

## **Exceedingly Abundantly More Than all we ask or Think**

Ephesians 3:14-21

#12 in our series from Paul's letter to the Ephesians

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### **Prayer**

Father, Help us to know what we don't know, to think what we haven't thought, and to want what we haven't wanted—Help us to believe the gospel. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Message**

Ephesians 3:14-21

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

The King James Version and the New King James Version translate it like this: *“To him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than all we ask (that word is also translated desire or want) more than all we desire or think (imagine)...to him be glory.*

*“He is able.”* I hope you know He is able.

- Once, I saw and felt as He grew one of my legs; it was crazy.
- I witnessed a friend healed of HIV; we have the lab papers.
- Once, I was literally pinned to the floor by His Spirit.
- Scores and scores of times...

I've seen demons manifest and then flee at the name of Jesus.

Jesus called these things “signs.”

I really hope you know that God is able, and so I hope you pray that He'd pour out His Spirit with “signs and wonders.” He is able. He is able to heal you. He's able to fix your finances. He's able to give you what you want.

It's Christmas time...and what do you want?

I think the greatest thing that I ever got for Christmas was my microscope.

I remember thinking: “If I only had a microscope,”

And then I got it, and it was awesome (I looked at bug antennas for weeks).

And then I stopped.

I began thinking, “If only I had a telescope...*that* would be awesome!”

And that Christmas, I got a telescope, and it was awesome

(I looked at craters on the moon for days). And then I stopped.

I thought: "If only I had an electric race car track."

At Christmas, I got a racecar track, and it was awesome,

But after 8 hours of doing this...

[Peter circles his head round and round]...

Watching the racecars go round and round...

Awesome became a pain in the neck.

I remember one year, Elizabeth saw the buffalo up in Genesee and decided that she wanted a buffalo. She threw a screaming hissy fit because we wouldn't bring one home. Can you imagine a three-year-old and a buffalo in the back yard? That would be hell!

It's a good thing God is able to give us not just what we want...but *more* than what we want because we really don't know what we want, and maybe we want hell.

Jesus said, "*Ask and you shall receive.*"

I've really worried that that's not true, but maybe I should worry it's all *too* true.

C.S. Lewis wrote: "*All get what they want—they don't always like it.*"

All get what they want but not all want what they get.

Lewis wrote a book called *The Great Divorce*, I think it's the best description of Hell (That is *Hades*) that I've ever read. In *The Great Divorce*, everybody gets what they want—Great mansions full of gold, in which each person sits entirely alone.

There was this great *Twilight Zone* episode about some thieves who robbed a train bound for Fort Knox. They take the gold and hide in a cave in Death Valley where a mad scientist had designed suspended animation chambers so they could wake up and enjoy the gold in the future—long after all their enemies were dead. When they do wake up, they fight over the gold until only two remain. Then, walking to civilization, one kills the other for a drink of water and his gold. By the time he reaches a road, he's dying of thirst. A traveler finds him, and he offers him gold for water.

Clip from *Twilight Zone*

Thief: You can have it. You can have it. Drive me to town. If you give me water...I'll give it to you.

Traveler: Poor old fella. I wonder where you came from.

Traveler's Wife: Who is it George? What's the matter with him?

Traveler: Some old tramp, at least he was; now he's dead.

Traveler's Wife: What's that?

Traveler: Gold...that's what he said it was. He wanted to give it to me in exchange for a lift to town.

Traveler's Wife: Gold? What in the world would he be doing with this gold?

Traveler: I don't know. He's probably off his rocker. Can you imagine that? He offered this to me, as if it were really worth something.

Traveler's Wife: You know, wasn't it worth something once George? Didn't people use gold for money.

Traveler: Sure but...a hundred years or so ago, before they found a way of manufacturing it.

[Twilight music plays]

He wanted gold...he got gold, but in the future they know how to make gold. I bet the streets are paved with gold. That means that gold was about as valuable as asphalt—you walk on it. So anyway, the guy got his wish. He wished the people away and got the gold.

When I was a boy, on several occasions, I think I wished my sisters away, that is, I wished my enemies away. My two little sisters didn't respect me or my stuff. I wished they'd leave me alone with my stuff (my guy stuff).

