

God's Commitment to You

by Peter Conlan

The sermon emphasizes God's unwavering commitment to us as a loving Father who empowers and strengthens us in our weaknesses.

Duration: 51:45

Scripture: Psalm 103:1-5, Ephesians 3:8, Ephesians 3:14-21

Topics: "Commitment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a boy named Johnny who is fascinated by a thunderstorm. The speaker uses this story to illustrate the different perspectives people may have of God. Rather than seeing God as a stern figure scolding us for our mistakes, the speaker encourages the audience to see God as a loving father with an everlasting commitment to us. The speaker also emphasizes the idea that God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, and encourages the audience to believe in God's ability to work in their lives and in their church. The sermon concludes with practical suggestions for prayer and being aware of one another's needs.

Transcript

It's great to be able to get away like this for a few hours, precious hours, and to let some of the burdens of the week roll away from us. I really have come with a sense, not so much that we need heavy ministry, but we really, I need something from God this weekend, something that is more than anything we've organized, but just God himself speaking to me. You remember the disciples after the resurrection, and they were sitting huddled in a locked room, fearful of the Jews, and just totally discouraged, probably exhausted, apart from anything else, the events that had preceded that time.

And then two things happened that changed, not just their lives, but changed all of history in one sense. Jesus came, John 20, Jesus came into their midst, that's the first thing, and secondly, he spoke to them. And that is what made all the difference, just that word, he said, peace be unto you.

Maybe that's actually the word somebody needs here this weekend, but Jesus came into their midst, and he spoke to them. And that's just my very simple prayer this weekend, that Jesus will come into our midst, and that we, me personally, you personally, will just get that word that you need from him this weekend. Now, I don't know if you've brought, I heard, let's see, who's got a pen and paper? I want you to write two things down, good.

If you haven't got one, steal one, borrow one from a person next to you, because everybody needs to be involved in this. Now, I'd like to ask you to write two sentences on this piece of paper, and I want you to fold the piece of paper up, and not throw it at me, but actually put it into your Bible. The first sentence, I want to ask you this question.

What, well take a moment to think about it, what is it that you want God to do in the coming months in your church? That's the first thing. What, as you just think about it for a moment, what would you like to see? Now, just put whatever you want, maybe you want to see the church painted. I don't know, perhaps you've even got a slightly wider vision than that, but just in a sentence, just write down on that piece of paper, doesn't have to be what your wife wants to happen in the church, or any, but what would you like to see? If you could, if you could see God do just one thing, what would it be? Perhaps you'll write the name of a person you want God to touch in your church.

Let's take a moment, just write that down. What do I want God to do in the next few months in my church? Okay, second sentence, what do I want God to do in the next weeks, or months, or days even, in my life? Don't worry if you can't think of some great heavy event, just put down what comes to your mind. What is it you'd like God to do? Maybe it has nothing to do with the church this time, but it has to do with the family.

Wife, husband, whatever, what would you like God to do? What would you want God to do? What do I want God to do in my life? Babies can put thumbprints, we'll accept thumbprints, my mark. Okay, now fold that piece of paper up and just tuck it into the back of your bible. We won't think about that for a little while now.

Great, I wonder if you would just pray with me now for a moment before we look into the scriptures. Father, our lives have been challenged so many times from your word. We thank you for the great joy of coming to your word this morning, but we pray that you would not only challenge us, but change us as your word becomes a living word in our hearts and lives.

In Jesus name, amen. I spoke to Chris, I think about a week ago, about what was on his heart for this weekend, and one of the things he said to me was, perhaps you should think about speaking about commitment to the Lord, and also commitment to one another. That was more or less what you said, I think, and I thought about that, and the more I thought about commitment to God, I somehow couldn't quite get peace about that challenge.

I just thought, well, I'm not quite sure if a real heavy challenge of commitment to God, and then as I was praying about it the other day, I thought, well, maybe we should look at, turn it around a little bit, and look at God's commitment to me. Not so much my commitment to him, but his commitment to me. What a rock solid foundation that is to begin our thinking from.

God's commitment to me. And we're going to turn to a very, very familiar verse of scripture, Ephesians chapter 3. I'm just believing he's saying amen, that's great. I love people saying amen when I'm preaching.

