The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all its fullness, You have founded them.
 - c). Our Father who defeated the combined power of hell – who has the power
 - 3). John Newton is saying ask in a way that reflects who your asking from
 - a). If you're seeking support for a cause from a billionaire – you don't ask for a dime
 You lay it out – you bring the big numbers because big numbers are nothing to him

Point: Don't be afraid to ask – don't think it bothers God – *He loves big faith because it honors him*

- A. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water – Lord if its you bid me to come
 - 1). I imagine there was a smile on Jesus face when Peter's feet hit that water

Because that faith honored God – it trusted Christ to enable him to do what was impossible

George Muller: Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends.

a). God loves it when we trust him for the impossible

B. Let me try to illustrate how faith honors God

1). Ever seen a dad in a pool with his young son – trying to get them to jump from the side

a). The dad gives him promises – I'll catch you – trust me - jump

b). If the kid jumps that honors the dad doesn't it – I trust you will keep your promise

c). If the kid won't it dishonors the dad – I hear you and I don't trust you

C. Big faith honors God – it says “You said you can do exceedingly, abundantly above anything I can ask.... So here goes. I'm asking big. Bigly”

DMLJ: “Let the whole church bring impossible requests – daring petitions – believing for great things”

1). There is no danger of exceeding the limit of God's power

For His grace and power are such,

None can ever ask too much.

Transition: That's good – even great – but Paul still thinks it's not enough

A. Just asking is to weak – Paul piles on “Or think” NIV or “Imagine”

Eph 3:20-21 (NKJV) Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or *think*, (NIV *imagine*) according to the power that works in us...

II. MORE THAN WE CAN EVEN THINK OR IMAGINE

1. There is a vast difference between what we ask and what we think

A. Thought or imagination is next level stuff

B. Our thoughts go far beyond what we dare ask – our imaginations can be amazing things - huge

1). So to encourage us Paul takes it out to the extreme

2). Listen God is willing to do *exceedingly abundantly more* than anything you could ask

But that's nothing – he is willing to do *exceedingly abundantly more* than you can even imagine

a). Those things that are so big you would never have the nerve to ask for

b). Those dreams we think are far too impossible to happen

Point: We can never ask to much – we can never dream to big or think to high

A. We dare not let little things like impossibilities stop us

Transition: But if we're honest our faith is not usually shut down by impossibilities

Many times it only takes difficulty to stop us – defeat us – let's look at that

2. Limiting God

A. So easy to skip asking God for things if they look really hard – this ones just to difficult – don't bother

1). I wonder if the angels look at us in amazement – “You do know he created the universe. Right?”

B. Our God is to small! God rebuked Israel in Ps 50:21 – “You thought I was exactly like you.”

1). That's our problem we think he's like us – if it is hard for me – it is hard for God

a). If I can't figure out how it could happen it probably won't happen

C. So instead of asking and trusting – we immediately move to plan B

Something that is easier for us to figure out

1). Something where God doesn't get nearly as much glory or any glory at all

a). It is our plan – done in our timing and in our way

- C. Be careful with plan B's – They can turn out to be so much worse
- 1). See this with Sarah – Abraham's wife – God says she will have a son in her old age
 - a). God delays – it's difficult - she gets to an age where it seems impossible
 - b). She panics and runs to plan B – Sends Abraham to sleep with Hagar - handmaid
 - 1a). Hagar becomes pregnant and Ishmael is born
 - 2a). That choice is still having repercussions – conflict between Isaac and Ishmael - Jews and Arabs – Islam and Christianity
- All a result of taking matters into their own hand and running to plan B

Point: Not saying there is never a plan B – just saying pray a lot before you flee to it

- A. Don't go there just because things aren't easy or difficult
- 1). Who ever said things would be easy – where do you see that in the Bible?
 - a). I see warfare – Satanic and human resistance
 - b). I also see God in his way and timing – overcoming the obstacles

Transition: Back to our prayer – there is so much encouragement here

- A. Remember how Paul started it
- Look at: Eph 3:16 (ESV)** that *according to the riches of his glory* he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
- 1). We've needed to be strengthened for all of this
 - a). To be able to understand the greatness of the blessings available to you
 - b). To overcome our flesh and surrender – so Christ is at home
 - c). To understand a love that is beyond human understanding
 - d). To be filled with the fullness of God
- B. Now we come to verse 20 and we need power again
- 1). Divine enabling that will move us to pray and believe to this degree
 - a). To take God at His word and ask and dream in a way that is appropriate
- C. Did you see how much God gets involved?
- Eph 3:16 (ESV)** that *according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened* with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
- 1). It is according to the riches of his glory = all that he is!
 - a). Paul is saying God is not passive about any of this – no halfhearted effort on his part
God puts all that he is into blessing you with these blessings
He brings all he is – all his resources to answer your prayers

Point: What an encouragement to stretch your desires – to not ask to little

What is it you are asking for? Does this challenge you – us as a church?

1. Let me read you a story from Nine Marks Ministry – extremely sound

- A. It's about a church that began to pray in a specific way
- La Plata Baptist Church is a small rural church in Southern Maryland. Our history was not marked by ethnic diversity in attendance or in membership. But few years ago, during our Sunday evening service, we began asking God to grow us in ethnic diversity, for his glory. In the last 6 months, our church has grown exponentially in this way. God has transformed our congregation into a place where people of all backgrounds feel loved and welcome, and we are thrilled at the growth God has given us because only he could do this work. I know this will cause our church to pursue humility and unity even more. We pray our community will take notice at this love in our congregation so that people will come to Christ for salvation.
- 1). Let's do that – let's believe God for great things for this church
 - 2). We've been praying and it hasn't happened yet – so what!

- a). Why did God put in the parable of the persistent widow
So we would pray and not faint – don’t wilt – soldier up!

2. The Bible is filled with incredible answers to prayer

- A. Hannah is infertile, and she prays desperately for a son. (1 Samuel)
 - 1). God answers her prayer and she has Samuel one of the greatest prophets in Israel
And three more sons and two daughters
 - B. Peter is in prison and the church prays for his release. (Acts 12:5)
 - 1). No problem – God sends an angel who opens the prison doors – Peter walks free
 - C. Jerusalem is under siege and Hezekiah prays to save the people (2 Kings 19)
 - 1). Lord sends an angel who kills 185,000 Assyrians in one night
 - 2). The siege is immediately over
 - D. Jairus asks Jesus to heal his daughter so she won’t die (Mark 5)
 - 1). She is raised from the dead
 - E. Moses asks to see God’s glory (Ex. 33)
 - 1). God answers that prayer – after glory – face glowing
 - D. Daniel prays for God to reveal Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to save his friends lives (Dan. 2)
 - 1). God gave Daniel the interpretation – and his friends were saved
- Point:** We could go on and on and on – the Bible is filled with God’s amazing power for his people
- A. What are you praying for? What should you be praying for?
 - 1). What would be stopping you – the difficulty – not for God

CONCLUSION

1. Does this challenge you – “go big or go home”

- A. God is doing all he can to instill a bold confidence – a large faith – to ask – to dream
 - 1). To attempt great things for him
- B. This is God exalting – faith producing – doubt defeating truth
 - 1). You can never ask too much – or dream too big