

A Gospel Filled Imagination

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, we ask that you would help us to understand your word. You know, Father, the different ways that we want to quench your word, quench your Holy Spirit.
- You know the different ways that we forget the gospel. You know, Father, the different ways that we can be full of ourselves and have problems then with ourselves and others. But, Father, you know all these things.
- We are in your presence. We know that you want to feed us through your word. And so, Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would move in our hearts and minds that we might think upon your word, that we might be drawn to you, that we might be gripped by the gospel and live for your glory.
- And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. My wife loves young children. I mean, she loves older children, too, by the way.
- It's not as if she says, oh, they're no longer young. Forget about them. She loves people. She loves young children. And so, if you were to come to our house with a young child, my wife has toys for those young children.
- [1 : 0 4] Even though our youngest is not even close to being a child, we have toys. And one of the things that we have, which is perennially, it's always popular, is we have a red and yellow car.
- Just a simple red car with a yellow roof. It's a car that you don't need a pedal for or anything like that. You just sort of, you know, like in the Flintstones, you just, the little kids can just use their foot to make it move.
- There's a steering wheel. There's a door that opens so you can get in and sit. There's a trunk in the back so you can put Lego and dolls and stuffed animals and all that type of stuff.
- And when a kid comes to visit, basically, as soon as they can start to move at all, you can just see they love looking at that red and yellow car. And it's, in fact, there can be fights over it in terms of whose turn it is to get in and wheel that little thing around.
- The kids just love it. You can just see their imagination at work. You know, they're just thinking, like, there's, like, a mom or a dad or a big person driving their car. There's stuffed animals. It's a wonderful time.
- [2 : 1 2] They love it. They have great fun. I was going to bring a picture of it, but I thought, no, no, this is a sermon about imagination. So I just want you to imagine a red car with a yellow roof where kids can sit in it.
- And even better, older kids or uncles or aunts or parents can push that car with the kid really, really quick and all sorts of different things. Because all the child has to do is just lift his or her feet just an inch off the ground and off it goes.
- The kid won't get hurt. And it's a wonderful toy. And we love to encourage imagination in our children. Every single one of us does. But one of the things, unfortunately, which has been true of the Christian church throughout the years and probably even true amongst many Christians today, is that for many Christians, it's all right for kids to have an imagination.

But once they get a bit older, it becomes a little bit suspect. In fact, for many churches, to go to a church is to go to a place where your imagination will die. Because often we Christians are just very afraid of it.

We're afraid of the type of freedom and creativity that comes with imagination. I remember many, many years ago, because I'm getting ancient of days, I went back to the church that I grew up in.

[3 : 27] Good godly church. I'm sure there are lots and lots of the people who went to that church are in high places of heaven today, those who have died. But I remember going back and I had just started university.

And they all, with interest, asked me what I was doing about schooling. And when I told them that I had gone to a secular university to study philosophy and sociology, their face literally fell.

Literally fell. And they warned me against going to such a place. And they recommended me to go to a place which was very, very strict. And just very, very strict.

And very, very safe. Sort of like a ghetto. So why is it that Christians often are very, very suspicious of the imagination? Why is it that we encourage them with imagination with children, but are fearful of it with adults?

And is this something that comes out of the fact that we're Christians? Or is it something, does the Bible tell us something very, very different about the imagination?

[4 : 29] That's what the text that we're going to look at today has some very, very powerful and interesting things to say about this question. So if you have your Bibles, turn in them to Ephesians chapter 3, verse 14.

Ephesians chapter 3, verse 14. And actually, for those of you who don't have your Bibles, we're going to put the text up on the screen.

There it is. And just as you start to read it, just a little bit of context for you. This is something that began, it was a letter originally, and it was written by a man named Paul, maybe around the year 60.

And he's in jail in Rome. And he's sending this letter to a place in what is now Turkey, but at the time would have been just part of the Roman Empire. It was the second biggest city in the Roman Empire, a city devoted to the worship of Artemis, a goddess.

And the people that he's writing to, almost all of them would have been pagans who would become Christians. And here's how it goes, this little bit that we're looking at today.

