

THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE EPHESIANS 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

If I were to ask you to define [the ultimate experience](#) what would it be? For New Zealand's Edmund Hillary, the ultimate experience occurred on May 29, 1953.

That was the day Sir Edmund set foot on top of the 29,032 foot summit of Mount Everest - becoming the first human to reach the pinnacle of planet Earth.

For George Perry, an avid fisherman, the ultimate experience took place at Lake Montgomery, GA, on June 2, 1932. On that memorable day, George landed the record for the largest bass caught in America.

The record-setter weighed 22 pounds, 4 ounces, and was 32½ inches long. Imagine, the excitement for George trying to get that monster into the boat.

I said for years, the ultimate experience for me would be to drive on the German Autobahn. Picture 5000 miles of blacktop with no speed limit! What a rush!

My dream almost came true in 2006. I'd gone to speak at a CC in Germany. I took my daughter and we rented a car. There we were on the Autobahn, cars flying past us doing 160 mph. *But we had a problem...*

Cheapskate Sandy had rented a little economy car. It topped out at 95 mph... *There we were with **no speed limit**, but we were driving a car with **no speed**.*

Moral of the story... when you dream be specific!

But here's my question for you this morning, **what would be your ultimate experience?** A vacation to an exotic destination?... To go faster, or higher, or farther than anyone else?... To invent the iron man suit?

To sail around the world?...

To walk on the moon?...

All these experiences would be thrilling, but none would rival - what is for all humans **The Ultimate Adventure** - and that's an experience with God!

Think it through... *a frail, finite, fallible, fragile, foolish human being rubbing shoulders with the indestructible, indescribable, infinite, infallible, incredible God.*

That's quite an experience!

We're talking the same God who hung the heavens, and parted the Red Sea, and sent fire from heaven, and walked on water, and even rose from the dead!

To sense His presence...

To feel His forgiveness...

To behold His glory...

To be touched by His tenderness...

To savor His love...

To hear His calming voice...

To soar on a surge of His strength...

Without question, God is **the ultimate experience!**

I'm sure it's a thrill to stand on Mt. Everest... but that's nothing compared to sitting in heavenly places.

Catching the world's biggest bass is an adrenaline rush - but it pales in comparison to fishing for men.

And flying down the Autobahn at break neck speed, even in the right car, plays a distant second fiddle to walking between the white lines of the will of God.

I hope we'd all agree that to know God, to walk with Him - is without a doubt - **the ultimate experience.**

Joseph Newton once wrote, "**Only God is permanently interesting. Other things we may fathom, but He out-tops all our thoughts.**" After you've experienced God everything else borders on boring!

Sure there's always an attraction to the new and novel, but it never holds your attention for very long! It's temporal and superficial. What's the big deal about *walking on the moon* after you've *walked with the Son*?

Author Simone Weil made an observation about “imaginary evil” - the evil portrayed in books, and TV, and movies. She calls it “romantic and varied,” while “real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, and boring.”

But the opposite is true with good. “Imaginary good always comes across as boring, (but) real-life good is always new, and marvelous, and intoxicating.”

And the origin of *real good* is a *real God*.

I love how King David put it in Psalm 84:10, "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand (anywhere else). I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

I'd rather hold the door, so when it swings open and shuts, I can peek inside at God's glory... rather than have front row seats for the wickedness of this world.

As a child, I grew up in a Bible-believing church. I like to say, “I cut my teeth on the back of a pew.”

When the kids at public school said "peeewww," and pinched their nose... I looked for a place to sit down.

In fact, as a baby, the first word I ever uttered, wasn't "mama" or "dada" - I think it was “Amen!”

I grew up in Bible-toting, Scripture-quoting churches!

I knew the hymns - could quote the verses - recall the stories of the OT - list the books of the Bible... I even memorized a timeline for the book of Revelation.

I could preach, teach, testify, collect an offering, pray in KJV English - all the church stuff... *except sing!*

I was the poster child for a good church-goer - a future deacon on the rise. Yet I had one major, gaping omission in my spiritual resume'... ***I didn't know God!***

I thought I knew Him... I knew a lot about Him... But I'd never experienced God in a personal, intimate way!

I was religious, but I lacked a relationship with God.

And I was not alone... Countless people I grew up around majored on being religious, *yet missed out on God.* Rather than live refreshed and empowered and comforted in God's presence - we live burned out, and worn out, and bummed out... *We had missed out.*

Religion is like playing house with your daughter.

When Natalie was young she'd invite me to lunch. She used her best china. She cooked up *imaginary food* for her and her dad. It was always scrumptious!

