

# SPIRIT + WORD

*power unlimited*

Discover the immeasurably great power  
that God has ready + waiting for you.

by Berni Dymet

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*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;  
and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*

– Jesus

(John 8:31)



CHAPTER ONE

---

# resurrection power



Too many Christians, in fact way too many Christians, are living lives that fall so far short of the life that Jesus promised. Where God promised power, they instead end up living a powerless life. Where God promised victory, they instead end up living their lives as victims. Where God promised that they would be more than conquerors, they instead end up living their lives as the conquered and the vanquished.

Do you think, perhaps, that I'm overstating the problem?

Then look around the church. Look at all the “*Christians*” whose lives are a mess through the consequences of sin. Look at all those who come each Sunday to warm a pew, but whose lives, for all intents and purposes, count nought for Christ in this lost and hurting world. Look at all the “*Christians*” who have left the church – so many that text books are being written about them. Look at all the “*Christians*” who blend so well into society today, that it's impossible to pick them out from the crowd.

*And, not to put too fine a point on it, look at your own life. I don't mean to point a finger at you. I'm not being judgemental. I am simply asking you to examine your life – and ask yourself this: Does my life reflect the victory of love that Jesus won*

*for me on that Cross and through that empty tomb? Does the power of the Holy Spirit overflow through me – through my joy; through my holiness; through everything I think and say and do – into the lives of the lost and the hurting around me?*

I wonder when you weigh your life on the scale of godly impact and effectiveness, what you come up with.

At some stage, you decided to believe in Jesus. Perhaps you, like me, can remember the day, even the time, when you took that first step. Or perhaps, like many others whom I know, you can't remember a time when you didn't believe in Jesus.

However it happened for you, you've believed ... and believed ... and believed ... and yet somehow, life doesn't seem to get any better. You seem to have the same challenges, the same successes, the same failures ... as all the other people out there who don't believe in Jesus. In fact, often times, they seem to be living a better life than you and to top it all off, they're not wracked by guilt the way you are, because, by not believing in Jesus, they don't have to worry about the idea of temptation, or falling short of God's glory, or any of that stuff.

Does that sound at all familiar?

Sadly, it's *de riguer* for many a Christian. For most Christians in fact. Let's be perfectly blunt about it: for most Christians, the Christian life isn't all that it's cracked up to be.

Didn't Jesus Himself say:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* (John 10:10)

I had someone ask me once, "What does it mean, to have life in all it's abundance? What does an abundant life look like?" Now that's not such an unreasonable question. And if it's a question that's been rattling around in your head, let me turn it back on you.

If you had to describe your life today, would you use the word "*abundant*"? In fact, in that quote from Jesus, the original Greek word used for "*abundant*" literally means "*super-abundant*" – it's just that we don't have an English word that translates that notion directly. So, let me ask you again, as you weigh up your life today, would you describe it as being "*super-abundant*"? Well, let's take a look:

Is your life filled to overflowing with God's goodness and grace? Are you so full of God's joy – irrespective of what's going on around you – that you're fit to burst? When you face trials of any kind, are you filled with a sense of God's provision and power, confident in the knowledge that He has the situation in hand?

*And if not ... why not?*

Could it be that “*the thief*”, your enemy and mine, the devil, is indeed stealing and killing and destroying the *super-abundant* life that Jesus came to give you?

I mean, where is this super-abundant life that Jesus promised you? Why is it that life sometimes seems so difficult? Why is it that you're not filled with the joy and the excitement that you felt when you first gave your life to Jesus?

Have you ever found yourself in this place? Now please, the last thing that I want to do is to “*talk down*” your Christian walk. I'm simply trying to take you to a place where you can be honest with yourself, about the reality of what's going on in your life. Come on, on a scale of zero to ten (where zero is the “*steal, kill and destroy*” end, and ten is the “*super-abundant*” end) where is your life at? Really.

I've asked this same question of a lot of people – of individuals, of small groups and at conferences. I remember I was asked to speak at the “*weekend camp*” of a medium-sized church, so I took the opportunity to ask people to write down a number between zero and 10 on a piece of paper. We took up all the pieces of paper and during the break I calculated the median score that people had given their lives (my double maths major finally came in handy!).

Now I want you to remember that these were Bible-believing Christians. People who had given up their weekends to hear the Word of God preached. Are you ready? Drum roll please ... their median score was 6.2.

6.2! What?

Did Jesus come to this earth, live His life as a man, preach His heart out, heal the lame, sick, blind, deaf, dumb and demon possessed, still storms, suffer, die and rise again ... so that you and I could be living a life of 6.2?!

Is 6.2 really the super-abundant life that Jesus was talking about?

And this was by no means an isolated incident. I speak with many Christians as I travel around the world and they come to me

with basically that same story, over and over again. Here it is in a nutshell:

*I know that my life isn't what it's meant to be in Christ. I know that. But I don't know why. And I don't know what to do about it.*

So that's what this book is all about. That's why I've written it – “*Power Unlimited*” – because the thing that's lacking in the lives of all these people – perhaps in your life too – is the power to live the life that Jesus promised us. The devil comes along and whispers in our ear, “*You're not good enough for God*”. We swallow that and there begins the whole stealing, killing and destroying of our super-abundant life, bought at such a terrible price.

Now, of course, the sheer genius of the devil's tactic here is that he's absolutely right. None of us are good enough, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That's exactly what the Apostle Paul says of himself (and remember God called Paul to write almost half of the books of the New Testament).

*For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own*

*actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. (Romans 7:14-21)*

So Paul, as it turns out, has exactly the same problem that you and I have. But happily, he doesn't give up, because the old Paul, God bless him, also has the answer (an answer that the devil carefully avoids when he throws accusations at us). It's the only answer that has the power to make a difference:

*Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 7:24)*

You see, I have some very good news for you today. Pay careful attention so you don't miss it: If you believe in Jesus, then God

has already placed within you all the power that you need to live the super-abundant life that Jesus died and rose again to give you.

Let me say it again in case you missed it!

God has already made the resurrection power, the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead, available to you, here and now, to live the super-abundant life that Jesus came to give you. I know, I know ... you don't believe me. Good, you shouldn't believe me. It's not within my purview to make you believe that. But will you believe what God says in the Bible?

*I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and*



God has already placed within you all the power that you need to live the super-abundant life that Jesus died and rose again to give you.

*dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:17-23)*

Do you see? Paul's prayer for the followers of Jesus is that as they get to know God more and more, that they would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they would know the *immeasurable greatness of God's power* for anyone who believes ... the very same power that raised Christ from the dead.

Stop! Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Let that sink in for a moment. Okay, here it is again. ***The very same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that you already have by believing in Jesus.***

Each year we celebrate Easter, the death on the Cross (which understandably, receives most of the focus) and the resurrection (which frankly, we don't focus on as much – to our detriment).

But this resurrection is the evidence of the immeasurably great

power that is available to you and me, so that we can live a new life. The life that Jesus promised. One of my lecturers at Bible College many years ago, Dr Barry Chant, once shared this with us in class. He said that if he were to transliterate or render the original Greek words for *'immeasurably great power'* into English, they would look something like this ... *hyperballistic, megathonic, dynamic power!*

Do you get it?

God isn't just talking a little bit of power. God isn't doling His power out to His people like, *"A little bit for you ... and a little bit for you ... and a little bit for you ... none for you today, you've been a bad boy ..."* That's not how it works!

It's the complete opposite. Every believer, the more we come to know God in our walk, day by day, month by month, year by year, the more we're meant to come to know the incredible, power – power unlimited – that He has already poured out on our lives. And that my friend, that one fact, that one thing that we learn here in the first chapter of the book of Ephesians, changes everything.

As Bible teacher Casey Treat once said . . . we need to stop praying *for* power, and start praying *with* power, the power that we already have.

Do you get it? Do you realise the immeasurable greatness of God's power that God has already placed at your disposal to live your life for Christ?

And the purpose of this power, the whole point of this power, is to enable you to live the new life, the born-again life, the resurrection life, the super-abundant life, that Jesus came to give you. Yet so many Christians – dare I say, most Christians – miss out on that life for one reason and one reason alone. Because they don't know what they already have – power unlimited – they don't lay hold of that power.

And the reason that they don't know what they already have, is because they haven't discovered it, hidden there in plain sight, in God's Word.

Friend, you and I, we live on a spiritual battlefield. Towards the end of his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul puts it this way:

*... our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*  
(Ephesians 6:12-17)

Now I used to be a serving Army officer, so I can tell you that as I look at each of the elements, each of the weapons of that spiritual armour that Paul lists there – the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes, the shield, the helmet – each of those is a *defensive* piece of armour. Now defence is important in order to protect yourself, but you don't win a war by defending your position. In order to win, you have to attack. You have to take the battle to the enemy and defeat him. And the only *offensive*

weapon in that list is ... what?

The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God!

That's the only attack weapon in the spiritual armoury that God has given us. And the terrible truth is that most Christians leave that sword in its scabbard. They leave the sword of the Spirit at home, and then they wonder why the devil keeps on winning! They never open their Bible – which of course is the Word of God – but instead, they leave it up on the shelf gathering dust and then ... then they wonder why they are living their lives without power.



CHAPTER TWO

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the power to change



If you take just one thing away from this book, then my prayer is that it would be this: *that God has already given you power unlimited ... the rest of your Christian walk is all about discovering the power that you already have, laying hold of it and living in it.*

And the place where you lay hold of that power unlimited, is in God's Word. In fact, that's what this book is all about. It's about addressing this malady in God's church today, which sees so many of God's people not taking His Word seriously. There is power in God's Word, the Bible, the sword of the Spirit. Power to help us overcome sin and temptation. Power that will transform our lives, if only we'll wrap our hands around the hilt of the sword and draw it out of its scabbard; if only we will open God's Word, read it, receive it and respond to it.

Incredible as it may seem, the exceedingly great power of God is already available, here and now, to each and every man, woman and child, who has placed their trust in Jesus.

That is precisely what the Apostle Paul writes about back there in Ephesians Chapter 1. If you would drink that one Scripture into your heart, if you would turn it over, if you would come to believe

it with your life, if you would live your life – everything you think and say and do, through every trial and obstacle that you face, in every decision that you make – as though that is absolutely true (because, after all, it is!) that one thing will completely transform your life. That one biblical truth changes everything.

And therein lies the key. It's a biblical truth, because it comes from the living Word of God, the Bible. The one offensive weapon in your spiritual armoury. The one weapon that you have with which to attack and defeat your enemy (and mine) the devil. All the rest of your armour is defensive, protective. But the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, is your attack weapon. And remember, in order to win the battle, you have to attack and defeat the enemy.

When he comes along, to steal, kill and destroy, when he comes along to rob you of God's peace and joy, of the super-abundant life that Jesus promised, God has given both the means to protect yourself, and the means to defeat the enemy and his earthly and spiritual forces. Not in your own strength, but in the very power of God.

Do I hear a hallelujah here?! Amen?

There's another place in Scripture where God's Word is referred to as a sword:

*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. (Hebrews 4:12,13)*

In other words, the Word of God isn't just there to defeat our enemy the devil (something we're going to talk a lot more about later) but to help deal with what's going on in our hearts. God's Word is alive, it's active – not just words on a page, but capable of dealing with what's going on in our hearts. And, as we saw earlier in what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7:14-21, there's not a lot of good stuff that happens in there. We need help, and according to God, the place to find that help, the place to find victory, is in God's Word, the Bible.

Because God's victory comes to us through Jesus, through what He did for us on that cross and through that empty tomb. And it's

through the Bible, that God the Holy Spirit, reveals that victory to us. It's through the Bible that you and I are able to appropriate, to lay hold of the immeasurably great power of God in Jesus Christ, available to each one of us.

This is something that is so easy for you and me to allow to just pass us by: *Yeah, the Bible, read your Bible more often. Sure. I've heard it all before. I've heard preachers carrying on about this, but what difference is it really going to make?*

I wonder to what extent that one attitude right there, is the source of the malady of powerlessness in the house of God today. Let me put it plainly and succinctly. God gives us one offensive weapon – the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God – with which we have the power to defeat Satan, and which has the power to sort out what's going on in our hearts.

We ignore that one weapon. We leave sword in scabbard, our Bible on shelf, the revelation of God, who He is, His plans and purposes, His grace and mercy through Jesus Christ over there somewhere, and then we wonder why our lives are being plundered by the enemy, by our circumstances, by other people.

How stupid can we be?!