Ephesians chapter 3. One of the problems, when you choose a very familiar verse of scripture, is that you know everybody's heard at least 50 sermons on that verse of scripture. And the other thing is, probably those sermons are better than anything you can preach, that I could preach. So I'm always aware that somebody has said much better, more creatively, with more ability, what I want to say.

You know, don't you, the story of the North American Indians on the edge of the Nevada desert, behind the mountain range, one day talking to each other. You know how they talk to each other, don't you? Smoke signals, the blanket and the bonfire. And they were having a discussion from one mountaintop to another.

Unknown to them, the Americans were about to have a nuclear explosion, an experiment in the desert beyond the range. And as this conversation was going on, the smoke signals were going up and down. Suddenly, this one Indian sort of dropped his blanket and looked up at, mouth dropped, he saw this enormous mushroom cloud rising from beyond the mountain range.

The whole ground shook. He turned to his friend, he said, boy, I wish I'd said that. Well, I'm afraid that I often think that when I'm turning to a familiar verse of scripture, and I know that I've heard God use so many men and women to expound that verse.

I wish I'd said that. But let's just see what God has for us. Ephesians chapter 3, actually we'll read from verse 14 through to the end of the chapter.

And it's Paul's great prayer for the Ephesian Christians. You may remember his prayer earlier on in chapter 1, his prayer for enlightenment. And this is his great prayer for enablement for the church.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father. So it's a prayer to our Father. So that's the beginning.

God's commitment to us is the commitment of a Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And to know this love that surpasses knowledge. Not bypasses knowledge, by the way, surpasses knowledge.

That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. This is incredible, isn't it? This is superlative upon superlative. This is what I once heard Martin Goldsmith describe as Paul's hyperbole.

Is that the word? Paul's hyperbole. I mean, just absolutely, if anybody was going over the top at this point, it was Paul. Now, to him, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. God's commitment to me as my father. I kneel before the Father.

Somebody said that Jesus did not die for the cause of world evangelism. That's not why he died. He died because the Father loves you and me.

It's a commitment from the Father. Will you turn to Psalm 103. We get a lovely picture here of God our Father.

Psalm 103. Spurgeon said this was the greatest of all psalms. And if the church had no hymn book, but only this psalm, it would be the hymn book for the church.

Praise the Lord, verse 1. Oh my soul, all my innermost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.

He redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion. He satisfies, I often think of this, he satisfies my desires with good things. So that my youth is renewed like the eagles.

Isn't that exciting? My daughter asked me the other day, Dad, what's it like to be old? When Esther first put on a pair of earrings, I said to her, oh darling, they make you look so much older. And you know, she beamed. And she wanted to return the compliment.

I could see she was seeking for something to say. And she said, oh and Daddy, that gray hair makes you look so much older. I don't know if you've ever looked at Psalm 102, verse 6, I'm like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins.

What an incredible change from that, that moping old discouraged owl, to this eagle that's soaring. When God touches our lives, a change like that does happen. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Then just dropping down to verse 13. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed.

He made us. He remembers that we are dust. Verse 17.

And here's his commitment, his covenant. But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children. God's compassion, verse 13, God's caring, giving, forgiving, loving, is not on the basis of my response.

It's not on the basis of my behavior. It's because he's my father. His commitment, and we're going to come back to Ephesians very soon and see the depth of that commitment, but his commitment to me as a father has nothing to do with my behavior as his child.

It's because he is my father. Let me ask you a question. Does God love me? Does God love you any less when you lose your temper, when you're irritable with your wife or your husband, when you think uncharitable thoughts about your boss or the person working directly under you? Does God love me any less when I fall flat on my face as I so often do? The answer, of course, is no.

God's commitment is the commitment of a father. I remember George Duncan at the Keswick Convention years ago telling the story of a little boy who had this image, and I think some of us do, of God, a picture of God, not so much as a loving father, but as somebody with a stick that's just waiting for us to step out of line and, bop, he's got us. And this little boy, he liked most things that were set before him on the table except prunes.

And one day, of course, it happened. Prunes were put on front of the table, prunes and custard. And this is up in Scotland, and I don't know what that has to do with prunes.

But little Johnny said, no, I'm not going to eat those prunes. And his father said to him, Johnny, you eat those prunes or I'll be angry with you. Well, that was a fairly serious possibility, and so he picked up the spoon.

Halfway to the plate, he decided he would risk his father's anger and put the spoon down. He said, no, I'm not going to eat those prunes, don't like them. Then his father invoked yet a greater authority and said, Johnny, if you do not eat those prunes, God will be angry with you.

