



1 | EPHESIANS 3:14-4:12

THE ABUNDANT CHURCH

The Lord wants his church to succeed more than you do.

Outline

1. **WE NEED ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD (3:14-19)**

Your View of God

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A Loving Forever Family

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The Infinite Fullness of God

2. **WE NEED EMPOWERMENT FROM GOD (3:20-21)**

An Infinite Power

An Internal Power

3. **WE NEED EFFECTIVENESS FROM GOD (4:11-12)**

Effective Shepherds

Effective Saints

Call to Worship: Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

³ who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

⁵ who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Introduction

Our title this morning is: "The Abundant Church". Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Paul tells us God wants to do "exceeding, abundantly above all that we could ever ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20).

I believe God wants to bring a great, earth shaking revival to this town, to this land, through this church. I believe that with all my heart. He's building his church. We are on the offensive, snatching people through the bars of hell. But we often don't get to see a lot of that

forward movement for Christ's church. Why? I believe it is because the church in America is powerless. I have often felt powerless. He wants to steward us with an abundant church, full of power, but we just don't know how to get it. The truth is, in Ephesians, we learn that we have it already, with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3), but we actually are not often accessing it.

Key Thought: God wants to give us an abundant church, but we have to overcome our powerlessness before we can have it.

Have you ever felt powerless? I can remember as a child growing up in the winding roads of Louisiana where my most faithful transportation was a Huffy bicycle. I used to go everywhere on that bike. It never failed me... until I was going at top speed at about 15 miles an hour by Michael Barnes' house. Here's the thing – Mike had a big dog. I don't even remember what kind of a dog it was. I just remember one thing about it. It had big teeth. Everything about this dog was big! I couldn't go fast enough. I remember thinking I wanted to grow up. I didn't want to be this dog's meal. Terror raced through my veins as this dog started running next to me and gnawing at my twirling feet that couldn't peddle fast enough! My Huffy bike failed me. Obviously, I survived. I don't remember how I got out of that, but the fact that I'm here today proves I lived through it!

Then came 1987. I begged my mom for a used 1980 C-70 Honda passport moped! She vowed never to get me one of those. It went too fast. But we lived a mile deep into the woods in Louisiana and a moped could be quite helpful. She broke down and got it for me! It wasn't in the greatest shape. It had a part missing from the carburetor, so any time I wanted it to go I had to actually place my hand over the carburetor so that the gas would get suctioned into the engine. I finally rigged the carburetor with a rubber band and a piece of cloth, and I could go anywhere. What's my point? What good is the moped if it has no power? What good is it if it has a broken carburetor and you can't get fuel to the engine?

In the same way, the Christian life is like a car. What good does it do you if you have a beautiful, sophisticated automobile if you don't have the key? No key, no power. Well in the Christian life we have all we need! We've learned about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and the believer's resources available in Christ. Ephesians 1-3 speak of who we are in Christ – all the resources we have in Christ, and 4-6 what we are to do – our vocation. The first three chapters explain our position. The last three, our vocation, or our calling. We cannot do what God intends for us to do, unless we be what God intends for us to be.

Sandwiched in the middle of these great chapters is the empowerment of it all. In other words, I know *who* I am in Christ. I know *what* he wants me to do. But *how* do I do it? He wanted the Ephesian believers to experience worship through God's power, Christ's love, and his infinite fullness.

Outline: We need Encouragement, Empowerment, and Effectiveness from God to be an abundant church for him.

1. WE NEED ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD (3:14-19)

Since we have no power in and of ourselves, we begin by praying to the Father in heaven, like Paul did, for power.

Ephesians 3:14-19 | For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

YOUR VIEW OF GOD

If we are going to see God work mightily in his churches, we have to get our view of God right. So many of us are like the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal (Lk 15). We need to see God not with his arms crossed, waiting to criticize and condemn us. That's impossible. "There's no condemnation" (Rom 8:1). Our God is not an "arms-crossed" God, but an "arms-open" God. He's there waiting for us at the end of the road, like the father yearned for his wayward son. He's got his arms outstretched for you. Jesus says, "Come to me!" Look at the Father with arms wide open!

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. —Luke 15:20

A Loving Heavenly Father

Paul comes to a loving heavenly Father and bows his knees.

Ephesians 3:14 | For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.

