

Ephesians Sermon Illustrations 3

EPHESIANS SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

OUR DAILY BREAD, et. al.

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Priceless Letters

Ephesians 3:4

August 28, 2003

If you have a letter from Mark Twain in your attic, it could be worth a lot of money. A personal, 9-page letter written to his daughter in 1875 sold for \$33,000 back in 1991. Ordinary correspondence from the author of Tom Sawyer usually brings \$1,200 to \$1,500 a page. Experts say that even though Twain wrote 50,000 letters during his lifetime, demand is still strong for these personal notes from one of America's favorite authors.

You probably don't have any correspondence from Mark Twain, but chances are you own a priceless collection of letters. Twenty-one of the 27 books in the New Testament are letters written to encourage and instruct Christians. They contain the priceless revelation of Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "By revelation He made known to me the mystery ... of which I became a minister" (Eph 3:3,7). He had received a message from God and was told to preach it to the world (v.8). The letters we hold in our hands today contain God's special revelation to us.

To every Christian, the value of the New Testament letters is not their cash value, but the wisdom they bring to an open heart—wisdom from God Himself. —David C. McCasland

Exceeding great and precious
Are the promises of God,
Inscribed in golden letters
In the pages of His Word. —Cockrell

If you want life-changing mail, open your Bible and read a letter from God.

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Ephesians 3:8

Spurgeon, C. H.

Morning and evening

The apostle Paul felt it a great privilege to be allowed to preach the gospel. He did not look upon his calling as a drudgery, but he entered upon it with intense delight. Yet while Paul was thus thankful for his office, his success in it greatly humbled him. The fuller a vessel becomes, the deeper it sinks in the water. Idlers may indulge a fond conceit of their abilities, because they are untried; but the earnest worker soon learns his own weakness. If you seek humility, try hard work; if you would know your nothingness, attempt some great thing for Jesus. If you would feel how utterly powerless you are apart from the living God, attempt especially the great work of proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ, and you will know, as you never knew before, what a weak unworthy thing you are. Although the apostle thus knew and confessed his weakness, he was never perplexed as to the subject of his ministry. From his first sermon to his last, Paul preached Christ, and nothing but Christ. He lifted up the cross, and extolled the Son of God who bled thereon. Follow his example in all your personal efforts to spread the glad tidings of salvation, and let "Christ and him crucified" be your ever recurring theme. The Christian should be like those lovely spring flowers which, when the sun is shining, open their golden cups, as if saying, "Fill us with thy beams!" but when the sun is hidden behind a cloud, they close their cups and droop their heads. So should the Christian feel the sweet influence of Jesus; Jesus must be his sun, and he must be the flower which yields itself to the Sun of Righteousness. Oh! to speak of Christ alone, this is the subject which is both "seed for the sower, and bread for the eater." This is the live coal for the lip of the speaker, and the master-key to the heart of the hearer.

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Ephesians 3:8

Spurgeon, C. H.

Morning and evening

My Master has riches beyond the count of arithmetic, the measurement of reason, the dream of imagination, or the eloquence of words. They are unsearchable! You may look, and study, and weigh, but Jesus is a greater Saviour than you think him to be when your thoughts are at the greatest. My Lord is more ready to pardon than you to sin, more able to forgive than you to transgress. My Master is more willing to supply your wants than you are to confess them. Never tolerate low thoughts of my Lord Jesus. When you put the crown on his head, you will only crown him with silver when he deserves gold. My Master has riches of happiness to bestow upon you now. He can make you to lie down in green pastures, and lead you beside still waters. There is no music like the music of his pipe, when he is the Shepherd and you are the sheep, and you lie down at his feet. There is no love like his, neither earth nor heaven can match it. To know Christ and to be found in him—oh! this is life, this is joy, this is marrow and fatness, wine on the lees well refined. My Master does not treat his servants churlishly; he gives to them as a king giveth to a king; he gives them two heavens—a heaven below in serving him here, and a heaven above in delighting in him for ever. His unsearchable riches will be best known in eternity. He will give you on the way to heaven all you need; your place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks, your bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure; but it is there, there, where you shall hear the song of them that triumph, the shout of them that feast, and shall have a face-to-face view of the glorious and beloved One. The unsearchable riches of Christ! This is the tune for the minstrels of earth, and the song for the harpers of heaven. Lord, teach us more and more of Jesus, and we will tell out the good news to others.

Ephesians 3:8

March 5, 1997

During the Great Depression, a man named Mr. Yates owned a huge piece of land in Texas where he raised sheep. Financial problems had brought him to the brink of bankruptcy. Then an oil company, believing there might be oil on his land, asked for permission to drill.