And that really made him jump for the spoon. But he didn't actually get the prunes inside, and he said, no, I'm not going to eat those prunes, I don't like them. So then his father said, you go up to your bedroom and you wait up there.

Johnny went upstairs to his bedroom, closed the door behind him. That moment, the weather broke, thunder rolled, lightning started flashing. Johnny's mother was slightly softer hearted.

She was downstairs worrying, oh, the poor thing, what's he thinking and what's happened to him? So she went upstairs and just opened the bedroom door. Then she saw Johnny with his nose pressed up against the window watching the thunderstorm. And she heard him muttering to himself, this is a terrible fuss to make over a few wee prunes.

Well, I don't know what your picture is of God, but I hope that we might just grasp, not that God with the stick, with the lightning, the thunder scolding us for our prunes, but that his commitment is that of a loving father. Verse 17 in that Psalm 103, his commitment is also to me is forever, but from everlasting to everlasting. Isn't that something? Not only is his commitment that of a father and there's nothing I can do to change it.

I can't misbehave so badly that I will lose his fatherhood in my life. But also his commitment is from everlasting to everlasting. I don't know why it is, but when I see some of you old friends, John down there and a few others, my mind always goes, and David especially, you know me, Phyllis, since I was knee high to a grasshopper, my mind always goes back to certain incidences where you might say I misbehaved.

When I walked in here, I hadn't seen Chris Marshall for almost 20 years. The first thing he said to me was, shall I tell them some stories of your antics when you used to come here? And I do remember when I was, here's another person that's arrived, dear Edwin, who also reminds me of some of my misbehavior when I was a boy. And I was thinking when I looked at this verse that God's commitment is from everlasting to everlasting.

I remember the time when I was at Birmingham Bible Institute and in the bathroom, they had a bathtub and there was about a six inch gap or perhaps a foot gap between the partition, which led you into the bathroom. So actually, if you had a mind to, you could tip something over the top of that while somebody was lying in the bath. And I waited for one of the most senior respected lecturers to enter the bath, lock the door behind him, and then I got a small bucket of ice cold water.

And I stood on a little stool, climbed up, and when I knew he was lying in his tub of hot water, I tipped the bucket over. At that very moment, his wife walked by the open entrance and saw me and caught me. There was a scream from the bathtub.

There was a scream from his wife. I still have a letter in my filing cabinet at home on the official letterheading of Birmingham Bible Institute. Dear Peter, unfortunately, we are requiring you to be on probation for a second term.

We hope the Lord will enable you to abide more placidly by the college rules. I've memorized that letter. Do you know, do you know the wonderful thing is we're not on probation with God? His commitment is not just for one term or two terms, it's from everlasting to everlasting.

And it's the commitment of a father, independent of my response to him. He wants my response, but independent of my response is his commitment. Will you turn back now to the verse that I really want us to look at in Ephesians 3. And if we could distill this prayer that we've read, Ephesians 3, 14 to the end of the chapter, down to three words, these would be the three words.

He is able. Just those three words. He is able.

That's his commitment to me. He is able. Now to him, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. I want to look just at four, four things that I believe he's able to do in our lives. Many more, but four from this passage of scripture.

First of all, he is able to strengthen weak people. He is able to strengthen weak people. Verse 16, I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being.

Some of us are rather like swans. And I think sometimes I communicate the wrong thing to people. They get a picture, they have an image of what you're like, and they have no idea.

You know what swans are like, don't you? They gracefully sort of slide or glide across Ward End Park pond, if they still have them there. I tried to get rid of them when I was a boy. Anyway, you see them just gracefully sort of gliding along and you think, what could be more elegant, more beautiful, more competent, more altogether than a royal swan? But if you could just look under the water, you would see their flippers going like crazy just to keep them afloat.

And I think some of us are like that. Other people see us sort of gliding along on the surface. We seem to be financially together, our personalities don't seem to have any great quirks, marriages seem reasonably intact, and more or less it all looks okay.

But if only we could see under the surface, we would discover what is true of all of us, that we are weak people. We are not all together and super strong. But the whole basis of our humanity is that we are weak people.

I think it was Paul Tournier who wrote a very powerful book many years ago, *The Strong and the Weak*. And the bottom line of that book was, friends, we are all weak. We are needy people.

