

**Secrets of Abundant Living:
THE SECRET OF MORE**

Ephesians 3:14-21

God has more for you than you can imagine.

A sermon preached by
Rev. Dr. William O. (Bud) Reeves
First United Methodist Church
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When I lived in Lake Village, Arkansas, on the shores of Lake Chicot, there was a city dock that was used for fishing. The city had submerged Christmas trees to enhance the fish habitat, so not only would people fish off the dock, but they would also come up in boats to try their luck.

The story went around about a guy who came up close to the dock in his fishing boat, and he was doing well, pulling in one fish after another. But the people on the dock noticed something strange going on. The fisherman would pull up a small fish and throw it in his live well. But if he pulled up a big fish, he would appear to measure the fish, and then he would throw it back in the lake.

This strange activity drew the notice of the people fishing from the dock, and finally someone yelled at the guy, “Hey, what are you doing out there? It looks like you’re keeping the small fry and throwing the big ones back!”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing!” the fisherman replied.

“How come?” shouted the man on the dock.

The man in the boat yelled, “Because I only have a 10-inch skillet at home!”

I don’t know if that story is a historical fact, but I do know it’s a good parable for the way we live much of the time. We limit our success by our circumstances and our expectations. We look at our equipment, and it’s a 10-inch skillet. We can’t conceive of how we can handle the big fish of life. In spiritual terms, we limit our faith to pretty much whatever we can do on our own, and we never ask God to do something surprising, miraculous, or extraordinary in our lives. Almost 70 years ago, Bible scholar J. B. Phillips set the religious world on its ear with a book entitled, *Your God Is Too Small*. It is still being read today, because it’s still an issue today. Our God is too small; the real God can do far more for you than you can ask or even imagine. That’s the secret I want to share with you today.

This week the world marked the death of one of the great American entrepreneurs. Ron Popeil died at the age of 86. He was the founder of Ronco, and his commercials were all over television for decades. Ronco supplied Americans with such indispensable items as the Veg-A-Matic slicer, the Inside-the-Egg-Shell scrambler, Mr. Microphone, the precursor of karaoke,

and the Ronco Pocket Fisherman, the tool of every sportsman. Ronco commercials also gave several phrases to American culture that will not soon go away: “How much would you pay?” “No muss, no fuss!” and “Set it and forget it!” And just when you thought the commercial was over, Ron would inevitably say, “But wait, there’s more!”¹ That’s the secret I want to share with you today. With God, there is always more.

Saint Paul knew the more of God. He was not one to limit his fishing to a 10-inch skillet. He had a big ministry, spanning almost the whole Roman Empire of his time. It was a ministry that caused suffering, imprisonment, and finally his death. But it was a ministry that brought and is still bringing millions to Christ. The churches he founded changed the face of the empire. The letters he wrote became the Scripture of the Church. Paul had such a big ministry because God had shared with him a big secret.

In the first part of Ephesians 3, Paul talks about his secret. He has just finished the part about the Gentiles becoming members of the Christian family, that they were equal to the Jews in their relationship to God, and that the walls of hostility have come down between Jewish and Gentile Christians. (We talked about that last week.) Paul is in prison because he has been telling this secret everywhere and every way he can, “*that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*”² This is Paul’s calling, his mission: to make this secret known that was hidden up until that time: “*to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.*”³ So Paul tells the church not to worry about his imprisonment or his sufferings; it’s all for their glory, because now they know the secret.

Then Paul launches into a passionate prayer for the church. If he was anything, Paul was intense about his churches. He says, “*For this reason I bow my knees...*”⁴ William Barclay points out that Jews normally prayed standing up. Paul is so passionate that he falls to the ground in prayer.⁵

Even though this prayer is in letter form, can you imagine how the people of Ephesus felt to have Paul praying for them? The prayer of a pastor can be a powerful thing. Even I get this

sometimes. I pray for many people; since COVID, more over the phone than anything else. I pray for people who are sick and grieving or in trouble. Sometimes I get to pray rejoicing over something good like a promotion or a wedding or a birth. I always mean what I say, but I seldom feel like the words I say are profound or even adequate. But the reaction to my prayer is often amazing: “Oh, thank you so much; that’s means so much to me; that was a beautiful prayer.” Things like that. And I say, “Oh, well, you’re welcome,” but I know, that reaction wasn’t about me.

So imagine yourself in the shoes of an Ephesian Christian, hearing this prayer read in church, and what it would feel like: *“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, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*⁶ Do you feel that?

What is Paul praying for here? He’s praying for strength and power. This is not physical strength or political power; this is in the inner being. It comes through the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Christ living in our hearts.

