

"The Power At Work Within Us"

How can I get through stressful and difficult situations and not buckle under the strain? How can I deal with the disappointments of life and not feel bitter or defeated? How can I have the strength to endure situations that I hate, but cannot change? How can I be joyful and creative, and not just live a boring and monotonous life? How can I influence others in a positive way when so little that I do seems to make a difference?

These are the kinds of questions that we bring to our text in Ephesians, chapter 3. The Apostle Paul prays for believers in the church in Ephesus, that they may be strengthened in their inward being by the Holy Spirit (verse 16), that they can begin to grasp the immeasurable love of Christ (verse 18-19a), and that they can be filled with all the fullness of God (verse 19b).

Then the Apostle breaks out in praise to God – a doxology: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21).

When we take this section of Scripture together – Ephesians 3:14-21 – we get the feeling that *followers of Jesus have access to a tremendous power, far beyond their own!* That they can be plugged into the limitless, boundless resources of God!

There's a lot of emphasis today on developing our human potential. Much of this is from a *secular orientation*, that urges us to go deep within ourselves to discover that human potential that's untapped in all of us. This is fine, for we are wonderfully made, and most of us don't begin to reach our full human potential. But there's a limit to how far we can go simply relying on our own *human resources*. Years ago, a star goalie for the Philadelphia Flyers, Pelle Lindberg, was killed in an automobile accident. That season the Flyers lost in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. Their coach, Mike Keenan, gave this assessment of what happened: "Maybe it was just a matter of going to the well one too many times through a very emotional and draining year." There's a limit to how far the well of our *human abilities and powers and* can take us.

Sometimes it's hard to admit that we need a strength beyond our own. I mean, we have our pride: "I can do it...I'm ok...I don't need help, thank you." Some people believe religion or faith is for weak people, for people who can't make it on their own. But sooner or later we come up short. None of us is almighty.

The gospel is Good News that there is an unlimited power available to us! Ephesians, chapter 3, describes this Power and how to tap into it! **First, it tells us the source: the riches and resources of God!** Ephesians 3:16 says, "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he (God) may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit." Notice, it says, according to the "riches of his glory". That's pretty rich! God's supplies are expansive and endless! His energy, wisdom, goodness and love are available to us.

Second, we see how this power is activated and how we tap into it: it is by Christ dwelling in us. "And that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17a). The Greek

word for "dwell" or "dwelling" means to take up *permanent* residence! When we confess our sins and turn from them and trust Christ, Jesus Himself takes up permanent residence in us! Isn't that incredible!

Anne Lamott is a noted American writer. Thought-provoking. Inspirational. Quotable. She tells about her experience of having Christ come and live in her. She was unmarried, pregnant, and decided to have an abortion. She coped with pain in her usual way, by smoking dope and getting drunk. But when she started hemorrhaging a week later, she sobered up fast!

And it was that night that she became aware of Someone in the room with her. She writes, "The feeling was so strong that I actually turned on the light for a moment to make sure no one was there—of course, there wasn't. But after a while, in the dark again, I knew beyond any doubt that it was Jesus." She says that in her circle of family and friends, nobody was a Christian. They were all kind of like the people living in Ephesus: worldly, sophisticated, and in need of no one but themselves. But still, writes Lamott, Jesus stayed in the corner, "watching me with patience and love, and I squinched my eyes shut, but that didn't help because that's not what I was seeing Him with."

Lamott started going to church for several Sundays; she was drawn in to a funky little church mostly because of the music. Each Sunday she went back. She writes that she couldn't escape the feelings. "It was as if the people were singing in between the notes, weeping and joyful at the same time, and I felt like their voices or something was rocking me in its bosom, holding me like a scared kid, and I opened up to that feeling—and it washed over me." She says that one Sunday, when she got home, she opened the door, and said out loud to Jesus: "All right. You can come in."

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:17). Inviting Him in as our Savior and Lord is the act on our part that connects us to the Power Source for creative and fruitful living!

We also see in Ephesians 3 ***the reason God makes His resources available to us: to express the love of Christ.*** Ephesians 3:17-19 tells us: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, 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."