That's why we need to respond, of course, to a powerful God according to his power that is at work within us. That word power is actually the same word in the Greek as the word able. Interesting, isn't it? So, David, what's the word? Power in Greek.

Okay, let's get somebody. John. Yes, I heard it.

Dunamis. Dunamis. So, the word for able or ability is dunamis.

It also is the same word for power, from which, of course, we get our word dynamite. Dunamis. Dynamite.

So, in other words, God's ability is the very same thing as his power. When he says, I'm able, you can guarantee within that ability is the power to accomplish what he wants to accomplish in my life. Very different to you and I. When we say we're able, that's one thing.

We're free or we're available, but it doesn't mean we actually have the training experience or the power to do whatever it is people want us to do. I have on my wall in my little study at home an everlasting reminder of my inability, my lack of power. Some of you heard this story, so you can just sort of think of something else for a moment, but I want to share it with you because it illustrates the point.

I have on the wall of my study a photograph that reminds me of my inability to be the person that God really wanted me to be. To be the person that my parents wanted me to be when I was a boy. See, that photograph is my school photograph and it has 800 boys in a great long, you know, what the school photographs look like.

I counted the other day all the shields and cups that were there on the grass, the bottom row and the headmaster sitting behind and very proud all the staff in their black gowns. And it was a great day when that photograph was taken. I will remember the day because I was standing on the back row and it took the old photographer about an hour to get us all set up on this rickety wooden sort of rises going up, nine levels I think.

And after an hour he got us all in place and then he said, now everybody hold it perfectly still and smile. He put his head under that little black cloth. He's going to squeeze the button.

That's how they did it in those days. And that was my moment. That was my moment.

There was this rather large boy in front of me on the row below who I didn't like very much and I got my foot behind his backside and I gave him a great kick like that. He fell forward but to stop himself falling he grabbed the people next to them, who grabbed the people in front of them, who grabbed the people behind them. And within a few moments 800 boys collapsed in a huge chaotic heap.

And I can remember Mr. Brown, he's in eternity now, not through this accident. He crawled out from those boys, the headmaster, straightened himself up, stood up and shouted above all the pandemonium one name, Colin. He didn't have to ask any questions.

He knew. That I would be somewhere in the middle of all of that. Always part of the problem, never the answer to anybody's problem.

So there it is, a reminder to me of my inability in my own strength, somehow my own disobedience and troublesomeness always coming through. My inability outside of God's invasion of my life, his power, his grace. Outside of that, there it is, a reminder of my inability to be the person that God wants me to be.

You know, I believe we dare not go forward, even you folks who are right at a new, if you like, crossroads as a church. We dare not go forward in our own strength. We need to be strengthened by him.

We need his ability, his power in our lives. We need to believe that he is able to strengthen struggling, weak people. We're facing some real challenges in OM, and I may share a little more this evening with you about that.

And we as a fellowship, as a group in OM, feel very much the need not to rely on 30 years of history, which we have in OM, but we need to trust his strength as we go forward, and his ability as we face the future. Second thing, he is able to fill empty people. Able to strengthen weak people, he is able to fill empty people.

Somebody once asked Charles Finney why he prayed so often that he would be filled with the Spirit of God, and he answered, well, it's because I leak. It's because I leak. That's why I need to be filled and refilled and refilled again.

Verse 19, Ephesians 3, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. That actually is one of my favorite verses in Scripture. It somehow speaks to me of the extravagance of our Father, that he wants to fill us, not just sort of top us up now and then, so we go out of church feeling we'll at least make it through till lunchtime Monday, but actually to fill us with his fullness, his character, beginning to fill into my character, filled with the fullness of God.

You know, there's an expression that's coming into missions that I didn't hear 20 years ago. I'm sure it was there 20 years ago, but I'm hearing it more and more now, and it's the expression, burnout. Burnout.

We have seminars for Christian workers, for missionaries, for ministers, who are facing burnout. They're like rockets that have been launched in Christian work, and now they've run out of fuel, and there's an emptiness, and there's a hollowness, and I think one of the values, by the way, of a weekend like this is that for those of us who are facing a little bit of burnout in our lives, we need to come together at a time like this. The ancient Greeks used to have a saying that a bent bow, what is it, if you keep the strings of a bent, if you keep a bent bow strung, it will break.

