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More than We Can Imagine
Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,^[a] ¹⁵ from whom every family^[b] in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power 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, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

In 1952, British Bible scholar and translator J.B. Phillips wrote a little book entitled: ***Your God is Too Small***.

In it he says: "*The trouble with many people today is that they have not found a God **big** enough for modern needs.*" (NY: Macmillan Company, 1960, p. v)

He said that in 1952.
He could have said it today.

Just think about his ***idea*** for a minute:
Have you found the God big enough for your life?
Or is your 'god' too small?

Phillips says there are many ways
that we ***limit God's power and love*** in our lives.
He mentions lots of ***small 'gods'*** that we try to substitute for the real God.

One is the voice of our ***conscience***.
Phillips rightly points out that our conscience
can be ***shaped*** and molded by good, **or** bad forces in the world.
Think of Nazis who were trained to believe that being a good person meant
hating Jews, and their conscience might even lead them to feel guilty

if they helped a Jew!

Have you ever fallen into the trap of limiting God to that ***voice of your conscience?***
Especially the voice that just tends to say 'don't do that'...
Ever feel like God is just the inner voice of ***NO?***
Well if so, your 'god' is too small.

Phillips says we also limit God by thinking that God is the ***voice of our parents***, hidden in our hearts—which if you had good, loving parents might not be so bad—but if you had difficult relationships with a parent, this idea of God can be very messed up.
If your 'god' is just the voice of a father or mother, isn't that 'god' too small?

Phillips points out our tendency to limit God to an ***old man in the sky*** from the Old Testament, or a ***meek and mild Jesus*** from the New Testament.
But they are not adequate images of God.

Another temptation is to believe in God the ***Managing Director***, who doesn't care about the daily details and needs of our lives.
God is just keeping things going out in Creation, and doesn't really care about you and I.

Haven't you ever ***felt this way?***
I think many of us have—after all, we are small little people in a great big world, right?
But if that's our idea of God, that 'god' is too small.

But perhaps one of his most tempting ways of limiting God, is to put ***God in a box***.
For Phillips this means that we get stuck in our way of believing and worshipping and gathering as individuals, and as a church, and soon we believe that our way is ***THE way***, and our church is ***THE church***, and soon our God is way, way, way too small because God is in a box that we created.

Haven't ***you seen*** this happen?

We start making **exclusive claims** about who God does and doesn't love, does and doesn't accept, who the church includes and doesn't include and pretty soon—**God is in a box**, a box that we made.

And if our God is in a box of **one way, my way, our way**, that 'god' might just be too small.

One pastor, Rev. Guy Sayles says,

*Many of us **do have a god who is too small.***

*Without knowing it, we have substituted a **puny and punitive god** for the great and gracious God revealed in the history of Israel and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.*

*The substitute god we've fashioned is **limited, narrow, and tame**--does nothing surprising or amazing--and is boxed-in by our preconceptions.*

*This god of our own making is **predictable, safe, and BORING.***

Such a god is hardly worthy of praise, ...

[So] We allow less time for silence, because this passive god couldn't possibly have anything crucial or even interesting to say.

*We **don't expect** this deity to **restore, redeem, or transform** anyone or anything... "Our Vast and Loving God," Rev. Dr. Guy Sayles, Day1, 2012.*

Wow.

I hear a lot of **truth** in that.

So what do we do?

What's the **alternative**?

Well, the apostle Paul in this beautiful prayer of Ephesians 3 describes how **vast and loving the REAL God** truly is.

Listen again:

*16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be **strengthened** in your inner being with power through his Spirit,*

*17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being **rooted and grounded** in love.*

*18 I pray that you may have the **power 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, so that you may be filled with all the **fullness of God.***

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine...

Why is it so important for us to know **THAT God?**
THAT Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ?

Don't we need that **real God?**
The Awesome Almighty God?

Which brings us to Jesus and his disciples as they faced a crowd of over **5,000 hungry people**. Jesus sees that crowd, and asks Philip—where are we going to get bread? Philip says, look that's more than 6 months of wages, which is when Andrew comes up with a little boy's lunchbox...5 loaves and 2 fish, but what can that do among so many? When it was gathered up they had 12 baskets leftover.

Now That's an **awesome** God.
A **mighty** God.
A God who **provides---in abundance!**

And what do we do?
We think **too small**.
We can't feed them, we don't have money, or food...
We tend to think in terms of **scarcity**, or what we **don't have**—instead of **abundance**,
the **overflowing abundance of God's provision**, right?

Do you ever come to **God's banquet table**, and ask for **fries?**
Do we come to the maker of the universe,
the one who created **oceans**, and ask for just a **cup of water?**
We sell God short—asking for a bit, when God wants to give us so much more!

And what about those **seemingly impossible situations** in your life?
(Like 5000 people coming to church dinner!)
What do we do? Do we tend to **give up?**
Do we try to **figure it all** out alone?
Or do we expect God to work wonders?

Let's go back to **Philip and Andrew**.

When Jesus saw the huge crowd coming, he said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” Philip said, “**Six months’ wages^[b] would not buy** enough bread for each of them to get a little.”