[5 : 32] For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. Just sort of pause there.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. Now, first of all, many of you might say, George, I can see the problem right here.

Like, this is why imagination and creativity goes to church to die. I mean, how on earth can you possibly begin a text on imagination by having to bow your knee to God?

Like, surely, if there's going to be something that's going to just stop imagination cold, it's this odd idea of bowing your knee to God. It's not very, very promising.

Now, I just want to explain something about this text to see that it's actually the beginning of something which is really important about imagination and the many, many different aspects of imagination.

[6 : 32] And first of all, I have to apologize for those of you who are here, and this is your first week that you are here. We're going through all of the book of Ephesians. And so one of the ways to imagine what you've just heard and what we're about to hear this morning is imagine you're watching a series on Netflix that has 12 episodes.

We're at episode 6. And so you've just come to visit us, and we're watching episode 6 with you. I've watched the previous five episodes. This is your first episode, and you're going, What?

I'm like, What? What's going on here? So this thing here, which sounds really weird, is coming out of a previous episode, and it's actually something which is very, very powerful and wonderful.

You see, actually here, I'll just put up the point, and then I'll explain a little bit about what's going on. You bow the knee to the one who adopted you as his son, giving you a new name and a new destiny.

You bow the knee to the one who adopted you as his son, giving you a new name and a new destiny. And somebody's saying, George, why it's all this guy stuff? Like, what about girls?

[7 : 41] Like, what about women? So here's the thing, the wonderful thing which went on earlier on in an earlier episode that we talked about. In the ancient world, somebody my age could be adopted.

And in fact, in the ancient world, people my age, somebody like me might, in fact, a very, very rich person who didn't have an heir might look at me and say, that's the guy I want to have.

I'm going to adopt that guy so that he can become my heir because he has five sons who are all healthy. This would be the perfect guy.

And he seems, like, reasonable. He seems, you know, he knows how to brush his teeth. And at least on Sundays, I'm vaguely color-coordinated, although I am wearing sandals with socks, which is a fashion faux pas.

But, you know, apart from that, he's probably a perfectly good guy for me to adopt. And when this rich person would have adopted me in the ancient world, I would have given up my last name.

[8 : 44] I would no longer be George Sinclair. I would take on his last name. And I would be adopted as his son to inherit all things. And so one of the things that we looked at is that many people make the mistake of thinking that Christianity is just proposing a whole series of hypotheses.

And obviously, it does propose things to believe. But at the heart of the Christian faith isn't just, I suggest this hypothesis and this hypothesis and this hypothesis.

One of the ways to understand it is at the heart of the Bible, the heart of the New Testament, is that God is making a proposal to you. Can I adopt you as my son? And this is what's so breathtaking about this text and it's why we keep the male language.

You see, one of the things, if you go back and study how the Christian church grew, in the first 50, 60 years, 100 years, the overwhelming majority of the church, not all, but the overwhelming majority of the church were women and slaves.

You can't imagine in Canada how powerful the message would be to a woman who is lacking rights and power and property often, that if you become a Christian, the creator of the universe is going to adopt you as if you are his son with the right to inherit.

[10 : 10] It's hard for us to imagine a slave being told that if you give your life to Jesus, God will adopt you as his son with the full right of inheritance.

And that's what's going on in this text. Paul is sort of bringing a section to a close. He's sort of rounding up some of the things in the previous five episodes. He's rounding it up in the form of a prayer.

And he's saying to these people who have given their lives to Jesus, and when it says here that, if you remember, I'm not, I can go backwards, can't I? Woo-hoo, let's see that.

Here you go. If you go back and you look at the text again, see, that's what's going on here. For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father. Bowing my knees means that I'm, it's an act of allegiance.

It's an act of gratitude. It's an act of just acknowledging the greatness of the one and the greatness of the gift.

[11 : 15] And you know, I mean, I'm going to inherit nothing from my parents. And I'm not losing any sleep over that, but just to, all of a sudden, Bill Gates, if this was the ancient world, and Bill Gates said, I'm going to be, George, you're going to be my heir.

