

God is

INFINITELY MORE

than we could ever imagine...



Week 1 - Infinitely More

Bible Readings: Colossians 3:1-4; Ephesians 3:14-21

TEACH - Content to help inform a sermon or small group outline

Introduction

Wanting more can be a dangerous business. It got Dickens's *Oliver Twist* into a lot of trouble. We prize the virtue of being satisfied with what we've been given, and rightly so.

- But then there are those, like little Oliver, who somehow find the courage to wonder if they might actually be allowed to ask for more. They are the heroes and the heroines of the stories we love the most. They're the ones who help us realise that hungering for more helps make the world a better place.
- Quote - *'I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, come further in!'* (Jewel the Unicorn in C.S. Lewis's final Narnia chronicle, *The Last Battle*)
- We who have been raised to life with Christ should be the hungriest of all. Paul says that our hearts and minds should be set on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1). 'Earthly things' tell us we should never dare to hope for too much or ask for more because this is all there is.
- 'Things above' are the things of God's Kingdom: limitless possibilities, endless goodness and more than enough to fill and fulfil us. Like Jewel the Unicorn, we can marvel at the beauty of what we've seen so far, but we're meant to keep going further up and further in.



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Exploration

1) Are we limiting God?

- We are limited beings and can default to 'earthly things' so easily. It's a natural habit to put limits on things, and especially on God. Our hunger for more loses its edge, and before we know it, we've settled for accepting that this is as good as it gets.
- If we want to get hungry for the 'infinitely more' (Ephesians 3:20 *NLT*) of God's Kingdom, both as individuals and as worshipping communities, we need to think honestly about the ways we're limiting God:
 - **We limit God by our fear** - We're afraid of what might happen if we get hungry for more of the Spirit.
 - **Past disappointments** - We've asked for more before and things didn't go the way we hoped, so we hold back to avoid being disappointed again.
 - **Tradition** - We're comfortable with how things are now. Being hungry for more might bring uncomfortable change / new things.
 - **Self-sufficiency** - We're doing OK as we are, relying on our own resources. If we get hungry for more, we might need to depend on God more than we want to.
 - **Low self-esteem** - We're not worthy to experience more of God.

2) Bigger dreams, bigger prayers

- How do we step beyond those limits? Paul suggests that the key is to take a good look at Christ, who is right at the centre of that limitless, boundless, glorious Kingdom.
- *'So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be*



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alert to what is going on around Christ - that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.' (Colossians 3:1-2, MSG)

- God is always doing infinitely more than we realise. We can easily get stuck looking down at what's in front of us, seeing only the problems and limitations, struggling to believe that our friends and family will find salvation, that our local communities will be transformed by love in action, that our world can become a kinder, fairer place.
- It's only when we look up at Christ that we can start to believe in seemingly impossible things. Being hungry for more isn't just about us and our worship together. It's the heartbeat of our mission - to be hungry for more for our families, our friends and our colleagues, for our villages, towns, cities and nations.
- Being hungry for more means looking up at Christ, having bigger dreams and praying bigger prayers. How might the 'infinitely more' of God change the way you pray? If anything is possible in this limitless Kingdom, what might you ask God to do in your local community?

3) Encountering limitless love

- There is infinitely more for us and for our world, but it's not like a product you can order for delivery. It's something we experience. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul described the 'infinitely more' of God as limitless, everlasting, spacious, deep love.
- *'And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'* (Ephesians 3:17-19)
- Paul was saying they needed to encounter that love - not just to know about it in their heads but to experience it in their lives. Our adventure into God's



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‘infinitely more’ begins when we choose to go ‘further up and further in’... to open our hearts and say: ‘Lord, I want to experience more of your limitless love.’

Conclusion

- Let’s get hungry again: hungry to experience more of God. Let’s repent of the ways we’ve been limiting God in our own lives. Let’s ask forgiveness of each other for the times our fears, disappointments or traditions have stopped God from doing new things in our communities.
- Let’s agree together to dream bigger dreams and pray bigger prayers for those who haven’t yet discovered the limitless love of God.