With nothing to lose, Mr. Yates agreed. Soon, at a shallow depth, the workmen struck the largest oil deposit found at that time on the North American continent. Overnight, Mr. Yates became a billionaire. The amazing thing, though, is that the untapped riches were there all along. He just didn't know it!

Are you a spiritual "Mr. Yates" who is unaware of the riches you already own in Christ? When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he revealed hidden treasure by preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). His goal was to make all Christians see how

wealthy they actually are (Eph 3:9).

Paul not only preached but also prayed that believers might recognize and use their spiritual wealth, that they would be strengthened within, established in love, powerful in prayer, and filled with God Himself.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21 again, and claim your unlimited spiritual resources today. --J E Yoder

Why do we live like paupers,
When riches we possess?
We have become joint heirs with Christ
With blessings measureless. --Sper

To be rich in God is far better
than to be rich in goods.

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He Has What We Need

Ephesians 3:8-21

December 3, 1997

What makes the gospel such good news? Paul summarized it in Ephesians 3:8 as "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Those who receive the living Christ into their lives are free to enjoy His spiritual riches. But are we using all that He has given to us?

Author Bob George has observed that it's possible for a Christian to live as a "practical atheist." That's a person who, despite right doctrine, "approaches life as if he were the only resource available." Such an approach is as unnecessary and impractical as buying a powerful car and then pushing it.

The apostle Paul's passion for the Ephesian believers was that they might realize that all their needs could be met by Christ's resources. He prayed for them and asked God the Father to give them spiritual strength, close fellowship with Christ, and better understanding of His love for them, resulting in greater Christ-likeness (Eph. 3:16, 17, 18, 19). He prayed because he believed our God is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20).

Are you enjoying Christ's treasures? Or are you pushing on in your own strength? Paul's prayer gives us reason to be thankful. God has everything we need. --J E Yoder

Empty hands I lifted heavenward,
And He filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches
Till my hands could hold no more. --Nicholson

God wants to be everything to every one of us at every moment.

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Whose Prisoner?

Ephesians 3:8

August 17, 2006

A story is told of Scottish minister Alexander Whyte, who was able to look at the bleakest situation and yet find something to be thankful for. On a dark Sunday morning when the weather was freezing, wet, and stormy, one of his deacons whispered, "I am sure the preacher won't be able to thank God for anything on a day like this. It's absolutely horrible outside!" The pastor began the service by praying, "We thank Thee, O God, that the weather is not always like this."

The apostle Paul also saw the best in every situation. Consider his circumstances as he wrote to the church in Ephesus while he awaited trial before the Roman emperor Nero. Most people would have concluded that he was a prisoner of Rome. But Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Christ. He thought of his hardship as an opportunity to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

These words of Paul should challenge us: "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). Paul, a prisoner of Christ, saw himself as being given the privilege to serve God and present the "riches of Christ" to many.

Whose prisoner are we? —Albert Lee

Afflictions may test me,
They cannot destroy;
One glimpse of Thy love
Turns them all into joy. —Willett

The trials that imprison you need not limit God's work in you.

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He's Waiting

Ephesians 3:8-21

July 2, 2001

Telephone answering machines can be helpful, but it's often frustrating to call someone and hear a recorded voice say, "I'm sorry I can't take your call just now, but please leave your name and phone number and I'll get back to you." Disappointed, we speak into the machine, hoping the other person won't be forgetful or too busy to call back.

In our high-tech world, it's encouraging to know that when we call out to God we get straight through to Him. In Ephesians 3, the apostle Paul said that "in Christ Jesus our Lord ... we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him" (Eph 3:11,12).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul encouraged believers to "pray without ceasing," which assumes, of course, that God is always listening and wants to hear from us. Yet, for some reason we often keep God waiting. Our prayerlessness gives God the repeated message that we won't answer His call to pray now, but we'll get back to Him later.

What are the things that keep you from praying? Begin by talking to God about whatever is hindering your prayer-life. Such praying will cultivate the two-way closeness that your heavenly Father is longing to enjoy with you.

Why keep God waiting any longer? —Joanie Yoder

We can know that God is watching,
Always present, everywhere,
And with hope and joy and patience
He is waiting for our prayer. —Roworth

If you're too busy to pray, you're too busy.

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Ephesians 3:9

F B Meyer

To make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery. (r.v.)

This chapter is parallel with Colossians 2. To the stewardship of the apostle Paul two mysteries were entrusted, with the intention that he should unravel and explain them to our race.

