

Do you own a Kodak camera? When's the last time that you had a "Kodak moment"? Kodak (**picture**) at one time was the world's leader in cameras and renowned for its innovation. Up until 1976, it had a 90% share of the American market for cameras, film, equipment, and photographic services. Kodak was so popular that the phrase "Kodak moment" was part of the national jargon. But by the late 1990s, digital imaging was becoming more popular.

What you probably don't know is that Kodak actually invented the digital camera. Steve Sasson, an engineer with the company, developed it in 1975. Instead of moving it forward and marketing their new creation, Kodak chose to suppress it. It posed a threat to their core products and services. By 2005, they'd realized their blunder and Kodak released the 1<sup>st</sup> Wi-Fi camera. It allowed people to email pictures. But again, they sat on their hands and didn't develop it, something their competitors took advantage of. By 2013, Kodak barely escaped bankruptcy by selling its patents off for \$525 million.

If you still have a Kodak camera, it's probably sitting on a shelf in a closet or stuffed in a drawer. Maybe someday it'll sell as an antique. More likely it will end up in the trash because Kodak missed their opportunity.

Every believer has a much, much greater opportunity. We're not talking about money or market share. We're talking about making a real difference, having an eternal impact. Too often we **let prayer be a missed opportunity**. Please turn to Ephesians 3:20 (p. 977). This is an exciting verse, brimming over with promises. It tells us that...

**Our prayers need to grow because...** Our God is a God that does awesome things. Here are some things that this verse unpacks that God is able to do.

**God is able to do far more abundantly.** The word *abundantly* in the original language is a very descriptive word. The English language limits it. It doesn't just mean more, it means *super-abundance* in quantity and quality. A more descriptive picture of what this verse is saying would be, "Now to Him who is able to do far more super abundantly in quantity and quality."

Why does Paul use this over the top, hyper descriptive language when speaking about the power of God? He's attempting to describe the indescribable. Have you ever been to the mountains or seen a sunset that just blew your mind? You try to put words together to describe to other people what you saw, but those words never fully paint the picture.

Then, he's trying to describe his confidence in just how powerful God really is. If I came up to you and asked if you could do 10 push-ups, what would you say? If you were confident in your ability to do 10 push-ups, you'd say, "Yes, I can do 10 push-ups." But if you were really confident you'd say, "Yes, I can do more than 10 push-ups." But if you were really, really, confident you'd say, "Actually I can do lots more than just 10 push-ups." But how confident would you have to be for your response to be, "Scott, I can do far more, super abundantly in quantity and quality than ten push-ups." You'd have to be pretty stinking confident in your push up ability to make that kind of statement.

Paul is so confident in God's power that he says God is able to do far more *super abundantly* in both quantity and quality.

**God is able to do far more than we ask or think.** As believers, we have access to this super abundant power of God, but we must ask for it. Prayer is what allows us to have access and to experience this power in our lives.

There's another word that I want to focus on. It's the word *think*. God is able to do far more abundantly than all that you can ask or *think*. That's a huge phrase with lots of room. We're encouraged to have a Spirit-filled imagination.

Think about yourself or your past. Has there ever been anything you've ever dreamed or imagined God could do through your life? Have you ever stopped to ask how God wants to use your life for His glory? Have you ever imagined how much He can do through your life? Some of you are older. Have you ever imagined how God could use the rest of your days for His glory?

If we're honest, the answer would probably be, *No*. Most people don't spend much time thinking about how God could powerfully use their lives. Deep down inside a lot of us struggle to believe this promise in Ephesians 3:20.

**The problem isn't God, it's us.** The African impala (**picture**) can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in a zoo with just a 3-foot wall. The impala won't jump if they can't see where their feet will land.

Faith is the ability to trust what we can't see. With faith we're freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.

Because of our lack of faith, we don't spend a lot of time imagining how God could powerfully use us. We struggle to believe the truth of this claim. When we read the Scripture about the power of God, we believe it. At the same time, we struggle to believe that same power applies to us. We may believe in God's power during Bible-times, when Jesus was alive...but that was then, this is now. We act as if God got old and went on Social Security.

