

## **The Awesome Love of God**

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There is a saying that has stuck with me since my high school days. I am unsure of its origin. It goes like this: "I would never want to join a club that would have me as a member." (Repeat.) The thought of this saying is convoluted, and expresses a lack of confidence. Still, it seems, an idea that some of us apply to our lives, at least some of the time.

For example, I wonder if we don't sometimes apply this kind of thinking to God, and our relationship to God. Instead of thinking how absolutely awesome it is that the Creator of the heavens and the earth is not only willing to, but wants to have a relationship with us, we reason something like, "If God is willing to have a relationship with the likes of me, perhaps God is not so great after all." Such a thought may protect us from the scariness of opening up our hearts and minds and lives to God

But God is awesome, and not limited by our ability to be comfortable with this, and it is important that we know this. We all face challenges in our lives from wondering how best to raise our children to staving off our loneliness when they grow up and move away. We face unemployment and/or struggles with our jobs and

our volunteer work. Or, we are successful, and worry how others will respond. Disruptive medical issues come up. Financial struggles emerge. We need to be reminded of the true greatness of God as we deal with the challenges we face in life.

In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays the prayer of a pastor who deeply cares for his people. He falls to his knees and prays. He prays that they will be strengthened in their inner being with power through the Spirit. He prays that Christ will dwell in their hearts, as they are being rooted and grounded in love. And most fervently, I think, he prays that they “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 they may be filled with all the fullness of God.” His prayer reveals his sense of the immensity of the love of Christ, and the fullness of God.

One of the things that Paul says is that this love of Christ is so great that it surpasses knowledge. How can this be? What does this mean? How can we know something to be greater than what we can know of it?

Here Paul prays for a knowledge on our part that is not head knowledge. It is not a matter of what we can know with our minds.

Instead, it is something that we know in our hearts through the experience of being loved by a limitless God. Think of a baby, a fortunate baby, born into an adoring family. The baby experiences the love of his parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and others. The baby has an experience of profound love that will impact the rest of his or her life. However, he or she can't identify the experience of love, can't name it, can't think about it, and can't talk about it.

To experience the breadth and length and height and width of God's love as an adult is like this. When and if we try to describe it, words are inadequate. Rational concepts are too small. Yet we "know" in the depths of our being that God is real, and that God loves us. Paul prays that each of the people in the community in Ephesus will experience God's boundless love in this way.

I am grateful for the love of God which is beyond full human understanding because of the mistakes that I have made. My mistakes have had an impact on others. I cannot undo them. I cannot unsay what I have said, or undo what I have done. Moments have come and gone, and I can no longer say an encouraging word, or impact the situation with a positive action. I have regrets. To move forward, I need God's understanding and forgiveness.

In our lessons from the Hebrew Scripture, the now middle-aged King David is facing the same dilemma. Like many great people, King David lives life large. His accomplishments stand out above others. Likewise, his mistakes are writ large.

Next week, we will hear the story of the prophet Nathan's conversation with David, and his self-condemnation, sorrow, and appeal to God. This week, we hear of his abuse of power, his attempt to cover up his mistake, and his clever murder of Uriah. Most scholars now understand David's actions toward Bathsheba to be rape. It was not unusual for people to bathe on their rooftop. David sent his men to "take" Bathsheba, the beautiful wife of Uriah. It was not an invitation. Bathsheba could not say "no" to the men who came to take her. Neither could she refuse King David's advances. She was forced. She was raped.

Later, when David heard that Bathsheba was pregnant, he knew he was in trouble. What he had done would come to light. So he tried to get Uriah to sleep with his wife, hoping that he could cover up his action. But, Uriah had too much integrity to sleep with his wife, while his fellow soldiers tossed and turned in fear in the mud. And so David commanded the head of the army to put Uriah in the front of the fighting, and then pull back the rest of the troops. It was a clever way to ensure his death. It was murder.

This hero of our faith, this ancestor of Jesus, does irreparable damage. He needs God as much, or more than any of the rest of us. And God, whose love is boundless, will come to him, and help him.

And so Paul prays, and I pray with him, that we may all know the immeasurable love of God that is longer and broader, and taller and deeper even than we can know with our minds.

In the name of God . . .