

“Immeasurably More”

Introduction: Have you ever thought about the fact that right from the moment we are born, measurements are a part of life?

- We all know that some of the first questions asked about a new baby are “How tall is she?” and “How heavy is he?” There is another important measurement taken by medical personnel. It is called an **APGAR score**. It was devised by Virginia Apgar in 1952 and it measures the baby’s Appearance, Pulse, Grimace, Activity and Respiration on a scale of 1-10.
- Another interesting measurement is the **Baker’s dozen**. A baker’s dozen refers to 13 because there is a tradition that if you buy a dozen items in a bakery the baker will throw in an extra. I do know some generous bakers but the custom did not start because of generosity. A medieval English law in the 13th century provided consumer protection by mandating that if a baker shortchanged a customer he could be punished by having his hand chopped off. Suddenly, tossing in an extra item made a lot of sense!
- Does anyone know how many birds are in a **flock**? Two score. Anyone know how many are in a score? 20! Birds in a flock? 40.
- Finally, in 1938 mathematician Edward Kasner asked his then 8-year-old nephew Milton Sirota what he would name a really, really, really large number. He said “**googol**.” A googol is a very large number...10 to the 100th power.

I imagine there weren’t that many people familiar with this unit of measurement until many years later, when Larry Page and Sergey Brin named their start-up company “Google,” and that’s where I found all of this fascinating information!

Measurements are everywhere. Sometimes they are fun and sometimes we get tired of feeling constantly evaluated and quantified.

And, in spite of the many kinds of measurements we experience in daily life, some things in life are simply immeasurable.

There is no way measurements could have told us that VCU and Butler were going to be in the Final Four in this year’s NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament.

In fact, many of life’s most important experiences are immeasurable....

- We can’t measure hurt or grief
- We can’t measure friendship or loneliness
- We can’t measure joy or love

In Ephesians 3:14-21 we read a prayer of the apostle Paul and it is a wonderful example of how to approach an immeasurable God with our greatest concerns....

“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 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.”

While there is so much to consider in this prayer, let’s look at two fundamental truths about how best to interact with God through prayer:

1. First, approach God with humility

Paul begins by saying, “I kneel before the Father”

The tradition of Paul’s day was to stand when praying, but to kneel or bow as an expression of deep emotion or earnestness.

- Solomon knelt at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:54)
- Stephen knelt as he prayed while being martyred (Acts 7:60)
- Peter knelt at the death bed of Dorcas (Acts 9:40)
- Paul knelt as he said goodbye to loved ones on his last journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:36)
- Jesus knelt in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:35; Luke 22:41)

But Paul didn’t just kneel...the word he used means “to prostrate oneself.” That is what one does when encountering the Immeasurable One.

In the gospel of Mark, the fifth chapter, we see a vivid example of how people in need approached Jesus.

Three people came to Jesus for help... a man possessed by demons, a synagogue ruler whose daughter was dying and a woman who had been ill for 12 years. Although their stories and situations were each unique they shared one thing in common.....when they came to Jesus for help they each fell prostrate at his feet.

And Paul’s humility was not the product just of some general, theological

understanding of an Almighty God. This was personal.

Before Paul met Jesus he was a man with a strong religious resume' and he was proud of it. In his letter to his friends in Philippi, the third chapter, he summarized his credentials. (vss. 4b-6)

“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

In his zeal Paul was a leader in the persecution of the early church, but then one day he unexpectedly met Jesus.

Acts 9 tells us that “Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied.”

Within days, a humbled, repentant and forgiven Saul was given a new life, and at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

And in Ephesians 3, right before he begins his prayer, Paul says he is the least of all God’s people, and the grateful recipient of God’s immeasurable grace.

Question: How is your humility doing these days? Are you more inclined to stand tall before Jesus, counting on your belief that you are a good person or to fall on your face before him, fully aware of your sin and need and deeply grateful for his love and grace?

Our posture often says a lot about our heart.

2. Second, ask God boldly

Just because we kneel before God in humility doesn’t mean we can’t boldly approach him with our needs.

John Newton, the composer of “Amazing Grace,” wrote these lyrics for another of his hymns;

“Thou are coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring;

For his grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much.”

And yet, what kind of prayers do you pray? Sometimes we pray as if we don't want to bother God...he must too busy or my needs are so meager compared to others.

Sometimes we pray as if we have no imagination and are hemmed in by our limited concept of “what's possible.”

- **Abraham and Sarah** had no idea what God could do in their lives. Decades after they had joined AARP God said he would give them children. Long story short, God did give them children and Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.’ And she added, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’”

Did you notice she mentioned Abraham's old age but said nothing about her own?!

