

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Fullness of God, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 3:16

Code: 1916

1978

Ephesians chapter 3 is our study this morning, third chapter of Ephesians. If you were with us last time you got on message number one of this text and we're going to spend several weeks in it because it is so very important. I feel the truths in this text were part and parcel of the basic foundation that was laid here at Grace Church some eight or nine years ago when we were in this book for the first time and so we want to take our time examining again these very, very important areas.

Ephesians chapter 3 verses 14 to 21 is a passage that's stuck right in the middle of our study of the book of Ephesians. And it is a key passage. It bridges the first and second section of the book. And remember that I told you that the first three chapters of this Ephesian letter described the resources of the believer and the last three describe how the believer is to live. So you have all of these resources, all of the potential, all of the power, all of the riches, all of the energy, all that is ours in Jesus Christ in the first three chapters. Then in 4 to 6 how that is to be applied to the matter of living. And the bridge in between is this little passage 3:14 to 21 which I call the ignition. Now the first three chapters describe the power plant of the Christian. The last three describe the race, the Christian drives in and this is how you get the power turned on. And before the race begins in chapter 4 you've got to get the ignition on at the end of chapter 3.

Now the key thing that we've been looking at here then is that this is what we call the Christian's turn on or the Christian's ignition. This is where you really get the energy that God has already given you in Christ, fired up for the matter of living, for the matter of operating, for the matter of being to the glory of God.

Now there's a kind of a key thought here. As I was examining again our study from last time I noted that Paul begins in verse 14 by a prayer. And we've already talked about that in our last study at length. And he bows his knee and he prays. And he is praying that Christians would really turn on. That Christians would really begin to see the power flow. And the resource for his prayer is in verse 16. It is the riches of God's glory. See it there in the middle? In other words, he is saying - God, on the basis of the riches of Your glory I want You to release this power in the believer? And that little word riches reminded me that Paul has used that a multiple of times in the first three chapters. Christians are rich. We are so rich that we don't even comprehend how rich we are. In fact in chapter 1 and

verse 18 Paul prays his first prayer in Ephesians. And he prays that we would know the riches of the glory of our inheritance. In other words, it is an inconceivable, incomprehensible richness that we have. And having prayed that we would understand it in chapter 1, in chapter 3 in our text he prays that we would use it.

I think you are all aware that somebody once said that the average person uses one tenth of one percent of his brain. And I would venture to say that the average Christian probably uses one tenth or less of the percentage of the power of God that is available at his disposal. We limp along. We chug along on one misfiring piston instead of going on all eight as the Spirit of God has designed.

We are rich he says in chapter 1 verse 7. We have the riches of His grace. Verse 11 - we have an inheritance. Verse 14 - again, we have an inheritance. Incredible riches. Chapter 2 he tells us verse 4 - God is rich. And then in verse 7 he wants to show us the exceeding riches of His grace. So in chapter 1 he says we're rich. In chapter 2 he says we're rich. In chapter 3 verse 8, look at it, that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Once in each chapter, at least, he says that we are rich, unsearchably rich, incredibly rich, inestimably rich and so in chapter 1 he prays that we would understand it. And in chapter 3 he prays that God would enable in us... that God would enable us to use it. It doesn't do any good to be rich unless you use it.

Now just how rich are we? Well I don't know how to illustrate it other than to say this - we are so rich, now get this, that we own everything God owns. That we possess everything He possesses. In case you question that you need to read again Ephesians 1:3; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," now listen to this, "Who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." We are as rich as heaven is. In fact we have been made, according to Romans 8, heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. We are as rich as heaven. God is going to, in the ages to come, pour out the exceeding riches of His grace and His kindness on us. There's no limit to our riches in Christ.

We might illustrate it in this manner. I wanted to find out this week who the richest people were in the world. I found out that the Dupont family is the richest family in the world. And then I got a little information on the richest women. Thought you might be interested in that. A Mrs. Charles Joseph Walker is a black lady millionaire, self-made, started with nothing and invented a hair straightener. She's one of the wealthiest women in the world.

