

## What every Christian needs to grow: God's power at work in your life

Message for Sunday, April 24, 2016  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Isaiah 41:10, Zechariah 4:6,  
Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

**Children's Message:** "I am looking for a volunteer. It has to be someone who is brave, who isn't afraid of being different from others, even if it means looking silly. A lot of people are scared to stand out from the crowd; but I'm looking for someone who is willing to be different. Would anyone like to volunteer?" *I expect many will be eager to accept this challenge!*

Ask the volunteer to leave the room for a short while. Perhaps an adult can go with him/her, so there is some company.

Tell the remaining ones how hypnotists perform on stage. "They hypnotize people so that they're awake, but not really themselves. It's called being in a 'trance.' The hypnotist then gives them instructions to do silly things, like driving a car (except there's no car) or playing a piano (except there's no piano). And because they're hypnotized, they do it! So you have a stage full of people waving their hands in the air, looking absolutely ridiculous, doing things they would never do in normal life. For the people in the audience, it's absolutely hilarious."

"Like those hypnotists, I am going to make *Volunteer* do something where he/she will look really silly. He/she is going to pretend to be a bull fighter, and then pretend to be the bull. Do you think I can make *Volunteer* do it? Let's see."

Bring the volunteer back in. Simply ask him/her to act out a bull fighter, and then the part of the bull. Being a brave volunteer, he/she will likely do it.

The point: I didn't have to *make Volunteer* do anything! I simply asked, and he/she gladly did it for me. That's how God works in our lives. Our life with God is based on working together.

Ephesians 3:16, New Living Translation:  
I pray [to the Father] that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit.

God is all-powerful. He could make us do anything, if he wanted to. But he doesn't. God doesn't *make* us do anything. God *wants* to help us; but God doesn't force us to accept that help. First, we have to say "Yes, Lord, please come into my life and help me."

And when we open our lives, then he gives us the power that we need to live the right way.

**Message** "What every Christian needs to grow: God's power at work in your life"

Teddy Roosevelt was one of the strongest presidents the United States has ever had. Yet when he was a boy, he was so afraid of the Madison Square Church that his family attended, that he refused to set foot inside if alone. He was terrified, his mother discovered, of something called the 'zeal.' He said that it crouched in the dark corners of the church ready to jump at him. When she asked what a zeal might be, he said he was not sure, but thought it was probably a large animal like an alligator or a dragon. He had heard the minister read about it from the Bible. She quickly pulled out a concordance (a book which indexes all the words found in the Bible). She looked up and read aloud to him all the passages containing the word 'zeal' until suddenly, very excited, he told her to stop. The line was from the John 2:17, which describes Jesus' outrage when he saw how the merchants had made the Temple a place of cheating business: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."<sup>1</sup>

Many people are still afraid of the "zeal" of the Lord. They are afraid of letting God really and truly come into their lives. They want respectable religion, but not passion and power.

William Willimon, chaplain at Duke University in the USA, remembers a very angry parent phoning him: "I hold you personally responsible for this," he said. "I have spent an enormous amount of money for my daughter to get a Bachelor of Science degree

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<sup>1</sup> Told by David McCullough in his book *Mornings on Horseback*.

in mechanical engineering and now she wants to throw it all away and do mission work for the church in Haiti. Can you imagine! A trained engineer digging ditches!”

“Now, how is that my fault?” Willimon responded. “What did I do?”

“I’ll tell you what you did,” the now shouting father answered. “You ingratiated yourself with her, filled her head with all that religion stuff. She likes you. That’s why she is doing this. I hold you personally responsible.”

“Now look, Buster,” Willimon responded, growing increasingly defensive. “You had her baptized in the church. You read her Bible stories. You took her to Sunday School. You were the one who paid for her to go skiing with the youth group. It’s your fault that she took that stuff so seriously she now wants to go into the ministry.”

“I know, I know,” the once angry and now grieving father lamented. “But we didn’t want her to be a minister. All we wanted her to do was be a good Presbyterian!”