The mystery. — A mystery is a hidden secret. The word does not imply that there is no solution, but that the solution has not yet been communicated. God has many secrets, which unfold as the ages are ripe for them, but not before. This secret, which was hid in the Divine heart from all ages, was that the Gentiles are on an equality with the Jews in the Church. Under the old covenant they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; but under the new they are fellow-heirs, fellow-members, and fellow-partakers of the blessings of the Gospel.

The stewardship of the mystery. — The apostle felt that whatever had been communicated to him was not for himself alone, but for all his fellow-disciples. Hence he was ever accounting himself a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). This is the clue, also, to his assertion that he was a debtor to all men for Christ's sake. What was given him was on deposit for others. See to it that you count nothing you possess or know as your own; look on all as a sacred trust.

The exercise of his stewardship. — "To preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men know." It is not enough to proclaim, as a herald might; we must stay with the dull of wit and slow of thought, elaborating, explaining, and insisting, till we have made them see what a Savior Jesus is, and how rich the soul may be that uses his unsearchable wealth. (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

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Deeper Than The Deep Blue Sea

Ephesians 3:14-21

October 25, 2005

Several hundred miles off the coast of Guam is the Mariana Trench, the deepest place in the ocean. On January 23, 1960, Jacques Piccard and Donald Walsh climbed into a submersible vessel and were lowered into the cold, lonely darkness. Their descent into the deep, which set the world record, has never been repeated.

The depth of the ocean is mind-boggling. The Mariana Trench is nearly 7 miles down. The water pressure at the bottom of the trench is 15,931 pounds per square inch. Yet there is life. Walsh saw flat fish on the ocean floor, surviving despite the pressure and the darkness.

For most of us, it's hard to fathom just how deep the Mariana Trench is. But much more difficult to comprehend is the love of God. Paul was hard-pressed to describe it, but he prayed that his readers would be able somehow to grasp "the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18).

The reason we can never reach the depths of God's love is that it is infinite—beyond measure. If you ever feel alone and unloved, that you've sunk to the depths of dark despair, think about Ephesians 3:18. God's love for you is deeper than the Mariana Trench!—Dennis Fisher

I have a Friend whose faithful love
Is more than all the world to me;
It's higher than the heights above,
And deeper than the boundless sea. —Anon.

You're never beyond the reach of God's love

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Inner Strength

Ephesians 3:16

January 12, 1994

A large company extracts contaminating substances from steel drums by suction. Powerful pumps draw the materials out of the barrels, but the workers must carefully regulate the force of these pumps. If they take out too much air, the drums will collapse like paper cups because the outer pressure will exceed the inner pressure.

Likewise, when adversity and hardship come into our lives, unless God empowers us from within we will be unable to withstand the pressures from without. True, we get solid support from loved ones and Christian friends, but it is our spiritual inner man, "strengthened with might through His Spirit," that sustains us and keeps us from crumbling.

The Spirit works to strengthen us and renew our minds as we read God's Word and pray. If we neglect the Scriptures, seldom talk with the Lord, and stop fellowshiping with Him, we will grow weak and vulnerable. Then we will be unable to withstand the pressure of temptation or trouble.

Let's ask the Lord to develop our inner strength so that when life's blows and burdens press upon us we will not cave in. --D C Egner

Help us, O Lord, when troubles come
To trust Your Word and not succumb,
And help us not to turn aside
But in Your strength and love abide. --D J De Haan

The power of Christ in you is greater
than the pressure of troubles around you.

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Inner Strength
Ephesians 3:16
July 8, 2004

A large company uses suction to extract contaminating substances from steel drums. Powerful pumps draw the materials out of the barrels, but the workers must carefully regulate the force of these pumps. If they take out too much air, the drums will collapse like paper cups, because the outer pressure will exceed the inner pressure.

Likewise, when adversity and hardship come into our lives, God must empower us from within or we will be unable to withstand the pressures from without. True, we get solid support from loved ones and Christian friends, but it is our spiritual inner man, "strengthened with might through His Spirit" (Ephesians 3:16), that sustains us and keeps us from crumbling.

The Holy Spirit works to strengthen us and renew our minds as we read the Bible and pray. If we neglect the Scriptures, seldom talk with the Lord, and stop fellowshiping with other believers, we'll grow weak and vulnerable. Then we will be unable to withstand the pressures of temptation or trouble.

Let's ask the Lord to develop our inner strength so that when life's blows and burdens press upon us we will not cave in.—David C. Egner

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Deep Roots
Ephesians 3:14-19
January 6, 2002

A friend told me about a neighbor who years ago spent most of his spare time planting trees. The man seldom watered the young trees because he thought that too much watering spoiled them. (He came from the "no pain, no gain" school of plant care.) Pampered trees, he said, made for shallow roots, and deep roots were something to be treasured.