Shirley Temple who is another of the wealthiest women of the world made her first million before she was ten years old. Anna Dodge who died in 1970 left 96 million dollars. And then there is Princess Wilhelmina Helena Pauline Maria of Orange, not Orange County--Orange in the Netherlands. Princess Wilhelmina died in 1962 and left a mere 550 million dollars.

Well, now when you come to the richest men you're up into the billions and you really can't count it. You know J. Paul Getty, John Davis, Andrew Rockefeller, Henry Ford, Andrew Milan, John

MacArthur, (not this John MacArthur) often I thought that the Lord could have just mixed up a little bit on that, might have unloaded it on me, you know. But these people have billions of dollars. And, you know, when we talk about somebody having millions or billions we understand that that's really rich. We can imagine the cars and the houses and the yachts and the planes and the buildings and the factories and the plants and the investments and the securities and the safes full of money and we can visualize all of that economic stuff. We can see all of that kind of riches. And we understand a little about what it means to be rich.

But when we talk about being spiritually rich we're kind of at a loss to understand that. We don't know what to look at. We don't know how to visualize it. So I thought maybe you could visualize it this way - these people are rich, they are the richest people in the world. But if you compare them against everything in the universe they're not very rich at all. Are they? If God, for example, owns every single commodity in the universe He's rich. Now these people have a billion dollars. Compared to that they are really nothing. See. Nothing. God owns everything on the planet earth to begin with. God owns every planet in our solar system. God owns every planet in every solar system and every star in the entire endless universe and they own one little area of the earth --- that's quite a difference. So compared to God they're paupers. But listen to this, spiritually speaking God owns everything and as a Christian so do you. You see the difference? You are really rich in the spiritual dimension, inconceivably rich. Unfortunately we function only on one tenth of one percent if that of that riches. The power of God is amassed in our behalf, unsearchable riches are ours.

Now, on the basis of this Paul prays his prayer. He says because the believer is so rich, because as I pointed out last time, he's rich in mercy, grace and kindness and all things we found all over the New Testament that we're rich in, because we have all of these things he says -Oh, Father, I pray that You would grant them according to their riches that they would move out and know Your power. That's his prayer. Boy, to have it all and not to use it is pretty sad. God has been so generous in making us rich we ought to be able to use those riches. We ought to be able to function on those riches. We ought to be able to daily use them in the living ... the process of living.

I remember a man in ... I told you about him some years ago... in the city of Downey named Mr. Stamps. He owned the city of Downey. For all intents and purposes the whole city had to buy all of their land from him. As the city expanded they kept buying more of his land. He was extremely wealthy man. He owned the Country Club but he used to dress so tacky. And he used to look so skuzzy all the time, unshaven and everything. You didn't know that word? It's a Greek word for ragged. (laughter) Anyway, he was a terrible looking old guy. And one day while he was out on his own Country Club Golf Course, the police arrested him for vagrancy. They didn't know who he was and they heard about it ... believe me. I think they put in a new police chief after that. But anyway he ran the show. But he didn't look like...he ... he didn't seem to appropriate his riches.

I read this week about a man named Julian Ellis Morris. Julian Ellis Morris was a very, very wealthy man. He ... however, used to love to dress like a tramp. In fact that was the style of life that he chose. He dressed like a tramp. Sold razor blades, shampoo and soap on the west coast of England in the English resort city of Blackpool. And he sold it door to door, dressed in an old tattered, beaten-up Army coat and some tattered ragged canvas shoes he went from house to house selling razor blades, soap and shampoo. When he was done at night he would return to his mansion where he had three television sets, two cars and he would have his chauffeur-driven Daimler limousine with his chauffeur take him to dinner. Or else he would catch a flight to Paris where he would lavish gifts on the two girls that he kept there. He died at 75 and left a fortune.

Well, it's hard to imagine somebody with all that stuff not living it up. Right? I mean, it seems a little ridiculous to have that on and get on a pair of old beat-up tennis shoes and sell soap door-to-door. But it's not unlike some Christians who spend most of their time running around in the tattered rags of their own inadequacy when the resources of God's power are available, they just don't ever bother to apply them. It doesn't make any more sense, makes less sense.

