



* "MORE THAN WE COULD EVER IMAGINE"

Biblical Text: [Ephesians 3:14-21](#)

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(* denotes frame change on screens)

*Fred Craddock grew up in Appalachia. And one clear, hot, summer night, hoping for a breeze to relieve the heat, he and his father were in the back yard, looking at the stars. *His father said, *"Son, how far can you think?"* *"I don't know, daddy, what do you mean?"* *"Just think as far as you can think up toward the stars."*

So, Fred pushed his imagination as far as he could and said, *"I'm thinking... I'm thinking as far as I can think."* His father said, *"Well, in your mind, drive down a stake out there now. Have you driven down the stake?"* The boy said, *"Yes, sir."* His father said, *"Now what's on the other side of your stake?"* Fred said, *"Well, there's more sky."* His father said, *"Then move your stake - think farther on..."*

*There are times for all of us when the boundaries of our thinking need to move farther than we have known or seen. That's what education is for. That's what we want for children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews. It's what the best leaders, coaches, teachers and preachers always challenge us to do: *"Move your stake!"*

When I was younger, my parent's version of that advice was this: *"Michael, it's time to grow up!"* **Today, that advice is more likely to come from my sweet wife!**

But I want to suggest that our *"growing up,"* is never to stop. We each are invited by God to spend our years growing in character, knowing and living more and more of the truth. So, look up with Fred at the night sky! Somewhere out there, you are driving down a stake at the limits of what you can think, who you can be, how much you can love. But what's on the other side of that? *"Move your stake."*

In the New Testament, in Ephesians 3, our text this morning, Paul prays for this very thing. *So, open your Bibles with me as I read these familiar words...

*"¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family 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."*¹

¹ Ephesians 3:14-19, New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © 1989, National Council of the Churches, USA. All rights reserved.

This is a very tall prayer, isn't it – that we might ***“comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth... and be filled with the fullness of God?”*** Why such a towering, lofty prayer for us? Because we were born for nothing less.

*Most of us believe Jesus died to forgive our sins. But that's only the beginning of the meaning of the cross. God had more in mind – that we might learn to discover the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love and call upon our lives.

So what keeps us from it? A very great deal keeps us from it! We inhabit a culture filled with shallow boundaries, shallow values, perceptions, commitments, shallow politics, and often shallow Christians too. So often we collapse into the downward pull of conformity. Or we are swallowed up inside the demands of daily living, the pettiness of our resentments, the smallness of our fear and worries, and we stake our claims only on what seems within our reach.² **But God designed us for more!**

We have a magnificent potential for abundant living. And yet we postpone our aspirations and settle for low expectations. To paraphrase Garth Brooks, ***“We've got friends with low expectations!”*** And we are them and they are us.

But it is dangerous to postpone the life God set us free to live! Margaret Atwood, in her novel, Cat's Eye, tells of a talented artist who for years is reluctant to use his gift. One day he discovers to his horror that he has all but lost the gift God gave him. Atwood sums it up: ***“Potential has a shelf life.”*** I think she's right.³

But God does not leave us in our narrow expectations and untapped potential.

*Open your Bibles again and look at the remainder of our text in verses 20-21:

“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... .. to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”⁴

I love the King James Version from which I first learned verse 20. It says: ***“(He) is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think...”***⁵

The phrase ***“exceedingly, abundantly”*** in our Scripture is the Greek ***“hyper-ek-peris-so-u”*** which means super-abundantly. God can do more than we can even dream about, above and beyond our expectations. That's the Good News!

The problem is that few of us really, really believe that!

² Many of the ideas and phrases in this message are inspired by *“Beyond All We Can Imagine,”* Copyright © 2013 by Paul Simpson Duke.

³ Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye, a novel. Copyright © 1989, Doubleday Press; 1st edition.

⁴ Op. Cit. Ephesians 3:20-21, New Revised Standard Version.

⁵ Ephesians 3:20 from the *King James Version*. The KJV is in the public domain in the United States of America.

*On Sundays we sing and pray as if everything depends on God. But when we leave Church, most of us live as if everything depends on us. When most of us look at our circumstances, family, work, and certainly the world, we rarely leave room for God to work! We stake our claim in the territory of low expectations.

But I don't want to stand before God someday and have God ask of me,
"Why didn't you aspire for more? More joy, more blessings, more peace, more justice, more righteousness? More for your life and more for this world. I am able to do abundantly far more than anything you could ever imagine. You settled for safe boundaries, when I gave you a life of infinite possibility."

How about you? What do you believe? Ephesians 3:20 says this:

**"(God) is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think..."*⁶

God can do exceedingly, abundantly more than we imagine. **God is able!**

Are you facing mountains in your life? **God is able to move mountains.**

Are you fearful of what we call death? **Don't be afraid? God is able.**

Do you wonder where the strength or resources you need will come from?

Do you look at the world with worry and fear? **Come what may, God is able!**

*I want to pray with you this morning. Before I do, I want to invite you to take your Bible, or one of ours in your hands. I'll give you time to do that now. As you find a Bible, think about the needs, the worries, the fears of your life, the limitations you face, the challenges facing the world. Now, as you hold the Bible, feel the power of God, and his promises for you and for me. And join me in this prayer.

**I believe that God is able
 to do exceedingly, abundantly,
 more than I can imagine,
 through his power that is at work within me.
 Amen.*

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⁶ Ephesians 3:20 from the *King James Version*. The KJV is in the public domain in the United States of America.