My friend told me that he often walks by the old place and looks at the trees his neighbor planted 25 years earlier. They're rugged, strong, and durable now. Tall and tough. Adversity and deprivation seem to have benefited them in ways that being sheltered and pampered couldn't.

All of this makes me think about the way I pray for others. I'm inclined to pray that God will spare my family and friends from hardship, but lately I've changed my praying. I don't ask for an easy life for them, for that may not come in this world. Instead, I try to echo the prayer of the apostle Paul for the believers in Ephesus (3:14-19). I ask that their roots will go down deep into the love of God—experiencing a close relationship with Him—so they'll grow up sturdy and strong. Then when the winds of adversity blow, they won't be swept away but will stand tall as a testimony of faith. —David H. Roper

For Further Study
Read the following passages and note how Paul prayed:
Ephesians 1:17, 18, 19; 3:14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; Colossians 1:9, 10, 11, 12.
Follow Paul's pattern as you pray for others today.
Pray not for a life free from trouble, but for triumph over trouble.

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Are You Losing Power?
Ephesians 3:14-21
November 29, 1999

Little eyes were looking over my shoulder at the gas gauge. Running out of fuel on an interstate highway was no one's idea of fun. There had been plenty of places to stop and get a fillup. If we ran out of gas, it would only be because of my own foolishness. So we

pulled into a gas station at the next exit.

But getting a full tank of gas didn't solve all our problems. We became irritable and impatient with one another. Tempers flared. It didn't take long till we sensed that our lives were not being controlled by the Spirit's power. Only after apologies and a quiet prayer of submission to the Lord was our inner spiritual strength restored. It was as if we had stopped to fill our hearts and minds with renewed energy.

Unlike my experience of running low on gas, we as Christians can't run out of the source of our strength. We have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, but it is possible for us to grieve Him and block the flow of His strength in our lives (Eph. 4:30).

As you travel the road of life, do you sometimes face a power crisis? Don't try to see how far you can go without yielding to the Holy Spirit. Remember, He is an unlimited source of spiritual power. –M R De Haan II

His Spirit fill my hungering soul
His power all my life control;
My deepest prayer, my highest goal,
That I may be like Jesus. –Chisholm

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. –Is 40:31

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No Hands But His

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21

February 2, 1996

Jennifer had just heard a disturbing report about an increase in cases of depression among women. The report cited a related upswing in alcoholism and an increased reliance on prescription drugs.

"So what are You doing about it, Lord?" Jennifer prayed. But the more she thought about it, the more she felt that God was asking her to do something. All she could see, however, were her own limitations.

To help her think it through, she listed some reasons that were keeping her from action: shyness, fear of getting involved, lack of time, a cold heart, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure--a daunting list!

As she finished her list, she saw that it was time to pick up her children from school. She put on her coat, then reached for her gloves. They were lying limp and useless--until she slipped her hands inside them. At that moment she realized that God didn't want her to think about her limitations. Rather, He wanted to put His power into her and work through her, just as her gloves became useful when she put her hands into them.

Why do we feel inadequate for the work God has given us? He wants to love others through us, "according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). --J E Yoder

The Lord will give you help and strength
For work He bids you do;
To serve Him from a heart of love
Is all He asks of you. --Fasick

God's call to a task
includes His strength to complete it.

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Ephesians 3:17

Spurgeon, C. H.

Morning and evening

Beyond measure it is desirable that we, as believers, should have the person of Jesus constantly before us, to inflame our love towards him, and to increase our knowledge of him. I would to God that my readers were all entered as diligent scholars in Jesus'

college, students of Corpus Christi, or the body of Christ, resolved to attain unto a good degree in the learning of the cross. But to have Jesus ever near, the heart must be full of him, welling up with his love, even to overrunning; hence the apostle prays "that Christ may dwell in your hearts." See how near he would have Jesus to be! You cannot get a subject closer to you than to have it in the heart itself. "That he may dwell"; not that he may call upon you sometimes, as a casual visitor enters into a house and tarries for a night, but that he may dwell; that Jesus may become the Lord and Tenant of your inmost being, never more to go out.