Love is the reason God wants us to tap into His limitless resources! That we can experience the fantastic love of Christ, then share that with others. God doesn't want to pour out His power and blessings on us so we'll become millionaires, or become someone famous so people will worship at our feet! We can sincerely want more power to cope with life, and to accomplish things, but our motives or goals can be questionable and self-serving. *God does not give us His power to do things that are not part of His loving purposes for humanity.*

But to any of us who really want Christ to live in us as Savior and Lord, and to live a life consistent with Christ's love for all people, there is unlimited power for living.

Illust. A man named Ira Yates owned a sheep ranch in Texas. It was during the Great Depression of the 1930's, and Mr. Yates was having a difficult time making ends meet and paying the mortgage on his ranch. He was in danger of losing it. With little money for clothes or food, his family, like many others during the depression years, had to live on government subsidy. Day after day, Yates would watch his sheep as they grazed over those rolling West Texas hills. He would rack his brain trying to figure out some way to pay all his bills. One day a crew of men from an oil company came into the area and convinced Mr. Yates that there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a wildcat test well. Yates agreed & signed a lease contract. At 1,115 feet, the drillers struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. But that was only the beginning.

Many more wells came in, some more than twice as productive as the first. In the 60's, after oil had been pumped for more than 30 years, a government test of just one of the wells showed that it still had a potential flow of 125,000 barrels of oil a day. In the year 2000, Yates Field was still one of the top 10 producers of oil in the United States. There he was, living on a government subsidy, but sitting on a mammoth underground lake of incredibly valuable oil. He was a potential multimillionaire living in poverty. He didn't realize the vast supply of oil was there.

Where do you and I need the unlimited power of Christ? *God makes His power available to us in Christ! For example, He gives us power to endure.* Sometimes situations can't be changed. We can't control others. We simply may not have the ability to alter circumstances. Scripture emphasizes the importance of *endurance*. Hebrews 10:36 says, "For you have need of *endurance*, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised." Colossians 1:11 ties in with our theme today: "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all *endurance* and patience with joy."

There are many things in life we just have to endure – either temporarily, or maybe as long as we live. Chronic illness, a cantankerous neighbor, financial struggles. But God's power is available for us so that we can get through!

God also makes His power available to us to influence others for good and for God. Most of us want to feel that when our life is over we've in some way contributed to life, we've done something for Christ, and been a blessing to people. In one church I served we had a weekend retreat for the congregation. We brought in one of the staff members of the Board of Evangelism in Nashville, Harold Rogers. I found him to be a kind, mature Christian with great devotion to Christ and his faith. In the car, driving him back to the airport after the retreat, I thanked him for his leadership in making it a very worthwhile weekend. Harold said, "I just want to be able to live in such a way that I can help someone along in their Christian journey." Don't most of us want to make some kind of positive difference in the world?

Lloyd Ogilvie tells of a woman who wrote to him, saying she was in a dry spell spiritually. She

wanted the power of the Holy Spirit, but felt no flow of new life or enthusiasm. Lloyd asked her to tell him the names of ten people who needed love. And she did. But each person she listed needed wisdom, knowledge, and faith that she wasn't able to give them *within just her own human resources*. Yet, she stepped out on faith and began to reach out to them in specific, costly ways. As she did, she experienced an infusion of power that enabled her to say things beyond her human intelligence, and communicate hope to them beyond her own experience. When she was stretched by the demands of loving them, she experienced the power of God's Spirit in her – a power far beyond her own – to impact their lives in a positive way.

The power of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, is available to each of us! Listen again to these words from God's Word: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen" (Ephesians 3:16, 20, 21).

Do you believe God is able to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine? Here's another translation of this verse: "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20 New Living Translation). *The Message* paraphrase of this verse says: "God can do anything, you know – far more than you can ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us".

In one of his books Max Lucado tells of a lady who had a small house on the seashore of Ireland at the turn of the century. She was quite wealthy but also quite frugal. The people were surprised, then, when she decided to be among the first to have electricity in her home. Several weeks after the installation, a meter reader appeared at her door. He asked if her electricity was working well, and she assured him it was. "I'm wondering if you can explain something to me," he said. "Your meter shows scarcely any usage. Are you using your power?" "Certainly," she answered. "Each evening when the sun sets, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; then I turn them off." She had the power connection – she just hardly used it!

If we've opened the door to Christ and He resides in us, we've got an unlimited source of power for right living! Henry Blackaby comments, "I have found that God always has far more to give me than I can even ask or think...if God wants to give you more than you are asking, would you rather have what you are asking...or what God wants to give?"

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