

Power of Positive Action
Ephesians 3:16-21

Intro

We have been focusing on living a powerful life....powered 4 living is the title of the series.

- we often talk about living a powerful life, especially one for Christ, but we get tired...we get weary...we get frustrated when things don't go our way or we don't seem to grow spiritually
- God has given us all the power we need to endure and overcome those times
- so many times though we are caught up in looking for the spectacular...the burning bush, the mountains trembling, the thresholds shaking....
- yet God often speaks to us in subtle or simple ways, means that we may take for granted

Juan Carlos Ortiz – Hispanic ministries at Crystal Cathedral of Shuler Ministries

- man coming in complaining about not getting a job despite praying for one for months
- help wanted ads, internet, job centers, staffing companies
- similar illustration of the man who quit his job saying God would provide for his needs

Today, let's look at some of Paul's writings about the power that is available to us to help us in this crazy world.

- it's there for the taking but it isn't a magic potion that we just drink and go poof!
- we don't magically turn into super Christian because we have the wrist band, the t-shirt, the cross necklace and a bible app on our phones!

Mark Batterson, one of my favorite authors, says "Pray like it depends on God, work like it depends on you."

You see...we often pray for things and then sit back when there are things we can be doing...positive actions.

The apostle Paul, the greatest contributor to the NT, was a very spiritually mature man.

- Rejoice in the Lord Always (Phil 4:4)
- Experienced peace that passes all understanding (Phil 4:7)
- He had learned to be content in all situations (Phil 4:11)

Let me tell you what....I would need some kind of supernatural power to always be rejoiceful, to have a peace that is mind blowing, or to be content with really having nothing....

- It would be hard to be full of joy, peace, and contentment in Paul's circumstances...
- we think our circumstances are bad...and not to diminish your circumstances in any way...but Paul's hardship and trials come in his service to the Lord...being obedient to the Great Commission
- Tradition portrays Paul as a physically small man, but he endured enormous physical hardships on his missionary journeys.
- His perseverance in the face of danger and persecution has inspired countless missionaries

Paul had gone from being a hero to the Jews as he hunted down the followers of Christ to being a zero to the Jews and the hunted!

- 2 Cor 6:4-5....in endurance and afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonment,

sleeplessness, hunger

-2 Cor 11:23ff...whipped 5 times, 3 times beaten with rods, pelted with stones, 3x shipwrecked, being naked, lost at sea for a day...

-2 Cor 12:10...insults, distress, persecutions, lies

With all of this going on in his life, it would have been easy to just curl up and bawl like a baby!

-in my opinion, Joseph's circumstances last week seem like vacation bible school compared to Paul's trials.

One thing I want you to know about Paul is that he was a man of action.

-throughout his letters he lets the recipients know that he was praying for them but he was also urging them into some type of action

-despite struggles he didn't huddle in the corner afraid to go out into the world

-he wasn't trembling in fear about his future....his eternity was secure but he didn't rest in that security and wait for Christ to call him home.

-God's intention was not salvation, sanctification, and then petrification

-Paul had too much living for Christ and the Gospel before he could be done!

Paul also understood that despite joyful attitude, despite the indescribable peace, and his ability to be content in all situations, he had so much more growing to do.

-Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But **one** thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I **press on** toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, **who are mature** should take such a view of things. (Phil 3:13-15)

taken hold of it....what is Paul talking about?

-verse 8-11 tell us....

-he desires a righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus....he says his faith isn't fully developed yet...but he is working on it

-he wants to know fully the power of the resurrection...he hasn't fully experienced it yet

-he wants to share or participate in Christ's sufferings....be careful what you ask for!!

two very important things I want you take note of here in this verse

1. press on....to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after to pursue (in a hostile manner)

-Here is the image I want you to get...Black Friday shopping w/mom

2. he is not talking to newbie Christians here...he is speaking to mature people as we think of physically mature, he is talking to those who think they don't need to learn anymore because they lack nothing to be complete...he is talking to those that are perfect (in their own mind I would presume)...