We come to a tender, loving, concerned, compassionate, accepting Father. A loving human father always accepts the advances of his children, even when they have been disobedient or ungrateful. How much more does our heavenly Father accept His children, regardless of what they have done or not done? Paul approaches the Father with boldness and confidence, knowing that he is more willing for his children to come to him than they ever are of going to him. He knows that God has been waiting all the while with a Father's heart of love and anticipation.¹

A Loving Forever Family

Paul comes to a loving heavenly Father and bows his knees

Ephesians 3:14-15 | For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We have a **super big family**, "from whom every family on heaven and earth is named." We need to remember that a great host of believers has already made it safely to heaven, and when we are all together on the last day, there will be "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and families, and people, and languages" (Rev 7:9).

I may earnestly hold to a certain system of theology. I have a "big God" theology. I believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation. But I cannot cut out the first part of this book of

¹ MacArthur. *Ephesians*, 101.

Ephesians that tells me that I am one with everyone who is born again, and Christ is the head of one church. He does not have 20,000 churches, but one only. Some may be in bad condition. Read the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2-3). As Paul says,

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. —Ephesians 4:4-6

It's also a **supernatural family**! Membership in the family of God does not depend on any earthly relationship, but upon being “born again” (Jn 3:3).

There is a **family language**: prayer. Paul said, “I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (3:14).

There is a **family likeness**: Christ in us! Every day we should be more and more resembling the Lord Jesus since all who know Christ are “predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

There is a **family location**: heaven and earth. Remember, two places, and only two, contain the family of God. We are the *church militant* on earth, and the *church triumphant* in heaven.

There is a **family love**: It is an infinite, everlasting love that is poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit. It is so powerful that it banishes all fear and anxiety from your heart (1 Jn 4:18).

So we saw your view of God and the church, and what it ought to be, but let me ask you, what is your experience of God?

YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD

The Ephesian church had the reputation of losing their first love (Revelation 2:1-7).

If you ask most Christians in most churches, they could tell you a lot about God. But they don't know him. They don't love him. They know about him. Pharisees and Sadducees knew about him. Being theologically conservative doesn't mean you know God. Paul's prayer was that the Ephesian church might know God. That's an important prayer, because later on, **they had the reputation of losing their first love (Rev 2:1-7)**. Christ was not happy that though they had good doctrine, they lost their first love.

We need that love relationship with the Triune God, and Paul is about to explain how we get there. I want to get there don't you?

The Infinite Power of the Spirit

Paul knew that God's power had no limit. The supply of power God promises is from the Spirit and it has no end. Paul prays that God would enable them to employ the fullness of that power. Because believers are the habitation of the triune, all-powerful God of the universe, Paul prays that their unlimited energy from Him would be manifested.²

² MacArthur. *Ephesians*, 101-102.

Ephesians 3:16 | For this reason I bow my knees before the Father...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

To start with, if you're going to really be effective, and want God's power to be released, you need to have spiritual stamina to be victorious over temptation, to be victorious over the world, the flesh, and the devil. The only way you get there is through Pentecost. You have to put off from you anything that would grieve the Spirit.

Jesus went to the cross and the grave for our sin, so that we could live lives that are clothed with power. Remember Jesus promise to them and to us?

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city [of Jerusalem] until you are clothed with power from on high. — Luke 24:49

Do you believe this is a promise for us? Paul prays that we would know the power of the Spirit here in Ephesians! Can you say that right now you are “clothed with power from on high”? Do you know the power of love and joy and peace? Are you experiencing the precious communion of the Spirit of God. Is there glorified, heavenly joy in your life (1 Pet 1:8)?

Then Paul prays for the Ephesian believers and us to experience not only the Spirit's power, but Christ's infinite love.

The Infinite Love of Christ

The Dwelling of the Loving Christ in You

Ephesians 3:17 | That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love.

God says we ought to be “rooted and grounded” in Christ's love (3:17). The word “dwell” means to make oneself at home. The word is a compound “kata-oikeo” “kata” means “down” and “oikeo” means home. Is Christ “down-home” in your heart? Is he comfortable? Is the Holy Spirit pleased or is he grieved?

There is a book called *My Heart, Christ's Home* by Robert Boyd Munger –perhaps you own it. This is a great book to read to your children. Munger likens the Christian's heart to a house. And the question is, “Is Christ comfortable there?” The heart like a home has a library and then a dining room and then a living room and then a workshop and finally a closet.

