

I. Introduction

- A. *Our key verse: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20, 21, NKJV).*
- B. An awesome promise from an awesome God.
- C. Do you realize today, that God is able? God is almighty. God can do all things. God is all powerful. God is omnipotent.
- D. God is able. Do you believe that?
- E. Sometimes?
- F. Okay, let's push it deeper.
 - 1. Is God able to do all you ask or think?
 - 2. Is God able to do above all you ask or think?
 - 3. Is God able to do abundantly above all you ask or think?
 - 4. Is God able to do exceedingly abundantly above all you ask or think?
- G. Today's truth is simple: God's abilities are not limited to the confines of your imagination. The wildest dreams you can muster don't even compare to the limitless power of God.
- H. And I gotta admit that it's the toughest thing in the world to hold onto that faith, and to cling to that God in a bad economy, or in a dysfunctional family with a disappearing father, or in a culture that seems more saturated by death and evil and sin and Satan every single day.
 - 1. God is able, but we are frightened.
 - 2. God is able, but we are hurting.
 - a) And it's so easy to begin to doubt.

I. Then what?

II. Soccer and connecting the dots

- A. Last week, my son scored his first goal in two years of soccer. He is 7 years old. Scoring a goal has been his constant prayer, and a week ago, Monday, God answered. My son was super excited, jumping and hugging his team. It's good to score a goal.
- B. In the car ride home, we did a little post-game analysis. I said, I couldn't see everything really well, so I'd love to hear exactly how you scored the goal.
- C. JD said, "Well first, I talked to Gavin..." Then he corrected himself. He said, "Actually, first I prayed to God" (this was before the quarter started.) "First I prayed to God and then I talked to Gavin about passing the ball if we were in front of the net. And then Gavin took the ball down the field, and he kicked it to Trevor and Trevor kicked it to me, and I scored the goal."
- D. That's when my daughter chimed in. Josie is 9. She said, "So your goal was connect-the-dots."
- E. JD asked, "What do you mean?"
- F. She said, "Your goal went from God to Gavin to Trevor to JD. It's connect-the-dots with four dots, like a square."
- G. Connect the dots.
- H. Do you ever have moments when something just gets real clear for you?
- I. That's what happened for me when Josie said it was connect the dots.
- J. Because life is all about one simple thing: connecting the dots between God and every single area of your life. Life malfunctions when you shut God out.

III. EveryONE Counts

- A. We're pretty deep into a project and sermon series called EveryONE Counts. We are dreaming big dreams about how God might use Neighborhood Church. We are dreaming big dreams about touching people with God's love, about joining men and women and kids into communities of faith, hope and love.
- B. God says, open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.
- C. And I can honestly say, I've never trusted God for more than I trust him now.
- D. I know God is able, and I'm connecting the dots.
- E. But here's my problem: sometimes I don't see what good it's doing, I say, God, I'm trusting you, but I'm getting hung out to dry. I'm a Chicago Bears receiver, stretching for your pass, and getting slammed in the process. Every time I connect the dots, you do way less than I can ask or think.
- F. What's that about?
- G. I'd like to put two stories side by side and see if we can learn better how to connect the dots between God's ability and our needs.

IV. Jesus Heals Ten Lepers Luke 17:12

- A. *12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (Luke 17:12, 13, NKJV).*
 - 1. Let's take this apart a little.
 - 2. First: leprosy. This was a disease that caused open sores and open sores, in those days, meant infection. People with leprosy were quarantined. It was a sad disease to have. You were considered unclean, an outcast, and the bottom rung of society.
 - 3. Let's think about this for a minute. Are you the kid that was always picked last for dodge ball? Or maybe the kid that the teacher never believed in? Maybe your own dad made you feel like an outcast? Or used you or exploited you or wounded you?
 - 4. Have you ever felt unclean? Then put yourselves in these 10 men's sandals.
 - 5. We all have an Inner Leper. That's the part of you that's ready to quit.
 - a) Maybe your marriage is broken, and you've pretty much given up hope.
 - b) Or maybe your finances are all messed up. You look at the economy and the job market and there's just so much anxiety.
 - c) We have a lot of students, and maybe you dug a hole in math or chemistry, and you're freaking out.
 - d) Let's let leprosy stand for whatever makes you feel broken right now.
 - 6. And Jesus enters your village and don't miss what it says in verse 12: you stand afar off.
 - 7. They had to stand far off because they were lepers. That was the law of leprosy.