We believe in God's power generally, not personally. For example, if I asked you if you believe God has the power to reach your neighborhood with the gospel, the vast majority would say *Yes*. But if I asked you if you believe God has the power to reach your neighborhood through YOU, how would you answer? Most of us are hesitant to say absolutely.

If I asked you if God has the power to reach your school, or neighborhood, or place of work with the gospel, probably everyone would raise their hand and say absolutely. But if I asked you if you believe He'll do it through YOU, most of us would be very hesitant. We struggle to believe that God can do great things through us, so we don't ask Him to do them.

Have you ever asked God to use you to end addiction in our area? Have you ever asked God to use you to bring the name of Jesus to an unreached people group who have never heard His name that live on the other side of the world? Have you ever asked God to use you to raise up your children so that they'll change the world? Have you ever even asked God to use you to reach your lost family or friends? Too many of us have never seen God do powerful things through us, because we've never asked Him to.

I wonder how often God hears our prayers and thinks they're wimpy. We pray, asking Him to bless us or keep us safe, or let us have a good day. I wonder how often God hears those prayers and thinks they're okay, but way too small.

It'd be like if Warren Buffett (**picture**) were sitting outside in our Coffee Café and said that after the service every single person could come up to him, one of the richest men in the world, and ask him for anything you wanted. He may not grant your request, but he wants you to ask him for anything, because he has the power and resources to make it happen.

If that were the case, most of you would leave right now to get in line. But I have a hard time believing you'd go and ask, "*Warren, I don't want anything, I just want you to bless me. Would you just bless me?*" Or, "*All I want is for you to help me have a good day.*" Or, "*I brought my lunch, will you just bless my lunch?*" I think Warren Buffett would probably look at you and say, "You know, sure! I can bless you and your lunch. I can help you have a good day, but I can do much more than that!"

When it comes to prayer, we ask far too little. God wants to do more than bless us or give us a good day! Too many miss the unbelievable privilege of being used powerfully by God simply because we never ask. The reason we don't ask is because we don't really believe He will or can answer our prayer.

**2. Jesus didn't pray for what we pray for.** Throughout the Gospels, Jesus gives us instruction about how to live, serve God, and love others...and He tells us to pray. We know prayer is important because Jesus told us to pray, and the Bible says that Jesus prayed regularly. Yet, when we study the New Testament, we discover that, with the exception of a whole chapter in John 17, we aren't privy to many of Jesus' actual words spoken in prayer.

Our Lord was known for turning things around, for giving surprising and unexpected answers that were contrary to expectations. What's very noteworthy is *what* Jesus didn't pray for. We learn something new by looking not at what Jesus did pray, but at what he didn't pray for.

***Jesus didn't pray for provision.*** If I told you Jesus prayed for a nicer home, a job promotion, or a luxurious car, you wouldn't believe me. Neither did He ask God to stretch what money He and his disciples had. In the Lord's Prayer, He told us to pray for our "daily bread," but we never find Jesus praying for food or other necessities.

Yet how often do our prayers center on material things? Is it wrong to ask God to help you pay your bills? No, but don't be surprised if God instead teaches you about living within your means and being content with what you have. When Jesus taught His followers the Lord's Prayer, He told them to ask for their daily bread—the basic essentials, what they needed at that moment to survive—but nothing beyond that. "*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?*" (Mt. 6:25).

Instead, Jesus trusted that God would provide everything that He and the disciples needed. Instead of asking for more, Jesus gave thanks for what He already had. He blessed the food in front of Him and thanked God for hearing Him and giving wisdom to those who believed in Him.

***Jesus didn't pray for the sick.*** When someone came to Jesus for healing, He didn't hesitate. But He didn't pray. He simply put His hands on them and healed them. He shocked people by starting with what was on the inside—the state of their hearts—and then He moved from the spiritual to the physical. After forgiving them of their sins or declaring that their faith made them whole, Jesus healed their bodies. Their spiritual needs, their salvation, was more important than any physical needs.