The billions and billions and billions of dollars. Or if the Queen of England, all her kids die, and she adopted me, and I'm going to be the next king. And so, for this reason, I bow my knee before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named.

It's not saying every human being. It's saying every single person, whether in a family on earth, or not, now has a new name, a new identity.

That's what my point is. Has a new name, has a new identity. And you bow the knee to the one who adopted you as his son, giving you a new name, and a new destiny.

You see, that's why he says this. Not to quench your imagination, not to put you down, but for Christians, to remind you who you are.

[12 : 37] And his response is completely and utterly reasonable. Now, usually, when we think of the imagination, we think of being able to draw.

We think of little kids playing in their red car with the yellow roof. We think of being able to write a book, or being able to write a poem, or something like that.

But in fact, the matter is, is the imagination is way more powerful and present in all of our lives than this. Just think of this quote. I wish I could remember where I heard it. I heard it a long, long time ago, and I can't remember now where I heard it from.

Worry is a waste of the imagination. Isn't that true? Worry is a waste of the imagination. Louise would have vastly more stories about this than I would.

But I, you know, there's been, you know, times when I've been at home, and I've expected Louise home at four o'clock, and she's driving the vehicle, and 4.30 comes, and five o'clock comes, and 5.30, and six, and 6.30, and still no Louise.

[13 : 41] And my imagination starts to go. It's gone long before it's come to 6 or 6.30. And my imagination isn't, oh, she's just sitting somewhere having a coffee and a Starbucks, and having a wonderful quiet time by herself.

No! I picture car accidents and terrible things going on, and that's how my imagination just automatically starts to go.

And isn't that true? It's not just that our imagination works in terms of being able to draw something, but we imagine success. We imagine triumph. Somebody says some terrible thing to us, and we don't have the chutzpah or the guts to say something to them, but we walk away, and in our imagination, are we ever putting them straight?

We're triumphing. But then if your wife says, you should go and say that to that person, then our imagination instantly goes to the ruin that would happen if we actually tried to say that to the person.

We imagine all sorts of things beyond just how to make a poem. Imagination's a far more powerful force in our lives. And the Bible here has something, again, that's speaking far more deeply into imagination than just the aspect of creativity.

[14 : 55] Look what happens next. And those of you who are following along in the ESV, I've made a couple of tiny changes in the text, not so that it fits my argument, I promise you, but to bring up the more literal original language.

Here's what the next part of the Bible says. It says, that he may grant you to be strengthened with power in accordance with the riches of his glory through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and likewise to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

It's a very, very rich and powerful text. And here's what's going on to try to help us to just calm down and pause and try to enter into the beauty of the text.

A couple of weeks ago, I was in a coffee shop, and there was an older woman sitting there working. If you go to some coffee shops, they'll have tables where, I think this table, you could get eight people seated.

And so there's a table for eight. I was at one end, and there's this woman probably close in age to me at the other end, and there's nobody else. All the other six chairs were empty.

[16 : 25] And a young woman came and sat right in front of the older woman. And not only did she come and sit right in front of the older woman, but she immediately put up a computer and another screen and a whole pile of things and basically pushed the older woman back and took away her view by putting like a double screen in front of her so that all of a sudden, if the older woman's sitting there, rather than being able to just sort of look out or around people's shoulders, there are two big computer screens right in front of her, right in front of her face, like 18 inches away.

So a little drama unfolds in terms of the woman saying something to the younger woman and getting no response and then going to the manager.

And then, the next thing you know, the young woman goes to the manager and still nothing happens and then the manager comes to speak to the younger woman. And what happens next is one of those things that makes a public place like a coffee shop, everybody get quiet and everybody get very, very uncomfortable.

Because that young woman with a very, very loud voice started claiming some disability with light sensitivity and with a loud, loud voice said that this was the only place in the entire restaurant that she had to, she could sit and so everybody else had to get out of their way and whenever the manager, who's very, very quiet and gentle with a quiet voice, started to try to say something to her, she literally, the young woman literally went, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, with a loud voice, her fingers and ears, la, la, la, la, la, la, and finally the manager would pause, she would, the young woman takes her fingers out of her ears and then the manager tries to talk to her again, la, la, la, la, la, la, even louder so the whole restaurant can hear this.