Paul is praying for understanding of the mystery of God. Every week we send out a discussion guide for the sermon called “Higher, Deeper, Broader.” We started doing this during COVID, but several small groups are using them for their discussions. We can make them available to you individually or as a group. This verse is where I got the title for the resource: “Higher, Deeper, Broader.” But Paul adds even another dimension. Maybe I should have called it “Higher, Deeper, Broader, and Longer.” Or maybe not. This is the same spirit of wisdom and revelation that we talked about in chapter one three weeks ago.

Finally, Paul prays for love in the church: *“as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ...to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”*⁷ This is the foundation of our life together. Love is the basis of the birth, life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus. Love is the “coin of the realm” in the Kingdom of God. To paraphrase another letter of Paul, if you don’t have love, you’re nowhere and nothing; if you have love, you get it all.

Dr. Rebekah Miles is a friend of mine who is a distinguished professor of practical theology and ethics at Perkins School of Theology at SMU in Dallas. But Bekah grew up as a preacher’s kid in Arkansas, and her brother John, also a pastor, told me this story. When Bekah was in junior high, she began visiting people in nursing homes. In one of the homes, she visited an elderly woman named Mrs. Feemster. Mrs. Feemster had had a stroke, and she could only speak one small sentence. To everyone in any situation, she would say, “I don’t know.” Most people would be intimidated by this bizarre response, but not Bekah. Over time, she learned by how Mrs. Feemster delivered the sentence how she was feeling. She said “I don’t know” in different ways at different times. Gradually, Bekah and Mrs. Feemster developed a relationship.

After a time, Mrs. Feemster determined she was going to say Bekah’s name. After struggling for a while, she got to where she could cry out when Bekah entered the room, “Bekah, Bekah.” One day as Bekah was leaving, a surprising thing happened. Mrs. Feemster reached out her bony little hand and grabbed Bekah. She looked at her, and after years of limited speech, she said, “I love you, Bekah.” That’s what Paul was praying for. That’s love that surpasses knowledge. That’s love that will fill us with all the fullness of God.

Having prayed this prayer, Paul just can’t contain himself. He dictated his letters, so I can imagine him getting up off his knees and spreading his arms and speaking this word of doxology, this word of praise: “*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!*”⁸ There are no 10-inch skilletts in Paul’s kitchen! This is an awesome God. This is a God of more, who is able to do more for you than all you can ask or imagine. Why would we make small with a God like that?

James Howell reminds us that “C. S. Lewis wrote that our problem isn’t that our desires are too strong, and faith is supposed to throw cold water on our desiring. No, God wants us to desire far more than we desire. We play around with lesser goods, pleasure, money, diversions, things, when God promises us more elusive but more delightful goods, like joy, purpose, belonging, hope.”⁹

What joy there is when we realize that God has more for us that we even thought to ask for. It’s like a kid at a birthday party who asked for Legos and got a trip to Lego World. Or he asked for a few things—maybe a bicycle or a video game—but got more than he could ever imagine. When Gabriel Hurles turned six, that’s exactly what he got. The little guy was so focused on eating his cake that he hardly noticed the giant package in the corner of the room. When another kid pointed out the large gift, Gabriel ran over and began to tear off the wrapping. It wasn’t a bicycle or any of the other items a six-year-old might want. It was his dad, Army Specialist Casey Hurles, home on leave from overseas duty. Gabriel and his father had been apart for seven months, so when Casey learned his leave would coincide with his son’s birthday, he hatched a plan to give him a surprise beyond his wildest dreams.¹⁰

That the secret of more. Try to imagine all that you could ever want out of life—not the lesser goods of pleasure, money, diversions or things, but the real stuff of life: love, faith, hope, joy, peace, purpose, belonging. Try to imagine the best life possible. I’m telling you, God can do more.

Jesus said the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It’s the smallest of seeds, but when it is planted and grows, it becomes a huge bush, so that even the birds can make nests in its branches. Our God is not a ten-inch skillet kind of God. Our God takes a mustard seed and makes it huge.

As we come to the Lord’s Table today, let’s celebrate the abundance of God toward us. Our God is able to fill us with power and strength. Our God is able to fill us with knowledge and wisdom. Our God is able to fill our hearts with love. Our God is able to accomplish abundantly in our lives far more than we can ask or imagine. *“To him be glory in the church and in*

Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever! Amen!"¹¹ But wait, there's more...

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/30/ron-popeil-great-american-marketer/>.

² Ephesians 3:6.

³ Ephesians 3:9.

⁴ Ephesians 1:14.

⁵ James Howell, "Weekly Preaching: July 25, 2021," *ministrymatters.com*.

⁶ Ephesians 3:16-19.

⁷ Ephesians 3:17, 19.

⁸ Ephesians 3:20-21.

⁹ Howell, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Associated Press, "Boys wrapped birthday gift is dad back from Iraq," *YahooNews.com*, January 30, 2009.

¹¹ Ephesians 3:21.