As I said, I get to speak with a lot of people; people who respond to Christianityworks' radio and television programs, people whom I meet in my travels, people who've heard me speak and want to know how to apply it to their lives. And most of those people (please note, I'm not saying 'some', I have deliberately chosen 'most' because that word reflects the truth of the situation) come to me with just one problem. Here it is:

*This isn't working in my life ... and I just don't know why.  
That isn't working in my life ... and I don't know what to do  
about it. I want to follow Jesus ... but Satan keeps on winning  
as he tempts me with this sin or that sin. My circumstances are  
overwhelming me and I just don't know what to do.*

Over and over again, I hear the same thing, the same questions, the same problems, the same frustrations in people's voices, and it all comes down to this:

*Why isn't my life all that Jesus promised it would be? Where  
is that 'super-abundance' that Jesus came to give me?*

It's a question that plagues many a Christ follower. It causes many to fall by the wayside. It causes many people to live a life

that falls so far short of all that it could be in Christ. To my way of thinking, this is one of the greatest tragedies playing itself out in the Kingdom of God today. And just like many of the lifestyle and diet related illnesses that are killing people across the globe, this is a sickness, a disease, a plague, that is completely avoidable.

And so what this book is all about, is how to avoid malady in your life; how to lay hold of the power unlimited in order to live the super-abundant life that Jesus promised, for God's glory.

Here is what I see happening in the Kingdom of God, amongst God's very own people, the very same people for whom Jesus died and rose again.

The societies in which we live are moving further and further away from God. Look at the United States. A country that claims to have religious freedom, founded by the pilgrims who came to the land to have the freedom to worship God. A nation who, on its dollar bill, has the words *'In God we trust'*. And now, a country, where it's illegal to pray at school; illegal for an officer in the military to share his faith or a Bible with a soldier; and a country where four in ten unborn children are *'terminated'* – that's a genocide of around 1.2 million children each year.

And I'm not just picking on the US of A ... it's happening right around the globe. Societies founded on Christian love, as they become more secular, are shifting further and further away from God and they're behaving as though this is progress. It's progress to allow one man to marry another man, or a woman to marry another woman. It's progress to allow a woman to choose whether or not to kill her unborn child. It's progress for women not to respect their husbands and men not to cherish their wives. And anybody who stands in the way of this so-called "*progress*" is a narrow-minded, conservative bigot.

And as these changes sweep across society, they're also sweeping many a Christian along with them. Christians *en masse* are forsaking a life based on God's Word, for a life based on the world's ways. And it's not just individual Christians, but preachers, Bible teachers, churches and denominations. And then we wonder why things aren't going so well for us in our lives.

Really?!

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, "Not me! That's definitely not me!" Fair enough. But in the affluent western world, the average

household spends more on pet food than it does on helping the poor. The average person is more interested in their own comfort, in their career, in their luxuries, in their holidays, than they are in making a real difference in the lives of people who are suffering.

Might I ask you, quietly but very deliberately, do you stand out from that crowd? Or do you blend in so comfortably that really, no one can tell the difference between you and someone who doesn't believe in Jesus. If you were put on trial for being a Christian, forensically, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

I know they're difficult questions. I know they make us feel uncomfortable. They're meant to. Listen to Jesus:

*You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said:*

*'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'* (Matthew 15:7-9)

You and I are really good at hypocrisy. We want to hang on to the rubbish in our own lives, because it makes us feel safe and comfortable when all along Christ calls us to a life of sacrifice



and service, lived out in the *hyperballistic, megathonic, dynamic* power of God. We go to church on Sunday and sing the songs, hear the sermons, talk the talk ... but when it comes to the tough decisions of repentance, the sacrifices of holiness; when it comes to taking up that cross and laying our lives down for Jesus, well, that's another thing entirely, isn't it?

You are called to live a life of victory in Christ, not to wallow in the consequences of a powerless life. And as the Word of God makes clear, it is God's Word itself that contains the power that all along you and I have been looking for, in order to live that life.

Now, I could leave it at that. I could say to you, "that's what God's Word says and that, therefore, is that." And I would be completely justified in doing that. But I know that we all are stiff-necked from time to time, we all want to ignore our Bibles because the world (and the devil) has so conditioned us to do exactly that. So I also want to share with you some empirical evidence on the difference that engaging with God's Word will make in your life on a day-to-day basis.

Back to the Bible International (based in Lincoln Nebraska) is a

ministry that I have been closely involved with now for a good many years. They, in fact, founded the ministry of Christianityworks that I am involved with here in Australia, way back in 1957. Part of Back to the Bible is the Centre for Bible Engagement, which has conducted extensive research around the world on the impact in the lives of men and woman, who are engaged with God's Word on a regular basis.

Here is something of what they wrote in a paper called "Understanding the Bible Engagement Challenge: Scientific Evidence for the Power of 4":

*Unfortunately, today many Christians fail to tap into that power regularly. As a result, our spiritual growth stagnates. We rely on only our own strength to deal with daily trials and temptations, making it more likely that we will fall. Those falls hurt us and hurt our witness ...*

*Unfortunately owning a Bible and believing it's the inspired word of God typically does not mean that people actually read the Bible ... a lack of scriptural engagement produces several consequences. Disengagement from God's word has left American believers ignorant of basic Bible facts and truths,*

*vulnerable to false teachings and, in many cases, spiritually immature. As our research has demonstrated, those who read the Bible at least four times a week are less likely to engage in behaviours such as gambling (74% lower), pornography (61% lower), getting drunk (57% lower) and sex outside marriage (68% lower).*

Powerful stuff. Imagine if there was some cure for cancer that could reduce mortality rates by between 51% and 74%. It would be completely revolutionary, wouldn't it?

So, what's the research that they mention there?

Well, they decided to research the spiritual lives of more than 100,000 people in 21 countries, ranging from ages of eight to 80 years. In doing so, they began with this question: *What is it, of all the things that Christians do, that is the most powerful predictor of spiritual growth?*

When you think about it, Christians do a lot of things to express their faith. They go to church, they pray, they listen to sermons, they attend home groups, they give, they serve ... and many more things.

The Centre of Bible Engagement's research project wanted to discover which of those expressions of faith, had the most impact in the life of a Christian, measured by a change in behaviour. That's not a bad question to ask through a large, scientifically constituted, statistically valid, international research project. That's not a bad question to ask, for anyone who wants to lay hold the super-abundant life that Jesus promised to give us.

The conclusions of this research were as follows (and I quote from their report):

*The findings consistently show that engaging in the Bible four or more days a week is the single most powerful predictor of spiritual growth.*

They defined spiritual growth as becoming less of the person that you were before you committed your life to Jesus and more like Christ in your thoughts, words and deeds.

I know Arnie Cole, the President of Back to the Bible, pretty well. His background is as a professional researcher and statistician. He was speaking at a Christian media conference here in Australia a few years back and during that presentation, he made this point:

that statistically speaking, the correlation between engaging with God's Word, the Bible four times a week or more and spiritual growth, is stronger than the correlation between smoking and lung cancer.

Just think about that. What strong evidence of the importance of receiving, reflecting on and responding to God's Word in having a powerful impact in changing our lives; in making the changes that we ourselves have been powerless to make.

Let me come back to the Apostle Paul's reflection on this whole question of the power to change:

*Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
(Romans 7:24)

The answer is that only God can give us the power to change, the resurrection power to be able to live the born-again, new, super-abundant life that Jesus came to give us.

*What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who*

Statistically speaking, the correlation between engaging with God's Word, the Bible four times a week or more and spiritual growth, is stronger than the correlation between smoking and lung cancer.

*have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*  
(Romans 6:1-4)

Do you see? God's plan is for you to walk in the newness of life, the resurrection life made available to you through the Cross and the empty tomb. And the power to live that life is something that you will find in the Word of God, as the Spirit of God breathes His Word into your heart:

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.* (2 Tim 3:16-17)

That's where you'll find the power to change – power unlimited. In God's Word. So ... you have to ask yourself, why do so many Christians ignore their Bibles?!

CHAPTER THREE

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# who exactly is God?



By now, I hope and pray that you are getting the distinct impression that engaging with God's Word on a daily basis isn't some optional extra; it's not something that you can take or leave on a whim, but it's an absolutely vital part of your walk with Christ.

I know that there have been times in my walk when I've found myself to be "*too busy*" to read my Bible. Sometimes when I'm travelling, and hopping through lots of different time zones with disrupted sleep and a busy work schedule, I used to kid myself that I could get by with a quick prayer. And invariably, at those times I would be weakened. I could feel the power of God draining out of me.

Let me ask you, how long can you go without eating or drinking, before you start feeling lightheaded? Before you start losing focus on the tasks at hand? Before you start becoming irritable? Six hours, or eight at an absolute stretch? How would you feel, if you went without eating for a whole day, for two or three days, for a week ... for a month?

So how is it that we believe that we can go days, weeks, even months without listening to God in His Word? I know that I

am a better husband, a better father, a better son, a better work colleague and certainly a better preacher when I am immersed daily in the Word of God. I need to feast on the Bread of Life on a daily basis in order to be all that God wants me to be, in order to be able to overcome temptation, in order to handle trials in a godly way.

In fact, over the twenty plus years that I have been walking with Christ, I can tell you that it is the singular habit of spending time most days in God's Word, that has, more than any other thing, been what God has used to transform my life. And to this day it remains the most important tool in God's hands to keep on transforming me, maturing me, helping me to see the things going on around me through His eyes, rather than from my narrow, selfish perspective.

That's an important part of growing up in Christ. Because God is so profoundly different to anyone or anything that this world has to offer. His ways are so different to our ways, and unless and until we have a personal encounter with the risen Christ, unless and until we encounter Jesus in our own, personal experience, our lives simply cannot be transformed.

That simple little three-letter word, “*God*”, is used in so many different ways. I mean, when you use the word “*God*”, different people have different views of who that is. Is He some angry despot? Is He a judgemental old man? Is He kind? Who or what is God?

If you go out and ask different people, what you discover is that quite a few of them have a picture of God in their heads that doesn't always have a whole bunch to do with who God actually is.

It's almost as though we reconstruct Him in our own image, to suit ourselves, to suit our own agendas. But let me ask you something: *If God is God wouldn't it be worthwhile kind of figuring out exactly who He is? If God has and indeed is the power, to transform our lives, shouldn't we get to know Him?*

I mean, who is He really and how do you and I relate to Him? What if God is awesome, powerful, loving, kind and we spend the rest of our lives missing out on all that because we never really went after Him to discover who He really is? So how do we discover who God really is?

In the pages of this little volume, what we're about is setting out

to lay hold of God's power to completely and utterly transform our lives. Today, tomorrow ... and for the long haul. And the place that we discover that power, the place that God the Holy Spirit has made available for us to lay hold of that power – is in His Word, the Bible.

Over the last 20 or so years, I've spent a lot of time in that Book, in fact, in its 66 different books. I've had the chance to study and to learn and to think and to mull it all over and truly, in those 20 odd years, I've really only scratched the surface.

And yet the more I think about it, the Bible is basically about four things:

1. Who God is, what He's like and how He reacts to things.
2. What God's will and purposes are, what His plan is.
3. Where my life is headed. It's about who I am, made in His image but how does He see me? Who did He make me to be?
4. And ... how I can respond to God.

Some people think this last one, number four, is all that the Bible has to offer. Just a bunch of rules and regulations; do this, don't do that ... but you know, as you read it for yourself, how to respond to God is quite simply not the main thing. It's the natural consequence of the first three.

So, those four things again are: who God is; what His will and purposes are; who you and I are in His eyes; and how we can and should respond to Him. That's what the Bible contains. It's real and it's practical, it's about life, it's awesome and it's exciting and it contains power ... power unlimited to transform you, to transform your life, to heal you, to bless you, to empower you.

So in the remainder of this chapter, we're just going to look at the first one of those; *who God is*. The biggest thing we can get from the Bible is God Himself. So if God is really God, shouldn't we figure out *who* He is? Who He says He is? Where better to do that – to search Him out – than that great love letter He's written to you and to me, the Bible. It makes sense, doesn't it?

When I first laid eyes on my wife Jacqui; when I first saw her from a distance, I was speaking at a church and she was sitting in the

congregation. As far as I was concerned, she was just another face in the crowd and had I never sought her out, I would never have come to know her and have a relationship with her. So, I did seek her out and she responded to that.

In a sense, picking up the Bible is seeking God out and when we do, it's the same thing as in any other healthy relationship. He responds. It's not a dead book written by men thousands of years ago. It's the living, active word of God and His promise is that when we pick it up, the Holy Spirit, God Himself, will bring it to life in our hearts. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, God promised that He would pour His Spirit out on all flesh and that He would write His words onto our hearts.

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they*

*shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:27-34)*

That's God talking to His people through the prophet Jeremiah well before the coming of Jesus. Back in those days, not everyone had received the Holy Spirit, just a few select prophets and kings. But the promise of God is that He make a new covenant, a new contract if you will. One where we would know God personally, because He would pour His Spirit out on all, from the least to the greatest:

*Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28-29)*

The desire of God, the heart of God is that we should know Him – that He would be our God and we would be His people; that His Spirit would fill each of us who put our trust in His Son.