The Library – what do you think on? What do you take into your heart? And when the Lord comes into your house, what does he find in the library? What does he find in the control room? You might have a TV in that room. What does he find? Is it trash and triviality, pornography and materialism? Whenever Christ comes in and is comfortable – he renews our mind and comforts our heart with peace. He clears out the garbage books and throws out the trash and replaces it with the Word of God. Truly the blessed man's “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psa 1:2).

The Dining Room – This is the room of appetites where your desires and appetites are satiated. And Christ wants to know what do you long for? What's on your menu? What do you order? What really satisfies you? The Lord wants to replace all the illegitimate stuff with the will of God so that that alone would satisfy you. We say with David: “Whom have I in heaven

but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Psa 73:25). “The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (Psa 119:72).

The Living Room – Your communion with God. The living room is a place of conversation and being together and cultivating relationship. And in this particular story Munger describes how Christ comes into the living room and sits there and sits there and sits there and sits there and nobody ever shows up. What ever happened to prayer? And what ever happened to communion? And what ever happened to fellowship? And what happened to relationship? Do you have a prayer closet? Do you get alone with God?

The Workshop – What are you making? What are you doing with your life? What’s your legacy? We’ve got all these gifts – what are we doing with them? And the answer is most are making toys. And Christ wants to fix it so that you’re producing something that has eternal value.

The Closet – In Munger’s book he gets through the whole house, but he says there’s a **terrible stench coming from somewhere**. And it’s a closet. So the Lord, picking up the scent, goes to the closet and in there is something foul, something dead and it’s the place of hidden personal sins. And he throws the door open. And Munger says, “This is too much! I am not going to give him the key.”³ I mean, give me a break. I gave you the library, the dining room, the living room and the workshop and everybody knows in every house if you find the right closet, God only knows what you’ll discover in there. God wants your closet. He wants to clean out your personal sins. He wants to sanctify you completely. Listen to the sweet words of our Lord Jesus, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23).

The Dimensions of Christ’s Love

Ephesians 3:18-19a | That you...may have strength 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.

The Lord wants us to comprehend – to seize upon– to leap and take hold of – to dive for –the love of Christ. Rigorously grasp his love. Do whatever it takes to grasp it. Be greedy for it! But try as you might, you cannot comprehend it. You can’t grasp it. It’s infinite.

Christ’s Love is Wide

It is a love *wide* enough to embrace the world (Jn 3:16). There is no limit to who God will reach. God is not willing that any should perish, but that they should come to repentance.

God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”—1 Timothy 2:4

Christ’s Love is Long

It is a love *long* enough to last forever. As Ephesians 1:4 says, God’s love is so long that it extends to eternity past when he chose us in Christ. From eternity past, God planned to send his Son to save you on that brutal cross. God says,

³ Robert Boyd Munger; Andrea Jorgenson. *My Heart Christ’s Home: A Story for Old and Young* (Kindle Locations 171-172).

I have loved you with an everlasting love. —Jeremiah 31:3

Before you were formed in your mother's womb, God set his love upon you. It's a love so long it also covers eternity future, "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (2:7). As Spurgeon said,

Christ's love is so long that your old age cannot wear it out, so long your continual tribulation cannot exhaust it, your successive temptations shall not drain it dry; like eternity itself it knows no bounds. —Charles Spurgeon⁴

Christ's Love is Deep

It is a love *deep* enough to take Christ to the very depths to reach the lowest sinner.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. —Romans 5:6

Christ took hell for you. Look how low he reached to reach you. When we were dead in our sins God loved us (Eph 2:1-3). He went to the lowest hell for you and freed you from hell's very gates.

Christ's Love is High

It is a love *high* enough to take broken sinners like you and me to heaven. He loves you so much that what he has begun in you he promises to finish (Phil 1:6). He's working everything together for good for you.

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. —Romans 8:28-29

We've looked at the infinite **power of the Spirit**, and the infinite **love of Christ**. Now let's consider the infinite **fullness of God**.

The Infinite Fullness of God

Ephesians 3:19b | that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We are asking that God – the eternal God, the almighty God, the creator God, the sustainer God, the God of the universe, the God who made it all, the God who fills all to fill me? That's incredible. We are that we all are "his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (1:23).