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REFLECT - questions for discussion/small groups

Personal

- What sparks your hunger for God? Is there a Scripture, a song, a book, a TV show, a film, a topic of conversation, a memory or even a place which stirs in you a longing to know more of God?
- When was the last time you were surprised by God?
- Which aspect of God's character would you say you have experienced over the past year? Which would you like to know and experience more deeply this year?
- Are there ways in which you're limiting God? Are there any 'no-go' areas in your life - places you don't want to invite God into for fear of what might happen?
- Is there a 'tradition' in your life which God is challenging you to break, to allow for something new to start?
- Have you given up on expecting God to work in the life of someone you love? Has weariness or disappointment shrunk your prayers?
- Is God challenging you to pray a big prayer for a seemingly impossible situation this year?
- When people meet you, which of God's characteristics do you think they see most clearly?

Community

- What could we do to help each other know more of God this year? Are there things we could do to help each other stay hungry for the 'infinitely more'?
- Are there things we do in our gathered worship which put limits on God, things that restrict the way God's Spirit can work? What do we need to do to remove those limits?
- If God can do impossible things through our corps, centre and communities, what would we most like him to do through us in our local community this year?



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ENGAGE - Interactive ideas for prayer, worship and mission

- Give people a blank notebook to use as a journal. Blank pages are a symbol of new things, of the past being behind us and the future being full of possibility. Invite them to use the notebook during the coming week and ask them to make a note of one situation each day where they've experienced the limitless love of God at work, either in themselves or in someone else. (You could ask them to bring their notebooks back next week for one of the activities listed in Week 2.)
- Invite people to share stories of times when God has surprised them. This could take the form of a testimony time in a meeting, a conversation in small groups or a series of mini-articles in your news sheet.
- Multi-sensory ways to help illustrate the various aspects of the teaching:
 - Blow up a balloon. God grows us so we can know/contain/experience more and more limitless love.
 - Prove some bread during the meeting, so people see it's bigger at the end than it was at the beginning.
 - Provide appetite-inducing smells (fresh bread, coffee, bacon) to get people thinking about what it means to be hungry for more.
 - Invite people to hold an elastic band and stretch it between their fingers as they think about the ways they've been limiting God.
 - Give out cups of water/juice, exploring the idea that, even if you know all about the substance in a cup, you don't really 'know' it until you experience it by tasting and drinking it.

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- Make a large map of your local community. Invite people to write on it the seemingly impossible things they're asking God to do to transform the lives of those who live there.
- Do a 'prayer survey' in your local area. Get into twos and go door-knocking, telling those you meet that you're from the local Salvation Army and that you pray regularly for the local community. Ask them if there's anything they'd like God to do for them or their loved ones. Make a note of what they ask for, and come back together to pray through those requests.



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PRAY - Prayer liturgies for different contexts

Words of faith

Our life will become not narrower, but broader; not more limited, but more boundless; not more regulated, but more abundant; not more pedantic, but more bounteous; not more sober, but more enthusiastic; not more faint-hearted, but more daring; not more empty and human, but more filled by God; not sadder, but happier; not more incapable, but more creative. All this is Jesus and his spirit of freedom and peace. He is coming to us. Let us go into his future radiant with joy! Amen.

(A quote from *A Joyful Pilgrimage* by Eberhard Arnold)

A confession

Forgive us, Lord, for the ways in which we have rejected your offer of infinitely more.

Forgive us for the times we've turned away from you in fear, afraid of where you might lead us.

Forgive us for the times we've closed our hearts because of disappointment, allowing past pain to rob us of future blessing.

Forgive us for the times we've held on to the traditions we're comfortable with instead of welcoming the new things you're doing.

Forgive us when we've relied on our own limited resources instead of reaching for your abundant provision.

Forgive us when we've focused on the problems instead of looking up and seeing what you are doing in the lives of those around us.

Forgive us for surviving on rations when you offer us limitless love.

God of boundless grace, we choose today to welcome all that you have for us:
Make us hungry to experience more of your presence in our lives.



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help us to open our hearts, that we might experience your limitless love in the deepest parts of ourselves.

Give us the strength to lay aside fear and disappointment, and to choose faith and hope instead.

Give us the courage to let go of traditions that limit you, and help us to embrace change.

Give us the faith to dream big dreams and pray big prayers.

Amen.

(Lyndall Bywater)

A prayer

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love. Amen. (Attributed to Sir Francis Drake)

A blessing

Christ within me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

Amen.

(From 'St Patrick's Breastplate', a famous Celtic blessing)