*I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. (Leviticus 26:11)*

*Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)*

God wants to be close to us and He wants to speak to us. And He does that through His Spirit and His Word. That’s precisely what Jesus said to His disciples just before He was crucified:

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-15)*

But imagine, Jesus has all these things to say to us. Powerful things like: *Everything that my Dad in Heaven has is mine and that’s why the Holy Spirit will come and declare and impart all of that to you.* Yet



so many of His people have just stopped listening. They don't read their Bibles, so they never discover the incredibly powerful things that God has to say about Himself. And so instead, they ... we miss out on everything that God wants to give to us of Himself.

It seems to me that by far the greatest reason for reading the Bible, is to encounter God Himself; to discover who He is and how He sees things; what He's like and what He's up to.

You see, it's easy to read this story or that in the Bible and say, *"Well that was a story about King David"* or *"That one over there, that's the story about Moses or Peter or Paul"*. But so often in the pages of this great and mighty book, the great unseen player is God Himself and as I read every story, every verse, I keep asking myself, "What does this tell me about God Himself? What's He up to in this story?"

Let's take just one example, it's a short story. God makes a promise to this man called Abram (later his name is changed to Abraham) who is childless. Abram's an old man, his wife Sarai (later she is called Sarah) is an old woman, at seventy-five odd years of age, they're childless and yet God has called them to go from their

home on this huge journey. God's promised them children, a multitude of children, but it's never happened. It's gone on for years and years and years.

Abram's on this long, uncomfortable journey. He's way outside his comfort zone and he's frustrated that God's promises haven't yet come to fruition.

So ... this is what happens next:

*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)*

Put yourself in Abram's shoes. For years you've been on this crazy journey. You're an old man now. Still no children, in a society where children were a sign of God's blessing, and the absence of children a sign of God's curse on your life. And then God speaks ... how do you feel? What does it do to your soul to hear God speak into your life.

It's all too easy to read this story and imagine that it's a story all about Abram. But the real question that we should be asking is, *What does this short little story, tell us about God?*

Here's Abram. He's frustrated, he's waiting for a breakthrough that's not coming. He's trying to believe in God, but it's hard. (I wonder if that sounds at all familiar to you?) And it's going on for years and years and years and he and his wife are old and it all just seems absolutely impossible. But along comes God and He does this sort of gentle and kind and wondrous and patient thing with His servant Abram, He takes him outside to gaze up into this beautiful masterpiece called the Milky Way.

Have you ever looked up at the stars away from the smog and the lights of a big city at night? It's incredible how many stars are up

It's all too easy to read this story and imagine that it's a story all about Abram. But the real question that we should be asking is What does this short little story, tell us about God?

there and in the middle of Abram's frustration, God says "*Abram, look ... look at this! This is how many descendants you're going to have. My promise will actually happen*". And if you read the rest of this story, Abraham ultimately has a son with his wife Sarah, and on God's instructions, they name him Isaac. He never saw all these other offspring happen. Of course, Abraham never saw the rest of the promise fulfilled in his life time – but notice how this good and gracious and awesome God takes a man in the middle of his frustration and just speaks lovingly to him in such an incredibly powerful way.

It's a story about God. Do you get it? It's a story about how God treats those whom He loves when they're at the end of their tether.

The Bible is full of stories like that – stories that tell us who God is; what He's like; how He acts and responds to us; how He treats those whom He loves.

*I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. (Psalm 57:9-11)*

Do you see the power in something like that? Do you see how knowing God just as He promised, and how coming to understand Him in our small, limited way, can make such a powerful difference to us – especially when we're lost and frustrated and clinging onto a promise from God ... but only just?

People often say to me, "Berni, you seem to be so enthusiastic about God." Can I tell you why? Because over the last couple of decades I've discovered Him in the pages of the Bible. I've discovered what He says about Himself there and those things have ended up being etched onto my heart, so that I can experience Him in my life.

I can't help but be enthusiastic and you know, I can't help but wonder, where would my life be if I hadn't discovered who God is in the pages of that book, so that I could go on to experience Him in my own life. Where would I be, if I hadn't laid hold of this power ... power unlimited in the living Word of the living God?



CHAPTER FOUR

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what are His plans  
and purposes for you?



Many, many Christians live directionless, rudderless lives, despite their faith in Jesus. Their lives are just drifting along and don't seem to be heading anywhere in particular. That's okay for a little while, but at some point – as we realise that life is slipping by ever so quickly – we're shocked when we realise that before long, this life will be over ... and for what?

When I look at the rather brief life of Jesus on this earth – 33 or 34 years – the one thing I don't see is “drifting”. Okay, he spent the first three decades or so, working in Joseph's carpenter shop and we don't see or hear too much about that. But even as a young lad, he seemed so focussed:

*Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And*

*all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*  
(Luke 2:41-49)

You get the picture. Jesus knew what He was on about. He knew his purpose on this earth. When I first read that passage as a young Christian in my mid-thirties, I realised that I didn't have a clue as to the plans and the purposes of God for my life. Now, a couple of decades on, those plans and purposes couldn't be clearer. And although God didn't reveal everything all at once – He seemed to keep me guessing for quite a few years – I have this sense that my hunger to know (and the time that God had me spend in prayer and His Word) is how He revealed those plans and purposes to me.

One of the most common things that we all experience at some point or other in our lives, is this dilemma, this crisis if you will of, *Where is my life headed?* I think it's because somehow we're

hardwired to have hope for the future; to be able to look forward to a good future; to have a sense of significance; to make our mark in this world. When we feel as if we don't have any of those, *where is my life headed?* ... can become a question of quite some desperation.

And for our lives to be headed in the right direction, we need a few things to come together. We need the way we live (the things that we can control) to come together with the things that go on around us (the ones we can't control). That's not easy. It's almost an impossible juggling act. But ... what if God has a plan? What if He has a purpose in the things that we've been travelling through? What if there's meaning behind it all, and He does want to do amazing things and He does want to be involved in the choices we make today? What if?

Wouldn't you want to tap into that? I mean, wouldn't you want to know? Wouldn't you want Him to speak those plans and purposes gently into your heart just at the right time and let them guide you along your life's journey? Just think ... what a powerful way that would be to live, as opposed to drifting our way through life towards our death bed.

In the previous chapter, we saw that the biggest thing that we can get out of the Bible is discovering God Himself; who He is, what He's like, how He reacts to different situations and things. To me, that is the greatest prize of them all: God Himself, getting to know Him; having a wonderful, rich relationship that just gets deeper and deeper as time goes by.

And now it's time to take a look at the second thing that I think the Bible is about: God's plans and God's purposes, both the big picture and specifically, the small parts that He has for you and me to play. The big picture is so important. What is God's big plan? What is He up to? And then ... where do you and I fit in? What small part does He have for you and me in His grand scheme?

A friend and colleague of mine, Dr Graham Pratt, was my mentor and business partner for about eighteen years. We haven't worked together now for about fifteen years, but we still manage to chat on the phone at least once or twice a week. Some years back at an IT conference in Singapore, Graham and I were speaking during a break. We were chatting over coffee about some technology issue that was relevant back then and he said something to me that I shall never forget: "Berni," he said, "context is so important.

In fact in understanding something, context is almost everything.”

What a pearl of wisdom.

You see we all want to know where our lives are headed; my life, my little piece of the puzzle, right? And so all too often, in our relationship with God, in our prayer life, it's all about me, me, me. We somehow get to imagining that all of God's plans revolve around us. It is so easy to adopt this narrow, self-centric attitude to our Christianity. And if we continue living out that sort of immaturity, we're never going to grow.

That's why God's big picture, God's grand plan, is so incredibly important. Because it's only when we discover God's plan for our lives – in the context of His bigger plan – that any of it makes sense. It's only then that God will unleash His power through us to see His plans and purposes come to fruition.

Now there are many times when God works through people like you and me, when we don't really have a sense of what He is doing. That's true. As I said, He kept me guessing for quite a time, before leading me into the role that I now have. But the danger is that we begin thinking that all of God's plans are about “me” That “I” am

at the centre of the universe. That God's plans revolve around me.

That's why God's big picture is so important. And His grand plan, to bring His people to Him, is revealed in His Word, the Bible. That big picture is so incredibly important, lest we develop that all-too-common "*me-centric*" theology.

Think of a commander in a battle. What he needs is all of his subordinate commanders to lead their battalions, their companies, their platoons and their sections in the right direction at the right time, in order that the over all battle plan can be implemented. And, as a former army officer, I can tell you that the military goes to a lot of trouble in training over and over again, to enable a large formation to work together for a single purpose. Before any battle there's a complex series of briefings from the top down, so that every unit and, every sailor, soldier and airman knows their part in the plan. There's no room for rogue operators. There's no room for subordinates who think it's all about them. There's no room for a "*me-centric*" battle plan.

And you know, when I read the Bible, the stories and the things that happened a long time ago, somehow God's plan becomes

crystal clear – at two levels. The big picture, His overarching, sweeping plan for humanity. And subsequently, little by little, His more specific plans and purposes for my life start to take shape, just when He feels that I need to know them.

For me, before I became a Christian at age 36, life used to be just a here-and-now thing. It was about wealth and career. It was about how I felt today and what I could have tomorrow. And as much as that worldly lifestyle promised, in reality, it was empty, hollow, and directionless. Where was it headed? What was the point? But when I encountered Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible, when I started listening to Him by reading the Bible, I began to get a handle on God's big picture. A big picture that's best summed up in something that God says over and over again:

*I will be your God and you will be my people.*  
(Exodus 6:7)

Right from the beginning to the end of the Bible, you see God saying those words over and over again, explaining them and, just at the right time in history, sending Jesus so that it could actually happen. They're not just words on a page. This is the very heartbeat

of God to call us back to Himself; to call us back home, here and now and for all eternity. Despite our rebellion, despite the fact that we rejected Him, despite all our mistakes, He calls us back to Himself to give us a new life, an eternal life that's not about rules and regulations, but a relationship with Him.

And right throughout the whole Bible you see Him engaging with people and drawing them closer, people just like you and me, people in their weaknesses and their failures and yet He loves them and touches them and reaches out to them. Okay, we see God's anger too sometimes. Yet despite that, He still reaches out to people amid His anger and that's where we discover His grace and we see Jesus dying on a cross for you and me – and for the rest of humanity. For Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus and atheists and agnostics. For every sinner, just like you and me – to forsake all others and place their faith in Christ and Christ alone.

As we read those stories, God's stories of loving engagement of humanity over and over again – His heartbeat touches our hearts. His desires change our desires. His grace wraps itself around us and through us. Frankly, I'm pretty sure that I've only just begun to wrap my heart around God's love and grace and mercy; around



God's plans and purposes, as I've spent 20 plus years listening to Him, hearing His words and His stories and His heartbeat in the pages of that wondrous book – the Bible.

I have such a long way to go, but when you open the Bible and you read the story of Jesus dying on the Cross and crying out:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*  
(Matthew 27:46)

... it touches you, it changes you, it gives you a sense of the big picture, of the love of God and of the price that He's prepared to pay, in order for Him to be our God and for us to be His people.

And it's from the pages of that Book that we hear God crying out to you and me, here and now: "Don't you realise how much I love you?!" That's the big picture. That's what life is all about. And this ... this is how it ends:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)*

Glory to God! That's where your life is headed when you put your trust and your faith in Jesus. That's where my life is headed. And the heart of God is that all would be saved:

*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)*

And in that great plan, He has a part for you and me to play. Now, to be sure, the part that He has chosen for you to play, is going to be quite different to the part that He has ordained for me to play. Because He's created us differently, with different gifts and abilities, to fulfill different plans and purposes. That's something we're going to unpack more fully in the next chapter – it's a truly exciting bit too!

But the thing that amazes me, really, is that as well as the big picture of God's engagement of all humanity and His plans for humanity as a whole, what so often leaps off the pages of His Word are His specific plans for us. Sometimes we think that "Well, you know, God's stopped talking. God had the prophets in the Old Testament and He had Jesus in the New Testament and He had some Apostles in the New Testament ... but that was back then. Today though, here and now, God has stopped talking".

But nothing ... nothing could be further from the truth.

The Bible was written through men, but it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. So when you and I engage with God's Word, the Spirit lifts it off the page and writes it onto our hearts. So should we be at all surprised that God speaks specifically into the things that are going on in our lives right here and now, today, as we read the next chapter in the book of the Bible that we happen to be reading at the moment?

God knows that when we're travelling through times that are uncertain, when we want to give up, when we're in a relationship or in a thing we thought God had called us into but now we're not

sure ... He knows how much we need His counsel, His wisdom, His guidance. God doesn't miss it. He's right here and now, ready and waiting to speak with you through His Word.