That's a very crude way of putting it, but I know what it means. It means we need to loosen the strings now and then, and it's good to come together a weekend like this when we're feeling a little stretched, but isn't it true that sometimes when we're asked for a word to give, and there's no word there, you know there's an emptiness. There's a little bit of burnout there.

You're asked for encouragement, and you sense that there's none to give. Maybe we're asked to take responsibility, and sheer panic sets in, because we know, we just don't know where to begin. We don't feel that we've got anything to contribute.

There's something inside us that's missing. He's able to fill empty people. It often happens, by the way, to the busiest people, to the most active church workers.

They're the ones who burn out the fastest, the ones that are moving so fast that we don't have time in the Word of God. We don't have time for real prayer. We even don't have time for fellowship.

We just have acquaintances in the church. We're moving too quick, facing burnout, facing an emptiness that begins to come into my life. I often wonder why it is a handful of people seem to do the most work in any church.

It's the 80-20% rule. You know that, don't you? 20% of the people do 80% of the work, and so on. You can follow that principle all through our church life.

It happened to Elijah. Remember, he thought he was the only one left that hadn't bowed the knee to Baal, and we find him sitting out under a tree. This is a great man of God, who has been most powerfully

effective in his ministry.

And here now, he feels it's all over. And he actually is saying, Lord, I think you better just take me. Totally burnt out, totally washed out, empty, nothing more to give.

He's able to fill empty people. I often take my bucket to the beach, and the beach is Isaiah 55. Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come buy and eat.

Come buy wine and milk without money, without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest affair. Give ear, and come to me.

Hear me, that your soul may live. And here's that covenant again. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my unfailing kindnesses promised to David.

You see God, the Father, wanting to fill our lives, to refresh. I want to ask a question. How can we help each other? We're a busy church, aren't we, Kingshurst? How can we help each other not to burn out? How can we watch each other, and care for each other, so that when there's that barrenness, that emptiness coming in? I find it in my life.

I value it when brothers and sisters actually minister to me, and say, Peter, how are you doing? I know you're talking and preaching a lot, and you're going around the world, but how is it really with you? Are you really getting nourished? Are you filled yourself? Now, I want just to have a little discussion for a few moments. How do you think we can help each other in this fellowship, in this whole area of burnout? How can we make sure that we're not just running on nervous energy, and miles away from being filled with God's Spirit? Some practical suggestions. Yes.

Prayer. Okay. How would we do that? How would we pray for one another? Okay.

You were the one, you know, being all spiritual, Mary being spiritual, people being spiritual, you know, it's all planned from then. They should be able to come to the family, and say, look, I want help. I've had enough.

And not sort of keep it back, and think, well, I can't do that, because that's not Christian life. You shouldn't complain to God, you know, it's a sacrifice. But you should be able to come and say, I want to believe, and I want help.

Yeah, great. Okay, that's excellent. Really make friends amongst one another.

That is such a good point. You know, friendship. Somebody asked me a few weeks ago, we were at a marriage conference, in O.M. actually, and I was sharing a little bit, just actually a little bit about our situation.

And before we spoke, somebody said to me, what is the most satisfying thing about your work? What do you find most satisfying about your work? And I thought, well, I travel around the world many times. Is that the most satisfying thing? I'm involved in a lot of planning for O.M., and I enjoy that. Is that the most satisfying thing? Speaking a lot, meetings, conferences, is that the most satisfying thing? And do you know what I answered? I said, the most satisfying thing for me is the friends that I work with.

And that is the truth. The most satisfying thing in my life is my friend sitting down there, my wife, but in my work now I'm thinking of is actually the people I'm working with. And that brings friendship, you see, it brings deep stability and worth and value and satisfaction and joy.

And I just would say amen to what Krista said, that we need to cultivate and develop real friendship. That's one of the whole joys of the church and fellowship. This is great.

Any other practical suggestions, how we can sort of make sure that we're not burning out or the old expression is dying on the vine, isn't it? Yes, John. Yeah, yeah. It's almost not British, is it, to intervene into somebody else's life.

But if you look through the scriptures, you'll find time and time again, the places that the people whose lives were changed, somebody else intervened. Somebody actually intervened into somebody's life. And whether it was Philip jumping up into a chariot and talking to the man that eventually brought Christianity into Africa or whatever, there's that intervention.

I believe God wants to sensitize our spirits to one another so that we are able to intervene graciously, tenderly and effectively into each other's lives. So that we don't have people sitting in the congregation who are totally burnt out and really just crying for help, but would be afraid to ask for that help. He's able to fill empty or if you like, leaky people.