Now Paul here is praying that incredibly wealthy Christians who have immeasurable spiritual resources will use them in the matter of living. Will apply them to life. You know, Paul sees what everybody in the ministry sees, what every perceptive Christian sees and that is Christians who never really use the resources that they have. Sad. And so his prayer is based on that.

In fact he starts out in verse 14, I'm reminding you now of what we said last time, saying - For this cause. In other words, because of something and because of what? You have to go back to verse 1 where he started this statement before he was interrupted by his parenthesis. For this cause I pray. What cause? Back to verse 22 of chapter 2. Because you are built together in Him for a habitation of God through the Spirit. That's the point. In other words, because the believer has dwelling in him Christ, God and the Holy Spirit. All three mentioned in that verse. In whom is Christ, God is mentioned and in the Spirit. Because they all dwell in you, you are incredibly rich and because of that resource he prays that you would really begin to turn the power on so that ultimately verse 20 would be a reality, you would see exceeding abundantly above all you could ask or think according to the power that works in you.

Now, this is the Christian's turn on. He wants you to get to verse 20 where you really see the power flow. And you've got the resources, you've got the engine, you've got the energy, you've got the power, it's all there, you've just got to turn it on.

Now, in Paul's discussion here of how to get turned on there are five progressive steps. First of all, we go down through this progression. Now I told you last time this is a series in the Greek what we call hina purpose clauses, a purpose result clause. Do this in order that this may happen, in order that this may happen, in order that this may happen. You can't jump in the middle, you can't start at the end,

you've got to start in the beginning and it's a sequence. It's a progression. And it all starts with inner strength and then proceeds to the indwelling Christ, incomprehensible love, infinite fullness and internal power. Finally, you get to the place where internal power is released. But not until inner-strength, the indwelling Christ, incomprehensible love, infinite fullness. And that leads to internal power. We're going to cover these in the weeks to come.

Now let's begin at the beginning. For the Christian to really get his power turned on, for the believer to really know the energy that is there in operation he starts with this concept of inner strength, verse 16. Now here's Paul's prayer; "That you would be, first of all, strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." Now this is a very basic concept but I want you to get it so I'm going to keep it as simple as I can this morning. It is a very important and essential doctrine for the life of the church of Christ, for your life. Here is the first step - strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.

Now this is where it all begins if you're going to know the power of God in your life. And you know, most Christians, as I say, never really experience it. They sort of limp along, they can't resolve their home conflicts, they have hassles getting along with their family, they can't seem to adjust to the job, the neighbors give them problems, they're sort of weak, they're sort of infirm on the inside when challenged with an incredible or important opportunity for service to Christ. They feel inadequate. They try to do the best they can to be an example of Christ but they falter. They have internal anxieties and pressures and problems. They've got to go to the Christian counseling center. They've got to get help. You know, most Christians never ever get to Ephesians 3:20, never. They don't even know what it is to see exceeding abundantly above all they can ask or think operating in them. They don't even know that. But it isn't God's fault. It is theirs because the energy is there - the availability is there - the engine is there - the riches are there, it's only a matter of appropriation.

And it's a sad thing that Christians as well as the rest of the world suffer from a weak inner man. That's what he is trying to overcome here. The inner man is the real issue. You have a weak inner man; you suffer from frustration and mental strain and emotional and spiritual imbalance. Now we would expect the unregenerate world to lose the battle of the inner man, wouldn't we? We don't expect unregenerate people to have great self-control over sin. You know, we don't go into the local bar and say - All right, everybody, put that stuff down and shape up. You're wasting your time.