8. But I think it gets even deeper. What do you think happens to a person when you're pushed to the back of the line over and over and over and over, and all your life, you're picked last, or looked over, or people look away?
 9. Don't you think that has an effect on your esteem and worth?
 - a) The outer wound becomes an inner wound.
 - b) And the inner wound becomes a broken identity.
 10. And Jesus is coming, but you still stand far off and do the only thing you know to do:
 11. You cry out for mercy!
- B. *14 So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed (Luke 17:14, NKJV).*
1. He sent them to the priests because that's what the law said. The priest declared it official.
 2. And it was as they went; they were cleansed—healed of their leprosy.
 3. Because we serve a God who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think.
- C. *15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 17 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:15-19, NKJV).*
1. How many times have we been more like the nine than like the one?
 2. How many good things has God given you, and you just walked off and never returned thanks?
 3. In Chicago one of my best friends was Greek—his name is Tony. Over the years, I came to know Tony's extended family—awesome people—have you ever seen the movie My Big Fat Greek Wedding? Like that.
 4. We actually started a small group together, and every week we prayed and ate and studied the Bible and did our lives together for a couple of years.
 5. And when I say we ate, we ATE, and it was awesome. I love Greek food.
 6. Where was I?
 7. When we studied the Bible, my Greek friends had their Greek Bibles sitting on their Greek laps, and I gotta tell you, it was pretty intimidating doing Bible study with them. Especially when they laughed at how I pronounced Greek words.
 8. My friends taught me how to say a few Greek words their way and here's the most important word I learned. : EUCHARISTO (pronounced, Greek-style... ev-car-i-STO).
 9. Eucharisto means thank you. When you go to a restaurant, and the waiter brings your food, you say, Eucharisto, thank you.
 10. That is the word in verse 16—one leper returned and gave thanks. Eucharisto.
 11. Today, we participated in the Lord's Supper, in communion. The Broken Bread represents Jesus' body broken on the cross for our salvation. The wine or juice represents Jesus' blood, poured out in death to pay for our sins and reconcile us to God.
 12. The Cross of Christ is Ground Zero of our faith.
 13. And Jesus told us to keep going back to Ground Zero, back to the Cross, back to His broken body and His shed blood, over and over and over again until He comes again.
 14. When we do that, we call it Communion. We also call it the Last Supper. And there's another name for this event. It's called the EUCHARIST, (evcharisto), which means thank you.
 15. And every time we share the Eucharist the idea is that we tell God eucharisto, thank you, Jesus, for dying on the Cross and shedding your blood so you could reconcile me to God.
 - a) Thank you for forgiving me.
 - b) Thank you for saving me.
 - c) Thank you for loving me.
 - d) Thank you for the crown of thorns.
 - e) Thank you for the scourges across your back.
 - f) Thank you for the nail-pierced hands and feet.
 - g) Thank you for being the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World.
 - h) Thank you for crying out Father forgive them.
 - i) Thank you for announcing IT IS FINISHED!
 16. And in that moment completing all that had to be done to make it right for a holy God to love broken unholy person like me.
 17. Thank you, Jesus.
 18. When you take communion, you say thank you to Jesus.
 19. You connect the dots between your church life, your religious life and God, and that is a good thing.
 20. But it's not enough.
 21. Because the 9 lepers who were cleansed—they did the religious thing, they showed themselves to the priests, but they never said thank you with their lives.
 22. It's one thing to say thank you to Jesus on Sunday, at church—to connect those dots.
 23. But it's another thing to say thank you by how you treat your neighbor. Thank you by how you embrace your spouse. Thank you by how you mentor fatherless children. Thank you by how you encourage others with your words.
 24. And thank you by how you give your money, and share your riches with those in need.
 25. God wants you to connect ALL the dots from ALL the areas of your life back to Him.
 26. How many times have you been like the nine lepers who said thank you in the religious area, but never came and fell on their faces before Jesus?
 27. Now, stay with me, because I'm tossing some balls in the air and I hopefully want to bring them all down together in a way that makes sense.
 28. Let's go to another story about lepers. We've talked about it before, but there's part of the story I never connected with before, so I want to go back to it.