I cannot tell you the number of times in the early days of this ministry of Christianityworks, that I wanted to give up and go back to my secular IT consulting career. I can't begin to tell you!! It all looked so impossible, it all looked so hopeless. How could this guy from the IT industry ever do this thing called "sharing God's love with people through the media"? It was completely incongruous. I didn't have the skills or the experience. The ministry didn't have the finances or the people or the resources. I tell you there were some incredibly difficult times. There still are by the way. Plain sailing it ain't!!!

But as I look back on it now, that regular habit of spending time in God's Word, day after day, is how He touched me and whispered in my heart, "Just keep going". It's how He guided me to choose this over that. It's how He gave me the wisdom to deal with difficult situations. That's what happens when you read God's Word: you discover power ... power unlimited ... the power to keep going, the power to press through, the power to overcome,

When we want to give up, when we're in a relationship or in a thing we thought God had called us into but now we're not sure ... He knows how much we need His counsel, His wisdom, His guidance.

the power to hang in there ... with God's plan for your life. That's just what happens.

I remember one time when I was at rock bottom reading this:

*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)*

Another time, just when I was wondering whether or not to step out in faith by growing the ministry into Africa when we clearly didn't have the resources to do so, I opened up to the next chapter and read about Peter stepping out of the boat (Matthew 14:22-33). And the thing that the Holy Spirit impressed on me about that story was that Peter didn't wait to be called, He asked for Jesus to call him. And He didn't wait for the storm to stop. No, he stepped out in the middle of the storm and walked on the water towards Jesus.

And so based on that revelation from God, we stepped out into Africa at a time when, from a human standpoint, it was clearly

crazy to do so. Today, millions of people in almost every country across Africa, hear God's Word on their local radio station through the ministry of Christianityworks. Go figure! God.

Just when I was feeling so incredibly inadequate one time, I read about how Peter and all the other disciples deserted Jesus when He was being tried and crucified, and yet Jesus still went on to use them to start this fledgling movement called "*the church*". A powerful reminder to me to keep going – with Jesus and His church.

Those are just a few examples. The Bible is cram-packed full of this stuff and somehow God, through His Spirit, takes those stories and connects them with our lives and in our hearts we just know that God is speaking to us. There have been so many times when I needed a gentle touch from God ... then I read about how Jesus healed the leper or the blind person or the lame man, how He wept for Jerusalem, how ... do you see?

The Bible is full to overflowing with God's promises and plans and purposes. And if you and I will just get into a habit of opening it up every day, spending ten or fifteen minutes engaging with

God's Word, asking those questions – *What does this tell me about God? What am I discovering about God's plans and purposes? What part is God calling me to play?* ... we will hear God speak so clearly just at the right time, with just what you and I need to hear.

When we establish a regular habit of just spending some time in His Word with Him, His Spirit will write His promises and plans and purposes on our hearts with indelible ink. Written in such a way that no person, no man or woman, no situation, no trial can ever steal them away. God Himself brings His Word to life and that changes everything.

Let me say it again: so often I wonder where I'd be if I hadn't established a regular habit of reading God's Word. But come on, it just doesn't bear thinking about, really.





CHAPTER FIVE

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who are you...really?

I'm not sure if you realise it just yet, but you are amazing. Completely and utterly amazing. That's not some generalised platitude. It's something I know to be a fact. A biblical fact – and it's the biblical fact that we're going to unpack in this chapter of *Power Unlimited*.

But before we do, perhaps you're wondering why we're even talking about this stuff in a book on God's power. Why are we talking about who God is, His plans and purposes, who He made us to be and how He wants us to respond to Him? Well, I'll tell you why – because that's where the power is.

Scenario: you're life is just bubbling along. You believe in Jesus, but nothing ever seems to change. You keep falling into the same temptations. You keep wondering where God's power is in your life. You don't seem to really have a handle on what you're good at and what you're made to do. But then ... you read this book, *Power Unlimited*.

And somehow, through my little ramblings, (after all God can even take the foolishness that I preach and brings salvation through it – 1 Cor 1:21) God opens your eyes to the fact that through the Bible He will reveal to you who He is, He will show

you His plans and purposes, He will give you a sense of purpose and direction. So, a little sceptically, you open your Bible. A day or two goes by, nothing much. A week goes by ... yeah, maybe there's something there. A month goes by and you're starting to enjoy it. A year goes by ... and wow, your life is a whole bunch different.

You have a godly confidence; a strength that you didn't have before. You see yourself in a different light. You're getting an inkling of the plans and purposes that God has for you to fulfil. You're experiencing a power that you didn't realise you had. No, life's not perfect, but it's a whole bunch better than it used to be.

And that ... that's what this book is all about, right? Encouraging us to grasp how vital the Bible is to fully lay hold of God's unlimited power in and for us. Which is why right now, I want to tackle one of the most perplexing questions that each of us faces in life at some point, is: Who am I? *What was I made to do?* All too often we go looking for the answers in all the wrong places, and the image that we build of ourselves, the understanding that we have of who we are, becomes twisted and distorted. That one thing has ruined ... is ruining ... many a life.

Each and every day, we have so many pictures and images of who we should be thrust under our noses ... and yet none of them ring true, so we end up feeling a bit like refugees, lost in a world that promises glitz, glamour and success. The media and the advertisers, they want to define success for us. They want to tell us what it means to be open-minded. They want to tell us what we should aspire to. They want to tell us what a happy, well-adjusted family looks like and what beauty looks like and what we have to achieve, who we have to be, what we have to look like, in order to be “*successful*”.

They tell us that if we don't look like this, we haven't made it, but we will if we buy their product. That, quite naturally, will solve absolutely everything. Now, I don't know about you, but I can get so lost in that maze of “success” because quite frankly, my life never quite looks like any images of success that they wave under my nose, even if I do get suckered into buying whatever it is that they happen to be peddling today. And as we compare ourselves with other people who have apparently attained the success that the world is offering, (albeit that the whole thing is an illusion) we can all too readily come to the conclusion that we're anything

but a success. Failure is the word that comes most readily to mind at this point.

And so this question – “Who am I?” – rattles around in that empty, hollow void inside. *Who am I?*

Have you ever been to one of those fairs, you know where they have Ferris wheels and merry-go-rounds and amusements and sideshows? And in side-show alley, they have those distorted mirrors. They're lots of fun. You walk in front of one and you look all tall and skinny or short and fat or all wobbly and wavy. That's okay for a little while, about a minute or two, but imagine if your mirrors at home were like that, all distorted ... not good.

I remember back when I was working as an IT consultant. One of my clients, had a glass front door to their office, that created a reflection that was a perfect distortion of me. It made me look a bit slimmer and a bit taller than I actually am and truthfully, I could have stood in front of that door all day looking at myself.

We'd like to have a mirror like that at home, wouldn't we? Or would we?

My hunch is that whenever we get a distorted image of who we are, it's not a good thing, even if we happen to like the distorted image better than the real one. There's one distorted image that society throws up again and again. They tell us that you can be whoever you want to be, it's all up to you, it's all out there, just go and be whoever you want to be.

Now I'm 174 cm tall (that's 5 foot, 9 inches in the old scale) so it doesn't matter how much I might want to be a famous basketball player – it's never, ever, ever going to happen, right?! Blind Freddy can see that. In fact there are quite a number of things in life that I am decidedly not good at, and if I were to set out to try to become someone who can do those things, it would be a bad fit to who I really am. I am not pastorally gifted. That might surprise some people. If you read the books I write, or listen to the radio programs or watch the television programs, you might come to the conclusion that you wouldn't mind having *that* guy as the pastor of your church.

Can I tell you, the reason I don't get lonely spending hours upon hours researching, preparing and presenting all those programs and writing these books, is because I'm not particularly pastoral.

That doesn't mean I don't love people, I do. It doesn't mean I don't care about people, I do. It just means that if you want someone to kiss your baby or spend hours with a sick relative in hospital, I'm simply not your guy. It's not how God made me to be.

Yet how many people try to be something that they're not? How many people try to do a job that they were never cut out to do? Maybe that's why so many people aren't happy, because they're trying to do jobs or be someone that they're quite simply not designed to be. Aspiring to something that we're never going to be any good at is one of the worst things that we can do in the world. I wonder if that's why there are so many people who literally hate their jobs.

I was looking at a recent "*job satisfaction*" survey on the internet. Have a listen to these stats: 45% of workers say that they're either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their jobs. You know what that means? That means that 55%, or over half, aren't.

Of those 45% who said they were happy, less than half again – in fact only 20% – said that they felt really passionate about their jobs. That means that 80% of people don't feel passionate about



their jobs. Fully one-third believed that they'd reached a dead end in their careers and that there was no hope for a future. Some 21% were eager to change careers.

*I think that these statistics are a tragedy. The vast majority of people aren't passionate about what they do every day. So many people aren't enjoying their lives. But ... let's look at the flipside of that coin. There are a whole bunch of people wandering around in life, believing with every fibre of their being, that they're worthless. "Oh, I'm only a stay-at-home mum. I'm only a clerk. I'm not as smart or as good looking or as talented or as successful or as wealthy or whatever as the next person."*

So many people and the advertisers and product manufacturers and self-styled gurus out there want to tell us who we should be and how we get there and if we aren't there yet, we need to get onto their program. Amidst all of that, there is a question screaming itself out in people's hearts: *Who am I? What was I made to do?*

Without a doubt, that is why low self-esteem is such a global pandemic. Because none of us can ever measure up to the images of success. We see ourselves through those distorted mirrors, the images of us that society reflects back and we wonder why we're a bit messed up.

I think that these statistics are a tragedy. The vast majority of people aren't passionate about what they do every day.

And if you're living your life that way, then you are living a powerless life. A life that will, ultimately, count for nothing. In a very real sense, that was the life that I was living, until I discovered what God said about me. How God sees me. What His view of me from Heaven's balcony looks like. And that's something that you find in the Bible over and over again.

I want to set you a challenge today, to read Ephesians Chapters 1 to 3 – only a few pages – and to write down all the things that just those three chapters say about you. Let me just give you the first few:

You are a saint. Grace and peace are yours. You are already blessed with every spiritual blessing. You were chosen before the creation of the world. You were predestined, adopted into God's family, redeemed, forgiven. God's grace is being lavished on you. Wisdom and understanding are yours. God's will is made known to you ... and we haven't even arrived yet, at the tenth verse of the first chapter yet!!!

Do you get it?

The Bible presents a radically different view of who you are. The

Bible tells you who God says you are. So instead of believing the distorted images that the world reflects back at you, you can see a crystal clear, accurate representation of who you are. As one of my Bible College lecturers, Dr Barry Chant, often used to say – you and I need to ditch our self-image, and develop a faith-image, by discovering and believing what God says about us.

Because as you discover who you really are, who you are in Christ, you will be laying hold of the power to be who God made you to be (more about that in Chapter 7). It's a power that will completely and utterly and radically transform your life.

God is no pedlar of good philosophies or belief systems; He's not some distorted mirror of low self-esteem or unrealistic stereotypes, the way in which the world is. We can either believe what the world says about us, who we are, what we have, what we don't have. Or, we can believe what God says about us – about who we are and all that He has already given us. It's a stark choice, and just by reading those first few chapters of the Book of Ephesians, I know who I'd rather believe!

Not knowing who we truly are is like trying to navigate your place from A to B, with an inaccurate map – in fact, a falsified

map. Blind Freddy can see that that's no way to live life. I come back again, to the many people I speak to about the problems that they're experiencing in life. When I ask them ... how often do you read your Bible, they invariably tell me, in a low voice, with obvious embarrassment ... *Well, not very often.*

Okay then, so when was the last time you opened your Bible and spent just five minutes listening to what God wants to tell you? The answer? Sadly, for many it's been months and even years ago.

Who am I? If that's a question that you want the answer to – let me say – that you want the right answer to, if you want an accurate map for your life, then the only place that you're going to find it is in God's Word.

Because when we come to His Word, the Bible, with questions like “Who am I?”, His Spirit breathes those truths into our hearts. I can't do that for you. Only you can do that with Him, only He can do that for you and the truth through which God will set you free, to be who He made you to be, that truth, that accurate map is in the Bible.

What I can do for you though is give you just a glimpse of what the Bible says about who you are. Are you ready:

*For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.*

*My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.*

*In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them - they are more than the sand; I come to the end - I am still with you. (Psalm 139:13-18)*

At the beginning of this chapter I told you that I knew, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that you are utterly amazing. And this passage is the basis of my conclusion, even though I don't know you personally. In it, God tells you something incredibly important about you.

He tells you that you are one-of-a-kind, handcrafted by Him. Everything about you, every one of the billions of decisions about who you are and what you're like that is stored on every strand of DNA in your body, was a sovereign choice of God. If we could string each strand of DNA in your body end to end, do you know how far it would reach?

No, not from Sydney to London. No, not once around the equator or even a hundred times around the equator. No, not to the moon and back or even to the sun and back. No. If we could string every strand of your DNA together end to end, it would reach about 667 times to the sun and back!