Last night we had a party in our neighborhood. I mean it was ... if you lived anywhere near Balboa and Devonshire you were at the same party. You was ... no way you could avoid that party. They had a rock, I don't know if it was a band or not, it was a rock hysteria going on with loud amplifiers and drums ... the music made absolutely no sense. You could tell by just listening to it, it was right out of the pit. And kids everywhere. And this morning we came out our front lawn had beer bottles all over the place. And... now that is not a good testimony for the pastor. (laughter) So I had Marcy and ... Marcy and I we picked up the beer bottles and put them in the trash and then we thought that's probably not a good testimony either. So this afternoon we're going to dump them in the Jones trash

across the street. (laughter)

Now we wouldn't do that because they go here to Grace too. So, we won't. But anyway, we're now trying to think how we can get rid of them in the right way. But anyway, there were kids all over the place. There was drugs and... oh, it was ... a terrible racket, dragging up and down the street and all this. And Patricia and I were talking about the fact that ... you know, first of all, these rowdy kids, what are they doing? You know, you can't sleep and all this stuff. And then I said, you know, I said - what else would you expect? What else would you expect from people who have no resource to control their inner man? They express it in whatever is permissible, whatever is allowable and whatever feels good. What else can you possibly expect? These are just people without Jesus Christ. These are people with no resource to control the inner man. But on the other hand, you know, sometimes we as Christians find ourselves in a position where we don't seem to be able to control it either. Maybe it comes out in the things we say and the things we think and the things we do that are unacceptable to God, a failure to be obedient to follow up on spiritual resources whatever it is, but very often it happens even to Christians. Sometimes we lose the struggle with the inner man.

Now what is the inner man? What are we talking about? Well, we don't have to get too heavy about this, the inner man is just the real you, the inside you. Now we've spent a lot of time on the outer man, maybe that will help you to see the inner man by contrast. Now you all took good care of the outer man this morning. You all look lovely, wonderful. Some of you took especially good care of the outer man. You got up this morning and immediately you faced the outer man in the mirror. And you brushed it and fixed its teeth and then you put on its face, if you're a lady. If you were a man you took it off, you know. (laughter) You're very concerned about the outer man. And you went immediately downstairs after you had clothed the outer man and you fed the outer man. And hopefully you did because it's good for you to be fed because then you're alert and your mind can function. And you got the outer man wonderfully prepared. And you came here and now we're endeavoring to minister to the inner man. The inner man is just the real you. It's just the spirit and soul part of you. And that's the thing that needs to be strengthened.

You know, I've been thinking to myself a lot lately about this craze we have in America of exercise. And I've been realizing that the Bible says bodily exercise profiteth little. Not nothing, but little. And there are some people who are really super-pre-occupied with that little. They run, they diet, I mean, they wouldn't miss their protein drink. They are very outer man conscious. And if there was some way we could get them to spend half as much time on the inner man we could revolutionize their lives. Christians should be preoccupied with the inner man. The inner man is the eternal part; the spirit, the soul, the real you. Let me show you the contrast of the two by having you notice II Corinthians chapter 4, verse 16. Second Corinthians 4:16, and here Paul contrasts both. He's talking here about a situation of persecution which he was caught in as was common. He had been perplexed and he had been distressed and he had been persecuted and he had been cast down and he had been bearing in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus. There was a lot to suffer in his ministry. Death was working in

him, he said. But he says in 16; "For which cause we faint not." In other words, even though we've got a lot of trouble on the outside, a lot of hassle on the outside, a lot of persecution and so forth, we don't faint. "Though our outer man perishes," watch this, "Yet the inner man is renewed," or better refreshed, "day by day." Now you see, Paul was never preoccupied with the outer man. He says God delivers fresh strength to that inner man every day. That, beloved, is the process of growth in the spiritual life. Your inner man being strengthened. Your inner man being revitalized and renewed every day.

In II Timothy chapter 4 and verse 17 Paul talks about the fact that the Lord came to him in a time of distress and strengthened him giving him victory over the lions that would have devoured him. Paul was very conscious of strengthening the inner man.

Now watch this, the outer man decays, the inner man accelerates and ascends. Keep that in mind. As a Christian, as you get older, your outer man declines, you can't avoid it. It just happens. The older you get the further it declines. And the older you get as a Christian and the more you grow as a Christian and are refreshed every day, actually, spiritual growth leaving the base say of your outer man does not go like this...spiritual growth does not ascend up like that, it goes like this. Because the outer man diminishes, declines and decays while the inner man ascends. Which means the older you get in Christ, the older you get as you're renewed by the Spirit the further away you come from the outer man. The less concerned you are about it. But you see, the Lord has a way of allowing us, when we're saved at this point, to then begin to grow away from those things as they descend and we ascend. So Paul says the outer man, I admit it, is perishing all the time. It's declining. But in proportion to the decline of the outer man is the renewal of the inner man so that I ascend in the inner man to Christ, and to God. And the more I come to Christ and the closer I come to God and the more I'm strengthened in the inner man, the less I'm concerned about the declining of the outer man.