You've got to go to more coffee shops, it's not just having a coffee, let me tell you, sometimes it's quite something. I'm sitting there thinking, no, I'm not going to get involved in this.

[18 : 37] I'm just going to look at my book and pretend that nothing over there is happening. You know, eventually the manager left in defeat, the older woman moved and then three minutes later she gathered her stuff up and she left the restaurant and eventually the restaurant started to quieten down.

Now, what that illustrates in a very, very powerful way, in an extreme way, is something that goes on all the time in our lives, right? It's the balance. How do we balance getting along with a group and our own individualism?

Like, how do we balance those things, right? Like, it comes up all the time. In our culture, we have a very, very, very, very high demand of an individualism and being able to be authentic to yourself and seek autonomy and being true to yourself and I have to be true to myself.

And in our culture, often what that means is if you're going to be authentic and true to yourself, what it means ultimately is if that means that your wife or your husband or your boyfriend or your girlfriend or your kids just aren't getting with the program, in our culture, often it's viewed that it's fine to end the marriage or end the relationship because individualism triumphs.

In other cultures, as we know, everything, the family matters very much more and if you have a child who's just not fitting in, the child has to be squashed to fit in with the family and there's, we see in different cultures different ways of trying to solve the interests, the needs, the desires, the plans of the individual with the group.

[20 : 17] And believe it or not, what we see here, and so it's very easy for us to try to think that when we come into the Christian world, so Jesus becomes our Savior and our Lord and he's going to pick one side on this.

He's going to say, yay, individualism! Woohoo! Like, you know, all, you know, individualism trumps over marriage, trumps over family, trumps over the workplace.

It just, it always, you know, and then, or some of us are going to say, especially if we come from very traditional cultures or if we have very traditional type of families, we're hoping that Jesus says no to individualism, boo to individualism, up family, up the organization, up the big group, and you just have to be squashed.

And so we go into the Bible and we bring this perspective with us and then what we come across is in this text where Paul is summarizing the truths that have been unearthed in the five previous episodes and now he's taking these truths and he's turning it into a prayer and in this prayer we see a different path, a different option.

Let me try to give you a couple of points to try to bring it out. You will know him personally and uniquely but you know him better with others.

[21 : 43] You will know him personally and uniquely but you know him better with others. That's what we see going throughout this entire text.

You see, I can't become a Christian through my family. I need to come to a personal saving faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross for me.

He was thinking of me and he was thinking of you and he didn't just die for the wrongdoings of white males in Canada over a certain age.

No, he died for the things that I have done wrong. He died to deal with my debt. He died to deal with my doom.

He thought of me as he died and looked for me in his resurrection. It's deeply personal. But at the same time, at the same time, there's something more.

[22 : 49] Paul, all the way through the text, has been trying to show how there's this corporate larger aspect to the Christian faith. And so it is, yes, it is the case that when he talks about knowing Christ and the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, there is a sense that you will know him personally and uniquely, but you know him better with others.

And don't we sometimes when things are going best, don't we experience that all the time? Like, isn't it the case that if you get to go to a cottage and the sun is setting and you just, and it's one of those days where it's just perfect and it's the mosquito season's ended and the black fly season's ended and you have a fire close to the shore and the sun is setting over the lake and you can hear the loon and it's just so beautiful and isn't it even more beautiful when you do it with your loved ones?

Isn't it? It is. And you can have a great time playing a game, but you know what, you can play that game with your loved ones, it's even better.

You're listening to music, they can go on and on and on. There are so many times where it's both something that you personally, uniquely know, but at the same time, the pleasure of others is there.

And what the Bible is saying is this, when I see God face to face, I will begin to know the unsurpassed knowledge of the love of Christ.

