

Pandemic Series Part 4
Pandemic Power: Personal Power?
Pentecostal Power?
9 Ways We Need Power©

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Pandemic Emotions: Part 4

Pandemic Power: Personal Power? Pentecostal Power?

9 Ways We Need Power

Crazy! Who can think about having any personal power during this pandemic? It seems the whole world is afraid, some people so severely that they turn to violence in an effort to quell the tide of anxiety and hopelessness. Some so afraid they give up on life, check out of the chaos.

Do you feel hopeless? helpless? I can easily feel helpless right now! Compounding the worldwide fear and death from the pandemic are the riots raging across US cities, spilling over into other parts of the globe. Is the world tilting further off its axis? Preparing to send men to the moon or sending them to the international space station in the midst of all this makes it seem even crazier! Watching the news...helpless. What can I do? How should I react in all this swirling shock and sadness?

What are we to do? Sadness and grief can immobilize us and leave us feeling there is no way we can help. I feel that weight, like running out of breath under water with the surface seemingly a long way up. I remember the terror of almost drowning, the panic...the rescue. Ahhhhh.... When I was overcome, someone saw my helplessness, my feeble, fading strength, and strong arms guided me to safety.

In this pandemic series we have focused so far on our human emotions. We must look beyond emotions, however, to find strength and stability. We need to go back to who God is, to His character. We must engage our thinking and embrace the truth of God's working in the world.

Last Sunday was Pentecost Sunday, celebrated by the church worldwide. How can going back to that incredible event help us now? What can we learn about that flame-inducing tongues-of-fire, miraculous language, provocative, confounding, and illuminating day? Were those people all drunk, or was something divine bestowed on them that day? (See Acts 2:1-13.)

We need the divine! Pandemic and riots both teach us we are insufficient in ourselves. Both induce fear, anxiety, helplessness, sadness at our inability to change the ugly realities of death and hatred, of violence and destruction. These hit close to home, even in rural Pennsylvania. A friend who is a guard at the State Capitol was hit in the head with a brick when protesting turned into rioting. A concussion is keeping him home all week. It's scary. He's a family man. The injustices of both the pandemic and the violence endanger him. Doing his duty, he gets double jeopardy--exposure to death through both violence and virus, as do so many courageous men and women.

Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33) He was certainly right! We are experiencing it now. What did He offer us in the midst of the trouble?

As we recover from shock, we must take stock of His power. Yes, we are weak, but He is the one who reassured us that His power is made perfect in our weakness. That is for sure a divine mystery! Our weakness....His power? What paradox can that be?

The One who said His strength is made perfect in our weakness acknowledged the limits of our humanness. Thus, He wills into us courage and power. He does not give us “the spirit of fear,” “but a spirit of power, of love, and a sound mind¹...” (II Tim. 1:7). I am reminded each time I am afraid that fear in any form does not come from God. It is my human weakness or a spiritual dart from God’s enemy. I claim the spirit of love and the power to enact it. I claim a sound mind and self-discipline, especially in the crazy-making moments of horror and shock.

Nine Reasons We Need Divine Power

Like me, you might ask, “What do I need *power for* anyway? What does the “love, power, and a sound mind” promise mean?

Mental and spiritual power:

1. Power to not give up—to get past our helplessness, our ennui.²
2. Power to act with courage in spite of fear, especially in danger and in spiritual warfare.
3. Power to live by faith and not by fear. In fear, we draw back; in faith, we move forward. *The same Holy Spirit who is our power manifests it through the “fruit” we exhibit: “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22, 23)* The world needs to *see this fruit made visible in our lives* as we experience it!
4. Power to exercise a sound mind and self-discipline, to make right decisions rather than being reactive and impetuous. This may require agonizing in prayer, seeking the Lord’s mind.
5. Power to reject the lies of the enemy, rampant in times of danger and disease. This requires spiritual discernment. I need power to reject negative thinking and to cultivate sane thinking. In our counseling language we can say this is powerful *reframing*—changing our perspective in defining and finding meaning.

Life-action power:

6. Power to proclaim the positive, not get caught up in the “what if’s” and “if only’s.”
We are to focus on “whatsoever is true,” noble, good. (Phil, 4:8)
7. Power to love and not to hate. It takes more energy to love than to hate. Hate is the default of a soul without God, of a person whose heart has not been regenerated.

¹ The NIV renders “sound mind” as “self-discipline.”

² What is commonly called “The Third Law of Thermodynamics” is that everything gradually slows down or loses energy. Entropy. This seems true of us as people when our motivation and energy are not continually renewed. We don’t want to fall prey to that process. We want the continual renewal of Holy Spirit Power.

8. Power to make a difference, to reach out to give, even a “cup of cold water” when its needed. (See Matt. 10:42) This means we must learn to observe, to see need, to creatively offer help and solutions, to not turn away because we feel over-whelmed.
9. Power to use our energy for *living*—divine power—to *get up and do something productive*; to not waste our precious life-giving energy on useless or empty pursuits. We may gain energy from the adrenaline of anger, but better to gain it from our motivation to change the wrong by acting in caring, loving ways which meet real needs. We can direct our energy, our power, into what is constructive rather than into destructive actions.

The Basics of Divine Power

Jesus said many times that He came to live within us, that He and His Father are one, come to indwell us. He told his disciples He was leaving the world so that His Spirit would come and live within them and later in us. When you and I put our trust in Him, invite Him into our hearts, minds, lives, His divine energy, His divine power, does actually take up residence within us. It replaces our human weakness with an infusion of divine strength. That changes everything in how we can respond in a dangerous and needy world. Instead of drawing back from fear and helplessness we can find the strength and courage to speak and act for goodness, to bring about healing for individuals as well as systems.

After Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble.” He went on to say, “But take heart, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) In that pivotal moment in all of history, on the cross, Jesus gave up His life so we could be transfused with divine life. He rose from the dead, conquering not only death, but sin and sickness. He said that greater things than what he had done his followers would do. (John 14:12) He handed off to you and me the mandate to go out and make a difference in the world. But He knew we could not do it alone. To make Him, the invisible God, visible in the world would require His spirit, His divine power.

The One who said His strength is made perfect in our weakness acknowledged the limits of our humanness. Thus, He wills into us courage and power. He does not give us the spirit of fear, “but a spirit of power, of love, and a sound mind³...” (II Tim. 1:7). I am reminded each time I am afraid that fear in any form does not come from God. It is my human weakness or a spiritual dart from God’s enemy. I claim the spirit of love and the power to enact it. I claim a sound mind and self-discipline, especially in the crazy-making moments of horror and shock.

We might ask, why did Jesus say we will have trouble in the world? He knew we must wrestle “not against flesh and blood” but against rulers, principalities, dark powers. (Eph. 6:10-12) He knew the reality of doing battle with Satan, of being tempted, of the ugliness of the Father of Lies and the Master Schemer. He knew we would have to come up against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Perhaps in our context today we could identify the *world* in worldly systems, in corruption and conspiracies, the *flesh* in the all-too-human pandemic virus, and the *devil* in the

³ The NIV renders “sound mind” as “self-discipline.”

rioting spurred by evil. We are up against all three right now, and yet we can face them all with power, not with fear.

Jesus knew that our confronting these things would not be easy. Even His prize Apostle, Paul, found it was a fight to near-death. He said, after stoning and shipwrecks and beatings, "...we despaired even of life itself." He goes on to say that this happened so that they might discover that the power comes from God, not from their own endurance. (II Cor 1:7)

A paradox, this power. This same Paul reminds us that we "have this treasure in earthen vessels" to illustrate that the power within us is of a different stuff than our human container. (II Cor. 4:7)

Peter, the impetuous Apostle who in fear denied Jesus three times, came to maturity so he could tell us that *after* we have suffered a little while we will be able to comfort others who suffer. We become mature and more able to reach out to others through what we experience. (I Peter 5:10) This mature Peter also reminds us that God has "*given us everything for life and godliness....*" He goes on to say that it is through God's promises that we claim what He has already provided. (II Peter 1:3) You can access *whatever you need "for life" today*, whatever you need "*for godliness" today*. Think of the possibilities opened to us by the 1,000 promises in His Word!

Since early childhood I was intrigued with HOW we mere humans could contain the power of God. I was privileged in my dissertation work at the University of California at Santa Barbara to research this very mystery, looking at the life-long impact of the Holy Spirit in mature believers who had become highly fruitful, able to love far beyond the usual. The mystery I discovered is that they learned through life habits the power of God as their energy for living.⁴ Through continual dialogue with Him they discovered Him to be their daily source of courage, strength, and wisdom. They embraced the mystery that when in their weakness they chose to act in faith that God's power brought about the right outcome.

But how is it possible to live out power, divine energy, in such a broken world? Especially now when we can so easily see the world reeling in anxiety and violence. How do we see it manifest? Each time we make the right choice, overcoming fear, rejecting unfairness, standing up for someone else, we exercise God's energy. *Power is using energy to enact God's character* through self-giving, loving, helping, feeding, sheltering, receiving, welcoming—imparting God's care and acceptance. Even in a fleeting smile we can convey His love. But, is even such a small action possible in such a broken world?

Before Jesus parted from His beloved followers, He imparted to them the most awesome words in dialogue and prayer, recorded for us in the middle chapters of the Gospel of John (see chapters 14 to 17). He emphasized that what He wanted for them and wants for us now is *complete love, complete unity, and complete joy*. (John 17)

Now, Jesus reassures you and me, "Yes. In this world you are having trouble! But, take heart because I have overcome the world. Go now and use my power to enact my character of love in

⁴ Dodds, Lois A. Dissertation. See references.

the world, right now, wherever you are. Don't be afraid. My power is made perfect in you. Make me visible to your hurting world."

Annotated Recommended Reading

The reading listed below are about spiritual growth, trauma, and resilience. These all have so much to do with our recovery from both temporary and major setbacks which compromise our power. They can add perspective to how to rediscover our power and keep our balance in these challenging times.

Cox, Diane Burden. 2018. *Resilient Americans*. Pasadena: Positively Powered Publishers. Mrs. Cox shares many examples from her work with disaster victims throughout the U.S.

Dodds, Lois A. 1992. *The perception and experience of supernatural spiritual power for personality growth and change: An analysis of twelve life histories*. University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Information Service.

_____. 1999. "The Role of The Holy Spirit in Personality Growth and Development." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. Summer, 1999. pp. 129-139. (centerpiece article, by invitation)

_____. Breaking the chains of spiritual oppression. www.heartstreamresources.org.

_____. Personality growth and change and the role of the Holy Spirit.
www.heartstreamresources.org.

Gardner, Laura Mae. 2015. *Healthy, resilient, and effective in cross-cultural ministry*. Indonesia: Katalis. A wonderful exposition of what makes us resilient as missionaries and cross-cultural workers and how agencies can promote resilience while living in hardship.

Lanham, Stephanie Laite, and Pelletier, Joyce Hartwell. 2010. *Recovering from traumatic stress. A guide for missionaries*. Pasadena: William Carey Press. The authors review Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and recovery. They offer resources for support and healing.

Schaefer, Frauke C. and Charles A., editors. 2012. *Trauma and Resilience. A Handbook*. www.CondeoPress. The authors relate many stories of trauma and recovery and offer valuable resources.