



## POWER: A WORTHY PURSUIT IN MARRIAGE BY: JEREMY LELEK, M.A.

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### THE GREAT POWER STRUGGLE

Did you know that one of the reasons you may be struggling in your marriage is because you are engaged in a power-struggle with your spouse? You may think such a thing is the most unlikely possibility you have ever heard, but it is an important thought to consider. If your spouse has offended or hurt you in any way, your natural inclination is going to be to protect yourself from experiencing similar hurt in the future. This process often begins by exchanging a once vulnerable demeanor with a very protected stance towards your spouse. Where you once trusted him or her to love and cherish you "until death do you part", the dynamic between the two of you may now more accurately be characterized as adversarial. The sense of safety you once felt in your marriage may have mutated into a tough guardedness, anger, doubt, fear, or even hatred. To keep from being hurt by your new "adversary" or "competitor" you may now utilize creative strategies of control. "How?", you ask. Well, you may choose to remain bitter, minimizing the potential for closeness, therefore preventing further hurt. You may yell at or criticize your spouse, attempting to force him to keep a safe distance. You may overtly avoid your spouse by staying out late, drinking alcohol, or sleeping in separate beds. You may even participate in "passive-aggressive" behavior in order

to convince yourself that you maintain control in your marriage. Such behavior displays itself by making agreements with your spouse then doing the very opposite because you know it will irritate him or her. If you're a husband you may comply with your wife's request to mow the lawn by saying, "Yes, honey, I'll mow the lawn tomorrow when I get home from work", but when tomorrow comes, you choose to go to the bar with your buddies. For the wife, you may agree to have sex tomorrow only to come down with a "sudden cold" when bedtime arrives.

Each of these examples illustrates destructive attempts to maintain control (and power) in the marriage. They each exhibit desperate efforts to keep from being hurt by the one person you love and chose to commit your life to. However, the only thing such strategies actually achieve is to breed further isolation and contempt. For the one who calls him or herself a child of God, a pursuit for an alternative power must be considered.

### PURSUING GODLY POWER

Think for a moment. Who is the most powerful person who has ever lived: Alexander the Great, Winston Churchill, Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, Mohammad Ali, John F. Kennedy? While these individuals exhibit or exhibited a form of power in their own right, their power falls far short of the individual in question. The



most powerful person ever to live offered a very different power than these icons of history. His name was Jesus Christ, and while he held all the power of the universe in his hand, what he chose to exhibit before the watching world might surprise you. It is a power that brought ultimate reconciliation between God and man, and may be seen most clearly in his attitude. Philippians 2:5-8 describes it this way, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (ESV). It is in these words one finds the essence of true power as it pertains to relationships with others.

#### MAKE SELF NOTHING, AND GOD ALL

To reconcile God and man demanded profound sacrifice. Of course, you are probably familiar with the death of Jesus and the literal sacrifice he became for the sins of mankind, but this was not the only sacrifice he made. Jesus, in choosing to loosen his grip on reigning with the Father in Heaven, chose to become a man, and in so doing, made himself *nothing*. He did not arrogantly stomp his foot demanding his "rights" in response to a rebellious people, instead, he chose to make an enormous sacrifice and was born in the likeness of his own creation (though he retained every bit of his deity). He chose to enter our space-time continuum, and therefore placed himself as a co-

citizen of this planet. He left the splendor of Heaven, in which pain, sadness, and evil do not exist, and willingly entered a world plagued with curses: curses he too would experience as he witnessed sickness, deceit, false accusation, prejudice, selfishness, death, pain, and sorrow. Not only that, he even subjected himself to the world's fallen state as he allowed death and pain to ravage his own mortal body. He had every right to "grasp" his place in heaven, but he chose to make himself nothing instead.

What "rights" are you grasping in your life and relationship? How does this give you a sense of power? Be assured that if you cling to such rights, you cling to a false-power, and the life of God will not reign in your marital relationship. Seek to imitate Jesus by loosening your grip on your "rights", and choose to cling to the will of God as you relate to your husband or wife.

#### ADOPT THE NATURE OF A SERVANT

Jesus made himself nothing, and as such, became a servant of God to man. He was God in the flesh. He was deity in human form. Yet, as God, he chose to serve rather than demanding service from others. He had every right as the Holy One to require immediate worship once in his presence. This King of kings deserved complete adoration from all who surrounded him. But this was not his way. Instead, he loved, he served, he healed, and he comforted. At the end of his life, he evidenced this most clearly in that he washed the feet of his disciples, the very ones whose sins were compelling him to give his life upon the Cross.



#### ADOPT THE NATURE OF A SERVANT (CONT)

What is your priority in your marriage: to serve or be served? Relational conflict, offense, and pain tend to exacerbate the temptation to demand your way (power-struggle). However, it is noteworthy to consider whether or not it would honor God and your spouse if you sought to serve him or her (rather than be served)? Do you exemplify the heart of Christ (the servant) in your thoughts, attitude, and words towards your spouse? If not, look to the example of Jesus, and ask for his attitude when dealing with people who may hurt (even betray) you.