[24 : 27] But as I get to view Christ, I get to also view him and see how my brother and sister from Uganda, from China, from Iran, from Alabama, from Guatemala, when I get to see how they also at the same time know Christ and are being overwhelmed with the surpassing knowledge of the love of Christ, and we not only get to see that with those of us who live on the earth here at the same time right now, but also with the saints who were martyred in the Colosseum of Rome, in the first century, and the barbarians who became Christians through the ministry of Patrick in the 400s.

And we will know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, but to know it in the context of men and women, young and old, different cultures and languages, it will be better.

And if that is what our final end is, we should do what we can now to taste it now. To taste it now.

Another illustration. You are the home where Jesus dwells, and you are a living stone among countless others being built into a temple where God dwells.

I didn't, my notes are poor there. You are the home where Jesus dwells, and you are a living stone among countless others being built by him into the temple where he dwells.

[26 : 22] That's what Paul is getting here as well, right? He says that Jesus might dwell in your hearts with faith, but he says that you will know this with all the saints. And that's this spectacular mystery that, in a sense, the Christian life really begins.

There's this wonderful text in the book of Revelation that it pictures that Jesus is standing on the outside. He'll never force his way in, never at all. He respects your freedom right to the very end, and in all eternity.

He respects your freedom, but he stands at the door and knocks. And most religion is people talking to Jesus on the other side of the door. Maybe they bend down and they get on the ground and they see Jesus' feet, underneath the door.

And maybe if it's an old-fashioned door with a big lock, they look through the keyhole and they see a little tiny bit of a glimpse of Jesus. But the Christian life begins when Jesus, who is knocking and knocking and knocking, not just content to talk to you through the door, and you finally open the door up and you say, Jesus, come on in.

Be in, come in, as my Savior and as my Lord, and dwell within. See, the Christian faith isn't just proposing an hypothesis. Here's another proposal.

[27 : 33] Jesus says to you, will you let me in to dwell in you as Savior and Lord? It's a proposal. Will you let me enter in as your Savior and Lord?

And he dwells. He dwells. Very personally unique. But you know what? If you go back and look at the earlier episodes, at the same time, it's not just that he dwells within me, individualism, but the image is that out of saints who became Christians in Ireland in the fourth century and in France in the year 1000 and in China today and in Alabama and in Africa and in Canada, that each one who allows Jesus to come in and dwell is also becoming a living stone and God is making this temple out of human beings that crosses the cultures and the races and the languages and the ages and he dwells there at the same time.

One final image from that text. The finite can be filled, the finite can be freshly filled with the infinite forever.

The finite can be filled, freshly filled with the infinite forever. You see, that's what it says at the end, you know, that you will be filled with the fullness of God and the image there, it's as if you are a big basin and a basin is just finite, but it's as if God pours himself into you as a basin with living water.

He pours himself into you and he pours himself into you and it's not as if, oh, he's got you up to the top and now he's just going to leave you. No, it's as if from all eternity I who am finite, just a basin, just a bowl, but from all eternity God pours himself into me and pours himself into me and pours himself into me and even though I am finite and I will always be finite, I will never be a God, neither will you, but when the infinite desire is to freshly fill you, he will do that for all eternity and it will always be fresh and always be new and there will be no end to the glory in you.

[29 : 49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. You see, why does this connect to the text that I began with, worry is a waste of the imagination?

You see, Paul wants to remind us in the context of a prayer that so many of us, me especially, we use our imagination for worry.

We use our imagination for our own glory. we use our imagination, imagining triumph or fearing complete and utter ruin, success or failure.

But that as these truths grip us to give us a security about what is going on within us at the deepest level of who we are and what our final end will be and the final word about us, it can start to create a security to face the hard times and security to take the risks to plan for growth, to take the risk of creating a business or creating a beautiful cottage or house, like it creates, this begins to create and root your creativity and your imagination in a way that you can over deal with setbacks, hope for the future.

The Bible does not want you to live in fear, squashed. The Bible, God desires you to be healed and grow. Let's look at the final text.

[31 : 36] Now to him who is able to accomplish far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine. There's the word imagine. Say it again. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. I'm going to say it again. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more abundantly than all that we can ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, every generation forever and ever.