The idea is to fill to overflowing, to try to fill a thimble with the ocean. You don't need to wait for this to happen. I had this immediately when I came to know Christ. You already have "all spiritual blessings in Christ" (1:3). The fullness of God in the simplest experience is the awareness of God's presence and love for you.

⁴ Ibid.

2. WE NEED EMPOWERMENT FROM GOD (3:20-21)

When I was just a child, my big brother David planted a little twig in the back yard. Weeks passed, and finally my father noticed it. It was a little tiny tree. He didn't want a tree in our back yard, so each week he mowed it with the lawn mower. My father was persistent. But there was more time my father couldn't mow in Chicago than when he could mow, and my father had to leave the little twig alone. He must have soon given up, because that little twig is a beautiful Maple tree at 5900 Stuart Lane. It's so big you can see it from Google Earth! That little tree was far, far bigger than anything my brother or my father could have imagined. So it is with the plans God has for us.

Ephesians 3:20-21 | Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

There may be some chains in your life. There are some impossible situations in your life and perhaps in your heart. Whatever you are praying for, God wants to do far more!

Paul is not sitting in a church service or in a comfortable study. In-stead, the apostle is sitting in a prison in or near the barracks of the Praetorian Guard – the band of elite Roman soldiers assigned to guard the Roman Emperor. Paul may have been in rented quarters at his own expense – chained to Roman soldiers twenty-four hours a day. He is awaiting trial before the Roman officials and has suffered this specific imprisonment for two long years. All Paul can do is sit and wait. The word that describes Paul: *unable*! But Paul doesn't believe that!

AN INFINITE POWER

Ephesians 3:20a | Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.

Essentially, Paul has one message now: God's capacity to answer you infinitely exceeds your ability to ask him! Ask all you want, all you can, everything you can even imagine, and God's capacity to answer you is infinitely greater than you can ask or imagine. God's ability to answer you is far, far above anything you could ever ask or imagine.

Whatever you want to be freed from for Christ and whatever plans you want to accomplish, you are not asking too much, but too little.

This cannot be done with human power. "Not by the might of armies, nor by human power, but by my Spirit says the Lord" (Zech 4:6). We need God's power, as Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Psa 127:1).

He is able to *do*

He is able to do *what we ask*

He is able to do *all* that we ask

He is able to do all that we ask or even *imagine*!

He is able to do *above* all that we ask or imagine!

He is able to do *abundantly* beyond all that we ask or imagine!

He is able to do *exceedingly* abundantly above all that we could ask or think!

He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, *according to the power working in us!*

There is no exaggeration in this. Human language fails to properly convey the magnitude of God's incredible power. God is sufficient for all you are facing. This verse is testimony of God's abundant sufficiency for everything we are and everything we face.

AN INTERNAL POWER

Ephesians 4:20b | According to the power at work within us.

We think we need a better spouse or a better job or a better church. That's not the answer. The answer begins with God's work inside of you.

There is a power exploding forth inside of us. It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 8:11). It is the power that comes forth from the Person of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14), who indwells us.

When I was a child of fourteen, I got in trouble with the law, and I was in deep trouble. The judge gave me two options: juvenile detention or a probational work program. One of our kind neighbors stepped up. He was a business owner. He owned a world-renowned propeller shop (New Orleans Aircraft Propeller) near the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport. I was sweeping floors there for \$2.65 an hour. I was just glad to get out of trouble. But my expectations of the good Mr. Downs wanted to do for me were low. One day, Mr. Downs' friend pulled up in a restored World War II fighter plane. Mr. Downs asked me, "Do you want a ride?" His pilot took me high into the sky. He asked me, "Do you want to roll"? I had just seen the movie Top Gun, and of course I said, "Yes!" There I was flying upside down, suspended in the air above New Orleans. God's power is like that. It far exceeds our expectations! Over and above and beyond the greatest abundance – this is the power the God has promised you.

3. WE NEED EFFECTIVENESS FROM GOD (4:11-12)

Now we get to the heart of the message. In Ephesians 4:1-10, we are introduced to our unity in the Spirit and our spiritual gifts. Now this is where the prayer of Paul is answered.

He prays they may know the triune God.

- the infinite power of the Spirit
- the infinite love of Christ
- the infinite fullness of God

Then Paul says that whatever you are asking for, you are asking too little. God wants to do "exceeding, abundantly above" all that you ask or imagine. So how do we get there? We get equipped and involved.