Well, for some reason my father didn't see things the same way. On one particularly bad day, when I was about 6 or 7, my father sat me down and he said, "Peter, listen closely: It's important that you learn to be nice to girls because if you learn to be nice to girls, one day, you might marry a girl. And if you marry a girl, you'll get a really great reward." He didn't specify the reward, just that it would be great. A reward. I pictured microscopes, telescopes, racecar sets and money...you know, gold! We want rewards when we're asked to do what we *don't* want to do.

Jesus said, "*Love your enemies and great will be your reward.*" Can you imagine that reward? He talked about "heavenly rewards." Can you imagine the reward? Heaven! I bet the streets are paved with gold. Well...anyway...

Paul writes, "*Exceedingly abundantly more than all we ask or think* (all we desire or imagine).

How do you imagine more than you imagine?

I don't know exactly, but it seems that Paul wants us to try: Ephesians 3:19 "*To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*" "*Filled with all the fullness of God...*" Can you even begin to imagine that? This is from one of those websites that show the relative size of all things.

Clip revealing the relative size of all things

In this clip, the camera zooms out and we see man at about two meters high. He is then compared to a Redwood tree, dinosaurs, the Eiffel tower, California, the earth, the sun, planets, stars, one light year, the Milky Way Galaxy. We continue zooming out through the universe, until we reach the observable universe. And we see the estimated size of the universe, something like 160 billion light years.

And God spoke all of that into existence with a Word. And Paul prays that you'd be: "*filled with the fullness of God.*" It's hard to imagine how you could make space for all the fullness of God. But just imagine, if you really could be: "*filled with all the fullness of God.*" And imagine the power, power to create a universe. (You could create your own universe. Some people try, and none are happy, and usually they're alone.) But just imagine if you were filled with the fullness of God. You could feed the poor, eradicate disease, and then vacation on your own private island.

Imagine what you could do.

Isn't that exactly what we want? To be: "*filled with all the fullness of God*"?

Do you think God is able to fill you with all the fullness of God?

What would a human being filled with all the fullness of God look like? It's hard to imagine, yet Paul claims we don't have to imagine. We already know: Colossians 2:9 "*In Christ all the fullness of Deity-Godhead dwells bodily.*" What would a man look like "*filled with all the fullness of God*"?

[Image of Jesus on the cross]

He'd look something like this.

Do you still want to be filled with "*all the fullness of God*"?

Maybe not.

We'd like to do what God *could* do but not what God *would* do. And think about it. What God *would* do is exactly what is being done, and if I believed that, I'd never worry, never fear, and sleep on boats in the midst of storms.

Well, we'd like to do what God *could* do and sometimes *does* do.

We'd like to turn water into wine,

Make money appear in fishes' mouths, walk on water and cure disease.

We'd like to do "signs."

We'd like to do what God *could* do but not what He *would* do—what He wills to do.

We can't even imagine wanting to will what He wills to do.

God wills and wants to die for you.

No one took Jesus' life from Him.

He gave it.

He laid it down and wanted to lay it down.

God was in Christ giving His life to you...

And God only does what God wants to do and wills to do.

Jesus said, "*Love your enemies and be like your Father in Heaven.*" You see, no one constrains God to love His enemies. He doesn't say, "Gosh, I really should love my enemies." God is absolutely free; He *wants* to love His enemies.

But make no mistake. The cross hurt. It cost Him. Jesus "*endured the cross, despising the shame,*" yet He wanted to endure the pain for you. I think He actually wanted to suffer for you, and it was suffering. Have you ever loved someone so much that you wanted to suffer for them?

In the garden, Jesus prayed, "*Father if there be another way...never the less not my will but thine be done;*" that's suffering. But how could Jesus have a will contrary to God's will? I suspect that in the garden and hanging on the tree, He bore our will, and He subjected our will to God's will, and that was His will—Love—poured out Grace.

I'm sure I can't adequately explain it, but according to Julian of Norwich, the Lord said to her: "To have ever suffered the passion for you is for me a great joy, a bliss, and an endless delight."

We can barely imagine what God *could* do—His power.

But what God *would* do? His will is beyond our ability to even think.

God created the world and subjected it to futility and allowed you to sin because He wanted to give Himself away, on a tree called a cross in a garden. He wanted to give Himself and all things to you; it makes Him happy!

It's not recorded in the gospels, but in Acts chapter 20, Paul says it to the Ephesian elders as he's about to set sail for Jerusalem where he knows He will be tortured, imprisoned, and will never see them again in his life. It's a Beatitude that sums up all the Beatitudes. He says, "*Remember the word of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed (makarios—happy—to feel happy) to give than receive.'*"

In the garden we took.