Now if you're getting old and you're concerned about it and you're getting old and you're afraid of dying, and you're getting old and it bothers you a whole lot then I would venture to say that your inner man is not ascending in proportion to the declining of your outer man. God has a way of just making that all right.

So, what are we seeing then? Paul says our outer man may be perishing; it's a process he's talking about here. But our inner man is revitalized, increasing, richer, deeper, stronger every day. Now that's what he is after. Now let me say this to you, friends, if ... if this is true of Paul, you say, that his inner man was renewed and revitalized and refreshed everyday why isn't it true of me? Because, simple thing, the renewal of the inner man is dependent upon the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's work is dependent upon your yieldedness. The New Testament says quench not the Spirit. Right? The New Testament says grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you're sealed. Now if you grieve the Spirit and you quench the Spirit, you cut off the resource, you cut off the flow of refreshment then your inner man is not revitalized every day and you're not going to experience what Paul experienced.

The key thing, then, go back to Ephesians ... the key thing here is to start with that you be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. In other words, that you allow the Spirit of God to do that revitalizing, refreshing, renewing ministry day after day. Now the inner man's got to be strong or you can't fight the world, the flesh and the devil. The inner man's got to be strong or you can't overcome. The apostle Paul had that battle, didn't he? In Romans 7. The seventh chapter of Romans, Paul is saying - "In my inner man I delight in the law of God," Romans 7:22. "I delight in the law of God in my inner man." You know, he wants what is right, it wants what is right. But he says, "The things I want to do I," what? "I don't do and the things I don't want to do I do." I have a weak inner man. It has the right desires but I have this outer flesh that messes it up. And, you see, he says - Oh, wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death. And then he says I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But he just ... he doesn't know the answer yet, he just says - I know it's in Christ somewhere but I just don't know where it is. And then you go into chapter 8 and all of a sudden he discovers the Holy Spirit and how the Holy Spirit works and he says - The law of righteousness is fulfilled in me through the walk in the Spirit. Chapter 7 he had a weak inner man, chapter 8 he discovered the Holy Spirit and all of a sudden the Spirit strengthened his inner man.

Now listen, beloved, you cannot experience inner strength and the Greek there is to be powered with power, to be dynamited with dynamite, to be strong with strength, to be mighty with might. That's the idea. You'll never know that on your own. You'll never be able to stand firm and solid and unmovable. You'll never know maturity until you allow the Spirit of God to do His renewing work. Until you allow God's Spirit to strengthen you. That's what He wants to do. You say - Well, is He there to do that? Oh yeah. "If any man not have the Spirit of Christ he is none of His," Romans 8:9 says every Christian possesses the Spirit. And if you possess the Spirit Jesus said you shall receive power after the Spirit has come upon you. The power is there, the Spirit's there, it's a question of appropriation. You say - Well, what's the key? Galatians 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit and you'll not fulfill the lust of the flesh." That's ... it's a simple truth. Walk in the Spirit. The New Testament word walk is the word of daily conduct. Conduct your daily life in the power of the Spirit. Conduct your daily life yielding to the Spirit. Conduct your daily life with a consciousness of the presence of the Spirit of God. That's basic. We must be Spirit-controlled, Spirit-filled, Spirit-conscious, and that means walking in the Spirit. You can't just remember the Holy Spirit every so often. Walk in the Spirit. The walk is the picture of a step at a time, every step taken in the energy and the power and yieldedness to the Holy Spirit.

Over in 5:18 of Ephesians look what it says. "And be not drunk with wine in which is excess but be filled with the Spirit." The Greek says be being kept filled, let it be a constant thing. Constantly filled up with the Spirit. Constantly filled-up with the energy and the power of the Spirit of God.