Third thing, very quickly, he is able to use small people. This for me is the salvation verse. This is the most encouraging verse of all.

Ephesians 3 again, verse 8, although this is Paul speaking, although I am less than the least of all God's people. You cannot be smaller than that, can you? Less than the least of all God's people. This grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches in Christ.

Missionary history is filled with small people who have had big dreams, big vision. I like that so much. Some weeks ago I was in Indonesia with our OM representative.

First of all, she's small in stature. Her name is Meggie. She's a small woman, Indonesian.

She had organized a meeting with some pastors and ministers and she sort of introduced me as being a leader in OM. I felt so ashamed about that and she just treated herself as though she was absolutely nothing. So when I got up to the microphone, I said, I just want to tell you something about Meggie.

If you are all Indonesian blush, you went red. She didn't really go red. I said, we've got George Burry in OM.

He's the director for OM. He's in charge of geographically. He's responsible for the subcontinent of India, Pakistan.

We've got others in charge of Mexico and America and England. I went around the OM world. I said, but there's only one person who has the responsibility of 300,000 islands.

Also, that country with 300,000 islands happens to be the largest Muslim country on the face of planet Earth, Indonesia. I said, the one person that we have responsible for all of that is Meggie. This little Indonesian woman who feels that she's so small in God's work actually has the biggest territory almost of anybody in all of OM that has been entrusted to her as far as the work of OM is concerned.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 4, 7, but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. Isn't that a beautiful verse for those of us who feel? If you knew me, you'd know how often I feel that I'm totally inadequate for the ministry that God has called me to. I'm just not made of the right stuff.

I may have scraped through BBI, but I'm not made of that stuff. When I look at other men, women of God, I just feel, Lord, I'm out of line here. I'm not in this kind of category.

Then I see that actually we are clay pots. How many of you have been to India? Edwin, I know, has been to India. Edwin, do you remember? Have you ever been on the trains in India? I don't know if they still do it.

It's been, well, I think maybe I did see last year when I was there, but there's chaiwala. When the train, a chaiwala sells you tea, chai, see that's Hindi for tea, and as the train slowly pulls out of the station, he's running along with his tea pot, his little clay cup of tea, and he's shouting, chai, garam chai, chai, garam chai, that's hot tea, hot tea, and for two paisa, he'll put that through the bar of the window, and you drink it, by which time now the train has pulled out of the station, and all you do with that little red clay pot when you've drunk your tea is you throw it out the window, and it smashes to a million smithereens at the side of the train. It's completely worthless.

It's the chai. It's the treasure. That's the chai, is the treasure inside, but the pot itself really is not the thing.

It's the treasure inside, and I just think that it is encouraging that God uses clay pots like you and I. 1 Corinthians 12, I've not got the chapter here, but let me just read the verse from the Living Bible. Some of the parts that seem weakest and least important are really the most necessary. So God has put the body together in such a way that extra honor and care are given to those parts that might otherwise seem less important.

I met a woman in May when I was in China just this year who has been paralyzed since 1959, and they took me, a Chinese lady in her 80s, they took me into her room. It's her bedroom, her living room, her everything, and there was such a glow of godliness about this woman, and her bedclothes were up to her neck, paralyzed from the neck down, and through a translator she told me her story, how God had just used her in these last, what is it, 25 or more, 27 years, and given her a ministry of prayer. And she said during the Cultural Revolution, soldiers came into her home, and they were so afraid of the power and effectiveness of this woman that they accused her of being an enemy of the state.

And she laughed. She said to me, imagine, she said, I couldn't even move, I'm lying here paralyzed. And she said, I said to them, what are you going to do, carry me off to prison? And she said, and this is the ministry God has given this woman.

She prays for the sick, and they are healed in their hundreds and hundreds. They come from all over southern China. They carry in paralyzed people on stretchers, and this lady prays for them.

And around her bed I saw hundreds, just stacks of old notes and letters of prayer requests that people have sent her, and she prays for them. And then she has her husband who then signs off when the prayers are answered, and she just keeps all these records. And God has given, you couldn't find a frail, weaker vessel than this dear sister in China.

Her name is Men Wai, Sister Men Wai. Paralyzed, but powerful in God's hand. He's able to use small people.