On the tree God gave...so we could know The Good.

"*It is more blessed to give than receive.*"

Outside of Jesus, I don't know one person that actually and fully believes that. If I really believed it's more happy to give than receive, wouldn't I be as poor as the poorest person I know? Well, I might have a car and some sort of house with a shower and a change of clothes because I would want a job—so I could make money—so I could give the money away and be happy.

If I won the lottery I'd consider myself thoroughly blessed, not because I received 100 million dollars, but now I could give 100 million dollars away and be happy! People might look and call me poor, but I would consider myself exceedingly, abundantly rich for Jesus said, "*Blessed—happy are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.*" Luke 6 and Matthew 5: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit of them is the Kingdom of Heaven.*" See? Heaven may be paved with gold, but it consists of people that are poor in spirit and insanely happy. It's more blessed to give than receive.

Now...in fear, I think many of you probably just heard me saying: "You should give more than you receive." If you feel you should give more than you receive it's because you don't believe: "*It's more blessed to give than receive.*" And that's my point: It's more than you can even want to believe. Jesus didn't say *should*. We add *should* because we can't imagine that He meant what He said: "*It's more blessed to give than receive.*"

See? Jesus said some unimaginable things. John 4:34 "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work.*" His work includes all creation and hanging on a cross.

And His will? Jesus told us God's will.

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength."*

*"Love your neighbor as your self."*

That's God's will, and Jesus says "my food." He's saying, "Guys, you know how you enjoy going to Red Robin and ordering one of those Royal Red Robin burgers with the fried egg, and bacon, and cheddar cheese, and just chompin' on that burger? Well...that's what it's like for me when I touch lepers and turn the other cheek, and love my enemies. That's what it's like. And as far as we know, Jesus never said, "You SHOULD love the Lord your God" or "You SHOULD love your neighbor." He said, "You WILL love the Lord and you WILL love your neighbor. You will...will God's will."

That's not a threat or a bribe; that's a promise. It's also a command, but a command like these commands: *Let there be light; let dry land appear; let it be.* Jesus is the Word of God through whom God creates all things—all creation.

Last week, we said you are not what you do do. Maybe God is not what He does do, that is...all space, time, and power, all creation. Colossians 2:4 Paul writes, "*In Christ the fullness of Deity dwells bodily,*" and Philippians 2:7 "*He emptied himself.*"

Jesus is like God...emptied of all He does in order to reveal who He is.

And God is love.

To be "*filled with all the fullness of God*" is to be filled with all the fullness of Love.

And Love spoke space into existence.

Love doesn't take up space;

Love makes space for others.

Love makes space, then fills space (not excluding others but fully filling others)

Like music fills a vast dance hall...

You don't leave when the music fills the hall...

You don't leave when the music begins to play...

The music is the reason you stay.

On the cross the music began to play. At Pentecost it starts to fill the hall. We are that hall; we can't comprehend the music but we will be comprehended *by* the music and begin to dance... to the tune of God's will, to the tune of God's desire, to the tune of His Word. More than we can want...is a new want; more than we can think...is a new thinker; more than we can desire is new desires. More than we can imagine is a new imagination.

I got kind of wordy with all that so let me sum up what we've said.

1. God is able to give us more than we can want or even imagine  
And that's GOOD because...
2. We don't want and can't even imagine what God wants—His desire.  
And now the GOSPEL...
3. God is giving us His desires, His wants, His will, His Word.  
He is ABLE.

God is love, and His will is Love, and He loves in absolute freedom.

In other words, For God, love is not a law.

In other words, God loves you because He loves loving you.

In other words, God really, really, really likes you,

and there's not one damn thing you can do to stop Him.

He loves you, and love is its own reward.

Now, Scripture does say that Jesus: *"endured the cross despising the shame for the joy that was set before Him."* That sounds like a reward.

So what joy is set before Him?

What joy did He not have but then *did* have because of the cross?

You!

The joy is You-His bride filled with Him.

You know, I couldn't desire or even imagine the reward my father was talking about when I was six, so I imagined microscopes, telescopes, electric racecars. I imagined gold and streets of gold, and I tried to be nice to girls because I trusted my father...that it would be a great reward. But something happened that I couldn't have really imagined happening. It happened...and it might not have happened...if I hadn't tolerated girls out of obedience to my father to get some reward.