If that describes you — you want respectable religion, but not passion and power — then I’m sorry. I’m sorry *to* you, because you won’t like what I have to say today, or most Sundays. And I’m sorry *for* you, because you’re missing the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

*BUT!* — if you’re a person who wants to grow as a Christian, who hungers for more of God in your life, who knows that by your own power you can never accomplish great things for God, then great! We’re going to look at some wonderful passages in the Bible about God’s power at work in your life.

### Where does God’s power work in our lives?

When we talk about a “powerful” person, we usually are talking about someone who has power over other people. Examples:

**Bill Gates, when he was head of Microsoft Corporation, used his power to squash competition from smaller companies.**

In preparation for this message, I looked up all the passages in the Bible that talk about how God’s

power works in people’s lives. In every single case, I found that the result is *not* having more power over other people’s lives. The result is more power in our own lives.

I quickly ran out of room listing all the ways that God’s power works in our lives. Here are some of the highlights.

### 1) Overcoming fear

The prophet Isaiah gave hope to the people of Israel during a difficult time. Many people thought that God had left them, so they had to survive by their own strength and wits. Some people began worshipping idols again, hoping this would help them. But this is what God spoke through Isaiah.

Isaiah 41:10, New Living Translation:

**Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.**

When God is with us, we don’t need to be afraid. Oswald Chambers wrote about the connection between fear and faith in his book *The Highest Good*:

**The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.**

### 2) Hope and help when facing problems

The lowest point in Israel’s history in the Bible was when the nation was defeated, and the people were taken as slaves to a country far away. 50 years passed, and finally a new king in that country allowed them to return to their native land. When they arrived back home, their faces fell at the sight in front of them: the city of Jerusalem was totally destroyed; not a single stone was left sitting on top of another!

Yet they got to work, rebuilding their homes and the Temple, the central gathering spot for the whole nation. Zerubbabel was the person in charge of rebuilding the Temple, and was sometimes discouraged at how slow the work was going.

Do you face tasks and problems so great that you don’t know how you’re going to handle them? Do you find yourself discouraged at how hard you

work, and how little there is to show for it? You will want to hear what God spoke to Zerubbabel and the people of Israel through the prophet Zechariah.

**Zechariah 4:6, New Living Translation:**

[The angel] said to me, "This is what the Lord says to Zerubbabel: 'It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty."

In other words, when you're facing something that's bigger than you, then turn to someone who's bigger than you! The key isn't in your power or your strength; the key is in God's power at work in you.

Phillips Brooks was one of England's greatest preachers. His most famous message contained these words:

Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger people! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle. Everyday you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God.

### 3) Witnessing about Jesus

God has given all of us the mission of spreading the Good News, of using our gifts, of impacting others with the love of Jesus. None of us is good enough to do this. I've heard some preachers say that the Christian life is not just hard; it's impossible! There's no way that we can accomplish on our own what God wants us to do. Those three words are the key: "on our own."

**Acts 1:8, New Living Translation:**

[Jesus said,] "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

We do all this by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. Or, as we heard a moment ago, "It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty."

### 4) In our weakness

Have you seen the sign in some garages which gives the rate for work done on your vehicles? It goes like this:

Hourly rate: \$70

If you watch:	\$80
If you watch and make suggestions:	\$100
If you've already tried doing it yourself and we have to fix your work:	\$120

There are some things that we're just not good at. For me, working on cars is one of them. I can change tires for summer and winter, and change the oil in the engine. But the last time I changed spark plus, I stripped the threads in the engine.

What part of your life do you struggle with the most? Is it some temptation that you just don't seem to be able to control? Is it your lack of confidence in yourself? Is it fear of what others may think about you? Whatever it is, God has Good News for us!

This is the exact part of our lives where God can do some of his greatest work! It's in the areas where we admit that we're not very good, that God's power can work through us.

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10, New Living Translation:**

To keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My gracious favour is all you need. My power works best in your weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Let God's power work in your life!

**Next Steps:** Where do you see yourself in that list? Pray about it, asking God to give you power to overcome that thing. Enjoy!