

Daring Faith Series – Part 3: Stretching Your Imagination

Pastor Brian Flewelling

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Chinese Proverb:

The frog sitting at the bottom of the well thinks that heaven is only the sliver of blue that he sees.

- We generally perceive that the world is as we've experienced it.
- The aborigine thinks that the moon gets devoured by the sun every morning and reborn in the evening. How do you explain that, in space? --ball of nuclear fusion
- How do you explain to a person who grew up with 8 tracks that there's a thing called Spotify?
- How do you explain to someone who's grown up under vegetarian parents that a black bean burger isn't even a burger?
- The person who has grown up with a tragic church experience thinks that all churches are tragedies.
- Like in the ancient world when they had their map. We don't have a map for things beyond our experiences.

In the middle of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he's trying to help them understand there's more to your faith than you know...

Ephesians 3:16-21

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

- What are you strengthen with? By whom? Where? Why?

¹⁷ And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

- How do you grasp the love of Christ? --power
- You need power even to grasp knowledge.

¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- If it surpasses knowledge, how can you know it?
- Where do you know it? Where do you store knowledge that your brain can't analyze?
- It's not intellectual. It's not theological. (v.17) The living God dwells in your heart.

²⁰Now 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, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

I don't know what your view of God is but it's not big enough! Not patient enough! It's not compassionate enough! It's not strong enough! It's not accurate enough!

- God is in the business of marching off your map
- That's for hundreds of years God didn't live in a temple, he lived in a tent. He wants you to keep moving and growing. You're not settling here. He's taking you somewhere you've never been. Show you things you've never seen before. Do things you've never done before.
- It's uncomfortable being stretched by an ambitious God.

1. God wants to stretch your imagination about who you think He is!

- *Ill: Out to eat. Pastor.*
View of God is that he's a stiff. Telling them everything they are not allowed to do, and everything they've done wrong.
- God doesn't like to be slandered any more than you do. He wants to break out of your map.
- *Ill: Testimony of someone roaring like a lion at retreat.* She said, "it's the first time I've ever felt fought for. It changed my view of God. I experienced God as a lion and a protector. And I as someone worth fighting for."

All of the attributes of God: Faithfulness, Goodness, Justice, Mercy, Provision, Zeal, Holiness. Every one of the attributes of God is an infinite palace of beauty that he's inviting you to encounter.

Every one of those attributes that my heart isn't exploding with joy... That's where you have room to grow.

- His patience—that's too boring
- His zeal – that's too scary
- His holiness – that's too rigid
- His kindness – that's too weak

Everywhere your heart isn't overwhelmed with love—"I love that about him."
He wants to take you past your map.

Action Steps: Take that attribute into your prayer times with Jesus.

- **Slide: Pray:** "Father, I don't understand your (attribute of God _____)."
- **Slide: Pray:** "I need your power to understand your (attribute of God _____)."
- Meditate on his scriptures!

Slide: Picture of *Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer

2. God wants to stretch your imagination about who you think you are!

I don't know who you see yourself as. You will act out whatever script is playing in your head about yourself.

- If you see yourself as a victim, you will act out the role of the victim.
- If you see yourself a getter-dun kind of person...
- If you see yourself as Ivan the Terrible, you will act out Ivan...
- If you see yourself as a disappointment to God, you'll act out of disappointment.

Slide: We have to be careful what we believe about ourselves.

Don't get so lost in what others say about you, or what you say about you or what the enemy says about you that you can't hear what God says about you.

How the Father feels about me? Jesus came to lay that question to rest once and for all time.

John 15:9

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, now remain in my love.

Romans 5:8

God demonstrated His own love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for our sins

- Visualize God like all my affectionate Italian friends: "You're a glorious mess. I take you as you are. You're mine and I love you."

He doesn't leave us there. He's taking us on a journey. You're going to need a new map.

2 Corinthians 3:18

We...are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.

Slide: "Whatever we see in Jesus is what God plans to reveal in us." ~Francis Frangipani

The Father's Character: Faithfulness, Goodness, Justice, Grace, Provision, Love, Zeal, Holiness
Everything you see in the Father he's building into your life.

Action Steps:

Wherever you feel inferior, or unworthy, or embarrassed ...take that attribute into your prayer times with Jesus.

- **Slide: Pray: "Father forgive me my sins. Thank you for your kindness expressed to me in Jesus."**
- **Slide: Pray: "Father, as you are (attribute of God) you are making me (attribute of God) "**
- Let the Word of God redefine who you are!

3. **God wants to stretch your imagination about who you think your neighbor is!**

You'll treat them the way you view them.

Story of Amy

- She was a racially mixed unwanted baby in the 1960s born out of wedlock in the slums of Philadelphia. Grew up in a penthouse above the bar where the roaches, rats and, drunk

customers stumbled in at all hours of the day. Dad wasn't in the picture and mom was too busy working. She had to take care of her younger siblings.

- She said, "I knew we'd have one meal a day--free lunch at school. "
- She said. "I had two sets of clothes. One I wore on Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays."
- We didn't own a telephone. We didn't own car. We walked everywhere.
- Life taught Amy that she would never have enough. Fight for it. Manipulate. Hate rich people for it.

- Over a period of ten years Amy was sexually abused by every authority figure in her life.
- Life taught her: nobody's going to protect you, and nobody is going to rescue you, you're here to be used.
- She said, "by fourth grade I wanted to play the flute and become a nurse, but I began thinking maybe God has created me to grow up to become a prostitute."

- At 15 years old, her best friend and four other children were burned to death in a fire that destroyed the penthouse she was sleeping in twelve hours earlier.
- Life taught her this horrific lesson: "It's hopeless. I'm going to do whatever I want."
- She started chain smoking like her mom. Drinking alcohol and sleeping with all the boys.
- She lived in that emptiness for several years.

- How do you see Amy? Amy's story doesn't end there.

- When she was in first grade, she asked her mom, "who is God?" Her Mom pointed five blocks down the street to the church building and said, "go ask those people."
- Here she was, 12 years later, still on her spiritual journey... she started hanging out with the crowd from Young Life Ministry. At one of the services...
- She told God, "if there's anything left of my life take it. I don't have much to give you."
- And in her soul came a quiet peace that replaced anxiety. And joy that replaced hopelessness. Her countenance changed. Entire demeanor began to transform.
- Her teachers went to her guidance counselor and told her they were concerned about Amy -- she's so different. She used to be so sad and now she's so happy.
- Her Counselor said, "this isn't who you really are. You can't keep up this lie forever. You need to go back to who you are."
- Amy said, "God rescued me from that girl. Ain't no way I'm going back to her again."
- Life taught that girl: You're unwanted, you'll never have enough, you're here to be used.
- God gave her a new map and took her to new places: I love you Amy, you're valuable to me, I have plans to bless you and not to harm you.
- Amy became a pastor. She helps hundreds of other people find the Jesus that set her free.
- How do you see Amy? Can you hear the Father whispering...?

1 Corinthians 2:9

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

I'm just here to remind you, not to settle in the lowlands of worldly skepticism. Have a faith courageous enough to believe that God's not finished with his masterpiece yet.