This is what happened: I met a girl, and I wanted the *girl*. You see? I had a new want. I desired a girl for the girl. And I used all my gold to get the girl. I didn't use the girl to get some gold, as if gold were a reward for the girl. I dropped to my knees and offered the girl all my gold...and it hurt.

It really hurt me to pay for the gold. I actually wanted it to hurt to pay for the gold. I didn't even care about the ring, except for that it cost me all my gold. I was just a jeweler's dream: I remember talking to Harry the jeweler and saying, "Look I don't care about the ring. I just have to spend all I have." See? I wouldn't be happy unless I suffered...almost like it was *"better to give than receive."*

Well, I didn't use the girl to get the gold. I used all my gold and all my student loan money; I used my gold to get the girl. On May 28th, 1983 I received my reward. A reward I couldn't have even imagined when I was six. I received my reward and not once all night long did I even think of

microscopes, telescopes, race car sets or even gold; I considered it all *scubula*—rubbish—do do for the surpassing worth of knowing... *a girl!*

And that's just a picture of an even greater picture. In the Revelation, John sees the New Jerusalem coming down from Heaven adorned as a bride for her groom. Her streets are paved with gold, but she is constructed of people. One day, with our former enemies, we'll dance on streets of gold...and not even notice the gold.

Scripture says, "*You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your own passions.*" I used to think that "passion" was the problem, but Jesus had "passion." The problem is "my" passion, my sinful passion is a passion for Hell. But Jesus had passion. In fact, on the night of His passion, He literally said to His disciples, "*In lust, I have lusted to eat this meal—THIS MEAL— 'My body broken and blood shed for you' with you.*"

One day, His passion will be our passion; His desire will be our desire.

Well, what would that be like?

If His will was our will?

If His desire was our desire?

1. We'd fulfill the whole law.

Imagine if, on my honeymoon night, my twenty-two-year-old bride walked out in a negligée and said, "Listen, we've got work to do, and I'm laying down the law: You will love me right now with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, even if it hurts! It's the law." I'd say, "Thanks...but I probably don't need the law. We'd fulfill the whole law and..."

2. Our work would be play. Play is work that is its own reward.

3. The law would be life.

John 12:50 "*The father's commandment is eternal life.*" He commands eternal life.

4. If God's will were our will...we'd be entirely free.

Freedom is not getting what you want; freedom is wanting what God gives.  
And your Father's giving you Jesus and all things with Him.

5. We wouldn't compete to be good.

That would be like competing at enjoying a Royal Red Robin cheeseburger.  
We'd do good because we loved the good.

6. We'd have compassion for sinners...who are not good.

I think we're usually jealous of sinners because we want to sin.  
But we'd have actual compassion for sinners.

7. In this world we might get ourselves crucified, and yet for eternity, we'd know it as the greatest joy, a bliss and endless delight. IF God's will were our will, it would be heaven—eternal reward.

Well, Jesus said, "*Heaven is at hand,*" and John saw, "*the New Jerusalem coming down,*" Maybe somehow it's now, but how does God's will become our will? We can't will it; it's more than we can will. Once upon a time, the fullness of God dwelt in a man's body, and that man willed only what God willed; His name is Jesus. Can you think of another time the "fullness of God" dwelt in a human body? The *fullness* of God?

Well, if the “fullness of God” was in Jesus, and Jesus was in Mary’s body, then the fullness of God was in Mary—His mother. They asked Jesus about His mother and He said, “*Whoever does the will of my Father is my mother,*” almost as if we can be pregnant with the will of God...and give birth to the will of God.

So, how does God’s will become our will?  
How does God’s desire become our desire?

We’re out of time, so I’ll tell you in a word. The answer is Christmas. And Christmas is a miracle. That’s why Paul prays that it would happen. We can’t *make* it happen. We can’t *will* it to happen, but we can wait for it to happen and look for it to happen. My dad was not capable of making me love a girl. And I am not capable of making me love a girl. But my dad did say, “Be nice to girls. Don’t ignore girls. Pay attention to girls.”

I can’t make you love God. You can’t make you love God.  
But I can say this: “Be nice to babies. Don’t ignore babies.

Pay attention to babies who give you nothing in return...weak, good-for-nothing babies.

Pay attention to peasant girls and poor people—dysfunctional people.

Pay attention to people on the other side of the wall.

Pay attention to “*the last and the least of these.*”

Pay attention to manger, dirty, stinky, crappy mangers.

Pay attention to the empty spaces in your own flesh.