Do you get it? Do you realise how amazing you are? And not only that, but God made you with a purpose. Did you pick up on that?

*In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.*

God planned out every day of your life for you, and unless He made a mistake when He created you (likelihood of zero) you have been created to do what He made you to do. In fact that's exactly what the Apostle Paul writes:

*For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:10)*

The more you read your Bible, and the more you start to believe what God says about you, rather than what the world says about you, the more you will know the truth. And as Jesus said, knowing the truth is what sets us free.

*Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:31)*

Do you see? It's not the truth alone that sets you free, it's knowing the truth. And the way you get to know the truth, the way that the truth become part of who you are, changing your perspective completely, is by ... *continuing in God's Word.*

That's why this is so important. And if this one chapter doesn't inspire you to become a man or a woman of God's Word, I don't think anything will.

So let me take you back to that challenge. Open your Bible, go to Ephesians Chapters 1 to 3 in the New Testament and read them,



writing down everything that you find in those few short pages that tells you who you are and what you already have.

I have so far found 30 statements about my identity in just those three chapters. Let's see how many you can find. Write them down, ponder them, believe them ... and tell me then if you don't find power unlimited to live your life.

CHAPTER SIX

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**warning: the  
countercultural  
Christ**

I wonder if by now, you aren't beginning to get something of a different impression of your Bible; what it contains and what it's all about. I wonder whether you aren't beginning to sense the availability of something much more, something much deeper and richer; something vastly more powerful and expansive hiding in plain sight within its pages.

I want you to know that I have been praying for each and every person who reads this book. The prayer looks something like this:

*Father God, we are so narrow and selfish, each one of us in our own way. We wander through life imagining that everything revolves around us. We wander through life with an ever-diminishing view of who You are, and what Your plans and purposes are; with a distorted view of ourselves. Lord, I pray that as we unpack the truth of Your Word, You will blow apart our narrowness. I pray that You will drag us kicking and screaming out of our narrowness, out of our selfish comfort zones – and reveal Yourself to us. Reveal to us the power of Your Spirit, the power of Your Word in this world and in our lives. I pray that we will become men and women of power – the power to be holy, the power to sacrifice our lives for You, the power to take up our cross every day to follow You. As*

*we continue in Your Word and come to know the truth, Your truth, may the truth set us free to be all that You made us to be. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Know that this is what I am praying for you and for me. Because if you and I are going to live lives that truly count for Christ, if you and I are going to have the impact in this world that God had always planned, we're going to need that power – and it's a power that we discover in God's Word as the Holy Spirit etches the truth on our hearts.

Why? Why are we going to need that power?

Well, apart from our Christian life perhaps not being quite as “*super-abundant*” as Jesus promised, they say that following Jesus isn't easy. In fact, it's not just “*they*” who say it. Jesus actually said that following Him wouldn't be easy, because following Him means swimming against the tide of popular opinion. Following Jesus means, all too often ... in fact most of the time ... going in the opposite direction. That's why we need power ... power unlimited ... to follow Jesus.

*Remember the word that I said to you, "Servants are not greater than their master. "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you ... (John 15:20)*

And again ...

*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world. (John 16:33)*

The original Greek word translated into the English word "persecution" literally means to have the life squeezed out of you, to be crushed. And again ...

*Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:21,22)*

And again, this time through the Apostle Paul:

*Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)*

Are you getting the picture here? We want our walk with Jesus to be all warm and fluffy; sweetness and light. In fact, so conditioned

are we with the worldly notion of comfort and success, that most of us have come to believe that when our lives are going well, that equates to God's blessing. And when things are tough, well, obviously we must be outside of God's will for our lives. Obviously we've strayed. Because tests, trials and persecutions are an abnormality, right? They're nothing but a temporary aberration, and interruption of the normality of blessing, comfort and success.

But that's not the story that the Bible tells. It's not the story that Jesus tells. And in the midst of all that, Jesus explains that:

*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. (Luke 9:23-26)*

One of the reasons that so many Christians are living powerless lives, is that they're expecting the wrong things out of their walk with Jesus. They expect that their walk will be easy. But what Jesus

One of the reasons that so many Christians are living powerless lives, is that they're expecting the wrong things out of their walk with Jesus.

promises is that when our walk is difficult, which it often will be, He will be right there with us, leaning into the problem, pulling with us, pushing with us, applying His power to help us overcome the trial, whilst still giving us a role to play.

That's exactly what He meant when He said:

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28-30)

So far in this book, we've been talking about the unlimited power that's available to you and me through God's Word. It seems like a bit of a crazy notion – this idea that you can find incredible power, unlimited power in a book. But the Bible, well ... the Bible isn't just any book. It's the living Word of the living God and when God speaks, amazing things happen.

Two key verses change everything about how we look at God's Word. This is what the Bible says about the Bible itself:



*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (Hebrews 4:12)*

It never ceases to amaze me how people who call themselves Christians think that they can live their lives in peace and joy and power and service ... by never, ever opening the Bible. Never, ever feasting on the living, active Word of God that helps us discern the intentions of our hearts. Because let's face it, it's in our heart that we deceive ourselves. It's in our heart that we conceive sin and give birth to it. It's in our heart that we develop false images of comfort and success, so that when trials and temptations come, they come (as the enemy would have it) with the element of surprise, making them even more potent and dangerous.

And so we do need teaching, we do need reproof, correction and training in righteousness, in order to be proficient and equipped

for every good work.

What I've discovered in my life is that there are fundamental flaws and weaknesses in my personality, that, try as I might, I am powerless to change. And yet, when I let God's Word wash through my heart, when I allow the Holy Spirit to write God's Word on my heart, He does things that I could never do, He unleashes power ... power unlimited ... to do the things I cannot do. That's what happens when we listen to God through His Word. Because God *calls into existence the things that do not yet exist* (Romans 4:17).

Think about it, how did God create the universe?

*God said "Let there be light and there was light."*

(Genesis 1:4)

*God said "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters."*

(Genesis 1:6)

*God said "Let dry land appear" and it was so .*

(Genesis 1:9)

God said ... God said ... God said ... and so the universe was created. In other words God spoke the whole universe, the trillions

of stars, the great lights, all the creatures and plants on the earth ... into existence. God said ... and it was so. That's the power of God's Word. And if that isn't power unlimited, I don't know what is.

But ... there always seems to be a "but" doesn't there? ... but you and I, all too often, we want that power for all the wrong reasons, because as I said, we have wrong expectations. Let's be perfectly honest: by and large we want God's power to make our lives better, rather than to empower us to sacrifice our lives for Christ's sake. We want God's power so that we can get ahead, or overcome this, or to get that ... rather than to take up our cross and follow Jesus as He called us to do.

Let me ask you plainly, quietly but very honestly: *For what purpose do you want God's power, God's unlimited power, in your life?*

Is it in order to change the difficult circumstances, the difficult people, the things out there, the things around you that are causing you grief? Or is it in order that God would change you, to empower you, to enable you to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth? So that the Holy Spirit would give you the power to

take up your Cross and lay down your life, to potentially lose it all, for Christ's sake?

Everything that I say in this book about power unlimited comes with a warning. Don't try this at home, unless you're prepared to lose it all because this wild, untamed Jesus is radically countercultural. What's more, He's calling His followers to a radical, countercultural life. A life that could cost you ... No, that's wrong. A life that *will* cost you, everything.

Check out these encounters that Jesus had with the religious establishment. It's worth taking a few moments to see how Jesus upset the prevailing culture of His day:

*At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on*

*the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."*

*He left that place and entered their synagogue; a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, "Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?" so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. (Matthew 12:1-13)*

Do you get it? This is what got Jesus killed. This is why they crucified Him ... because He shone light where there was darkness; because He brought truth where there were lies ... and that upset people. Have you noticed how vitriolic people, society, culture become when you stand up for the rights of the unborn

child? Or when you speak with love of the wonder of God's plan for marriage to be a sublime union between one man and one woman? Or when you pull back from the filthy jokes that people tell at work? Have you noticed that?

Have you noticed what secular society is saying these days about the "*dangerous religious teachings*" in schools ... when for centuries Christians have been responsible for taking education far and wide across this globe, founding schools, founding hospitals, caring for the needy. When most of our laws were founded upon the Judeo-Christian ethic?

Have you noticed?

Make no mistake about it: Jesus isn't calling us to an easy life. When you follow Jesus you are going to upset people. They will come against you like nothing else on earth. And that right there is why you're going to need power unlimited: to make it through in love, to continue shining the light of God's love into this earth. Despite the opposition, despite the persecution, despite the difficult people, despite the difficult circumstances. In fact, because of them.

In our shallow worldly way, we think that the joy of the Lord is about having a happy, clappy life, a “*peaches and cream*” existence. But as Adrian Plass writes in his brilliant poem “*Amen*”:

*You're going to need the joy to bear the pain and sorrow.*

Jesus is radically countercultural. If you set your heart on following Him, you are going to suffer. It's not an aberration this whole suffering thing, it's par for the course.

And yet, when we get God's Word into us, the promise of Jesus, the Son of God Himself, is this:

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. (John 15:7,8)*

Did you get that? If the Word of God abides in you, dwells in you, has sway in your heart and in your decision-making, in your thoughts and words and deeds, and if you abide in Jesus, you can ask for whatever you wish – whatever – and it will be done for you. There it is. Power unlimited. But not to do the things that you selfishly desire anymore. Because once God's Word abides in you,

you'll be asking for the things that He wants.

Jesus is called "*the Word*" in the Bible. The Bible is called "*God's Word*". And the two are completely inseparable. They are, in a very real sense, one and the same. Because God's Word is God speaking; God communicating. He does that through the Bible. He does that through the Jesus of the Bible. And when God's Word doesn't abide in us, when our Bible is gathering dust on a shelf somewhere, it is not communicating what God wants us to hear, through Jesus.

But when you and I spend time each day in His Word, reading what He has to say, allowing His Word to be written by God the Holy Spirit onto our hearts, allowing God to reveal Himself to us as He speaks, then ... then our prayers will lose their selfish edge. Then our prayers will sound a lot more like this:

*Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come.*

*Your will be done on this earth, as it is in heaven.*

There it is. That's the place. That's where you discover *power unlimited*.





CHAPTER SEVEN

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laying hold of  
God's power

Where are you right now? Where is your thinking at? Are you feeling challenged? I've often said that "challenged" is a Christian code word that really means "condemned".

"That was a challenging sermon" usually means that your pastor had you squirming in your seat, uncomfortable in the knowledge that you fall so far short of what God wants for your life. So at this point, I just wanted to remind you of something. Something very, very important:

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

*So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.*

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

(Romans 7:21-8:2)

As things turned out, the Apostle Paul, whom incidentally, God called to write almost half of the books in the New Testament – had exactly the same problem with sin as you and I do. It was a struggle for him, as it is for you and me. But in the first verse of Chapter 8 of the book of Romans, (a chapter called “*the Himalayas*” of the New Testament by some scholars – the absolute high point if you will) Paul hits on the truth about sin and condemnation:

*There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

I'm believing that that's something that you need to hear right at this point. Because we only have access to the power of God by His manifest grace, made active through faith.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8,9)*

So, it is by grace and grace alone that we are able to talk about laying hold of God's power unlimited in our lives. That's something I wanted to remind you of. Because God hasn't brought His Word

to you, in order to condemn you. No, as Jesus said, His plan is to save you and to set you free from the body of sin and death.

That's why He has conferred on you His power unlimited through His Spirit and His Word. All too often we hear a message, or you read a book like this one, and what you feel is condemnation.

That's not what this book is about. That's not what the Bible is about. There is no condemnation – none – for those who are in Christ Jesus. None! Because Christ has already taken the punishment that we deserve, on Himself on that Cross. And after He rose again, He poured out His Spirit, to give us power.

*So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)*

But it's one thing to talk about power unlimited. That's what we've been doing so far in this book. Great. But it's another thing

entirely to experience God's *power unlimited* in our lives. And that's what we've come to in this chapter. Actually laying hold of the *hyperballistic, megathonic, dynamic* power that God has already made available to you through your faith in Jesus.

So how do you actually lay hold of that power?

Well ... the answer may not be what you think.

A few years ago now, I had the opportunity to speak with a group of high school students at the opening of their senior campus. The subject of my presentation was this: "How to Get More Out of Your Parents". I just remember that when I was at high school, speakers at those functions were so incredibly boring. They wheeled out these grey-haired, doddering old guys who droned on for what seemed to be an eternity.

Well, now I was the grey-haired, doddering old guy and so I wanted to grab their attention, hold it, shake them and give them something that they'd remember for the rest of their days. My plan worked. The young people hung on every word and a few of the parents, I have to tell you, were listening pretty intently as well.

