

How To Harness God's Power

1. Warm-up question: On Sunday Jeff mentioned a southern artist who paints everyday scenes, but embeds a hidden image of Jesus in each. The artist displays his work in the Craft Village at Dollywood, near Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where Jeff and David often vacation. Where's one of your favorite vacation destinations?
2. Sunday's sermon – the fourth installment in our series called “Living With Resurrection Power” – wove together four great Bible stories, beginning with Jeff's favorite resurrection story. Read Luke 24:13-32, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. This story took place three days after the crucifixion. The two disciples mentioned in this story “had hoped [Jesus] was the one to redeem Israel.” Now he was dead. All was lost. How would you describe the mood and state of mind of these two disciples at the outset of the story? When have you felt like them?
 - b. Luke 24 teaches us that the power of the Risen Christ is with us in every situation, even when we can't see it. Jeff compared it to the concept of dark energy. Scientists estimate that dark energy makes up 72% of the total “mass-energy density” of the cosmos. Dark matter makes up 23%. Atoms comprise only about 5%. That means that only about 5% of the reality (i.e., energy/power) of the physical world that surrounds us is perceivable to us. When you hear that, what thoughts or feelings arise within you?
3. Just as the vast majority of physical energy in our cosmos is invisible to us, so too the vast majority of spiritual energy coursing through our cosmos is also often not visible. But just as we're surrounded by dark energy, so too we're surrounded by spiritual energy. That point is made emphatically in a second great Bible story. Read II Kings 6:11-20, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Do you believe that, in your moments of great stress in life, you are surrounded angels? Explain why you do (or don't) believe that?
 - b. Can you think of a time in your life when you felt alone and overwhelmed (like Elisha's servant or the disciples after Jesus' crucifixion) only to realize later that during that ordeal you were surrounded by the power of God. Tell us what happened and why, looking back, you believe you were surrounded by God.
 - c. At the end of the story in Luke 24, Cleopas and the other disciple suddenly realize they've been in the presence of Jesus the entire day. How do you think that experience changed them and their approach to life?
4. In one of her books, Sandy Patty recounts the true story of George and Sarah Clarke who, in the late 1800s, founded the Pacific Garden Mission to house homeless alcoholics. Even as the ministry grew and thrived, they ran desperately low on funds and almost lost their lease. George and Sarah prayed all night, and the next morning

found that hundreds of fine mushrooms had sprouted in their yard. They were able to sell the mushrooms to raise the rent. When God's power suddenly breaks out and becomes visible like that, it can be dazzling, and we find ourselves thinking, "How can I tap into all that unseen spiritual power?" That brings us to our third Bible story, where Moses at the burning bush wanted to know God's personal name. It seems like an innocent request until you realize that ancient people believed they could gain leverage over a god if they knew his name because they could publically ask for something in the name of the god and the god would be shamed if he didn't come through. In Exodus 3, God refuses to share tell Moses his name, and instead says, "I am that I am. Tell the people of Israel that 'I am' sent you to them." Exodus 3:14.

- a. What do you think this story teaches us about human nature and the typical human approach to God and religion?
 - b. Is it wrong for us to want to control God's power? Why or why not?
 - c. If God was like a magic genie and you could ask for one thing – anything – what would it be?
 - d. Suppose God did work like a magic genie and our requests were God's commands. Would that be good or bad?
 - e. The title of Sunday's sermon was "How to Harness God's Power." Jeff said, "The answer to that question – i.e., how can we harness God's power? – is that we can't." He went on to say, "If you want to live with resurrection power, the goal is not to control God's power, but to allow God's power to control you. It's not for us to tell God what to do, but rather for us to get lost in God's greatness and goodness, to be filled with God's power and let it flow through us to fulfill God's purposes, rather than our own." How does that sit with you? Does it feel right to you? Do you think that kind of mindset would make your life better or worse?
5. The Bible does say, "Ask and you will receive," but it also says, "You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." James 4:1. In other words, our prayers have power only when they align with God's will. But often we're not sure what God's will is, leaving us wondering how to pray. That brings us to our fourth great Bible story – Jesus in the garden. There he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Matthew 26:47.
- a. What should we learn from Jesus' example about how we should pray?
 - b. Tell us about a time when you have prayed for one thing, but God did something else, and looking back now you see that God's plan was much better than yours.

***Remember, God's power is all around you in every situation,
even when you can't see it! Relax and trust God.***

Luke 24:13-32, selected verses

13 Now on [the third day after the crucifixion,] two disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad.

¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

II Kings 6:11-20, selected verses

11 The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed; he called his officers and said, 'Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?' ¹²Then one of his officers said, 'No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber.' ¹³He said, 'Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him.' He was told, 'He is in Dothan.' ¹⁴So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city.

15 When a servant of Elisha rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, 'Alas, master! What shall we do?' ¹⁶Elisha replied, 'Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them.' ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed: 'O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.' So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸When the Arameans came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, 'Strike this people, please, with blindness.' So he struck them with blindness. ¹⁹Elisha said to them, 'This is not

the way, and this is not the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.' And he led them to Samaria. 20 As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, 'O LORD, open the eyes of these men so that they may see.' The LORD opened their eyes, and they saw that they were inside Samaria.