Don’t listen to the principalities and powers, the world rulers. Christmas happens in the last place they’d tell you to look, and so thousands walked right past the manger and past a baby filled with: “*all the fullness of God,*” for it was: “*exceedingly abundantly more than all they could ask or imagine.*”

But maybe you’re a shepherd and you heard the angels sing. It happens in a place with which you’re entirely familiar and so would never expect. Christmas happens in a manger. It’s inside is bigger than the whole outside.

Or maybe you’re a Wiseman, and you’ve followed a star. It happens in a place with which you’re not familiar. And so would never expect. Not Herod’s palace in Jerusalem but the other side of the dividing wall. Christmas happens in Bethlehem. (Drop to your knees; give the baby your gold.)

Or maybe you’re Joseph. You’ve had a dream. You know it was a thing of great shame to be betrothed to a girl pregnant with a child that was not your own. Joseph, Christmas happens in your place of shame. Look to the Bride in anguish and deliver.

Maybe you’re Mary, and actually...you *are* Mary, and Christmas happens inside of you. Love makes a space in you, an empty place, a question, a sorrow, a pain, a longing, a space, like a womb. Love makes a space and then fills that space. When a mother holds a newborn baby, she forgets the pain for joy. And I bet she experiences new desires. When I held my newborn baby, I began to want what I had never wanted, and I wanted a baby, and that’s a miracle.

What do you want for Christmas?

Don’t follow your old desires.

Follow your Father’s Word and wait for new desires.

Go to the last and least.

Kiss the people on the other side of the wall.

Look for treasure in mangers covered in *scubula*.

Love is born in places like that.

Love is born in places like Newton Connecticut.

Love is born in anguish—places of confusion, dirt, and pain.

But love is: *“exceedingly abundantly more than you could ask or think.”*

*“He who loves is born of God and knows God. God is love.”*

Now, I need to confess my Father, Dan Hiatt, never actually in these particular words said, “Be nice to girls, and one day you’ll get a great reward.” But my Father in Heaven actually did say: *“Love your enemies....and your reward will be great.”*

### **Communion**

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, and we all made ourselves His enemies, He took bread and broke it saying, *“This is my body broken for you.”* And He took the cup saying, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins; drink of it all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.”*

We were His enemies, and we are His reward—His Bride filled with Himself. When the Word first came to Mary through the angel, it was: *“exceedingly abundantly more than all she could ask or think.”* The angel said, *“Nothing will be impossible with God.”* Do you know what Mary said? She said, *“Let it be unto me according to thy word,”* “according to thy will!”

Say that together, *“Let it be unto me according to thy word.”*

Now come to the table.

### **Benediction**

So, do you feel free? Well you are free. If you don’t feel free, you’re believing a lie. We all believe lies. This morning may have been a bit hard for you because I was talking about desire. Some of you are still hearing: “You should like giving more than receiving,” and in your heart you are saying, “But I don’t.” The Biblical definition of that is greed. You are greedy. And scripture says, *“No greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of God.”* When we read that we freak out and say, “Oh no. I’m not inheriting the Kingdom of God,” but Jesus says, “Yes you are.” So what’s the logical conclusion to that? One day you will not be greedy, and God will give you a new heart.

Some of you struggle with sexual desires, so the illustration bothered you. You think: “God, I’m trying to want the right things.” I try to want the right things too. My sexual desires are messed up according to Scripture too. And Scripture says, *“No person with a broken sexual desire will inherit (it uses words people debate about a bunch) the Kingdom of God,”* and we panic and think: “I’m not going to inherit the Kingdom of God.” But Jesus says, “Yes you are, I paid for your sins.” What’s the logical conclusion of that scenario: God will give you a new heart.

And already, you are beginning to feel a new heart; you’re beginning to love people. And it’s probably not when you’re thinking about it; it just happens. That’s Jesus rising up in you and the freedom of God rising up in you. I think this is the thing that we have the hardest time believing and we don’t really believe. This is why we hang on to doctrines of eternal torment and say God can’t save certain people: We don’t believe God is the Creator of our hearts.

Scripture says: *“Jesus is the author and finisher of your faith.”* He’s giving you Himself: Faith, Hope, and Love. You might get yourself crucified, but do you know who the freest person on earth is on Good Friday? Do you know who that was? It was the guy nailed to the cross. He was free. And one day, we’ll all be free. So believe the gospel and live. In Jesus’ name, Merry Christmas...Amen.

*Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.*