Observe the words—that he may dwell in your heart, that best room of the house of manhood; not in your thoughts alone, but in your affections; not merely in the mind's meditations, but in the heart's emotions. We should pant after love to Christ of a most abiding character, not a love that flames up and then dies out into the darkness of a few embers, but a constant flame, fed by sacred fuel, like the fire upon the altar which never went out. This cannot be accomplished except by faith. Faith must be strong, or love will not be fervent; the root of the flower must be healthy, or we cannot expect the bloom to be sweet. Faith is the lily's root, and love is the lily's bloom. Now, reader, Jesus cannot be in your heart's love except you have a firm hold of him by your heart's faith; and, therefore, pray that you may always trust Christ in order that you may always love him. If love be cold, be sure that faith is drooping.

THE RECEPTIVITY OF FAITH

Ephesians 3:17

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

"Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith."-- Heb10:22.

FAITH IS our power of appropriation. The pity is that we are so slow to make use of our Lord's resources! He does not force Himself upon us. Though He brings with Him gold tried in the fire that we may be enriched, and white raiment for our clothing, and eye-salve for our blindness; and though He knows how urgently we need these things, He will not force them on our acceptance. Rather, He stands and knocks, as a travelling merchant knocks at the door, who has wares to dispose of, and we need to open the door and receive the gifts which are offered, without money and without price (Rev 3:18, 19, 20; Is 55:1-2).

Faith is our reception of the spiritual to make good the lack of the physical. It is a drawing on the Eternal for the deficiencies of our earthly pilgrimage. Probably when we look back on our present life, we shall find that our deficiencies were permitted, and even assigned, that we might be driven to avail ourselves of the fullness of the Lord Jesus (John1:16; Eph3:19). We were allowed to wander in the sultry heat, that we might know Him as the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land; we were exposed to wild tempests and storms, that we might make for alcoves and harbours in Him that we should otherwise have missed.

It has been truly observed that Job's rebellious moods arose when he thought that God was afar off, but there was a difference when he realised that God was suffering with him. Remember that you are not divided from God by a deep chasm. He knows your sorrows. In all your afflictions He is afflicted. We have not a High Priest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. When Jesus saw the sisters weeping, He not only succoured them, but entered into their distress, and wept with them.

Are you weary with burdens that are crushing you? Is your lot cast with them that hate peace? Is your heart oppressed with loneliness? Take Jesus into account. Don't face your difficulties alone, but meet them in the fellowship of your Saviour. Have faith, i.e., reckon on God. Let the Lord Christ dwell in your heart, and He will be responsible for all, as you reckon on Him for all.

PRAYER - O Lord, I open my nature, and since my capacity is small, I pray that by love and faith, by patience and suffering, Thou wilt enlarge my heart, that it may be filled with all the fullness of God. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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THE DIMENSIONS OF GOD'S LOVE

Ephesians 3:17-19

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

THE DIMENSIONS of the Love of Christ! It is broad as humanity, "for God so loved the world"; the length God's love had no date of origin, and shall have none of conclusion. God is Love, it continues ever, indissoluble, unchangeable, a perpetual present tense. Its height--as the Flood out-topped the highest mountains, so that Love covers our highest sins. It is as high as the heaven above the earth. Its depth--Christ our Lord descended into the lowest before He rose to the highest. He has touched the bottomless pit of our sin and misery, sorrow and need. However low your fall, or lowly your lot, the everlasting arms of His love are always underneath.

The Apostle talks by hyperbole, when he prays that we may attain to a knowledge of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. We cannot gauge Christ's love, but we can enjoy it. Probably the only way to know the love of Christ is to begin to show it. The emotionalist, who is easily affected by appeals to the senses, does not know it; the theorist or rhapsodist does not know it, but the soul that endeavours to show the love of Christ, knows it. As Christ's love through you broadens, lengthens, deepens, heightens,

you will know the love of Christ, not intellectually, but experimentally (1Jo 4:11, 1Jo 4:12; 1Jo 4:20, 21).

But you say, "there are people in my life whom I cannot love." Granted, but you must distinguish between love and the emotion or feeling of love. You may not be able to feel love at the outset, but you can be willing to be the channel of Christ's love. I cannot love, but Christ is in me, and He can. Is it too much to ask that all this should be realized in ourselves and in others? No, because God is already at work within us by His Holy Spirit, and He is able to do infinitely beyond all our highest requests or thoughts. Ask your furthest, think your highest, and the Divine Love is always infinitely in advance.

PRAYER -We thank Thee, O God, for the infinite love which Thou hast given us in Jesus Christ. We have no measure for its heights and depths, its breadths and lengths. Teach us with all saints to know more because we love more. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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God's Great Love

Ephesians 3:17-19

January 30, 2001

God's love for us is so deep that we have a hard time comprehending it. It reaches down to us through the darkness of this sinful world, even though we are hopelessly undeserving. The Bible says that before God created our planet, He had decided to display the depth of His love for us through His Son's death on the cross (1Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8).