As we consider how to grow in Christ, it is interesting that Paul begins by naming the four teaching gifts to the church: apostles and prophets, which are foundational when it comes to the Word; and then he names the evangelists and teaching pastors / elders, which are functional when it comes to the Word. It is the Word of God that sets people's hearts aright so that they might serve the Lord with gladness.

Paul mentions the apostles and the prophets, which he has already mentioned as foundational offices (2:20). Now he speaks of building the church, like building a building,

with pastors and teachers in local churches, and evangelists who are like the missionaries we send out today, planting local churches.

EFFECTIVE SHEPHERDS

Ephesians 4:11 | And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints...

Paul mentions the apostles and the prophets, which he has already mentioned as foundational offices (2:20). Now he speaks of building the church, like building a building, with pastors and teachers in local churches, and evangelists who are like the missionaries we send out today, planting local churches.

The pastor-shepherds must build up the saints through ministering the Word. The elders are not to do it all. Paul didn't reach all those people in the Ephesian church. He reached a few through the teaching of the Word, but those mature Ephesian believers reached others who in turn reached others.

EFFECTIVE SAINTS

Ephesians 4:12a | To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

The saints are equipped by the Word to serve each other. I love to build things. I'm constantly looking, fixing, repairing. I even love to mow my yard. I love to plant flowers. I love to see things being transformed. I have on my wall a picture that Katie made me when she was much younger. It's not the Mona Lisa. But it is a picture of us together when we were in Spain and we built a garage next to our home. Why is this precious? Because Katie had "done what she could".

The saints are called to counsel one another in **life-on-life discipleship**. We get in each other's lives. We confess our sins constantly to one another. I do that a lot. I'm on the phone every week with some brother in our congregation confessing my sins. You know what God taught me this week? "The opposite of anger or anxiety or despair or pride or foolish thinking is WORSHIP." A couple in my church told me that. I needed that. Man did I need that. I don't need my wife to change, my church to change, my job to change. I need worship. With that worship, I need to be edifying the saints.

The saints are called to building up the body by **evangelism**. If you don't evangelize, you will fossilize! A healthy church has about 50% of the people who are solid and grounded and growing, and another 50% that are new and perhaps floundering and just getting introduced to the faith. A healthy church is going to attract all kinds of birds, sometimes strange birds. We regularly have people of all kinds of backgrounds attending and asking questions. Pentecostals, Arminians, Catholics, false converts. They come. We welcome them. We are glad they are there. And slowly, with great love and tenderness, we show them the way of Christ. We patiently help them grow in the Gospel, since some are unfamiliar with even the clear Gospel. We evangelize!

Every believer has to be committed to serve. Imagine if I went to build a house and only built the basement. That would be a disaster. Listen the basement of a house is no good unless the whole house is connected. Or imagine my mother-in-law made a shirt for me but it only had one sleeve, or only one side to it. The shirt is no good unless both sides are

sewn together. In the same way, the Body of Christ is severely limited if only one side works. We are to build up the whole Body. We are to do the work of ministry. This is the measure of spiritual maturity.

Conclusion

As we close, let me just say I love Spring! You can see the flowers blooming everywhere! Actually, I love to see all the various colors of the flowers together. The flowers are of every variety of the brilliant colors of the rainbow! God's church is beautiful in that same way. Every one of us is different—with different functions and gifting and abilities, yet we are all one Body.

Fifteen years ago, I was so excited to purchase several beautiful bushes for only ten cents apiece. I was proud of myself for finding such a bargain. I planted them in our back yard in the Spring. They were all barely alive. But I took personal interest and care for those bushes, carefully watering them. By the first year, I was just glad that these bushes even survived and began to blossom. Each year the bushes grew more and more. Today, they are beautifully manicured and look like I paid hundreds of dollars for them.

As much as I wanted those bushes to succeed, I worked on them. I worked so hard. God's working on you too, and he's a perfect Gardener (Jn 15). Keep abiding in Christ and you will be abounding in spiritual fruit. God wants you to succeed more than you want to succeed. He came to give you life and life more abundantly (Jn 10:10).

What do you want to see God do? God wants to do "exceeding, abundantly above all that you could ever ask or think" (Eph 3:20) for your good and his glory! What is your Ephesians 3:20 prayer? Exceeding, abundantly above walk with God? Let do this!