The heart of the presentation, the central thesis if you will, was this: our parents, at least the greatest majority of them, are hardwired to bless us. With everything that they are, they just want the best for us. But what teenagers do time and time again (I know that I certainly did) is rebel against their parents and that rebellion stops the flow of parental blessing dead in its tracks. Am I right?

I shared some practical things that these young men and women could do to respond effectively to their parents' love while moving through that difficult transitional stage from childhood to adulthood. Things that would get that natural blessing flowing again. You could see some lights going on as they came to grips with how to respond to their parents. As it turns out, our relationship with God is no different.

Over the past 20 or so years I've spent a lot of time studying God's Word – the 66 different books in the Bible – and so I've had the chance to mull it all over rather a lot. And while I know I've really just scratched the surface, the more I think about it, as I said earlier on, the Bible appears to me to be about these four basic things:

1. Who God is,
2. God's will and purpose for us,
3. Who you and I are in Him, and
4. How we can respond to God.

It's this last one that we're going to chat about in this chapter. And as things turn out, this one is the key to laying hold of the *power unlimited* that He has for us.

Now as I said earlier, some people think that all the Bible has to offer is a bunch of rules and regulations. But as you read your way through the Bible, what you end up discovering is that "*how we can respond to God*" isn't actually the main thing. Rather it kind of drops out as a natural consequence of the other three; once we start wrapping our hearts around who God is, what His will and purpose are and who we are in Christ, it changes our hearts. For me at least, my heart is fit to explode in response to God and what Jesus did for me.

It's simply not a "*rules and regulations*" thing. I don't remain faithful to my wife because I *have* to (although I do have to). I stay faithful



to her because I *want* to; it's my response to her love and to our promise to one another. As it turns out, it's not such a difficult thing to do, because she loves me and my natural response to her love is my faithfulness to her.

Well, it's exactly the same with God. As we encounter Him in the pages of The Book, as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in our hearts, our hearts change. It's the same in any good relationship. The more you communicate, the deeper the relationship becomes and the stronger the desire to love one another and honour one another becomes. When you look at it that way it makes complete sense doesn't it?

That's why there is so much power in spending time daily in God's Word. Because that's where the relationship develops and deepens. That's where our hearts are softened. That's where we draw closer to God Himself.

Now in any relationship, it's not enough simply to know that we ought to respond, or even to want to respond. We need to know how to respond. So often in marriages the husband wants to show love to the wife and the wife wants to show love to the husband,

but they're actually two very different people and so they don't know how to love one another. The husband tries to love his wife by giving her what he would want. And the wife tries to love her husband by giving him what she would want.

As a result, neither husband or wife feels loved because their spouse isn't giving them the love that they need and want, and so a lot of marriages fall apart simply because people don't know how to love one another. And in a very real sense, unless we know how to love God, we're not really loving Him at all.

We were talking earlier about teenagers. Nobody ever explained to me what was going on as I was growing up. You know, we start with a total dependence on our parents. As a baby we have breast milk, we're in nappies and progressively as the years go by, we grow to become increasingly independent of our parents to the point where one day, we're equipped to go and make a home and a family of our own.

It's a natural thing to grow up and become an adult and to be independent of your parents. Quoting the Old Testament, Jesus said:

And in a very real sense, unless we know how to love God, we're not really loving Him at all.

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they'll become one flesh.*  
(Matthew 19:5)

But in those teenage years, we're kind of almost adults but not really. We're still dependant on our parents financially. We're still under their authority and discipline; we still live in their home. Those awkward in-between years are times when a lot of teens rebel against their parents in all sorts of different ways. You know ... the teenage roll of the eyes, "I know it all and what would my parents know."

As teenagers, we continually do things parents tell us not to. We just do them anyway. We leave the empty drink can on the sink or the underwear on the floor in the bathroom. Whatever it is that a teenager does that drives their parents nuts. And once they know what drives their parents nuts, they'll do it all the more. I did that as a teenager, how about you? You establish a pattern of behaviour that's rebellious in order to assert your emerging independence and so you get into a rut that you don't know how to get out of.

In the short time that these young folk and I spent together at that

senior college opening ceremony, I just gave them some practical advice on how to honour their parents so that the natural blessing would flow to them again.

And it's exactly the same in our relationship with God. It's the little things that we do or don't do that demonstrate our love for God (or not). The way we think, the way we behave, the way we hold onto things like pride and selfishness. We might be able to understand God's love. Perhaps we even understand what Jesus did on the Cross for us, but unless we know how to respond to that, we almost certainly won't respond properly ... because we'll do it on our terms rather than His.

The Apostle John explained how to love God this way:

*This is love for God, to obey His commandments and His commands aren't burdensome because everyone born of God overcomes the world. (1 John 5:3)*

Now imagine that you don't communicate with God on a regular basis (I know that for some, that doesn't take a lot of imagination!). You drift apart from God. The things of this world seem to take on a far greater importance. Meeting the deadlines at work. Running

after the kids. Catching up with friends. Oh, and that new car that you really want to buy and go into debt for. And ...

At some point, you forget what honouring God actually looks like. At some point, honouring Him, loving Him through obedience simply becomes unimportant. You can know when that's happened because at that point, God seems like He's a million miles away. And power ... well, what's that? A dim, distant memory at best. I wonder if that sounds at all familiar to you.

Here's what a regular pattern of Bible reading and prayer has done for me: it's changed me progressively. Just when I'm going through a tough time in a relationship, I read something like this:

*There is no fear in love but perfect love drives out all fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears isn't made perfect in love, we love because God first loved us. If anyone says "I love God" yet hates his brother, he's a liar because anyone who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he hasn't seen and he has given us this command, "Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:18-21)*

Just when you're going through a rough patch in a relationship and you want to rip someone's head off, you pick up your Bible and it's amazing how something like that passage seems to be in the next chapter of whatever book you're reading. That sort of thing has happened to me more times than I can remember – in the very next chapter that I'm due to read today, God has precisely what I need for what I'm going through right at the moment.

So . . . you read something like that, and even a spiritual dunderhead like me can recognise that right here, right now, God is speaking directly to me about how I should respond to His love. Right in the middle of this difficult relationship thing that I'm going through.

Just when I'm struggling with this or that, I turn the next page and He speaks to me right into that struggle, right into that need, right into that "I want to go my way" thing that's happening, God gently whispers, *"Okay, but if you want to respond to my love, this is my way. It's a much narrower path, it's a much more difficult path, but these are my ways and my ways are not always your ways. My thoughts are not always your thoughts. Follow me, over in this direction. It'll turn out to be a much better way."*

His quiet, still voice speaks into our hearts with an exquisite mix of power and gentleness, calling us in His direction, not our own. And for me, it's always been that God's spoken to me in a way that my heart just wants to receive what He says. In a way that nobody else could speak and He does that through His Word, the Bible. He speaks in a way that changes me, that fills me and equips me and prepares me and encourages me ... even though sometimes, at first, I struggle with Him, as we all do.

What helps – what's made it progressively easier for me to live my life His way – is spending time in God's Word on a frequent basis. Because a man or woman of God's Word, ultimately finds it much easier to follow after God, than someone who doesn't listen to Him speak most days.

Now I have to tell you, this is still very much a work in progress and others, no doubt, are much further down the track of godliness than I am. But that's not the point. Like a surgeon God is taking out my cancers of sin, reconstructing, repairing, healing and encouraging me. That's what happens when we go to Him and listen to what He has to say. He teaches us and shows us how to respond – how to lay hold of the power unlimited that He has



already given us – when we spend time in His Word. He just does!

That's why there is such life-changing power in the living Word of the living God.

CHAPTER EIGHT

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**excuses, excuses,  
excuses**

Perhaps you've been reading along so far, and you're thinking to yourself "Well, that's all good, but ...". If you have, then you're not alone. There are a couple of big "*buts*" that stop people from reading their Bibles.

First up, it all seems a bit trite doesn't it? Just a tad simplistic: "Read your Bible and you will lay hold of God's *power unlimited* for your life." After all, that's the essence of what I've been saying. For anyone who has never experienced the transformative, healing power of God in their lives, or perhaps hasn't experienced it for a long, long time, it's difficult to imagine that something as routine, as seemingly mundane as "*reading the Bible*" could possibly make a difference.

And what's more, there are many people who couldn't imagine establishing a regular routine of reading the Bible.

Well, that brilliant bit of research by the Centre of Bible Engagement that I mentioned earlier, actually asked people why they don't read their Bibles. Interesting, in America, 93% of the general population has a Bible in their home. In fact, the average number of Bibles per household is four! And yet, the vast majority

of Americans, and indeed of Christians, do not engage with their Bibles, God's living Word, on a regular basis.

The obvious question to ask then, is why not?

There are two "*excuses*" if I may call them that, which consistently top the list:

1. Because I don't have time
2. Because I find the Bible difficult to understand.

And those are the two things that we're going to have a quiet chat about in this chapter.

## **I Don't Have Time**

It's Friday evening. You've had a long, hard week at work, and you're looking forward to a quiet, relaxing night at home. An easy dinner, perhaps a bit of TV to relax, and then off to bed.

You've been there, right?

But ... there's a knock at the door. Darn! So you get up off the comfortable sofa, pause the TV and go to answer the door.

To your surprise, it's Jesus. He's come to drop by for a meal, a coffee and a chat. "No, leftovers are just fine. It's not about the food," He says.

You now have a tough decision to make. Standing at your door is the Creator of the Universe. The King of kings and the Lord of lords. You've been dying to ask Him a million questions, but it's Friday night and you're tired ... and you were looking forward to a quiet night at home.

What do you do?

Well, I'm guessing that 99.9% of Christians would enthusiastically invite Him in for a chat, irrespective of their plans or circumstances. I mean, just imagine! Getting to pick His brain. Hearing Him speak to you audibly, in person. It's an opportunity too good to pass up, isn't it?

... or is it?

The Bible is God speaking to you. The Creator of the Universe. The King of kings and the Lord of lords, ready to have a quiet, fireside chat ... with *you*.

Just before Jesus was betrayed and crucified, prayed this to His Father in Heaven:

*Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*  
(John 17:24)

So right there, you have the primary reason that Jesus went to the Cross to suffer and die for you: so that you could be with Him where He is, to behold His glory! That's it. That's what the Cross was all about.

*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

The answer to that agonising question that Jesus cried out from the Cross, is: for you and for me! That's why God allowed His Son to die on that brutal Cross. This is God crying out down through the centuries to you and me, here and now:

*Don't you realise? Don't you realise how much I love you?*

Now, look Jesus in the eye and tell Him that you don't have time to sit down and chat with Him; that you don't have time to open

His living Word and listen to Him. Go on, I dare you ... look Him in the eye and tell Him!

Perhaps you think I'm being a bit rough on you, but tell me I'm wrong. Do you see how lame an excuse "I don't have time" really is?!

Somehow, we can find the time to watch the rerun of the rerun of the rerun of our favourite sitcom on TV. Somehow we can find time to play solitaire on our tablet, or to while away hours reading useless rubbish on Facebook or whatever other social media platform you may be addicted to.

But we can't find time for Jesus? We can't find time to listen to God speaking to us?

Look, the simple truth is this. We will make time for whatever we think is important, and for the things that we enjoy. There's plenty of time, and all it requires is a decision to allocate some time to Jesus. For me, it's early in the morning while everyone else is asleep. I love those times with Jesus – they set up my day like nothing else.

We will make time for whatever we think is important, and for the things that we enjoy. There's plenty of time, and all it requires is a decision to allocate some time to Jesus.



For you, perhaps mornings don't work. Maybe for you it's on the train or on the bus to work. Or a half an hour when you put the children to bed, or late at night. There's a time there somewhere in your regular day, for you to spend with Jesus.

Find it, make it a habit and here's my challenge. Spend that time with Jesus five days a week for the next month. Just give it a go. Some unhurried prayer. A chapter or a half a chapter a day in the Bible, with time afterwards to think through it, pray through it, ask God some questions ... and I will be absolutely amazed if, at the end of that month, you are not absolutely hooked on that time in your day.

There is always time. Take the challenge. 20 out of the next 30, read your Bible in a quiet, unhurried time ... and I guarantee you, it will be life-changing.

## **I Find the Bible Difficult to Understand**

Okay, so God's Word is packed full of power ... *power unlimited* ... to transform your life. But the second issue (aka excuse) that

people have which they say stops them from reading it, is that they find it difficult to understand. Well, that's something that we're going to tackle in the remainder of this chapter and the next one. Because you see, I think it's time we did something about this.

We've all heard of those word association tests that psychologists use. You know, they say "black", you say "white"; they say "rabbit" and you say "carrot"; "day" ... "night"; "God" ... "love"; "devil" ... "evil"; "Bible" ... hmmm ... Bible? How do you respond to that? Stuffy, old, irrelevant? Well, different people will have some different views but actually in Australia where I live, the Bible is one of the least trusted of all historical documents, even though forensically, it is by far, I mean by a country mile, the most accurate and attested to ancient text on the planet.