I'd chew, and chew, and chew - even send my compliments to the chef. All the while, she and I would be telling each other what a nice lunch we'd had...

I learned you can burn an hour or more playing house, and never eat a morsel. *And that's religion!*

You can go to church each Sunday - chew on the pastor's message - comment about the nice dinner - even compliment the chef... ***yet no one ever eats!***

We can say we're talking and listening to God - *but it's just pretend*. If you're starving for the real deal... if you're hungry for a genuine relationship with God...

Then pay attention to the last half of Ephesians 3, for here Paul invites us to [the quintessential experience...](#)

In verse 14 he begins his description of [the ultimate experience](#). He writes, "**For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...**"

Notice first, that Paul experiences God on His knees.

This is what's so beautiful about knowing God - *it's so simple*. If you want to experience God all you have to do is drop to your knees in humility and ask!

You don't have to coil your body into a mantra position and chant mindlessly... or walk barefoot over hot coals... or go door to door distributing religious propaganda... or pay thousands of dollars to order the definitive tape series from the latest guru...

If you want to experience the living God all you have to do is step over your pride, admit your sin, humble yourself, and bow to your knees - *if just in your heart...*

Come to God thinking He owes you, or you deserve to be there - *the heavens will seem like brass!* But bow humbly, **repent**, and God will reveal Himself to you!

In Luke 11:9-10 Jesus sends out an invitation, "**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**" Jesus can invite us to come to God because He's paid our admission!

His blood covers our sin and gives us access to God.

Jesus left His home in heaven, and made the long journey to Earth, even to the cross - so that now you can come home to God in an instant - *in the speed of prayer*. Just fall on your knees and ask, seek, knock...

God is raring and ready to work in our lives.

He's sitting on the edge of His throne, hoping we'll respond to His invitation... But first we have to bow...

In the last six verses of chapter 3, Paul prays for the Ephesians, and us - and as he does, he lays out for us a vision of what God wants to accomplish in our lives...

1) God wants to give us **strength for our weakness**.

2) He wants to give us **a presence for our loneliness**.

3) He wants to swap **a love for our bitterness**.

4) And he wants to give **fullness for our emptiness**.

When you experience *the strength of God*, and *the presence of God*, and *the love of God*, and the *fullness of God*... you've encountered ***the ultimate experience!***

In verse 16 Paul prays, **“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”** First, Paul prays for power - **strength for our weakness**.

We were taught a truth in Sunday School, *but have we really learned it?* **“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so... Little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but He is strong.”** *Me weak... God strong!*

Spiritually speaking, we're bent reeds - pine trees swaying in the wind - we're as stout as a wet noodle.

But Jesus promises to make us strong!

I love what one man said of his relationship with God. "God had the strength, and I had the weakness, so we teamed up! It was an unbeatable combination."

Bring your weakness to God - He'll add His power. Paul prays for the spiritual strength in *the inner man*.

And that's a strategic point to note. The focus of Paul's prayer, and God's strength, is *the inner man*, not the outer man. It's the spiritual portion of the person.

Understand each of us is divided into two parts... We consist of body and soul - a physical and spiritual side.

The inner man, the spiritual part of a person is that which lives forever... Whereas, the outer, material person is the part that dies and reverts back to dust...

2 Corinthians 4:16 tells us, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."

It's amazing how much time we spend on the outer man - the deteriorating part of our person - while we ignore the inner person of the heart that lives forever?

Do you realize every day in our country, Americans spend \$300 million on new clothes for their body?

They scrub their teeth with 550,000 pounds of toothpaste. They gargle 69,000 gallons of mouthwash.

And to top it all off, they consume 250,000 packs of breath mints... That all happens in just one day!

I'm not suggesting you shouldn't brush your teeth, or gargle, or pop an Altoid before you come to church...

But we tend to get obsessed with the outer man - *to the neglect of the inner man*. We're always praying for material stuff, while ignoring our spiritual condition.

We pray for safety, or healing, or prosperity - or for God to get us out of a jam - but what about the spiritual health, and prosperity, and security of our inner life?

So what if our bodies are strong - or our pockets are full - if our spirits are bruised, or cold, or emaciated?

I talk to people all the time who are working hard to lower their cholesterol levels, and monitor their blood pressure, and manage their weight gain - who haven't given the health of their spiritual life a second thought!

Your body is going to die! Everyone of us has an expiration date. Thankfully, it's not stamped on the package, but trust me, you have one. Why put all your effort into the part of you that'll end up shriveling away.

When the outer man grows weak, and anemic, and sick - we know how to treat it - we eat some chicken soup, or we visit the doctor and fill a prescription.