Now it's interesting to note that you will never be able to do that unless the Spirit of God is in your conscious mind. In other words, you can't...let me reduce it this way, living in the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit, being strengthened by the Spirit means that you've got to be

conscious of the Spirit. You get up in the morning and it's a question of decisions. Right? All of life is decisions. You decide whether you're going to get out of bed or not. And decide what you're going to eat or what you're not going to eat. Decision, decision, decision, decision. The simplicity of walking in the Spirit is simply yielding each one to the Holy Spirit. Yield each decision to the Holy Spirit. You say - Well, in order to do that you'd have to be thinking about the Holy Spirit every time a decision came. That's right. Exactly right. And you say - Well, if I go around thinking about the Holy Spirit all the time, you know, I feel like the bruised and bleeding Pharisee. You know there was a group who lived in Jesus' time that were called the bruised and bleeding Pharisees. They thought it was a sin to look at a woman. Every time a woman came up they closed their eyes and they kept running into buildings. We don't want you to be ... we don't want you to be stumbling around smashing into the walls but if you're going to be controlled by the Spirit then you must be conscious of the Spirit. You say - Well how do you do that? Very simple. Very simple. You fill your mind with the Word of God. You see in Ephesians 5:18 it says, "Be filled with the Spirit," a parallel passage Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." It's the same thing. You allow the word of God to saturate you. "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You." As I hide the word in my heart, as it saturates me, it begins to control my thinking processes. And as it controls my thinking processes then the Spirit of God brings it to mind instantly at the point of each decision. And then when I yield to that, one step at a time, I strengthen my spiritual muscle. Every time I yield to the Holy Spirit I exercise my spiritual muscle and I get a little bit stronger in the inner man. Paul said I can do all things through Christ who what? Strengthens me. But I've got to yield to Him. I've got to yield to His Spirit. I can't do it apart from Him. He...Paul is praying that our inner man would grow strong as we yield to the Spirit. You'll never do that until you're in the Word of God. We all receive the Spirit. In fact, I Cor. 12 says we've all been made to drink in the one Spirit. But for some of us, it's been a long time since we had a good drink. A good drink of the Spirit. We've been functioning in the flesh. If you want to drink in the Spirit of God, systematically study the Scripture. You might not miss your protein drink but I wonder if you miss the time in the Word of God. You know, if you took ... just figure this, someday, tomorrow will be a good day, or maybe today, today's probably better because you'll forget tomorrow. Add up on a little piece of paper the time you spent on your outer man.

Okay. How much time did it take you to get your outer man out of bed and dressed and fixed up and...how long did it take to feed your outer man? Breakfast took 20 minutes, lunch took this, dinner took this and a few snacks in between. How long did it take you to jog your inner man? Your outer man, rather. And, you know, whatever you did for your outer man. How much time did you spend on your outer man? Figure that out. Just do this, just spend an equal amount of time on your inner man and it will revolutionize your entire life.

You say - But how do you do that? Just spend the equal amount of time studying the word of God and intermittently talking to God about what He says in His word. You will literally be revolutionized. But you see - we don't do that. We...for us it's...we worry about that outer stuff and the inner man limps along until Sunday and you come here and say...Oh, John MacArthur he'll give us a good ole

shot in the arm, we'll be all right for another week, Mabel. See. I see you're really not ... you're really not taking care...how would it be if you only ate on Sunday? Can't do it. When you feed the inner man with the Word of God and you feed that in what happens is the inner man has truth in its frontal lobe, if you will, and when decisions come the first thought is the Word of God and the Spirit has a handle to turn you into God's will. And once you've exercised your will toward the Holy Spirit you've strengthened your spiritual muscle. And that's how you grow.

