

November 9, 2008
“Exceedingly Abundantly Above”
Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20 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...

Exceedingly abundantly above... Paul is straining to find the words to adequately express how far the possibility of the divine working extends. This verse tells us that not only can God do all things (for it says, “to Him who is able...” God is able to do all things), not only is God able, He can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask and not only can He do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask, He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can even think or imagine.

Ephesians 3:20 AMP

Now to Him Who, by (in consequence of) the [action of His] power that is at work within us, is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly, far over *and* above all that we [dare] ask or think [infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes, or dreams] ...

This means that we can pray big! Because God is able! Don't be afraid or hesitant to pray big. Pray for that healing, pray for that seemingly impossible situation to change, pray for the impossible...He is the God of the impossible. All things are possible with God. So let's stretch desires and thoughts to their utmost.

As a matter of fact we can expect that the answer to our prayers will be more than the request. When He answers a prayer there is always more bestowed by God than we receive. God is doing more than we know at the time. Even while we possess an answer to our prayer, there is more that God is doing. There is what we see God doing and what we don't see yet. It is like receiving a gift but not realizing how truly precious that gift is when you first receive it.

I was trying to think of an example; this one is kind of trivial but ...When I was in the Army I had orders to go to Viet Nam. We were told to report to Camp Lewis in the state of Washington and to only bring what we were wearing, which at that time of year was our short-sleeved, khaki uniform and not bring anything else. The reason was that there would be a whole new issue of special clothing specifically for Viet Nam, jungle fatigues and boots etc.

However, there was a problem in Korea at this time and the U.S. wanted to beef up the troops there. I was included in a small troop of men whose orders were changed from

Viet Nam to Korea. Now, that was good , but there was only one problem, it took 2 weeks for us to be notified of this, and all that time I had only the one short-sleeved, khaki uniform to wear. I went to speak to someone who worked in supply about being re-issued my uniforms. I was told that we would receive our new issue when we got to Korea. I asked, “Isn’t it kind of cold in Korea? All I have is this short-sleeved, khaki uniform. Do you think I could have an over coat or something?” He told me we was not suppose to issue me anything...so I begged. He grabbed an overcoat and told me to take it and go. I put it on and it was huge...down to the floor, sleeves several inches past my hands. I asked if it could be altered. He said first of all he wasn’t supposed to give it to me and second of all there would be no time to have it altered (we were being shipped out soon). I had to take the overcoat as is.

Well, I have to tell you that my first night in Korea I was in a holding camp just for the night and it was really, really cold. To make it worse, I was assigned to a barracks with no heat, no sheets, no blankets, and no pillow; just a bunk bed with a mattress. I was freezing (and if anyone knows me well enough, you know I’m even cold when others aren’t). Well, I took off my shoes ...only, That was the only piece of clothing I took off (I may even have left my hat on!) and put my shoes under my head for a pillow, then I wrapped that huge over coat around me like a blanket; and although I was not a follower of Jesus at the time I was thanking God that night for that overcoat. It was certainly a gift when it was given to me, when I begged for it, but I didn’t realized at the time that it was given to me just how precious a gift it was.

God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask.

But I wonder, if God is able to do far and above all we ask or think, why do we not always see that happening when we pray? If God is able, then my only conclusion can be that there must be something wrong with us. As we look at our text again we find that there is a condition to this promise. The text says, God is able “according to His power *that is at work within us...*” In other words, is God’s power at work within you? And the power we are talking about is the power of the Spirit of God dwelling within. How can we have that power?

First you must receive Christ. When we become followers of Christ His Spirit becomes one with our spirit, and the power of His Spirit is at work within us. In Acts 2:38 (NLT), Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins. *Then* you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

When we are sorry for our sins, thank Jesus for dying for us, and ask Him to please come into our lives, we receive the Holy Spirit (sorry, thank you, and please). We must be changed from being cold toward God to become children of God. John 1:12 (NLT) But to all who believed him (Christ) and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

So, that's first. For God to be able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, it will be according to the power of His Spirit that works in us, when we receive Christ.

But I am afraid that we have a form of Christianity in America whereby someone makes a decision for Christ and that's it. What we don't see enough of are Christians who are living a life wholly committed to Christ. Christians are enthusiastic about "getting people saved," but where is the passion for and patience with the process of discipleship and faith formation.

Unfortunately, outsiders do not see much difference in how they live and how Christians live. Outsiders reject Christianity not because they don't know about Christ but because they do know about Him, but have observed Christians, and fail to see many that look like Christ or what He taught. They don't see anything appetizing. They don't see transformed lives.

Now, even as I say this, there is a caution. Christianity is not just about rules, regulations, and living sinless lives. First of all we must not define Christianity by what we don't do. It would be better to define Christianity by what we do...we must exhibit genuine love for others, show compassion in action, feed the hungry, help the poor, visit the sick, minister to the hurting, care about others. Unfortunately, we have become known for what we oppose, rather than what we are for. Second, we need to be transparent about our failures to be all we should be, and at the same time transparent about our desire to live a pure life. Let's not pretend we are better than we are, but let's strive to be better. The church is not a place for sinless perfect people, but it is a place where we are striving to be different.

In one study Christians were found to be distinct in areas like owning a Bible and attending religious services but not in other life areas. For example they were just as likely to bet or gamble, visit a pornographic website, take something that didn't belong to them, consult a medium or psychic, to fight with or even abuse someone, to consume enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to use illegal or nonprescription drugs, to have said something to someone that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another's back. ...no difference! (From *Un Christian*, research from the Barna Group, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons).

We must be a people whose thinking is being renewed by the Bible and who then live by that renewed thinking. A people who love God with everything we are, and love others sacrificially; A people who worship God, have spiritual friendship with other believers, pursue faith, are intentional about spiritual growth, serve others, invest time and resources in spiritual pursuits, and have faith-based conversations with those outside the church; People with transformed lives, people who have the power of God working within them. For God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us... to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.