But another disciple named, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Jesus,
⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.
 But **what are they** among so many people?”

Aren’t we just like **Philip, or Andrew?**

Isn’t it so easy to logically examine the situation, and say,
 Well, we can’t do it! It’s **impossible!**
 Or we say, we’ve this little **lunchbox**,
 but how can that help a crowd?

We tend to **sell God short**, don't we?

Our faith, like that of the disciples, is often—well, what did Jesus say?
 You of **LITTLE** faith?

So what does it mean to have **BIG FAITH?**

What does it mean to have **true faith**---in an **awesome, almighty God?**

Theologian George Muller once said,

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 our power ends.

George Muller. Leadership, Vol. 12, no. 4.

I like that.

Faith begins, where our power ends.

In John 6, after this miracle, Jesus will call himself the Bread of Life.

Or in other words, **Jesus is God.**

The one who provides.

So, Trusting in Jesus

Means believing that **He provides everything** that we need,

Which means giving up our reliance on all the other gods---
 money, possessions, jobs, friends, family.....

it means giving up our power

and **relying upon the power of Jesus.**

And ***that's not easy***, is it?
 I don't know about you, but I think it's pretty ***challenging***
 to turn to God alone,
 to let go of our own resources,
 and ***lean on God for our every need!***

I tend to say ***here's what I've got figured out so far God,***
can you just get me over this hump?

Ever say anything like that to God?
 Ever asked for just a ***little bit of help?***
 Instead of ***surrendering the whole*** situation in faith
 to the only One who has the solution?

How do we ***learn to rely*** on God's amazing power in our lives?
 How do we ***believe and have real faith*** in Jesus—and lean on Him alone?

How do we ***let go*** of our own resources,
 Our own little 'gods',
 And believe in the ***One True God?***

We are a lot like the people who followed after Jesus,
 looking for food, and miracles, and hoping for ***signs***, right?
 Who hasn't told God—***just send me a sign!***

We are like the people who said to Jesus, "***What sign*** are you going to give us?"
 We want some ***reassurance*** that if we trust in God
 we'll get what we want and need.
 We'll get that sign we've been looking for.
 And when we see the sign, ***then we'll believe.***
Then we'll surrender...right?

Priest John Powell writes,
Most of us, in our desire for meaningful faith, seem to be saying to God:
"Show me, and I'll believe!" *This approach never works.*
God has made it very clear to us, in the life and teaching of his Son Jesus, that the
process must be reversed.
He is saying to us: "Believe in me, and I'll show you."
 John Powell, S.J., in *Through Seasons of the Heart*. Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no. 2.

Christian faith means *believing.... BEFORE we see!*
Which means *placing our full faith in Jesus Christ!*

How do we do that?

Do you think Paul might be hinting at it in Ephesians 3?
What if it happens by being *rooted and grounded* in love?
What if it happens when *Christ is at home in our hearts?*

Placing our full faith in Jesus is something we do
when we *know the LOVE of God.*
Isn't that when you can *fully trust* someone?
When you *know they LOVE you?*

Do you *believe that God loves you?*
And do you believe in the *kind of love* that Paul describes?
A love so high, so deep, so wide?
A love that is *abundantly far more than all we can dare ask or imagine?*

***This isn't easy folks—to believe in the abundant, overflowing love
Of a God who does more than we can imagine.***

We've all seen life go south,
We know that life is full of pain.
We've seen people's lives and dreams torn apart.
We've been through many dark valleys.

Which means it's all the more important,
For us to really ***SURRENDER.***
To hand over our lives to the care of an awesome God.
And *believe* that His care ***IS awesome.***

Which might be something you have to do ***one day*** at a time,
sometimes ***one hour*** at a time.
Slowly but surely, we surrender our lives to the care of our Savior.
Total Surrender.
Which can feel like *falling, or skydiving, or zip-lining!*
(*none of which I recommend*)

We **want to see how everything is going to turn out, before** we surrender,
 but God wants just the opposite.
 He wants us to **give our hearts to Christ,**
 and **then we'll see the beauty.**

Because **that's what happens when we surrender.**
 Life isn't perfect, bad things still happen, sin and pain are still real.
 But....something **amazing** happens when we surrender.
 Listen to *Streams in the Desert* on July 23rd:

*I once saw a man draw some **black dots** on a piece of paper.
 Several of us looked at it and yet saw nothing
 but an **irregular arrangement** of dots.
 Then he also drew a few lines, put in a few rests,
 and added a treble clef at the beginning.
 Suddenly we realized that the dots were musical notes,
 and as we began to sound them out, we were singing!....
 Each of us has many black dots or spots in our life,
 and we **cannot understand** why they are there or why God permitted them.
 But when we allow God into our life to **adjust** the dots in the proper way...
 .then from the black dots...He will compose a **glorious harmony.***

We see a hungry crowd, and a tiny lunchbox.
 We see the pain and suffering in our lives, and in our world.
God sees a **symphony.**

Hear the **Good News of the Gospel** today.

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish **abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,** ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.