Now this thing that we call "*the Bible*", it's a big book, it's massive and it can be daunting. To give you an idea, the Bible contains 788,258 words, 31,102 verse, 1,189 chapters and 66 books written over a period of approximately 1,600 years by different people in different cultures. (Source: the Gideons)

No wonder some people find it just a tad daunting. So I thought it might be useful just to have a look to see what this Bible is exactly.

But first, I want to share a secret with you: I never read a book cover to cover until I was in my mid twenties. Sad but true. I managed to get through school and university, without ever reading a book from beginning to end. I remember at university, in first year English, we studied the book *Wuthering Heights* which absolutely bored me to tears. I'm sorry, it just did. So I shut the book and never opened it again. Fortunately there are companies that publish "crib notes"; you know the summary of the book, critical elements of the plot, and some notes written by critics and academics. So I just quickly read the crib notes, wrote essays and managed, by and large, to do reasonably well.

On top of that, I've never, ever liked libraries either! You know how libraries have this kind of dusty, dank smell; all of them are the same the world over. Every library on the planet has that very same smell. So I thought about this for a while, and I've asked myself, "Berni, why don't you like libraries? Why did it take you so long to read books?" The answer, I guess comes, in two parts.

Firstly, libraries for me always felt really big and inaccessible. They have tens of thousands of books and in the “*olden days*” (as my children call them) when I was at university, they had card systems for finding books and periodicals – these days at least they have computerised catalogues. That old card system was based on the Dewey Classification System as I recall, and finding anything just took so incredibly long.

And secondly, when you did find the stuff, there was always so much of it. There was so much time involved in looking through all those books and researching them. I mean some people are natural bookworms. Well I’m not. I still frankly don’t like libraries. So (sorry to all the librarians) I just don’t like libraries. I haven’t darkened the doorstep of one since I finished my last degree quite a few years ago now.

I think, for a lot of people, the Bible is exactly like that. It feels big and inaccessible. There are many, many people who wouldn’t mind having a read but, for goodness sake, where do you start? Hasn’t someone written some “crib notes”. Can I skim through the main bits quickly, gasp the main points and just be done with it? And to

anyone who feels a bit that way, allow me to say – I get it!

But humour me. Why don't we together take a few minutes to break it down a bit; to make this thing called "*the Bible*" just a bit more accessible. Because it's not as bad as some may think.

I remember when I started Bible College only a few months after becoming a Christian, everyone took for granted that we knew all about the Bible. The reality was that I didn't and my hunch is, I wasn't alone. So let's unpack it a bit, let's demystify it a bit. All of a sudden, you know, it becomes a whole bunch more accessible.

As I said, this thing that we call "*the Bible*" is made up of 66 different books written by different people over a period of around 1,600 years. And the last book was written almost 2,000 years ago.

There are essentially two parts to the Bible (this was complete news to me when I first opened it) – the Old Testament and the New Testament. When I started at Bible College I didn't know which one was which. The Old Testament is the story of how God interacted with and engaged with His chosen people, the Israelites. The Old Testament is written completely B.C., before Christ – before Jesus came to be here on earth with us.

It's written mostly in the original language of Hebrew, the language of the Israelites. In fact, what Christians call the Old Testament is exactly the same as the Hebrew Scriptures. Jews still use those same Scriptures today, but Christians call it the Old Testament of the Bible.

Now there are some small parts of books (like the book of Daniel) written in a language called Aramaic (which incidentally is the language that Jesus actually spoke) but by and large, the Old Testament was originally written in the language of Hebrew. And what we have today, the thing that we call the Old Testament is an English translation of that. Now there are lots of books in the Old Testament with odd-sounding names: Deuteronomy and Judges and Chronicles, and then there's Ezekiel, Habakkuk and Zephaniah ... in fact, there are 39 separate books in the Old Testament, broken down into four main categories:

1. The first five books, Genesis through to Deuteronomy, are the Jewish or Hebrew Law, the Torah.
2. And then you go from the books of Joshua through to Nehemiah which together document the history of what

God did with and for His people, the Israelites – and how they responded.

3. Following that come the wisdom books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Lamentations. As the title “*wisdom*” suggests, they’re full of God’s wisdom for you and me.
4. And finally, the rest of the books in the Old Testament are written by men called Prophets. Men whom God chose to speak to His people and call them back to Him.

That’s the Old Testament, it’s a story of God engaging with His people, the Israelites. And importantly, the name “*Israel*” means “to struggle with God”. What an apt name. The whole of the Old Testament is how God’s chosen people struggled to keep God’s law. It’s a huge, sweeping, gripping story that sets the stage for the coming of Jesus. When you start to get your head around the central dilemma of the Old Testament – the struggle with sin and rebellion in God’s creation – you finally realise why Jesus had to come.

And that brings us to the 27 books of the New Testament which

begin pretty much with the arrival of Jesus into this world. The New Testament is predominantly written in the ancient language Koine Greek – the language which was spoken throughout the Roman Empire, which dominated the known world at the time.

1. The first four books of the New Testament – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – are called the “*Gospels*”. They are the historical account of Jesus’ life and His ministry – what Jesus did and said and how people responded to Him.
2. The next book, the book of Acts is the story of the first 20 or so years of the Christian Church, beginning with Jesus’ ascension into Heaven.
3. Finally there are a number of letters called “*Epistles*” written by Apostles like Paul, Peter and John. They were written to Churches (Ephesians, Colossians, Romans) that they were involved in, or in some cases, to individuals (such as Titus or Timothy).

Okay, this may all be a little old hat for some, but I know for many others, just a simple understanding of the basic structure of the Bible is going to be a real help in making it more accessible.



Honestly, when I was a new Christian, no one ever bothered to explain this to me – I wish they had.

Now at this point, perhaps you've got a big question going round in your head right now: how accurate is the Bible? Before the printing press was ever invented by Gutenberg in 1450, the Bible – the Old Testament and New Testament were transcribed over and over by people called Scribes, who copied the texts by hand. It's hard to imagine, isn't it? And of course the risk always with these hierarchies of manual copies (copies of copies of copies) is quite obviously that errors could and would creep in.

But these days, there is a science called "*Textual Criticism*". It studies where and when these errors crept into the Bible as it was copied through all those generations of manuscripts. And what it tells us, is that having studied thousands upon thousands of manuscripts, the levels of accuracy are remarkable. I mean, it's a science, people have actually done this as a life's work. There are very, very few words or sentences where there is any doubt as to what was originally written – and of those small number of instances where there is some doubt, none of them contain information critical to our understanding of what God is trying to say.

Now blessedly, these days, this thing called the Bible has been translated into easy-to-read, contemporary versions. The difficult-to-understand King James Version with all those “*thees*” and “*thous*” has been replaced by a great range of accurate translations in contemporary language, making them much, much easier to understand.

And here’s some really great news. Did you know that more than half of the 66 books, **more than half**, can be read in half an hour or less.

All we’ve been able to do is to scrape the surface, by looking at some basic facts about the Bible. But sadly, no one took the time to teach me the basics until I hit the sink-or-swim academic environment of theological college. I remember becoming a Christian and going and sitting in Church and people were just teaching from the Bible which was wonderful, but nobody ever explained to me that it was 66 books written by a whole bunch of people over different periods of time and how the whole thing plugged together, That some of it was stories and history, some of it was letters to churches and people and some of it was even poetry.

But when you simplify and demystify all that stuff, it turns out that it's just a wonderful, wonderful Book of many parts.

And with the many contemporary translations, it's much, much easier to read than I ever thought. As I started to read the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament – I was completely blown away by this amazing Jesus that I met within their pages.

Who would ever have thought ... the Bible. So accessible and easy to get into.

CHAPTER NINE

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**some really useful  
resources**

Now on our quest to make the Bible – God’s living Word – more accessible, we need to go beyond the basic structure of the different books that we discussed in the previous chapter. Because, when I’ve been reading my Bible, there have been many times when things haven’t made sense. And it’s not just me – it happens to everyone.

It’s not that I’m stupid; it’s just that I can have some trouble working it out. So if you find yourself in that same boat from time to time, stick with me, because in this chapter, we’re going to take the next step in making your Bible a whole bunch more accessible to you. And if the Word of God truly is the primary source of power unlimited (one of the key ways that God imparts His power to us) it makes sense to go to a little bit of effort to understand what’s being said in its pages, don’t you think?

Now the fundamental problem that we have in understanding the Bible, is that it was written over a period of 1,600 years, by different people, with different perspectives, with different things going on historically, in different places and different cultures. I mean, that’s it – it’s an historical document and there’s nothing much we can do about that.

So there are words and names and places and concepts and ways of thinking ... that often times aren't familiar to us. I mean, as an Australian, when I think of a shepherd, I'm thinking of a guy on a motorbike, with three or four cattle dogs, herding a flock of three thousand sheep. In some parts of Australia, because the properties are so huge, they even use helicopters.

But mention the profession of shepherding to a first century Jew, and the picture that it conjures up in their head is totally different to the picture in mine. So, the truth is, that in understanding the richness and depth of the Bible, we have a historical and cultural gap to bridge.

Fortunately, there are a whole bunch of people much smarter than I am, who have, over the years, done an enormous amount of scholarly work to bridge that gap on our behalf. And the good news is that all their work comes packaged for you and me, ready to use here and now. And those resources, that I use time and time again, are now even more accessible through the internet.

Today I just want to share some of those resources with you, to help you read your Bible for all it's worth. To help you discover and lay hold of the incredible power of God's Word in your life.

I remember 20 or so years ago, just after I became a Christian, I started attending a tiny little Baptist church in the southern suburbs of Sydney, in a little place called Oyster Bay. Our pastor, Pastor Phil, was a passionate and gifted Bible teacher who has had a huge impact on my life. As well as Sunday services, the Church used to have these little home Bible study groups that would meet one night a week in someone's home. In our small group, five of us would gather together and always start off with a cup of coffee, some biscuits, and a quick chat about everything that was going on in our lives. And at the time, the particular little home fellowship that I'd joined as a brand new Christian, was studying the Old Testament book of Hosea.

So we'd lob in there each Wednesday evening, open our Bibles and using some pre-prepared Bible study questions work our way through a given passage of Scripture. So far, so good. But right through that book, over and over and over again, Hosea talks about "*Ephraim*" – that word is mentioned 29 times by Hosea. So I remember asking these people, most of whom had been Christians for a good many years, "Okay, who or what is this "*Ephraim*" thing?"

I mean, Hosea kept talking about it and so it seemed to me to be quite central to what he was saying. And yet no one could tell me who or what “*Ephraim*” was. Now it turns out Ephraim was one of the tribes of Israel descended from one of Joseph’s sons (also called Ephraim) and there’s a whole history around this tribe and how they rebelled against God. But we didn’t know any of that in this little Bible study group. Since “*Ephraim*” was being used with quite some significant, symbolic meaning, a lot of what God was saying to us through this amazingly powerful book of Hosea, was frankly lost on us.

I share that little story with you because it had a huge impact on me. I remember thinking to myself, “This isn’t good enough. We’re wasting our time if we don’t understand the meaning of things.” And on top of that, unbeknown to me or the more experienced members of that Bible study fellowship, there is a huge amount of significance in the timing and context of the book of Hosea. Again, this was lost on us, meaning that we were just missing out on the rich, powerful truths that God wanted to share with us.

And this sort of thing happens a lot more than you might think.



There are so many Christians who go their whole lives without having, say a thumbnail sketch of the salvation history of Israel in the Old Testament, in their heads. Or without knowing the basic difference between a Pharisee and a Sadducee. Or a basic understanding of geography which is often used to convey meaning in the Bible.

Let's consider the story of the Good Samaritan. Now almost everyone has heard of this guy, but the story completely loses its meaning if we don't understand the Samaritans and who they were and what the Jews thought of them. When Jesus told this story to the assembled masses, they all knew who a Samaritan was and how Samaritans related to the Jews. But it's not natural for us to know that, because we're historically and culturally removed from that context.

As it turns out, the Samaritans worshipped the same God as the Jews, but the Jews looked down on them and despised them as half casts and illegitimate children of God. The Samaritans were scum as far as the average Jew was concerned. So, the fact that it was a Samaritan who helped the man from Jerusalem that was robbed and beaten, is radical! Those people listening to Jesus

telling that parable would have gone home scratching their heads, debating around the dinner table what He actually meant. Why did He choose a Samaritan? What is the Son of God saying about true love through this story?

Do you see how much we miss, by not knowing the significance of the Samaritan?