In my imagination I look back over time and see the Lord raising mountains to majestic heights, cutting valleys for flowing rivers, and stretching out vast plains. I envision Him creating the mighty oceans and beautiful lakes. Then I see Him pause and reflect on the goodness of His creation. He gazes at that part of the world where His Son will be born. He knows that Jesus will be rejected and crucified. With a sweep of His hand He could obliterate the world and spare His Son from the agony of the cross. But He doesn't.

Because of God's love, the Son came to earth and was slain. On Calvary He died to pay the penalty for our sins. In John 3:16 we read, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Oh, how great is God's love for us! —D C Egnor

Thinking It Over

What is your response to God's love? Have you
confessed your sin and accepted His forgiveness?
Are you living in grateful obedience to Him?

Eternal life is made possible by God's eternal love.

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The Lamb Is Our Shepherd

Ephesians 3:18

July 25, 2006

The book of Revelation gives us a marvelous picture. The Lamb of God leads us from one fountain of water to another, always deeper into the love of God (Rev 7:17).

Jesus prayed in the Upper Room shortly before He went to the cross: "I have declared to [the disciples] Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

Jesus leads us into an ever deeper knowledge of the love of God. His concern is not merely that we know about God, but that we know how deeply we're cherished and loved. As Jesus said, the love the Father has for the Son He also has for us.

But it's a process to comprehend that love. It takes time for God's love to take hold of us. Perhaps you're not sure that He loves you. Be patient. The Holy Spirit is at work guiding you into all truth (John 16:13). Read and meditate on His words and deeds in the Gospels. Ask Him to show you God's love. In time He will reveal its "width and length and depth and height" (Ephesians 3:18).

And if I understand it correctly, the process will go on throughout eternity. We will be completely satisfied in heaven, and yet we will continue growing, for there is no end to the love of God. —David H. Roper

O love of God, how rich and pure!

How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song. —Lehman
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Our love has limits but God's love is boundless.

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A Mysterious Equation

Ephesians 3:19

February 24, 2004

Professor John Nash of Princeton University is a math genius who has spent his life in the abstract world of numbers, equations—and delusions. Nash suffers from schizophrenia, a mental illness that can result in bizarre behavior and broken relationships. With medical help and the love of his wife, he learned to live with his illness and later won the Nobel Prize.

In the movie version of his life, Nash said: "I've always believed in numbers and the equations and logics that lead to reason... My quest has taken me through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional, and back. And I've made the most important discovery of my life. It's only in the mysterious equations of love that any logical reasons can be framed."

In Colossians 1, we read of "the mysterious equation of love" at its deepest level—God's love for us in Christ. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and out of love He has created us and sustains us (Col 1:16,17). He has also provided deliverance from the powers of darkness (Col 1:13) and the forgiveness of our sins (Col 1:14). No wonder Paul said that such love "passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). It takes us beyond logic into the very heart of who God is (1 John 4:16).

We are to live and show that love—always.—Dennis J. De Haan

FOR FURTHER STUDY

How do we experience the love of Christ? (John 15:10).

What is the evidence of God's love in our lives? (1 John 4:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21).

How can you show God's love today?

God's love cannot be explained—it can only be experienced.

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Ephesians 3:19

Spurgeon, C. H.

Morning and evening

The love of Christ in its sweetness, its fulness, its greatness, its faithfulness, passeth all human comprehension. Where shall language be found which shall describe his matchless, his unparalleled love towards the children of men? It is so vast and boundless that, as the swallow but skimmeth the water, and diveth not into its depths, so all descriptive words but touch the surface, while depths immeasurable lie beneath. Well might the poet say,

"O love, thou fathomless abyss!"

for this love of Christ is indeed measureless and fathomless; none can attain unto it. Before we can have any right idea of the love of Jesus, we must understand his previous glory in its height of majesty, and his incarnation upon the earth in all its depths of shame. But who can tell us the majesty of Christ? When he was enthroned in the highest heavens he was very God of very God; by him were the heavens made, and all the hosts thereof. His own almighty arm upheld the spheres; the praises of cherubim and seraphim perpetually surrounded him; the full chorus of the hallelujahs of the universe unceasingly flowed to the foot of his throne: he reigned supreme above all his creatures, God over all, blessed for ever. Who can tell his height of glory then? And who, on the other hand, can tell how low he descended? To be a man was something, to be a man of sorrows was far more; to bleed, and die, and suffer, these were much for him who was the Son of God; but to suffer such unparalleled agony—to endure a death of shame and desertion by his Father, this is a depth of condescending love which the most inspired mind must utterly fail to fathom. Herein is love! and truly it is love that "passeth knowledge." O let this love fill our hearts with adoring gratitude, and lead us to practical manifestations of its power.