-these are the possible meanings of the word mature here...

-For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (Col 1:29 ESV)

Toil: 1. to grow weary...tired...exhausted....

2. to labor with wearisome effort

-Paul is in prison...yet he toils for the Lord in the Lord's energy...

Turn in your Bible if you would to Ephesians 3:16...through verse 21

In this passage, we find Paul praying that the people in the Ephesian church might experience this power that has fueled his missionary journeys...through the struggles...the persecution...the being hunted....

V16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Paul prays that God would strengthen the believers or give them the power of the HS

-“strengthen with power” comes from two Greek words that essentially mean that no one can serve God adequately without the ability the HS gives to each believer

-dunamis means power residing in something naturally and kratos relates to a manifested or evident strength and shows that power in action.

1 Cor 4:20 says “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of **power**.”

-dunamis...this power residing in us naturally through the HS

Paul was praying nearly 2000 yrs ago that believers would be filled with this power!

V17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

...that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith....

-he is not telling the believers here that they were not Christians and that Christ didn’t dwell in their hearts already

-his prayer is that Christ wouldn’t be a temporary experience that comes and goes...like at a Motel 6

-his prayer is that Christ wouldn’t dwell in an Extended Stay America but would find a permanent dwelling where Christ would feel at home

-we have some people in the family that say they know Jesus but it always seems like when we visit...you could never tell!

-we are uncomfortable visiting although they are near and dear and I wonder if Christ feels comfortable there!

-when Christ feels comfortable and at home in your heart your witness becomes more consistent for Christ

V18...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

-here Paul is speaking about the overwhelming love of Christ and the message of the Gospel

-we will never fully comprehend it here on earth...1 Cor 13:9 says we know in part....

-we learn more about it as we study and as we experience it by sharing with others believers what insight God is giving us and what experiences He brings to us.

-notice this growth is head knowledge and experiential knowledge...knowledge gained by experiencing which means by trying and doing something

V19...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

-remember that “knowing in part?”

-it is hard to know it in its fullness because we cannot begin to comprehend the vastness of this love

- it is a love that we cannot understand completely because we have never sacrificed a love one for someone who does not deserve to be sacrificed for
- we may sacrifice a night out for a loved one....we might sacrifice and make a career change for your wife, for your husband, for the sake of your family
- you may sacrifice financially now so that you can live like no other later onDave Ramsey
- but we have never sacrificed one of our children for the BTK killer...we have never offered up one of our children for the Carr brothers...
- that's the kind of love we are talking about here and it is beyond our comprehension
- but Paul says that we may be filled to the fullness...that tells me that there is room in this vessel still for more of God...that I am not filled completely now but hope to be someday...

V20 now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

- in this verse Paul tells us that there is so much of God's power that we can't begin to imagine
- His power is at work in us now but we can have more...and more....and more...
- but as we look at this verse we see His power is conditional in that the degree to which we ALLOW God's power to work in us determines the extent of what He can do for us in this power.

V21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Because it was God's power and energy that allowed the NT church to accomplish what it did, God is to be given the glory...

- it is not to be done for my glory...to build my personal kingdom...to make a name for myself...to get a pat on the back from my church family, the person sitting next to me in the pew
- Paul, even in chains in prison where it is believed this letter originates, gives God all the glory

Now, let's see what this all means....

- Paul is praying for us to have this great power to grow, to love, to do something more than we can imagine

Let me share a story....

Once upon a time an angel entered the storehouse of heaven and announced, "I've run out of the fruits of the spirit — love, joy and peace — can you restock me?"

"Oh no!" said the guardian. "We don't stock fruit here. Only seeds!"

We tend to take it for granted that fruit is instantly available...that we just go to the store and bang...there it is...just magically shows up

- Tommy and the hog

We have instant financing, instant coffee, instant replay, instant pictures...pre-cooked bacon!

- because of all this instant sometimes we want to skip the process....of growing or brewing...or developing...

