

# THOUGHTS

By the father/son team  
Pastor Paul R Schroeder  
Douglas W. Schroeder

**SPEAKERS ON THE WORD TODAY**

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## **EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANTLY ABOVE...**

There is a pause in Paul the Apostle's letter to the church in Ephesus where he bursts out with a doxology, literally "a word of glory" directed toward God. We commonly think of what we call the Common Doxology, often sung: Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise him all creatures here below; Praise him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But, this doxology in verse 20 is different in that it sheds light on the vastness of God's capacity to affect his will.

I would like to lift out the phrase, "...exceedingly, abundantly above," or as stated in the NIV version, "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine," for consideration. When we want to emphasize something normally we attach a modifier as in "way" above, or "vastly" superior. Paul has taken care to double up his modifiers, almost as if a child was overemphasizing by saying, "Way, way, way above..."

The point is that God is so far ahead of us, so immeasurably capable that we can scarcely understand it! If he wishes he can not only get something done for us, he can not only supersede our expectations, but he can vastly supersede all expectations! God is able to improve on beyond, to turn out a "better than perfect" result.

Here's the best part, he does this despite humanity's sin, weakness, apathy and hate rampant among us. God's super, over-the-top love caused him to have his Son bear the consequences of our sin, death, and in so doing apply his vast, endless never say die love to us to restore us in his eyes again.

So, no matter how much we try to appreciate what God has done for us, no matter what reservoir of gratitude we draw from, we will not be able to plumb the depths of God's capacity, nor his love. Not only is God able to do exceedingly, abundantly above what we ask for or imagine, he has *already* done so in Christ!

## **SUFFERING, SURVIVING, STRENGTHENING, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

The book of James is not the most touchy-feely book in the Bible; in fact it's pretty stern. There is a great deal of talk about discipline, repentance and humility, but precious little about grace. One bright spot relates to understanding how God works through our painful ordeals. James even goes to the length of saying, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance (1:2)."

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Thoughts  
Box 77  
Greendale  
WI  
53129



*The Bible is God's Word . . . Jesus is God's "Word" made flesh . . .  
His death and resurrection, the message needed Today.*

March

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When was the last time you thanked God for an ordeal? How about excitedly praising him for an excruciating experience? Perhaps you didn't get that checked off your list the last time you suffered. Is James demented, saying we should consider it joy to face trials? Remember, he was writing to early Christians who would have clearly understood the term "trials" to include potential imprisonment and death. Are Christians supposed to deny the reality of suffering?

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Hardly; we are not to pretend suffering doesn't exist, but we are to remember that God uses it to develop us. Suffering has a cascading beneficial spiritual effect upon us. Paul told the Roman believers, "... rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (5:3-4)." Think of this progression as a series of links in a chain; the chain does not exist without the links, and likewise hope is not forged out of a climate free of suffering.

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The process of growth in hope and faith by necessity require us to wish to be free from something – pain, torment, evil, death. You either survive the suffering, or you don't. If you survive, congratulations, you're a survivor! Something is supposed to change within you due to the endurance test, namely you should be growing stronger. It should also give you character, the quality of refinement after undergoing "the Refiner's fire," as the process is sometimes called. The end product should be a firming of one's hope for the future with God. If God has gotten us through the current ordeal, then according to his promises, he will get us through anything, even death.

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Faith development does not happen by skipping links in the chain; we must go through the pain for God to develop our perseverance, character and hope. Just as one does not become a world class runner without significant sacrifice and strain, so also we do not become refined spiritually unless we experience significant sacrifice and strain.

God puts us through this because he loves us! People who condemn God for the wretched experiences they have don't understand God at all. They would blame him for their *physical* trials, while dismissing the intent, which is to develop *spiritual* qualities. God values our soul, so he will put us through testing in order to refine it! Knowing that, we can even give thanks and praise him for the process which prepares our spirit for eternal life.

### **PRAY FOR TWT TO ENTER JAPAN!**

Quick update; our partners in production of TWT are saying it looks like we may get our chance to go on the air in Japan! Keep praying fervently for us to enter this very tight, difficult to enter area of the world!

Blessings!  
Douglas W. Schroeder