Now people think - Well, I don't know if I could ever get to that level, you see I'm just sort of a class-two Christian. And I ... you know, and you think of a missionary or you think of a pastor or somebody as sort of a spaced-out, strange, they're up there on some spiritual level and oh, it would be wonderful but it's so beyond us. No. The only difference between you and me is that I'm here and you're there. That's the only difference. I'm talking and you're listening. That's the only difference. Same world, same flesh, same devil bugs me. I have the same infirmities, I have the same spiritual process to go through to get growth that you do it just so happens that somewhere along the line God was gracious enough to give me a good swift kick to begin to apply some of these things so I could grow to the place where God could use some things. That's the only difference. I don't have some kind of mystical contact with God; I'm not up there on another level half way between you and heaven. No. I'm just one of the people. But I ... you know, I'll give you an illustration.

When I was in ... I use to worry a lot. Because in my heart I always felt I wanted to go into the ministry but I hated to study. And I really did. In fact I never studied. All through school I use to ... I was very bad when I was little about that. My dad use to break coat-hangers on me to try to get me to change but the older I got the less the coat-hangers hurt so you know... but anyway, by the time I got to high school, you know, I knew that I was smart enough to just get by. So in high school I would just get by. Just do whatever I had to do to stay eligible so I could play ball. That was everything, you know. And then I got to college and did the same thing. College was great. You could do a lot of nice things, have a lot of fun and... as long as you stayed eligible and okay, fine. I just barely got by. Well, I had gone through an automobile accident which God had called me into the ministry and I began to worry about it. MacArthur, you're a real sluff-off. You don't put out any extra... whatever has to be done, you just do the basic minimum thing, you're never going to make it. And somewhere along the line I decided well, I better change. And I began to change when I got to seminary. And I began to realize that I better start to learn how to study. And I used to hate it, I mean, literally hate to study. I could hardly force myself to do it. But I began to walk in the Spirit. And as I began to walk in the Spirit and study the Word of God in my life the Spirit of God had handles and then He began to use those handles to lead me and one step at a time I would discipline myself and exercise a little spiritual muscle and I'd get a little stronger. And a little stronger, and a little stronger, and a little stronger. And, you know? Day by day through the years God has been exercising my will toward Him by the power of His Holy Spirit and now, you know something? I don't have any trouble with that at all. I don't have to worry about that. In fact you can't ... once I get going at it you can't drag me away from it. You may come in and tell me the most wonderful truth in the whole world and tell me the most sad story in all

the world and you'll probably hear a few grunts and I'll never lift my head up. Because through simply exercising my will to be obedient to the Spirit of God through the years God has strengthened my inner man to the place now where the easiest thing for me to do is to yield to the Spirit of God in the area of ministry to which He's called me. And it isn't mystical, and it doesn't happen overnight, it's the process of spiritual exercise.

Somewhere as a Christian you begin. And you begin to say yes to the Spirit of God. The word of God is in you. The truth is there so that you can respond to it. The Spirit of God gives you the impulse to what is right to do, you do what is right, you strengthen your spiritual muscle. The next time it's again strengthened, the next more, more, more. Finally, it becomes the flow of life. You're beginning to operate on another plain. You begin to respond most automatically.

And you know what happens? I've always defined spiritual growth as this -spiritual growth is the decreasing frequency of sin. You see, the more you exercise your spiritual muscle, the more you yield to the Spirit of God, the more the Spirit of God controls your life, the less sin is there. It's never the absence of sin; it's the decreasing frequency of it. And, by the way, the more you grow and the more it decreases the more heinous it is when it does show up. That's what it means to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.

And you can start right where you are. You can start by absorbing the word of God by saying yes to the Holy Spirit, maybe you're tempted to be angry or tempted to be lustful, you're tempted to be thoughtless, you're tempted to be prayerless, you're tempted for whatever it is - instead of saying yes to the temptation say yes to what you know is right and you've exercised your spiritual muscle, you're a little stronger. And that's the process that Paul is after.

And then someday you'll grow up and be like Paul. You say - Oh no, I cou.... same God, same Holy Spirit, same resource, same power maybe it's a different will, you need to exercise your will as he did

The apostle Paul got to the place where it didn't matter what happened to the outer man. He grew so far away from that perishing outer man because the ascendancy of his inner man was going so vertical he was so far away from it he could have cared less. Right? Why when they told him you go to Jerusalem in Acts 20 and you're going to get it, Paul. He said - none of these things move me because I don't count my (if I can paraphrase) outer man worth anything anyway. For to me to live is Christ and to die is simply gain. Get rid of this outer man thing. This thing is just a problem.