But what do you do when the inner man gets down and sick, and overwhelmed? Some people try to escape the problem... or numb the pain... or analyze and psychologize their way through the difficulty...

Paul would tell us **to pray!** Pray that God will send His Holy Spirit to strengthen you with His might!

I think one of the most wonderful inventions of our modern world are rechargeable batteries. When your batteries start to fade just plug them into the charger and they're good for another hundred hours or so...

With standard batteries you *use them and lose them*.

I like to compare the outer man - these bodies - to standard batteries. We use them - then we lose them.

But the spirit of a man is rechargeable. Through prayer we can plug into God's power and gain fresh energy. His Spirit stimulates a spiritual current deep within us - a joy juice swells up in our hearts and mind!

It's interesting, the Greek word translated "**might**" is "**dunamis**." From this word comes the English words, "**dynamic, dynamo, dynamite**." The Holy Spirit is our dynamite! He creates spiritual combustion inside us.

*Ask God to strengthen you with His "**might!**"*

I remember when Reebok Pumps came out. They were hailed as a breakthrough in basketball shoes.

When the going got rough - and you needed a lift. When you wanted to jump a little higher - or run a little faster - you reached down and started pushing the orange button on the tongue of the shoe. As you pumped it up, it inflated the shoe's inner-lining.

I thought, "This is so cool! At last, white guys can jump!" In fact, they still make those Reebok Pumps.

Wearing a pair of Pumps meant that though your foot received the same jolt as it did before - there was now a cushion between the sole of your foot and the floor.

And this is how the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

When life gets jarring and pounding - you can pray and pump up your spirit! The Holy Spirit will fill the inner-lining of your life. He'll provide you some spiritual cushion between your soul and this hardcore world.

You'll still get jolted. Difficulties won't vanish - but now when you take the hit, you'll *bounce* rather than *bruise*! An inner strength will absorb the shock!

Paul asks God to give the Ephesians **strength for their weakness**, but he also asks God to give them **a presence for their loneliness**. He prays in verse 17, "**that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...**"

God's presence can put an end to our loneliness.

Once we had a young man give his life to Jesus, and get involved in our church. A little later, he enlisted in the Marine Corp. He was nervous about boot camp.

The thought that comforted him most - was when I told him, "**John, from the moment you give your life to Jesus you're assured that you'll never again be alone.**"

That's so true! A Christian can never be alone.

If you're in Christ - Jesus lives in you. You have a permanent roommate. Paul prays *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith..."* Jesus has made *your heart His home*. You're His permanent residence.

*But He's after more than **just an address**...*

Jesus wants a place where He can really feel at home. The word translated *"dwell"* means *"to settle down and settle in."* It carries the idea of unpacking your stuff and arranging the space to your liking...

Jesus tires of feeling like an outsider, or even your guest. He wants to move into your life with all His blessings - stretch out His influence - get comfortable.

If I were to walk into your house one afternoon, and you casually said to me, *"Sandy, just make yourself at home!"* *You wouldn't really mean it - No way!*

For if I made myself at home, I'd take off my shoes and socks, and sling them into the corner of the room.

I'd raid the icebox - move furniture around - find a football game on TV - I'd flop on the couch, and start picking my nose - or getting the lint out from between my toes... *You don't believe me? Just ask Kathy!*

It wouldn't take long before I made you so hopping mad you'd shout at me at the top of your lungs, and in angry tones, tell me to make like a banana and split!

Well, Jesus really does want to make Himself at home in your heart! He wants to move in with all His stuff - unpack - take over - settle in - feel at home...

And at first, it's great to have Jesus move in!

Wherever He goes He brings His love, joy, peace, power. Jesus has some really cool stuff, and He shares it with His roomies! Jesus makes for a great roommate.

He's always up to something new and exciting. Believe me Jesus knows how to have a good time!

But the conflict comes when Jesus starts to make changes uncomfortable for us. He wants to rearrange the furniture - or clean out some smelly closets - or reprogram the TV - or get rid of some porn on your computer - or throw out some of your CD collection.

At first our tendency is to resist these changes, until we're reminded *who He is* and *what He's done for us*.

Jesus is Lord - that means Head Honcho, Boss, Master and Commander - *and He's been so good to me I want Him be comfortable!* Yet initially, His adjustments produce some hesitancy and some fear.

I'm not quite sure where it's all headed...

Let's say you had a new roommate and one day you came home to discover the old rug in your living room was gone. You're shocked! That rug was in the family for years. Your mom changed your diapers on that rug.

You knew that rug stunk - and you suspected your roommate was allergic to it - but you loved that old rug, and you've kept it around for sentimental reasons.

