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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

An Audacious Prayer

Paul closes the “theological” section of the letter to the Ephesians with a prayer of praise to God, ascribing to Him all the glory He deserves.

Sometimes this is called a “doxology,” which is defined as “a brief closing hymn or statement of praise to God.”

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (3:21).

If you were diagramming this sentence, the simple subject and predicate would be, “to God be the glory.” But Paul stacks on top of this foundation, adding layers of meaningful modifiers.

God’s Power

Paul addresses his prayer to Him who “is able.” This is actually the verb form of the Greek word *dunamis*, or “power” (and thus is echoed in the next phrase). Our English word “dynamite” comes from this word.

God's power is not limited in any way. The God who was able to save Jonah in the belly of the sea monster can do amazing things. The God who was able to stop the Sun's march across the sky to assist Joshua's victory can do big things. The God who created the Universe with no more exertion than speaking possesses the power to answer our feeble prayers.

But it's not enough to say that God is all-powerful. He is powerful:

To do *what we ask*

To do what we ask *or think*

To do *all* that we ask or think

God invites us to "cast all your anxiety upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). It makes no sense to make our requests if we do not believe He has the power to answer them. He can provide anything we can find words to describe, and even things that our minds and hearts fail to express in words. And not just some of it; but all of it. Furthermore, He is powerful:

To do *beyond* all that we ask or think

To do *abundantly* beyond all that we ask or think

To do *far more* abundantly beyond all that we ask or think

God's power exceeds our ability to make requests. He provides more than we are aware of, more than we can imagine. As an infant does not appreciate all that his parents provide, a child of God hardly suspects all that God arranges behind the scenes. Jesus reminds us that God knows what we need before we ask (Matt. 6:8), and that God is working in our lives for our ultimate good. Again, not just a smidge more, but exceedingly, abundantly, graciously, amazingly, hugely beyond!

This suggests that we ask too little. Of course, we should always leave room for the will of God, as Jesus did (Matt. 6:10, 26:42). We should always pray with right motives (James 4:3–4). We should always conduct ourselves as a child of God so that He will not close His ears to our prayers (Isaiah 59:1–3).

But certainly we put too many limits on the power of God. Our vision is too small. Jesus invited His disciples to have a bold faith: “Even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it shall happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive” (Matt. 21:21–22).

Would you feel comfortable praying these prayers?

- For a terminal sickness to be healed
- For a baby to be born to someone who has been trying for years
- For deep-seated family strife to be replaced with love
- For 100 visitors to attend the next gospel meeting
- For one conversion every month

If not, why not? Are they too impolite? Too audacious? Do we catch ourselves saying, “one conversion a month is too hard; let’s ask God for one conversion a year. That’s reasonable.” Wait! What part of “far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” do we not understand? The limitation is not upon God’s power; it is upon our willingness to ask and believe! As God said through Malachi, “test Me now in this, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows” (3:10).

That Works Within Us

But perhaps there is a reason we don’t ask. Perhaps we suspect that God can and will answer our bold prayers, but it means that we are going to have to be involved in bringing them to pass. And that concern—spoken or subconscious—is the reason for our reluctance to ask.

Indeed, this brings us to the other part of the doxology: God is powerful to do:

“...according to the power that works within us ... in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.”

It’s God’s power, but it works “within us.” In fact, God’s power is even more plainly evidenced in the church than in creation, for He took just six days to create the earth, while He took centuries to plan, reveal,

carry out, and secure redemption. God didn't break a sweat when speaking the universe into existence, but He poured forth sweat and blood and agony to save our souls.

God's power works within us as individuals. God can't give wisdom, purity, strength, or forgiveness to those who don't want wisdom, purity, strength, or forgiveness. We don't pray for wisdom because that means our Bibles will be open on our laps. We don't pray for purity because we don't want to give up our philandering. We don't pray for strength because we don't want to be asked to use it. Our unwillingness to be a part of God's plan for our own lives limits the working of the power in us, and prevents us from tapping into the awesome power of God.

It works within us as a congregation, too. What God accomplishes in this world He accomplishes mainly through the activity of His people, the church. Doesn't God intend the power that works in us to be directed at the lost? Doesn't that come down to us as well, who are part of "all generations forever and ever?" Maybe the reason we don't pray for more conversions is because we know that means we need to make more invitations, greet visitors, and help them change their sinful lives. Maybe we don't pray for more opportunities to speak up, because we are scared of experiencing persecution. Maybe we don't pray for stronger leadership because we know that means we will have to submit to it.

There is effort involved in every worthwhile spiritual endeavor. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth," and so it will forever be, to all generations (1 Cor. 3:6).

I cannot think of a better conclusion than Paul's: the one word invitation to agreement, "Amen." Will you recognize God's amazing power? Will you ask for it through prayer? Will you find a use for God's power in your life?

—John Guzzetta

Quote of the Week:

"We never need be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the dusty earth overlying our hard hearts."

—Charles Dickens