Deeper Than The Deep Blue Sea

Ephesians 3:19

October 25, 2005

Several hundred miles off the coast of Guam is the Mariana Trench, the deepest place in the ocean. On January 23, 1960, Jacques Piccard and Donald Walsh climbed into a submersible vessel and were lowered into the cold, lonely darkness. Their descent into the deep, which set the world record, has never been repeated.

The depth of the ocean is mind-boggling. The Mariana Trench is nearly 7 miles down. The water pressure at the bottom of the trench is 15,931 pounds per square inch. Yet there is life. Walsh saw flat fish on the ocean floor, surviving despite the pressure and the darkness.

For most of us, it's hard to fathom just how deep the Mariana Trench is. But much more difficult to comprehend is the love of God. Paul was hard-pressed to describe it, but he prayed that his readers would be able somehow to grasp "the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18).

The reason we can never reach the depths of God's love is that it is infinite—beyond measure. If you ever feel alone and unloved, that you've sunk to the depths of dark despair, think about Ephesians 3:18. God's love for you is deeper than the Mariana Trench!—Dennis Fisher

I have a Friend whose faithful love
Is more than all the world to me;
It's higher than the heights above,
And deeper than the boundless sea. —Anon.

You're never beyond the reach of God's love.

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EXCEEDING WHAT WE ASK OR THINK

Ephesians 3:20

At the time of his death in 1956, Jim Elliot was trying to reach the Auca Indians of South America for Christ. Just three years earlier, after watching an Indian die in a jungle hut, he had affirmed his willingness to serve God and die if necessary among these people. Then he added this petition: "Lord, let me live until I have declared Thy works to this generation." Jim Elliot didn't expect God to answer his prayer by letting him be speared to death before he was thirty years old. But neither did he have any idea that within three years his name would be known all over the world and that his journals would challenge many to give themselves to the Lord's service. He's been in heaven for more than thirty years, but he is still "speaking" to thousands of people.

God loves us deeply and listens to our prayers, but He doesn't always give us exactly what we ask. Since He "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," we can be sure that if He doesn't fulfill all our requests it's because He wants to give us something better.

When we don't receive everything we ask for, we need not be discouraged. God loves us and delights in giving us what we desire. But He also knows the end from the beginning, and sometimes He says no in order to give us something better. When we reach heaven, we will find that He did indeed answer our petitions "exceedingly abundantly above" all our fondest hopes and dreams. —H. V. Lugt

God always gives us what we ask for—or something better.

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UNBELIEVING PRAYER

Ephesians 3: 20

... when they ... saw him [Peter], they were astonished. Acts 12:16

The story is told about a church in a small town which seemed to have everything going its way. There were no gambling casinos, no liquor stores, and no "beer joints" in the entire area. After several years, however, a night club was built right on Main Street. The

congregation was very much disturbed and held several all-night prayer meetings in which some members specifically asked God to burn the tavern down. Well, a few days later, during a tremendous thunderstorm, lightning did strike the drinking establishment and fire completely demolished it. The owner, knowing how the church had prayed, sued them for damages. His lawyer claimed that it was their prayers which caused the loss. The church, however, hired their own lawyer and fought the charges. After many hearings and much deliberation, the judge declared: "It is the opinion of this court that wherever the guilt may lie, the tavern owner is the one who really believes in prayer, while the church members do not!" Doesn't this suggest how faithless we often are? Even those in the early church were guilty of such unbelieving prayer. Acts 12 tells us that Peter, having escaped from prison, went to the house of Mary the mother of John where many Christians were gathered together praying for his release. He knocked, and Rhoda went to the door; but, hearing his voice, she was so thrilled that, without opening it, she ran to the "prayer meeting crowd" and told them that Peter was outside. "Thou art mad!" they said. As she insisted that it was really Peter, they concluded, "It is his angel." As the apostle continued knocking, they finally opened the door. Seeing him, they "were astonished." How often we are like that: surprised at the way God answers prayer.

When we pray, let us be confident that God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3: 20).

God answers prayer; shouldst thou complain?
Be not afraid, thou canst not ask in vain.
He only waits thy faith in Him to prove,
Doubt not His power e'en mountains to remove! —Anon.

Have faith to believe that where prayer focuses, power falls!

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More Than Enough

Ephesians 3:20

August 23, 2001

It was an unexpected provision in a time of need. The prophet Elisha, like others in Israel, was hard-pressed by the famine. But the prophet determined that he must share with other needy Israelites the 20 loaves of barley bread he had just received (2 Kings 4:42, 43, 44). Elisha's servant questioned the wisdom of setting the food before 100 hungry men, for there was not enough to go around.