There's a vital lesson for us here. We focus on the physical and neglect the spiritual. We live in a culture that focuses on the external and temporal, and we've been infected by such small, short term thinking.

Resentment and unforgiveness are more deadly than cancer. Loneliness is more painful than hunger. Selfishness is worse than AIDS. Anger, negative, judgmental thoughts are worse than migraines. Looking lustfully at people is worse than being blind. Cowardice, lack of courage, laziness are worse than fatigue. Spiritual diseases ultimately are worse than physical ones because they can kill us spiritually and eternally. In Luke 12, Jesus said, "*Do not fear those who kill the*

body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!” When we die, we don’t take with us our bodily diseases, but our souls are eternal. The condition of our heart makes a difference in our eternal destination.

Is the physical important? Yes. God is concerned about physical health. But it’s not His priority. He’s more concerned about the spiritual and eternal. It’s why Jesus was more focused on heart sickness than physical sickness.

**Jesus didn’t pray about tomorrow.** Most of us are consistently asking for God’s insights and direction, and even blessing for the future. But here’s the thing: God doesn’t have to tell us what He is doing. Sometimes we’re better off not knowing. If we saturate our minds with Scripture and learn to listen for God’s voice—if we develop a healthy relationship with our Heavenly Father—we’ll hear and respond when He nudges us in a certain direction.

Jesus already knew God’s plan for His life, but He still approached God and asked if there was some other way it could be played out. It’s alright to tell God what you think you want. But then, in humility and full obedience, even when facing crucifixion and suffering, Jesus ended His prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane by asking for God’s will to be done.

Instead of relying on our own knowledge or ideas, God wants us to depend on Him. He doesn’t necessarily want us to be enlightened about every step of His plan, but to learn to lean on Him daily for help, and turn to Him with each step we take. He wants us to grow in faith and learn more and more that He can be trusted with **all** of it because He knows what He’s doing, and not to worry but to live in the present. *The Message* translates Matthew 6:33-34, “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

**3. We tend to pray predictably and temporally.** A collector of rare books ran into an acquaintance who told him that he’d just thrown away an old Bible that he found in a dusty, old box. He happened to mention that Guten-somebody-or-other had printed it. “Not Gutenberg?” gasped the collector.

“Yes, I think that was it,” the man replied. “Oh no! You’ve thrown away one of the first books ever printed. A copy recently sold at an auction for \$2,000,000!” “Oh, I don’t think this book would have been worth anything close to that much,” replied the man. “It was scribbled all over in the margins by some guy named Martin Luther.”

That’s how we often are when it comes to prayer. Our tendency is to miss what has true value. Please listen very carefully to what I’m about to say – there’s nothing wrong with praying for safety when someone is traveling or for a loved one’s healing. Yet, if all the requests for prayer for safety and healing were removed from our prayer meetings, many of us wouldn’t know what to pray for or even have anything to pray about. God wants us to move our prayer life out of our comfort zone, out of our bubble.

**Should we pray for safety?** Yes. Our son Ben is in Charlotte this morning. Before he flew out, I prayed with him for his safety. We know from Scripture that God protects us. Psalms 91:11-12 says, “For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” God protects us from even stubbing our toe. Yet, we must understand that safety and protection is a “this world” and temporal concern.

This last Thursday *Amped*, (**picture**) our after school children’s program began. Part of our program includes a missionary story. Currently, we’re sharing the story of Jim Elliot (**picture**). On January 8, 1956, 28-year-old American missionary Jim Elliot was martyred, along with four other missionaries and friends. These men were seeking to reach out to a violent and unreached tribe in Ecuador, the Auca Indians.

After several months, these men decided to build a base a short distance from the Auca village. But before they took this risk, do you think that they prayed for safety? I’m sure that they all did. While they were reaching out, don’t you think that their wives were praying for their safety back at home? You know that they were. But God let them all be murdered by the Aucas.