You can't wait to get your hands on your roommate and demand that he retrieve your favorite rug!

That is until the next day.

You open the door, walk inside, and to your amazement the whole house has new carpet - we're talking plush. It's beautiful, and you're so blown away - you'll never think another second about that old rug.

Now you can't wait to get your hands on your roommate so you can hug him and thank him for his generosity and the wonderful changes he's made.

Hopefully, you see where I'm going with my parable.

There's a lot of dirty habits we maintain in our lives just for sentimental reasons... Yet they stink, and Jesus is allergic to them. And they've really got to go!

It's hard to turn loose of patterns and attitudes, but it's worth it - for whatever Jesus takes from me, He promises to replace it with something infinitely better!

His blessings are lavish and plush. You could never afford them on your own, but Jesus is generous. He desires to supply your life with the richest and the best.

The only thing that holds our Lord back from making even more changes for the better is our reluctance.

We need to stop being scared and holding Him back.

We need to rise up in faith and turn it all over to Jesus. Remember Psalm 84:11, **"No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."** Let Jesus make **your heart, His home** - and you'll begin to experience the grace, and glory, and goodness of God.

Well, Paul prays next, “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge...” When we come to Jesus, He first *grounds us in love*, but then we *grow up in love*!

We root down - then we shoot upwards. Here, Paul asks God to give us **love in place of our bitterness.**

Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us..." How do you know God loves you?

Look to the cross... He sacrificed His only Son.

Most of you have been in a delivery room, and you've experienced the thrill of cradling a newborn in your arms. You're so proud of that little baby.

It's wrinkled and shriveled.

Its head is lopsided from sliding down the birth canal.

It's covered with blood and goo.

In the first few moments of life a baby is one ugly critter. If you were crawling under your house, and saw a newborn staring back, you'd call an exterminator.

I've only seen eight pretty newborns my whole life, and they were all named either "Adams" or "Keller."

But in the eyes of love there's nothing more beautiful, and gorgeous, and precious than *your* baby.

Now what if you were in the delivery room cuddling and cooing over your newborn, and suddenly a man with an assault rifle - burst into the room, and tried to snatch that baby from your arms? *What would you do?*

I know what you would do - you'd die holding onto your baby. There's no way you would give up your newborn. You'd fight and scrap to hold on to your child.

Yet God said goodbye to His only Son, and allowed Jesus to be mistreated - His body to be tortured - His hands and feet nailed to a board. Jesus was God's kid!

God loved Him - yet He was sacrificed for you!

If God never did anything else for us - the cross alone is reason enough for us to be confident of His love for us. We'd still have an overwhelming motivation to give our lives to Him, since He gave His life for us.

In Romans 5 we're told that God's love was set out on the cross, but there's more to the story... In verse 5 or the same chapter in Romans, we're told, "**The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**" God's love is *set out* on the cross, but *poured out* into our hearts by His Spirit.

An experience with God is like a skyscraper. Its peak reaches high into the heavens - but only after its foundation is poured deep below the surface.

You begin the Christian life looking to Calvary's cross, but then the Spirit brings God's love down from that cross and pours it into every crevasse of your life.

Faith in the love Jesus *has shown*, comes first. Then an experience of the love Jesus *will show*, comes next.

I love an OT analogy. After the priest made the sacrifice, he took the carcass outside the gate, and had it burned. The ashes were collected and mixed with water - then a leafy branch sprinkled the mixture onto whatever needed to be dedicated. The effects and merits of the sacrifice were transferred by the water.

And this is why the Holy Spirit is referred to as water.

He is the One who conveys the merits of what Jesus did on the cross 2000 years ago - to our hearts today.

Again, **God's love is set out** on the cross of Calvary, but **His love is poured out** by the Spirit into our hearts.

It's vital to be grounded in the knowledge of God's love, but a foundation is not an end in itself. If all you are is rooted and grounded... *you're just a stump.*

Yes, you need to sink your *roots downward into the love of God*, but then your *shoots should soar upward.*

God wants us to experience the full volume of His love. The *width, length, depth,* and *height* of His love...

How **wide** His love has reached to **get us**...

How **long** His love will go to **keep us**...

How **deep** His love is meant to **save us**...

And how **high** His love has gone to **bless us**...

God wants us to *"comprehend"* His love.

This word "*comprehend*" in Latin is "*prehendere*" which means "to grasp." We say that a monkey has a "*prehensile tail*" because it's designed to clutch on, and grasp, and pick up, and hold onto to stuff with its tail.

And likewise, when we ask, God will give to us *a grasping ability*. The capacity to latch on to His love.