I can tell you this, it's not preachers in OM that keep OM going. It's printers, it's mechanics, it's secretaries, it's accountants, it's a lot of back room people who actually keep this whole ministry going. And it's not just Chris that's going to keep Kingshurst going.

If that's true, he'll last, I reckon, about a year, then he'll be washed out. It's all of us together. God is able to use the least of all God's people.

That's the He is able to do much more than we ask or think. He's able to strengthen weak people. He's able to fill empty people.

He's able to use small people. And then on top of that, He's able to do much more. And if you look through all the different translations of the scriptures, you'll find that much more is immeasurably more, far more, abundantly more.

There's just no words that seemingly can describe how much more. Now to Him, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us. And I want us to grasp this, not just for this weekend, but as you're looking for this next season, if you like, in the life of your church.

Why don't we just believe together that He is able, not to just work according to plan, but to do much more. Sometimes when I take a trip overseas, I find in my suitcase notes that my daughters have left. And on this last trip that I've just taken to China and to Vietnam, and I'll be sharing tonight a bit about that, I found a note from my daughter, Anna.

And Anna's the youngest. And it's an interesting note. The biggest thing that caught my attention was, I love you, Dad.

Can you see that? I love you, Dad. But there's a rider attached to that. She knew I was in coming back through Hong Kong.

So this little note stapled, also in her hand, says, a radio cassette player, shells if you can, pretty things, and bits and bobs. Then underneath that note is stapled a reminder. It says, P.S., just a reminder, R-A-M-I-N-D-E-R, a radio cassette player.

Now, that is my daughter's note to her father. And I'll tell you something. I actually, not only do I want to bring back what Anna has written on her note, but I want to surprise her.

I want to bring back something more, something she didn't expect, because I'm her father. I want to do much more than she would expect. That's the nature, isn't it, of a father, of a mother, of a parent.

He's my father. He's able to do much more, immeasurably more, than all we ask, or seek, or think, or imagine. Habakkuk was at a crossroads in his life, and his greatest prayer was, Lord, could you at least restore your glory to Israel? The place is falling apart, total chaos.

Could you at least restore your glory to Israel? And here's the much more. God says, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Do you see that? Immeasurably more than all we ask, or think, or imagine.

Maybe God does want our church in Bromley, or your church at Kingshurst, to be bigger. Maybe that's what you've written on your paper, that the church will grow. I don't know.

But it could be that God's much more is deeper. Maybe that's the much more that God wants to do. Something that perhaps wasn't on the piece of paper that I wrote down.

Perhaps God's plan in my life is much more than I had even thought of. You know, once we grasp, I'm coming right back to the beginning now, once we grasp God's commitment to us, his commitment to me, then my commitment to him is not so difficult, is it? When I realize that he is forever committed in this way, to me as my father, then such a natural response is for me to commit my life to him, and to trust, as Paul wrote to Timothy, that he is able to keep that commitment that I have made unto him against that day. You know that hymn, his love has no limit, his grace has no measure, his power has no boundary known unto man, for out of his infinite riches in Jesus, he giveth and giveth and giveth again.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you that we can call you Father. We thank you that your commitment to us is so deep, so effective in our lives, that you do strengthen weak people, you do fill empty, burnt out people.

You use the likes of us, Lord Jesus, in this room, the likes of me, and Father we thank you that you're able to do much more than we've even begun to put down on our program, what we expect. Lord we just trust you and we gladly, on the basis of your commitment to us, we gladly commit our lives afresh this morning to you, in Jesus name, amen. I want us to break the rules and take just three more minutes if we can, is that okay Chris? I'd like you to take that piece of paper out from your Bible now, and what we want to do, we want to just pair off into twos.

Now we'll allow husbands and wives, but if you, you can also split up if you want to, but let's just pair off into twos, and then I want us not to share with the group, but just the person who you're going to be paired off with. Let's share what we've written on that piece of paper, and let's take just a few minutes, and let's pray together that he will not only do what we've written down, Lord in my church, in my life, but much more. Let's not limit him to our plans, but his plans.

Now I suspect it might be better not to do it in this room, but just to walk outside there. We'll just take three or four minutes only, and then we'll, once we've had that few moments of prayer together, we'll then go into coffee, which is back in the lounge. Okay, right, but please now, let's take three or four minutes, but we need to partner off, so look around and decide who you're going to pair off with.

I don't want anybody left alone, all right?

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