#### HUMBLE YOURSELF

Pride is often the greatest adversary of biblical change. To imitate Jesus demands a radical crucifixion of our "selves" (and the pride that ravages our souls). Jesus portrayed the physical embodiment of humility (the opposite of pride) in his coming to Earth to redeem his children. If you seek genuine God-like power, pray for humility. Seek to walk humbly with your spouse rather than be driven by your prideful agenda to get your way. Sure, this will present a challenge, but if you genuinely seek to exhibit true power in your marriage humility is essential.

#### OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH

One characteristic of humility is being willing to obey God. Even when Jesus was under profound pressure, his

example of obedience is staggering. The Bible points out that while Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (anticipating his crucifixion), he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). As such, he was exemplifying a devout commitment to the will of his Father over and above his own desire to live.

As you consider this passionate prayer, you may ask yourself, "Am I willing to give up my will in this marriage for that of God's will?" Take time to consider whether or not you have given yourself over to the desires of your flesh, minimizing the will of God because the task of obedience seems overwhelming. If so, that is certainly understandable. Be encouraged, however, to use this time as an opportunity to reassess your values, and formulate an agenda that will bring honor and glory to God.

#### THE DRIVING FORCE: LOVE

What was motivating this divine exhibition of unorthodox power in Jesus? Very simply, it was his love for God and others. He proclaimed as a boy the necessity of being about his Father's business while here on Earth (Luke 2:49). And he certainly remained true to his word. No matter the circumstances in which he found himself, his pattern of living to please his Father always dominated. He even states in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." It is easy to allow the temporal pleasures and conveniences of life to overshadow the genuine purpose for which we were



created. However, it is in recognizing the highest purpose of the human experience (to love God and others), that the true power of God is revealed. Success, strength, intelligence, and status all provide an illusion of power, but they fall short in comparison to the power illustrated by the life of Jesus. Unlike the counterfeits of power, godly power is evidenced in our love for God and others, therefore empowering the Christian (1) to make self nothing and God all, (2) to take the form of a servant in the midst of relationships, (3) to seek humility, and (4) to exhibit obedience unto the Lord under the most trying of circumstances. These qualities appear to the fallen nature as the antithesis of power. However, we must realize that power is most accurately illustrated in imitating the most powerful human who has ever stepped foot on planet Earth, namely Jesus Christ. A pursuit of power that excludes this truth is to participate in what Solomon referred to as "chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

If your spouse has hurt or offended you, or if you seem in constant conflict with him/her, seek God's grace to reflect the attitude of Jesus found in Philippians 2. It is this form of love (power) that ultimately reconciled God to his people, and it is the same type of love (power) that may reconcile you to your spouse. Whereas you are tempted to "stand your ground" until you get your way, you will discover that the ground on which you stand is shifting sand. It is unstable. On the other hand, if you stand on the firm foundation of the Bible, the storms of conflict may rain down upon you, but the foundation will prove to be secure and sufficient to weather the storm. Seek godly power,

and watch your faith grow as you trust Him over that of your own fallen perspective! Most significantly, do this all for the glory of God.

#### GODLY POWER QUICK LIST

1. **Read Philippians 2:5-8.** *Has your concept of power reflected the power exhibited by Jesus in these passages? If not, reassess your view of power. Write out a new mission statement for yourself using this verse.*
2. **Read Mark 10:42-45.** *In God's kingdom, what must you do in order to be considered great? How can you apply this in your marriage?*
3. **Read 2 Timothy 3:16.** *What does this passage say will equip you for training in righteousness and every good work? What will you do to become more familiar with God's Word?*
4. *As mentioned in the article above, often the pursuit of power is prompted by a demand for justice. How have you been hurt by your spouse? How have you responded with an attitude of justice (or wanting to get even)? Seek to rid yourself of such desires and thoughts.*
5. **Make a list of 5 ways you can serve your spouse this week.** *Commit to implementing this list no matter what your spouse does to you in the coming days.*
6. **Read Ephesians 6:12.** *Always recall who the true enemy is who wages war against you and your marriage.*



#### PRAYER FOR GODLY POWER

*Our God most powerful, full of glory and arrayed in splendor, I give thanks to you that you have willingly loved me so sacrificially. You did this even while I was your enemy. Yet, I am so quick to pursue justice against those who have wronged me. I manipulate, I punish, and I demand; all in hopes to protect myself or get even with my offender. I ask you to create in me a clean heart. Transform my mind to desire those things that most bring honor to your name. Help me to reflect the attitude of Jesus Christ who made himself nothing so that I might receive eternal life. Expose within me those desires that run counter to your will. Those ever so deceitful thoughts that convince me that I have a right to my power, and am allowed to wield it for my own personal gain. Please forgive me for my extreme self-focus, and help me to learn more of your power as you strengthen me to do that to which you have called me. I pray this in the blessed name of the great Servant, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

#### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*Knowing God, By J.I. Packer*

*Sacred Marriage, By Gary Thomas*

*The Mark of a Christian, By Francis Schaeffer*

For more books and resources, go to:  
[www.christiancounseling.com](http://www.christiancounseling.com)

*"The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
the voice of the Lord is full of  
majesty."*

**Psalm 29:4**

*Resources located on "Ask ABC" are intended for general use. It is highly recommended to seek the counsel of a pastor or biblical counselor when addressing personal and marital problems. All ABC resources are intended for personal reflection and mediation, but should not necessarily be used as a replacement for counseling.*