

He Can Do Immeasurably More Than You Imagine. That's good to know. He can do immeasurably more than you can imagine. Nowadays, that's *awesome* to know!

Just look at what's happening in the world around us. Tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, died in that earthquake in Haiti. They keep talking about an economic turnaround, but I'm not seeing it around here. Our loved ones are still fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The morality in this world is dropping deeper and deeper into a dark, fathomless hole. And our church, which made a miraculous recovery in offerings at the end of 2009, is starting out 2010 with two of the lowest totals we've seen in recent memory, launching us into a new year with a surprising and disturbing deficit—and we haven't even voted on a budget yet!

But **He Can Do Immeasurably More Than You Imagine**, and that's what the Spirit of God and his inspired Apostle would have us know as we meditate on Ephesians 3 this morning. **1. Paul's life makes it clear just how true this is**, that God can do immeasurably more than we imagine. And **2. Paul prayed that we all may understand it as he did.**

Now, you may not know Paul's life well enough to know how it helps us to understand that God can do immeasurably more than we imagine. You should, though. It's fascinating stuff. It's all recorded in the book of Acts. I mention it specifically because our text starts out, "*For this reason I kneel before the Father.*" "*For this reason*" refers to his life up to that point, especially the fact that (as he wrote a few verses prior to this), although he was "*less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given [him]: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*"

That's cool. That's amazingly cool. It was an unimaginable privilege and honor for Paul to serve God and his people as the Evangelizer of Gentiles. But that's not entirely the reason that Paul was dropping to his knees before God. The thing that he's actually focusing on more than anything else was what he had said earlier about being "*less than the least of all God's people.*"

What proved to Paul that God could do more than any of us can ask or imagine is the fact that he now believed in the "trou-

blemaker from Nazareth" as the one, true God and his own, personal Savior. Never forget what Paul had been doing that brought him into contact with the Good News about Jesus! Paul was a Pharisee, an enemy of Christ. He was the star pupil of one of the leading members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council that had dragged Jesus before Pilate in order to get him crucified. Paul had been trying to impress the faithless religious leaders of his day and the figment of his imagination that he thought of as the God of Israel by chasing down followers of Jesus and throwing them in jail. He even had a hand in killing some of them.

So I guess you'd say that Paul knew of what he spoke when he talked about what a miracle it was to become a Christian. He never should have been one. He should have been shut right down and thrown into hell for letting his sinful pride be the boss of what he believed instead of simply listening to the message of Christ and believing him. What a different life he was leading all those years ago when the Savior appeared to him and said, "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting*" (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15)! And now he was Jesus' number one man for bringing the Good News to the Gentiles of the world! God truly can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine! Paul was living proof!

On the other hand, this text isn't really about Paul. Paul was just a starting point. Paul's life makes it clear just how true it is that God can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, but the point of what he's saying here is that he is praying for the Christians in Ephesus (and ultimately us, as well) to understand the love, grace and power of God the way that he himself does—better, in fact, because he is praying for all Christians everywhere to understand the love of Christ better: "*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that*

surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Now, how can *you* come to understand the depths of God’s love as well as Paul, the great persecutor of the church who was saved by Jesus Christ’s direct intervention on the road to Damascus? The simple answer: Recognize that you are not really different from him. Neither is your story.

What Paul said about the Christians in Ephesus earlier in this letter applies perfectly and directly to all Christians without exception: *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (2:1-10).

Miraculous intervention. For a lot of us, those miraculous waters of regeneration touched us when we were too young to even remember the change that it made in our hearts, but that doesn’t matter. It was miraculous intervention nonetheless. It was spiritual life from spiritual death. It was the pure, undeserved love of God (*grace*) performing a spiritual resurrection toward which we could contribute absolutely nothing.

And if you are one of those who can’t remember that initial intervention in your life, I can still give you a very vivid illustration of this grace that you can relate to right now. Do you want to

know what it is?

You’re looking at it. It’s right here. I mean me, but I don’t just mean me. I’m talking about all of us being here in this holy place.

Look back on your week. Was it abundantly clear to everyone in your life at all times that it is not your old, sinful heart that is in the driver’s seat in your life? Or, as you think about your angry responses, your impatience, your worldly goals, your grudges and bitterness and your backbiting tongue, do you see all too clearly someone who has forgotten the waters of their rebirth and stooped to live like those still controlled by their sinful natures? As you see those failures more and more clearly, do you not also see more clearly how appropriately Paul’s description of himself also fits you: *“less than the least of all God’s people”*?

Don’t run from the truth, even when it shocks you with images of your own failure in the face of temptation and shallowness in your thinking. Through a genuine understanding of the depths from which God saved us, God is teaching you to *“grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know the love that surpasses all knowledge.”* You are beginning to understand the full measure of God’s forgiveness and grace *“together with all the saints”* for whom Paul prayed, that we may be strengthened in our *“inner being”* through that message.

It’s good to remember that God can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine when we see rampant disaster and immorality in this dying world. It’s good to remember that. But to understand that he does immeasurably more than we ask or imagine requires looking at the disaster and rebellion caused by our own sinful nature, the disaster and rebellion from which our gracious God and Savior has delivered us through his life, death and resurrection—disaster and rebellion from which he has personally delivered each one of us individually through the Spirit working in the Word of salvation and through the sacraments to which he has attached the power of that message. You need look no further than right here to say that God can and does do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, for here we see that God has saved us—even us—and will deliver us to life with him in eternity. Amen.