Nearly a decade before Jim Elliott had surrendered his all to God. In his journal entry for October 28, 1949, he expresses his belief that work dedicated to Jesus was more important than his own life. He wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

Could God have protected them? Yes, but God had better plans. Rather than terrifying or even angering Christians, those five men’s sacrifice launched a groundswell of young men and women volunteering for the fields of the world. And God later opened the doors to the Aucas. Many of them trusted Christ, including some who had murdered those five missionaries.

**Should we pray for healing?** What about illness? Countless people came to Jesus for healing. Praying for healing is a consistent theme in Scripture. James 5 talks about asking for prayer for healing. But we need to pray remembering that Jesus would heal someone’s heart by forgiving their sin before He’d heal their physical malady. God’s priority is spiritual healing.

Recently, I read Rosaria Butterfield's book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* (**pictures**). Rosaria is a former tenured professor from Syracuse University. She was also a lesbian, but she wonderfully came to Christ in 1999 in what she describes as a "train wreck."

Her mother had been a lifelong atheist, mean and angry, and made Rosaria's life miserable. She denied Christ with a venom. But Rosaria reached out to her in God's love. Her Mom contracted cancer, was diagnosed as terminal and placed in hospice. Rosaria cared for her in hospice, as she was dying. She prayed and sang songs of the faith to her Mom. And her Mom, the former atheist, put her faith in Jesus, repented of her sin, and made peace with God two days before she died. God is more concerned about "spiritual healing," than physical healing.

The Church today would be so much poorer without the wonderful testimony of Joni Eareckson Tada (**picture**). As a teen, Joni dove into the Chesapeake Bay after misjudging the shallowness of the water. She suffered a fracture and became a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down. Yes, she experienced anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, and great doubts. But she learned to trust God and has used her disability to be an earthshaking ability for the glory of God!

Should we pray for safety and healing? Yes, but first, we must pray for something much greater – the eternal and God's glory! We're sinners. We're hardhearted. Often we're comfortable in our sin. Most of us will not turn to God or change apart from a crisis. Sometimes God sends cancer or some other crisis because He loves us and wants to save our soul and change our lives.

God in His grace brings crises into our life. He brings us to a place where we have nowhere else to turn. That's what Psalms 107 teaches. It's to motivate us to turn to Him. Salvation, spiritual healing, God's glory are eternal and must be our prayer priority before the temporal matters of safety or health.

**4. We should pray for the seemingly impossible.** In Luke 1:37, the angel Gabriel told Mary, "*For nothing will be impossible with God.*" Most of us, I know that I do, pray small prayers. Do you know some of the biggest prayers that you will ever pray?

**Pray for a changed heart.** All of us, to some level can do behavioral modification. If you swear, you can stop swearing. By sheer determination, you can beat an addiction. But you can't change your heart. Only God can do that. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*" The biggest problem that I have and that you have are our own sinful hearts.

Sometimes our big prayer might be a sinful habit or addiction. *The Message* calls them "*parasitic sins.*" We're often blind to them and need the truth of Scripture to be a mirror to reveal them to us (James 2:23-25). We need a local church family to lovingly point out sin that we overlook or rationalize (Galatians 6:1). One of the biggest prayers that you will ever pray is for a changed heart – your own heart. Leonard Ravenhill (**picture**) rightly said, "*The greatest miracle that God can do today is to take an unholy man out of an unholy world and make him holy, then put him back into that unholy world and keep him holy in it.*"

**Pray for healing for your marriage.** Marriage is one of God's good gifts. We're all sinners and that complicates things. It's why in marriage when there is a problem, we need to first suspect the spouse we know the best – *ourselves*.

Many Christian marriages are miserable. That's not God's will and they need a miracle. Wonderfully, I've seen God intervene. But sometimes He doesn't. That's why a spouse needs God's grace to persevere, to be Christlike even in the midst of misery. God's grace is enough (2 Cor. 12:9), but you need to ask Him to provide it. You can't do it on your own.