In II Cor. chapter 11 the apostle Paul told us a little about 'his ministry. He says - Five times I received 39 stripes, 3 times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, 3 times I was ship-wrecked, a night and a day I had been in the deep, in journeyings often and perils of water, perils of robbers, my own countrymen, Gentiles, the city, wilderness, perils ... perils in the sea, perils among false brethren, weariness, painfulness, watching, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold, nakedness and besides that the care of

the church. This is typical for me but look all that stuff on the outer man never gets to me, he says, verse 30, in fact I will glory of the things that concern my infirmities. It just helps me keep my concentration on the inner man.

Paul said in II Cor. chapter 4 verses 9 to 11, I'll read it out of the Phillips, listen to it cause it's very vivid. "We are handicapped on all sides but never frustrated. We are puzzled but never in despair. We are persecuted but never do we stand alone. We may be knocked down but we're never knocked out. Everyday we experience something of the death of the Lord Jesus so that we know also the power of the life of Jesus in these bodies of ours and this is the reason we never collapse." He says - we may get it on the outside but Jesus is giving it on the inside and that's why we never collapse.

And then in verse 16 he says - "The outer man suffers wear and tear but everyday the inner man receives fresh strength."

Are you concentrating on the inner man? Listen, you will never get your ignition on until you do. You will flounder around in impotence until you do. If you want to ever get to Ephesians 3:20 you've got to get to Ephesians 3:16 first. You will never know what it means to have exceeding abundantly above what you can ask or think happening in you until you've started in verse 16. Until it is a daily routine for you to yield to the power of the Holy Spirit. And by that I simply mean to obey what you know is right before God. As the Spirit of God gives the right impulse in your life, you say no to temptation, you say yes to the Spirit, you've exercised spiritual muscle, you have been renewed that day, you have been refreshed that day. And though your outer man got one day older your inner man got one day stronger. And gradually you're growing away from the mundane, you're growing away and you're coming closer and closer to the God of your salvation. Further and further away from the things of this world that don't matter and less and less preoccupation with them.

And so as you're strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, you're ready to take the next step. And we'll see what that is next time. Let's pray.

While you're praying and your heads are bowed for just a minute, I want to ask you to do something. Right in the silence of your own heart before the Lord, would you just kind of covenant two things? Number one, would you echo the prayer of Paul? And would you just covenant with the Lord that everyday this week you're going to pray this prayer? That you would be strengthened by His Spirit in the inner man. Pray it and then ask God to help you pray it everyday this week. God, help me to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. Covenant with the Lord that you're going to spend one week, at least, concentrating on the inner man, not the outer man. Cultivate on the inner man.

And then would you do one other thing? Would you covenant in your heart before the Lord to pray for somebody else you know and love that they would be strengthened by His Spirit in the inner man?

Would you pick out some ... maybe it's your wife, maybe it's your husband, maybe it's your son or daughter, or your mom or your dad, or your best friend, or somebody your heart really yearns for. Would you just covenant with the Lord that you'll pray for them everyday this week that they would be strengthened by His Spirit in the inner man? I believe God answers prayer. I would... I would be so thrilled to know that you are all praying those prayers. First for yourself that you would be strengthened. And then for somebody else. And covenant with the Lord this week you're going to remember that. Sometime you might even jot it down so you don't forget. Put it where you can see it.

Father, thank You for the work that You can do and will do in us. Beyond our wildest imagination by Your power if we're willing to be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man. If we're willing first to focus on the inner man. And secondly to walk in the Spirit, pouring the Word of God into the inner man so that the Holy Spirit can direct us into His will. Oh, Father, I pray for this people what Paul prayed. I bow my knee before You the Father of the whole family in heaven and earth. And because I know that within every believer You dwell I pray according to the riches of Your glory that You would strengthen them with might by Your Spirit in the inner man. We would all begin again there to get the power moving in our lives, to change this church, this city, this world for You, for Your glory. We just pray that You'll work in our hearts for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen

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