V. The Siege of Samaria

- A. *3 Now there were four leprosy men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why are we sitting here until we die? 4 If we say, we will enter the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die" (2 Kings 7:3, 4, NKJV).*
1. One of my favorite stories in the whole Bible: They live in a city called Samaria. Samaria is under siege—a vast enemy army surrounds them, and is starving the city to death.
 2. And because they have leprosy, they don't even get to go inside the city. They just sit outside the gates, life ebbing away slowly, by degrees.
 3. Finally, they come to their senses, and decide to go into their greatest fear, head toward the enemy.
 4. What's the worst that could happen?
- B. *5 And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one was there. 6 For the LORD had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses—the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!" 7 Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact—their tents, their horses, and their donkeys—and they fled for their lives (2 Kings 7:5-7, NKJV).*
1. When did the enemy armies arise and flee? (v. 7) At twilight.
 2. When did the four lepers move toward the big scary fear? (v. 5) At twilight.
 3. What was God waiting for?
 4. He was waiting for someone to shake up the status quo, and to realize that a half-life isn't worth living.
 5. When the life you know isn't the life you want, it's time to take that scary step of faith.
 6. Just like our lepers.
- C. *8 And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid them; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried some from there also, and went and hid it (2 Kings 7:8, NKJV).*
1. Here's what I've never noticed before.
 2. What is the biggest problem these four men face right now?
 3. Is it that they're hungry? No.
 4. Is it that they're totally broke? No.
 5. Their biggest problem is that they have leprosy.
 6. Question: in this story, does God heal their leprosy? No.
 7. What does he do?
 8. He blesses them in the leprosy. He fills them. He enriches them. Can you imagine how fun that moment was? They're eating, drinking, laughing, and playing.
 9. In that moment, does their leprosy own their emotions? No. Does it dominate them? Does it define them?
 10. Who are these guys?
 11. They are happy, rich, blessed, full men.
 12. Who will always struggle with leprosy? And you might always struggle with a broken heart, always struggle with loss, always struggle with a particular temptation, or loss, or illness, or disability.
 13. You may always struggle with a tough financial situation—I don't know.
 14. You might always struggle with a decision you made years ago.
 15. God might heal you.
 16. God might not heal you.
 17. Either way, he can still bless you. You pray he takes away the leprosy, but he rewards you with a totally different currency!
 18. He is still able to do exceedingly abundantly above all you ask or think.
 19. So what if you have an Inner Leper. You don't need to let him or her run your life. God defines you, not your losses. Don't let your fears dominate your life.
 20. God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think.
 21. I love how the story ends—it's so relevant to where we are as a church right now.
- D. *9 Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household" (2 Kings 7:9, NKJV).*
1. They didn't connect the dots between their blessings and their neighbor's needs.
 2. They didn't connect the dots between their resources and their life's mission.
 3. They didn't connect the dots between their happy day and their generous God and then all of a sudden, they got it!
 4. This is a day of good news, and we remain silent—so they ran back to the city and told the gatekeeper, and saved the inhabitants of Samaria.
 5. Now, who's everybody's favorite leper?
 6. This is a day of good news, and we remain silent?
 7. We have a Savior who shed his blood and died for our sins and opened the door to heaven for the whole human race besieged by sin and death.
 8. This is a day of good news and we remain silent?
 9. We have a Father who never leaves us or forsakes us, and we remain silent, hunkered down on the steps of a dying city?
 10. We have a love that never fails. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have the Holy Spirit of God. We have a community of friends and allies to do life with. We have sins forgiven. We have guilt erased. WE have new mercies every morning. We have heaven, streets of gold, and pearly gates.
 11. We have the gospel.
 12. We have good news.

13. This is a day of good news and we keep silent? Why? Because we don't have enough? Because we don't see the need? Because God isn't providing?
14. No way! We have a story to tell of a dying, rising, living Savior who has changed our lives, and forgiven all our sins, and given us hope, even in our leprosy. Even in our dysfunction.
 - a) Some lepers get healed.
 - b) Some lepers don't get healed.
 - c) Healed lepers never connect the dots.
 - d) Unhealed lepers do connect the dots.
15. What matters is a heart set on God.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Being a pastor of a large church is all about two skills:
 1. The skill of controlling your panic attacks.
 2. And the skill of managing your ongoing crisis of self esteem.
- B. I am a leper.
- C. I am a messed up guy.
- D. I am a recovering legalist.
- E. I am a perform-a-holic.
- F. I am oftentimes clueless.
- G. If you knew the temptations I face and the thoughts I have, you wouldn't waste your time listening to me.
- H. Which is okay, because if I knew the mess inside your heart, I might not waste my time preaching to you.
- I. But you know what?
- J. In spite of my dysfunction, in spite of my ever-present fears, in spite of my fear of public speaking, in spite of my lusts and temptations, and sin...
- K. I AM A BLESSED MAN.
- L. I AM A BLESSED CHILD OF GOD.
- M. And
- N. *God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20, 21, NKJV).*