**Pray for the repentance and restoration of your prodigal.** By "prodigal," I'm referring to anyone who's drifted away or totally rejected their Christian heritage. It could be a college student who simply stops going to church or a man who thinks he doesn't need "religion," or someone who's become an atheist. It might be an adult child raised in the church who tells their parents, "I'm no longer a Christian." A prodigal could even be someone who gets so busy in their career that they have no time for God.

In all those cases, the prodigal was raised in a Christian home or had a Christian background and for some reason no longer lives for the Lord. In thinking about cases like this, we often wonder if the prodigal is saved or lost. The answer is, only God knows because only God can read the heart. While the prodigal may appear to have totally rejected his/her spiritual background, and may give all the appearances of being lost, only God knows for certain.

We need to pray big for prodigals because if those prodigals don't return to Christ, not only is their soul in jeopardy, but the souls of our grandchildren.

The heart of the problem is sin sickness of the heart. Often we worry too much about the symptoms without dealing with the root issues. We should pray, "*Open the eyes of their heart, Lord,*" because when that happens, life will radically change. One translation of Ephesians 1:18 says it this way: "*Open the eyes of their hearts, and let the light of Your truth flood in.*" That's what prodigals need. When the eyes of the heart are opened, light from heaven comes flooding in.

**Pray for lost loved ones.** This could be a family member or a close friend. Sometimes we treat the gospel like a sales pitch. You can't argue or "sell" someone on salvation.

Do we need to share the gospel with them? Yes, but it's not what we say or even how we say it that's going to bring about regeneration. It's the Holy Spirit Who draws people to Himself. God uses various tools to reach people – kindness, service, prayer, reasoning. But it's God who reaches them, not us.

Earlier, I mentioned Rosaria Butterfield. If you'd met her before she became a Christian, she'd have been the last person you'd have thought would come to Christ. She visited a Bible-believing church doing research to write about those nutty Christians. The pastor and his family began praying for her, showed Christ's love to her by continually having her in their home for meals.

All of us have someone that we love who doesn't know Jesus. Pray big! Pray for their salvation!

**Conclusion: Too often prayer is a missed opportunity** A woman once approached the famous preacher, G. Campbell Morgan (**picture**), after he spoke and asked, "Do you think we should pray for even the little things in our lives, or just for the big things?" In his dignified British manner Morgan replied, "Madam, can you think of anything in your life that is big to God?"

*"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."* As we tie this up, let me suggest **four ways** to apply this powerful verse:

**Pray, don't be guilty of not having because you haven't asked.** God says in Psalms 81:10, *"I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it."* So, open wide! Ask!

**Trust, don't be guilty of not having because you doubt God's ability or His willingness to give.** Nothing is impossible with God! Our Father gives good gifts to His children who ask (Matt. 7:11). We can't always understand His purposes, but must never doubt His ability or goodness towards us.

**Pray big! Don't be guilty of praying small prayers.** It's impossible to ask God for too much, assuming that it's in line with His will and for His glory. Phillips Brooks (**picture**) said, *"Pray the largest prayers. You cannot think a prayer so large that God, in answering it, will not wish you had made it larger. Pray not for crutches but for wings."*

**Pray broad! Pray for yourself and for this church that for His glory, God would do through us that which is humanly unexplainable!** Remember Jesus feeding the 5,000? The disciples were calculating how much food they'd have to buy to feed the crowd. Instead pray for the Lord to multiply our few loaves and fishes, so that He gets all the glory.

Pray for the powerful conversion of many sinners. Pray for repentance, holiness and spiritual growth of all believers. Pray that God will be glorified in His church! Pray that our church will be passionate and on fire for Jesus!

The great Scottish Reformer, John Knox (**picture**), was used by God to reach Scotland. And no wonder, his prayer was, *"Lord, give me Scotland or I die."*

We see God do so little because we pray to small. I'm trying to pray bigger. Will you join me? I'm praying that God will use our church to radically reach Burlington, Waterford, Rochester and our community with the gospel. God has great opportunities for us! May we learn to pray and learn to pray big!