Amen. See, the fact of the matter is that the human problem is that our imagination is too weak. Every single one of you, your imagination is too weak.

Sometimes we fear success. We fear our imagination. If it starts to even get too strong, we fear it. Just like in life, in so many businesses, a very common problem can be a fear of success.

What if I actually get that promotion and then they'll realize I am a hopeless loser? I am a 12-year-old who looks old.

[33 : 06] Why are they giving me this power? And so we can fear success. We can fear the promotion. We can fear that the dance or the music or the art or the business or the property or whatever it is that we desire, we can be destroyed by a fear of success.

It can be too much and we can quench it. You see, the fact of the matter is that stifling the imagination is a human problem. It is a human problem.

And the gospel is this perennial quiet witness to those of us who want to live in ghettos and want to live in fear to not be afraid.

What's one of the very, very first things? I think it's the very, very first thing Jesus says to the disciples after his resurrection. do not be afraid. Our imagination is too weak.

When we're gripped by the gospel, it will grow. And our imagination is too easily turned to our own glory. And from our own glory, we have these artificial highs and lows of triumph or ruin.

[34 : 28] We have no firm basis of security. that can go into all of eternity and the gospel desires to give you in Christ that security and knowing that Jesus knew and knows every single thing about you from the moment of your birth to the moment of your death.

He knows the dreams you don't remember when you wake up. He knows your secret shames. He even knows the shames that happened when you were young that you have repressed and blocked and someday it comes to light.

God, but he knew and still knowing he died out of love for you and on the cross, every single thing that could possibly keep you from God, any possible accusation against yourself or another against you, he paid for that price.

And when you stand before God face to face, you are not clothed with your perfect accomplishments. No, you are clothed with Christ's accomplishment. commitment. And this is to give us when we receive it, when we say, yes, I will accept your offer to adopt me.

Yes, I will accept your offer. Jesus, come in and dwell within me and make your home within me and remodel it and do whatever has to be done. Come and live within me.

[35 : 46] He really comes. in him, through the gospel, your imagination will be healed and grow and in the light of his many-splendored, multicultural, multiracial, multigenerational, eternal glory, it will be healed and grow.

It will be healed and grow. I invite you to stand, please. Let's just, just before we go into prayer, if you have never even thought about the fact that it's not just a matter of ideas, but I mean, there is, there are these very powerful ideas of creation and how the world works and very powerful ideas, but it's not just that the Bible is giving us a seminar in ideas, although there are ideas to learn, but that at the heart of the Christian faith is Jesus saying, George, I'm knocking at the door of your life, and I know what's inside there way better than you know what's inside yourself, and I know the failures you're afraid of, I know the successes you're afraid of, I know the way you quench your imagination,

I know how your imagination is bent, I know all that stuff, but I died for you. I want to enter in, just please, George, open the door, open the door, open the door, and don't just open the door, but say to me, Jesus, come on in, please come in, come in as Savior, come in as Lord, never let me go.

If that's never happened for you, or you've never, a change has happened in your life where Jesus is your Savior and your Lord, but you've never said anything, you've never been able to put it into words, there's no better time, forget the rest of my prayer, just do some work with him right now, and say, and if some of you have very good visual imaginations, just imagine him coming in and dwelling within, and he will do it.

And for all of us, let me pray for us. Father, we thank you that you do not want to squash our imagination, you don't want to squash our creativity, you do not want to squash us, that you died to save us.

[38 : 22] You died, Father, so that we might know the unsurpassable love of Christ. To begin to taste and know that now in ourselves and in the company of others, and that there is a sure and certain promise and hope that in Christ, our destiny, that even though we are finite, that for all eternity, you will freshly fill us with yourself.

And that that is something, Father, we will delight in personally, and our delight will be multiplied many, many times as we share that delight with others.

We thank you, Father, you do not want to leave us alone, that you have died to save us in the person of your Son. And we ask that you would grip us with these truths, grip us with the gospel, that we might live for your glory.

And all God's people said, Amen.