The Holy Spirit is able to line our hearts with spiritual Velcro, so the love of God sticks - we begin to sense it, and feel it, and experience it, and enjoy His love.

Once, a little boy who fell into a vat of sweet tasting molasses. He prayed, "*Lord make my capacity equal to my opportunity.*" God's love is an ocean. You can take in all you want. The only limitation is the size of your bucket! May we *comprehend* the full extent of His love!

When you read the Bible don't study it like a textbook. Read it like it was a menu. Read it with the intention of ordering from it - and tasting all its treats.

God wants His love be more than an abstract concept. God's love is a love that "*passes knowledge!*"

What a line, by the way, the love "*which passes knowledge.*" At first glance, this is an odd statement.

Yet think it through, there really are only two means of discovery - either through **study** or **experience**.

Take a bowl of ice cream for example. *How do I know it tastes good?* Well, I can put a drop on a slide and place it under a microscope. I can run chemical tests on the ice cream comparing it to my taste buds.

I can feed the data into a computer, and it'll tell me what kind of a sensory reaction I can expect when the ice cream hits my tongue... *Or... I can just eat a bite!*

That's the approach David recommends in Psalm 34:8 "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." God cuts to the chase. He invites us to taste and see.

Rather than spend years studying and researching God's love - *as fulfilling as that would be* - God makes it easier. You can *taste* His love right now! See for yourself that His love is good. Ask God to pour out His love into your heart. God swaps love for bitterness.

And finally Paul prays, "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Paul prays, and asks God to give the Ephesians, and us, a fullness for our emptiness.

Realize our physical bodies are quite porous. It's not evident to the naked eye, but your flesh is a sponge.

Your body consists of 92% water - only 8% solids.

I suppose if you ever sprung a leak you'd pop like a water balloon. But God has constructed our spirit much the same way. The inner man is also very, very porous.

Spiritually we're permeable and absorbent. Our lives are easily influenced by external influences - good and bad. We can get absorbed into something of interest.

We're like Bounty paper towels, "we're the quicker picker uppers." The problem though, is we get wrapped up in things that really don't matter in the long run.

We're a quicker picker upper all right, but we're quick to *pick up* stuff that eventually *lets us down*. This is why life is frustrating... emptiness can overwhelm us.

Yet God made us porous so He could pour into our lives His fullness. He wants to saturate us with Himself, and fill our empty spaces with His love and purpose.

God wants to flood our lives with His presence, His peace, His power... He wants to pump new life into our family, our marriage, our work, our friendships...

God wants to fill *your emptiness with His fullness*.

He desires my life to be spiritually saturated. Totally absorbed with Him - so full of Him I can't help but drip His goodness onto others. God wants us to be so soaked in His Son - so saturated in His Spirit - that when the world squeezes us - out flows His love.

Right now when you get squeezed what comes out?

Perhaps anger - maybe hatred - often envy, or worry, or impatience? If that's what flows out - apparently that's the stuff in which you've been soaking.

How many of us have been marinating in negativity? Absorbing the wrong attitudes?.. It's time to pray and ask God to replace *our emptiness with His fullness*.

It's interesting, Paul closes His prayer with praise!

Verse 21, *“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* Notice Paul likes to pray *“according”*...

In verse 16, he prayed "*according to the riches of God's glory.*" Now in verse 21, he prays "*according to the power that works in us.*" Paul loved to pray *according* - or *in proportion* to God's riches and power.

Paul could've prayed *out of God's riches*, but he prays "*according to His riches.*" *There's a difference!*

Suppose I was a billionaire, and I gave you \$10 - I'd be giving *out of my riches*. But if I gave you \$1,000,000 I'd be giving *according to my riches*. Paul doesn't pray for a *portion* of God's blessing, but for a *proportion*.

Hey, Paul is praying big - *and why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't we?* Realize, we have a big-hearted God. He loves us with *big grace* - grace He's given in a *big way!*

Let me close with a final look at verse 21...

We have a God who'll do what we "*ask,*" but more...

He'll do "*all that we ask,*" but more...

He'll do "*all that we ask or think,*" but more...

He'll do "*above all that we ask or think,*" but more...

He'll do "*abundantly above all that we ask or think,*" but our Lord will do still more...

He'll do "*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think...*"

Paul stacks superlative on top of superlative to help us realize that our God wants to do in us far, far more than we could ever imagine!... *If we'll just ask...*

If you're looking for the ultimate experience - to know God - *His strength for your weakness... His presence for your loneliness... His love for your bitterness... and His*

fullness for your emptiness - then be like Paul, bow your knee, and your heart, and your life, *and pray...*

This morning I'll give you an opportunity to pray.