- we want instant maturity in Christ...we want to skip the lashings, the shipwrecks, the hunger, the persecution

-we want to bypass the growth process...we can become content with being fully developed
God gave Paul the strength, wisdom, and endurance to carry out the mission Jesus entrusted Paul with.
-One of Paul's most famous statements is:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13, NKJV),

-reminds us that our power to live the Christian life comes from God, not ourselves.

What are some positive actions you can take to aid in this process to be more mature, to be filled?

1. Do something to grow spiritually!

- Get serious about Bible study....journal, get a devotional, do a verse by verse, chapter by chapter study of a book of the bible
- it is my hope as all the dust settles that we have a verse by verse bible study
- later this spring I plan to take us through the book of Romans on Sunday mornings...
- tentatively titled "When in Rome..."
- Memorize some bible verses...sticky notes
- make a list of blessings and give thanks
- read a Christian book
- find somebody that you have some bitterness towards, some anger towards and ask forgiveness...they may not even know that you are bitter or angry toward them but it is to your benefit and your spiritual growth to do so.

2. Do something for your family!

- ask your wife or husband to forgive you for something you have done, said, or maybe even thought
- express your thanks for loved ones who have done something special for you
- tell your children you love them...tell your parents you love them if you still can...if your parents are alive today don't overlook those three simple words
- stop griping about things at home and start complimenting or taking note of the positive things around the home and watch everyone's attitude and demeanor change
- have daily devotion times with your family

3. Do something for your church!

- volunteer somewhere...even if for an hour a week...
- offer to give someone a ride to church
- visit those who are homebound, ill, or absent and let me know....
- look at your giving....if you tithe, great....but if you have the ability to do more than 10% the Lord knows it
 - if you're not tithing, set a certain % and strive to meet it each month
 - see if God won't show prove to you HE can provide
 - if you are only giving 5%, see if you can bump it to 6%...then 7% as God proves His faithfulness
- refuse to join in the gossip or criticism of others...pray for them instead
- Join the choir...we could use some more male voices....
- or if you have another talent, use it for something in the church
- the constitution says that members are to use their talents to build up the church

4. Do something to fulfill your evangelistic responsibility according to the Great Commission!
- invite an unchurched friend or neighbor...if you don't have an unchurched friend, expand your network by getting out to some club, service organization, volunteer somewhere to meet more people
 - I have already volunteered to get out and officiate at HS/MS track meets this coming spring so that I can expand by network beyond you all
 - start giving out tracts....restaurants...
 - take a class on how to share your faith...you can even get an app for your phone now to help you share your faith

As we close today...I want to warn you against becoming part-time Christians....

- it's as easy for me to do as it is for you
- I am a full-time pastor but I also need to remember I am a Christian...study for me, serve for me, witness for me
- you may be a teacher but that is the vocation that God has given you to support your Christian Ministry
- you may be a painter, a secretary, a nurse, a machinist or a business owner...that is what God has blessed you with so that you can serve him without starving to death!
- you may be retired...God has blessed you with more time to serve....if you can't get out, he has given you the time to be a prayer warrior...the time to call up someone and just visit...to write a missionary and encourage him or her

We are to serve wholeheartedly in the power that Christ has given us...Paul on a couple of occasions encouraged people to work as if working for the Lord....

- in his letter to the Colossians he goes as far as telling the slaves that they are to serve their masters no matter the circumstances just as if they were serving the Lord himself.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters..."
Colossians 3:23

I want to share something with you that I hope brings this all around full-circle.

- Exercise...for many of you it is a dirty word...be honest
- yet every physiological study shows that the more energy you expend the more energy you have!
- you become more efficient at daily tasks...don't expend as much energy as you used to

Think of your Christian faith in the same way...let me take you back to the verse in Eph 3

V20 now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

The more of His energy we use....the more He gives us...as we grow...He trusts us with more and more....

Exercise your Christian faith....take action...positive action and see what God will do in your life...

The life he wants to power for living an abundant life in this crazy time...