Nevertheless, Elisha issued a command to feed his fellow prophets, adding a promise that this scanty provision would be enough: "Thus says the Lord: 'They shall eat and have some left over'" (2Ki 4:43).

True to God's word, when Elisha's servant set the loaves before the people, "they ate and had some left over" (v.44). There was enough—and more than enough. A similar thing happened when Jesus fed 5,000 with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish (John 6:1-14). These examples suggest the principle: When God gives, He is able to give more than enough.

When we sense that God is asking us to serve Him in a new or unfamiliar way, we should never say no simply because we feel inadequate. "We have only a few loaves," we may say. But the Lord replies, "Trust Me. They are more than enough." —D H R

What matter though our loaves be few?
Alike the little and the much
When He shall add to what we have
His multiplying touch. —Flint

We always have enough when God is our supply

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Something Far Better

Ephesians 3:20

April 28, 2002

A man who lived far out in the country bought his clothing from a mail-order catalog. At the bottom of the printed order form he noticed this statement: "If we do not have the article you ordered in stock, may we substitute?"

The first time that he wrote "yes," they sent him something that was worth double the price of the article he had requested. The company explained, "We are sorry we do not have the article in stock which you ordered. We are sending you something better at

our expense."

After that, the man said he always printed out much more boldly the word "yes" at the bottom of the order blank. He knew he would not be disappointed by the substitution.

So too, when we pray to God, it is good to tell Him that we are quite willing to let Him take our weak prayers and answer them according to His will. Too often we pray and do not see our requests answered because we selfishly "ask amiss" (James 4:3). Instead, we need to examine the motives of our hearts and trust Him to give us exactly what we need. We can be sure that when we do He will send us something far better, yes, "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). —Henry G. Bosch —Henry G. Bosch

I'll trust the Lord to do good for me
Whatever He deems best;
I know His answer will exceed
The hope in my request. —Hess

God's answers are often wiser than our prayers.

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Useful Gloves

Ephesians 3:20

September 30, 2002

Jennifer had just heard a disturbing report about an increase in cases of depression among women. The report cited a related upswing in alcoholism and an increased reliance on prescription drugs.

"So what are You doing about it, Lord?" Jennifer prayed. But the more she thought about it, the more she felt that God was asking her to do something. All she could see, however, were her own limitations.

To help her think it through, she listed some reasons that were keeping her from action: shyness, fear of getting involved, lack of time, a cold heart, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure—a daunting list!

As she finished her list, she saw that it was time to pick up her children from school. She put on her coat, then reached for her gloves. They were lying limp and useless—until she slipped her hands inside them. At that moment she realized that God didn't want her to think about her limitations. Rather, He wanted to put His power into her and work through her, just as her gloves became useful when she put her hands into them.

Why do we feel inadequate for the work God has given us? He wants to love others through us, "according to the power that works in us" (Ephesians 3:20). —Joanie Yoder —Joanie Yoder

The Lord will give you help and strength
For work He bids you do;
To serve Him from a heart of love
Is all He asks of you. —Fasick

When God gives an assignment, it comes with His enablement.

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Worrier Or Warrior?

Ephesians 3:20

May 1, 2003

A missionary wrote a newsletter to thank his supporters for being "prayer warriors." Because of a typing error, though, he called them "prayer worriers." For some of us, that might be a good description.

In his book *Growing Your Soul*, Neil Wiseman writes, "Prayer must be more than a kind of restatement of fretting worries or a mulling over of problems. Our petitions must move beyond gloomy desperation, which deals mostly with calamity and despair."

During an anxious time in my life, I became a "prayer worrier." I would beg, "Lord, please keep my neighbor from causing me problems tomorrow." Or, "Father, don't let that ornery person spread gossip about me."

But then the Lord taught me to pray for people, rather than against them. I began to say, "Lord, bless and encourage my neighbor, and help him to sense Your love." Then I watched to see what God would do. The Lord's amazing answers not only helped others but also helped to cure my own anxiety!

Paul was no "prayer worrier." He prayed for God's people that they might know the strength, love, and fullness of God, who is able to do far more than we can ask or even think (Ephesians 3:14-21). Such confidence made Paul a true "prayer warrior." Are your prayers like that? —Joanie Yoder

As we resolve to live for Christ
In actions, words, and deeds,
We'll yield our anxious hearts to Him
And pray for others' needs. —Branon

Fervent prayer dispels anxious care.