- **Mary** was a teenage virgin when an angel told her the Holy Spirit would soon come over her and she would bear a son who will be called the Son of the Most High and reign forever. At the end of his life-changing message he concluded by saying, “Nothing is impossible with God.”

- **The disciples** lived with Jesus for three years, saw him perform miracles and heard him teach. And they regularly had their concept of “what is possible” stretched by Jesus. One day a rich ruler asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all he had and give the money to the poor. Then he could follow Jesus. The man grew sad (there's an understatement!), turned and left. The disciples were confounded. They lived in a world that favored the wealthy and they considered wealth a sign of God's blessing. But Jesus said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” They blurted out their confusion saying, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus answered, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

Rev. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this about this prayer.... “The greatest sin of every Christian, and of the Christian Church in general, is to limit the eternal, absolute power of God to the measure of our own minds and concepts and understandings.”

So, what did Paul ask for in his prayer?

- **Paul prayed that his friends would be strengthened in their inner being**

Sometimes life throws something at us and we wonder if we will be able to handle it.

Nancy Guthrie wrote about her experience of dealing with the death of her

daughter Hope...

"I'll never forget standing in my kitchen with my sister-in-law, Caroline, after Hope's memorial service. 'How do you do this?' I asked her, wondering how I would get through that day and keep facing the days to come. Caroline knew what it was like to bury someone she loved. Before my brother came into her life, she had dealt with the devastating loss of her first husband when he was killed in a car accident two weeks after they got married. Her answer to my desperate question was simple: 'Manna.' She explained that just as the children of Israel were dependent on God to provide manna to sustain them every day while they wandered in the wilderness, I had to depend on God to give me the manna I needed every day to sustain me as I grieved my loss."

I know many of you are facing challenges in life and you may be also asking the question, "How do I do this?" Remember the manna. The same God who provided food daily for millions of Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years can provide today what you need deep inside your soul.

- Paul prayed that his friends would be empowered to grasp the immeasurable love God has for them.

Have you ever struggled trying to explain to someone how much they are loved?

Listen to how Paul struggles to tell us how much we are loved.... "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."

I spent a lot of time this week thinking about how I could somehow help us all understand more fully God's love until I finally saw the point of Paul's words.... I can't do it. No one can! God's love is immeasurable. His love is greater than "googol." It reaches beyond the scope of the universe and yet it also reaches personally, tenderly and powerfully deep into the depths of each of our hearts and lives.

God's love is like a perpetual > sign!

- Paul prayed that his friends would "be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

These days in Minnesota our ground is filled to the measure of all the fullness of water! Our area is saturated with water and that is not necessarily something to celebrate. However, when God saturates our lives with his presence it is time to throw a party!!

God does not force himself upon us but he desires to fill our lives with all of his good gifts.

He wants to saturate us with his Spirit who brings love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

He wants to saturate us with his forgiveness and mercy

He wants to saturate us with his Truth that provides direction and protection

He wants to saturate us with his strength that we may worship him by serving others.

He wants to saturate us with his grace that we may know the freedom and joy of being at peace with God.

He wants to saturate us with himself so that others see and ask, "What is it that you have? Can I have it too?"

Before we close, I need to mention one last thing; When God works in ways that are immeasurably greater and different from what you expect it will be a blessing and it often will rock your world and your carefully laid plans.

Be careful that the iron grip of self-control and the fear of His plans don't keep you from knowing the fullness of the immeasurable work of God in your life.

CONCLUSION: Louis Zamperini was born January 26, 1917. Raised in California, He ran in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany and when America entered WWII became part of a bomber crew in the Pacific. On May 27, 1943 his plane crashed while on a search and rescue mission. Louie and two others survived the crash and spent nearly 50 days drifting over 2000 miles before being "rescued/captured by Japanese forces. When the plane crashed the 5' 10" Louie weighed about 150 pounds. When captured he weighed about 80 pounds. For over two years Louis was held as a Prisoner of War in multiple camps and was regularly, sadistically beaten. Near death, Louie was liberated in September, 1945 and eventually returned home to LA, to family and friends. In 1946 Louie married Cynthia, but he was dogged by nightmares of the beatings he had endured, and he slid into alcoholism. The marriage was dying when one day in 1949 Cynthia went to a tent meeting to hear a preacher named Billy Graham. In a matter of days both she and Louie received Jesus' gift of forgiveness. The nightmares ended and the thirst for alcohol and revenge disappeared. Four years later Louie returned to Japan to personally forgive those who had mistreated him as his guards.

Sometimes life's pain and confusion is immeasurable. Always, God's love and power are immeasurable.

Prayer

BENEDICTION: Father, I kneel my heart and mind before you and I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen every single person in this room with power through your Spirit in their inner being, so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. And I pray that each person here, 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 your Son, Jesus, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that each may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And now, to you, Father, the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to your power that is at work within us, to you be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

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