

## “Wonder Workin’ Power”

*Discipleship – part #2*

*Acts 1:1-14*

**[title slide]** *Welcome, prayer*

**[extension cord]** Some years ago at another parsonage, my neighbors made an unusual request. They wanted to run an extension cord from my porch over to their garage. Apparently the utility company decided to turn off their power because of a death notice from the original owner of the house, my neighbor’s mother. But she actually died six months ago prior to the shutoff! Apparently, the utility company thought my neighbors were just your average, law-abiding, bill-paying ghosts. And ghosts don’t need power. So they shut it off for a few hours. Turns out, my neighbors were not ghosts. They actually did need that power!

**[light switch]** We take power for granted, don’t we? Turn on a light switch, and the lights are supposed to come on. Open a faucet, and the water is supposed to flow out. Turn the key or push the button, and the car is supposed to start.

What happens when we lose power? We panic, because we are so accustomed to having it. We can do so much more with power than without it.

**[white board question]** This morning I want to talk about God’s power in us and what we do with it. Now, that phrase, “God’s power,” is a little churchy, I admit. So help me out. Where do we find God’s power in action in the Bible? What is your favorite story where God’s power is displayed?

*(Pause and solicit some answers.)*

**[Elijah]** My personal favorite from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 18: Elijah calls down the fire from God on Mount Carmel. But do you know what is strange? Even though Elijah expected God to show up...and everyone was awed by it... after all that, Elijah ran away, and Israel still fell into sin. It’s like the miraculous show only gave them enough power for a day or two. There was no continuous flow.

Is the same true for us? Do we expect to have God’s power within us, all the time? Do we expect God to sustain us? Maybe, maybe not. But one thing is for sure: whether or not we believe it, God’s power is all around us, and we have benefitted from it our whole lives.

**[waterfall]** For example: God created, and we live in that creation. Every one of us was dependent on a parent or guardian to provide for us when we were born – God provided that person to nurture us and help us grow. Every relationship and every gift comes from God and was created before we received it. Jesus Christ brought the world into being and holds all things together. (Colossians 1:16-17) God has given us grace, “prevenient grace,” John Wesley called it. That’s just a fancy word for grace that we received before we even knew it. God’s power is all around us.

**[verse]** Romans 12:11 tells us to “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” As Christians, we are never supposed to run out of God’s power.

So what are we supposed to do? How do we “plug in”? The disciples asked the same question in Acts 1. They knew God’s power was all around. They had walked with Jesus for three years, and they had seen his resurrection! They were hoping to see more miracles. And what did Jesus tell them to do? “Wait.”

Let’s look at this scripture again.

*On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

*“Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:4-8)*

Do you like waiting? I don’t! Have you ever taken a long car ride with children? That’s what this passage sounds like to me: “Jesus, are we there yet?”

**[Disciples]** When my kids used to ask me on a trip, “How much longer is it?” I would tell them one of two things: either “15 minutes” (when there was more than an hour to go,) or “about an hour” (when I really had no idea). When my children focused on the clock, they stopped looking out the window at the world

and started staring at me, or the floor, or their siblings. They missed what was happening right in front of them!

That is what was happening to the disciples. They were looking forward to a future, specific event - the final reign of Israel - instead of seeing what was happening in the present in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus’ very first words when he started preaching were, “The kingdom of heaven has come near!” (Matthew 4:17, NIV) A bible commentaries puts it this way: “Entering God’s kingdom is not a matter of knowing when to mark the calendar, but of awaiting and receiving God’s promised Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

**[Pentecost]** We want to see the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Spirit would come to the disciples. That’s a good reason to wait. Later in the book of Acts, after the disciples received the Spirit at Pentecost, they responded by doing all sorts of miracles. In addition to healing the sick and escaping prisons, they gave generously and they worshipped Christ. Acts 2:47 says God added daily to their number those who were being saved.

**[Quote]** Wouldn’t we all like to see that happen to our church in Houghton? Jesus promises us all the power of the Holy Spirit. What is the purpose of having God’s power? We need God’s power to help others enter the kingdom of heaven. Our goal is to make powerful disciples that transform the world.

Do we really understand that? Are we making disciples? Because if we are honest, disciple-making might not be at the top of our list of priorities. Maybe we are more focused on preservation or consumerism. On Sunday morning, when we leave this place, do we ask how we are going to make more disciples of Jesus Christ? Or do we say things like, “That worship service was great. Don’t change anything. I liked the sermon. I liked the music. I liked how I was fed.” Don’t get me wrong, worship services are important. Sunday morning is important. But it’s not the main deal. We don’t exist to serve ourselves. We exist to serve Christ. Disciple-making is about new places for new faces. None of us should rest until everyone knows God’s power.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference unknown, unfortunately.

God’s power saved Joseph from prison and saved the whole land of Egypt from a famine. God saved Daniel from the lion’s den. Jesus healed the blind, the lame, and the deaf. He raised Lazarus from the dead. This same power is available to us all if we follow Jesus Christ. It’s not limited to a select few special people, as this clip illustrates.

**[Right Now Media: Superhero clip]**

**[Crosses]** What are we attempting to do under God’s power? Are we just giving our leftover time, resources, and energy to God? Frankly, as we respond to God’s power and ownership of all things, frequently, we put other things or people first on our list of priorities. Sometimes, in fact, what we make available to the Lord amounts to little more than glorified leftovers.

Leftovers are such humble things,  
We would not serve them to a guest,  
And yet we serve them to our Lord,  
Who deserves the very best.  
We give to Him leftover time,  
Stray minutes here and there,  
Leftover cash we give to Him,  
Such few coins as we can spare.  
We give our youth unto the world,  
To hatred, lust and strife;  
Then in declining years we give  
To Him the remnant of our life.<sup>2</sup>

I don’t want that poem to describe us. I want us to dream this morning. What could God do in this church today if we all accessed the power of the Holy Spirit? What would God in his power do through YOU?

God’s power changes lives. God’s power restores people. God’s power frees prisoners. God’s power works to overcome addiction and divorce. God’s power saved me when I was a depressed civil engineer and gave me the chance to preach God’s word.

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth L. Williams.

What about you? Has God’s power been evident in your life? Do you really want it to be?

**[Response cards]** I’m not asking rhetorically. Right now our ushers are going to pass around some cards for you to record your response to that question. These cards will be collected and returned – I want to read them – as well as posted outside the sanctuary on the bulletin boards. If we are going to be serious about God’s power, about being God’s church, we need to encourage each other and pray for each other, and these cards will help us do just that.

For those who might be thinking, “God’s power? I’ve never even talked to God before,” I challenge you today to pray this simple prayer: “God, please send your Holy Spirit into my life, so that I can be an agent of your power.” Jesus Christ so desperately wants to have a relationship with you and use you for incredible things. Take a moment and simply ask him to show you how much he loves you.

We will take some time now to fill out these cards, and then the ushers will come back in a few minutes to collect them.

*(Song – Same Power by Jeremy Camp)*

Let’s pray.

### Memory Verse

**Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

### Reflection questions

1. What is your favorite story in the Bible? How was God’s power displayed in it?
2. How has God’s power been at work in your life?
3. When have you been impatient for God to act in a situation?
4. What is one way that God’s power could change our church and community?
5. What is one way that you can respond to the Holy Spirit this week?