I remember too, coming to grips with the Levitical system of blood sacrifice in the Old Testament. When I think about blood sacrifice it's pretty ghastly to me here and now, but it's something I really had to understand in order to comprehend what Jesus did for me on the Cross. So I decided I was going to find out about it, not just skim the surface, not just read through a story and have them talk about "*Ephraim*" or "*Samaria*" or all these other things I didn't know about. I didn't want to miss out on what God was trying to say to me through these stories.

After all, if the Bible is God's Word and if God is speaking to us through it, I decided I really did need to know what He was saying. And surprisingly, that's not as difficult as I thought it would be. So right now, I'm going to share with you a handful of really simple

resources that made absolutely, the world of difference.

**The first one is my Bible**, a simple English translation. These days, the New International Version or the NIV as it's called, is really popular. I happen to use the New Revised Standard Version (the NRSV). There's a translation called "The Message" which is really in here-and-now language. I use it as a supplementary Bible, not as my main one. There's the Contemporary English Version (CEV), the New English Translation (NET) and quite a few more.

Which one is the best one? Simple. The one you're going to read. Go and choose one and read it.

Now on top of your basic Bible, you can get a thing called **A Study Bible**. In addition to the words of the biblical text, a study Bible also has a huge amount of additional resources packed into it. At the beginning of each of the 66 books of the Bible, it will explain the context of that book – when and where it was written, why it was written, to whom it was written and by whom. If only I'd had one of those back then when we were studying the book of Hosea. Study Bibles generally also contain word definitions, explanatory

notes, maps, cross references and whole bunch more.

So if you want to do more than just skim across the surface, it's really good to have one of those – a study Bible is a really worthwhile investment and it's not much more than an ordinary Bible. You can get one from a Christian bookshop or you can buy one online. I happen to have an electronic one these days on my tablet device.

**The second resource is my Bible dictionary.** Now I happened to purchase a Bible dictionary called the Holman Bible Dictionary quite a few years ago – it's just a single volume with pictures and diagrams. So when I was reading the Bible and it talked about the "*Temple*" for instance, I could go to my Bible dictionary and look at it and see a picture and plans explaining the different parts of the Temple. So I'm able to read a few paragraphs in just a few minutes, and I'm there, I understand what the writer is saying about the Temple, or about the Holy of Holies, or whatever. It's really that quick and that easy.

Or when the Bible talks about Ephraim, I can look up that term, read half a column of information in three minutes, and I know

who or what Ephraim is. In the story of the Good Samaritan – who were the Samaritans? What was their relationship to the Jews? Look it up. Ah! That's what Jesus meant by the story of the Good Samaritan ... and so on.

**The third resource is a Bible timeline.** It's one of these things you can fold out and it's about four pages wide that shows the chronology of the Bible. So when you're reading about King David, you can find out when he was king, who was king before him and after him, what else was going on at that time in history, which Prophets were writing when David was the king and so on. All of a sudden you will be able to put the whole Bible thing in time sequence, and it starts to make much more sense.

And finally, just to top things off, let me tell you about two stunning websites. The first is **biblegateway.com** where you can compare different Bible translations. The second, and to me the most valuable, is **studylight.org**. It has Bible dictionaries and timelines online, the meanings of Greek and Hebrew words, and so many other great resources ... and they're all free! Once you've used them a few times, they just become second nature.

So let me ask you? Do you take Jesus seriously? Do you want to lay hold of the power unlimited that He has ready and waiting for you. Do you want to have God's Word abiding in you so that you can know the truth and the truth can finally set you free? Well, do you?

If you do, you need to take the Bible seriously. And for just a small investment on your part in just a few simple resources, you'll receive such huge dividends in hearing and understanding what God is saying to you today, through His Word.



CHAPTER TEN

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**listen and learn**



I'm hoping and praying that by now, you have come to believe in your heart that God truly does want to unleash His power, *power unlimited*, in your life.

The principal way that He does that is through His Spirit and His Word. That's what we've been talking about a lot in this book. And frankly, I'm excited at the prospect of seeing God's Word abide in you. I'm excited at the prospect of you knowing the truth and so, being set free. Way too many people go to the Holy Spirit for power – and yet they don't give the Spirit of God anything to work with.

Imagine a three-year-old child goes to its father and asks to borrow his electric drill. Would a loving dad say, "Yeah, sure, not a problem. Here it is. Go play and enjoy yourself."? Of course not, because the child doesn't know how to use the drill safely. The child doesn't realise the damage it could do, not to mention the harm that it could do to itself.

It's no different in our relationship with God. There are things that we need to know. Not just head knowledge, although that's

important too. But heart knowledge. A deep, sincere, life-changing knowledge of God and His plans and purposes and who we are in Christ and how He wants us to respond.

And as we progressively become more proficient in the ways of God, – He’s no longer handing the proverbial power tool to a three-year-old child – He can safely unleash more and more power through us. In fact, He’ll start doing that straight away, to empower us to grow and mature in Christ. There’s a fascinating and wonderful passage about this right at the beginning of the book of James towards the end of the New Testament:

*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (James 1:2-8)*

Somehow the Holy Spirit works with us during our times of suffering, during our times of trial ... with the aim of making us *mature and complete, lacking in nothing*. And He brings wisdom to those who ask Him – wisdom that comes from the Word of God. If you'd like to know more about the power of godly wisdom during times of trial, have a read of Proverbs Chapters 1 and 2.

Now, let's say that you're going through a time of trial, but you don't have God's wisdom. I've seen many people do that, and they come out the other side bitter and twisted. Instead of growing and maturing, the experience leaves them stunted in their personality. That's not what God wants for you or for me. And that's why the power of God is unleashed through His Word, the Bible – His wisdom, His truth – into our lives. He wants us to grow through out trials. He wants us to come to Him for His wisdom. Again:

*If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.*  
(James 1:5-8)

And His Word, the Bible is packed full of wisdom and power. But, if your Bible is sitting up there on a shelf gathering dust, well ...

Now as we come to the end of our time together, I want to share with you one other important way that God wants to get His Word into your heart. And the way that He has ordained for that to happen down through the ages, is when you hear His Word preached and you take it into your heart. There is power, real power, *power unlimited* right there in God's Word.

If you spend anytime listening to or watching Christianityworks' radio or television programs, one of the things that you will know is that I'm really passionate about God and what He has to say. Not in a "*religious*" sort of a way but in a "*Jesus*" sort of way.

The thing that really strikes me about Jesus, when you read about Him, is how plain and matter of fact He is about sharing the things of God with people. He doesn't mince His words. He doesn't shy away from putting the truth out there, no matter how difficult it may be for people to receive.

At one stage in fact, it puts a whole bunch of people off. He's been preaching His heart out and this is the response of the crowds that have been following Him:

*Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. (John 6:66)*

We know that the Bible is God speaking to us, and God means to challenge us and to stretch us and to encourage us and to bless us through His Word. I want to encourage you to receive His Word also through Spirit-filled and Spirit-led preaching. Find a church where the Word of God is proclaimed in power and with passion, faithful to the Bible and relevant to your life.

Now that can be something of a tall order.

Over these last 20 years or so, the time that I've been a Christian, I've seen two things. On the one hand, I have been so blessed by some really good teaching. But on the other, I've seen and heard some pretty bad stuff too. In my very first church, Pastor Phil who I mentioned earlier, was a gifted teacher. He just had this ability to open God's Word and speak the things of God into my heart. I learned later this is a real gifting. Different people have different gifts and abilities given to them by God and teaching is one of them. And some people are gifted to preach and teach the Word of God, whilst others, quite plainly, are not.

Jesus had that gift. Time and time again people were amazed because He spoke with a plainness and a power and an authority that they hadn't heard before.

*They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:21,22)*

That's an important distinction there between Jesus and the scribes (we talked about those Scribes back in Chapter 8). In his book *"The Pursuit of God"* A.W. Tozer writes this:

*Hearts that are "fit to break" with love for the Godhead are those who have been in the Presence and have looked with opened eye upon the majesty of Deity. Men of the breaking hearts had a quality about them not known or understood by common men. They habitually spoke with spiritual authority. They had been in the Presence of God and they reported what they saw there. They were prophets, not scribes, for the scribe tells us what he has read, and the prophet tells us what he has seen.*

Tozer is talking there about authentic, Spirit-led, Spirit-filled

preaching by people who themselves, have a genuine, deep, personal relationship with God. Yet there is still so much dead preaching going on in God's church today as people regurgitate things that they have heard. You and I, we need the benefit of God's Word being opened and explained to us in the same kind of way that Jesus preached. With power and authority, not like the Scribes that we've become all too accustomed to.

Jesus didn't always tell people things that they wanted to hear. He didn't tickle their ears with pleasantries.

*"Love your enemy." "Take up your cross and follow me." "Lose your life for my sake and you'll gain your life."* It's not exactly good marketing. Spin merchants would not let Him get up and speak like that today.

I've spent quite a bit of time looking at how Jesus preached. It's real, it's powerful. It's balanced on the one hand and radical on the other and it sort of, well, it cuts through all the selfish rubbish that we carry on with, right to the heart of what God wants to talk about. And my prayer is that when I discharge my gifting to teach in my own way, I will always try to teach like Jesus did.

But sadly I've sat in churches over the years and listened to preachers drone on with dry and theoretical, completely cerebral stuff, things that may well be true, but don't have one iota of relevance to my life. On more than one occasion I've walked out after a church service and within two hours asked myself "Do I remember what he talked about?" And the answer is, "No, not really."

Or you listen to other speakers and there are lots of wonderful words. They're very entertaining and they make people laugh and they tickle their ears with great stories and things they want to hear. And people slap them on the back afterwards, "Praise the Lord, great sermon brother". But later on, I felt as though, yes, I'd been at the Lord's table to be fed, but I had left hungry and empty.

The flipside of that is that with some other preachers, I can remember what they spoke about. Years later, in difficult circumstances, God seems to bring into my heart the words He spoke to me through them.

Preaching and teaching is one of the ways that God gets His Word into us. You see it right throughout the Bible. He uses men



and women to speak to others, to teach them. The Samaritan woman at the well; she went and told people about Jesus. Paul and Peter went out preaching to large crowds and small churches. The question is – how do you get the most out of that? How does preaching and teaching play a part in us reading our Bible and unlocking the *power unlimited* that God has ready and waiting for us?

Well, here are just some of my observations. I see people come into a church on a Sunday and listen to the preacher and yet they don't bring their own Bible with them to follow what the preacher is saying. They don't take any notes. I see their minds and their eyes and their attention wandering all over the place. Really? Is that what they think of God's Word?

Each Sunday I take my Bible with me. I open it and I read the passage that the preacher is talking about. Sometimes I highlight things in my Bible that leap out at me. People can speak all the words that they like, they can crack jokes and have great stories – but the most important thing in any message, the most powerful thing, is God's Word itself. The most important thing is what God is saying. And, secondly, I take some notes. The last time I

People can speak all the words that they like, they can crack jokes and have great stories – but the most important thing in any message, the most powerful thing, is God’s Word itself.

checked, you can't even get through kindergarten without taking some form of notes.

If we take God seriously, if we want to follow Jesus and really take that seriously, we need to take learning seriously. Do you know what a disciple is? A disciple is literally “a learner”. That’s what the word “disciple” means – to be a learner.

And thirdly, the thing that I do when I’ve listened to some really good preaching, is to spend some time afterwards in God’s Word reading it for myself. Sometimes it’s not until you get home and you pray it through and you spend some time in that passage and maybe looking at some other related ones, that God really drops it into your soul. Years ago I heard a preacher teaching on a profound passage:

*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you in due time. Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)*

Now I’ve learnt so much from what God taught me through that preacher in this passage. But I’ve learned just as much and maybe even more from pondering and praying over this Scripture and

looking at other related passages. Learning in my heart, taking God's Word into my heart – that's when I'm able to get off my little tin-pot throne and just walk each day faithfully with Jesus.

And that ... that is why God's Word is so incredibly powerful when it's unleashed in our hearts. Because it changes us, transforming us from glory to glory, back into the image of God Himself.

I've looked at this whole thing of preaching, and having listened to some incredibly powerful sermons as well as some dreadful ones, I've come to the conclusion that there are two types of preaching; dead and alive. Dead preaching is full of words. It's boring and dry or maybe it's hyped up and frothy and bubbly. Whatever it is, at the end of the day, there is no eternal food there because God's Word is not being preached in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's only God's Word by the power of the Spirit that can change us. A preacher cannot change you. A preacher cannot say things in their own strength that will transform your life. But if they are speaking God's Word, if the Holy Spirit somehow takes that Word that they read out from the Bible and puts it into your heart, that's when change happens. That's when power unlimited is unleashed. And only God can do that.

This is how the Apostle Paul put it:

*When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

Can I encourage you to be discerning as to what you listen to? Go and listen to the preachers who are proclaiming God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Have a read about how Jesus preached in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. It's edgy and profound and real and dealing with the hard issues. Then go and find yourself some preachers like that. Not ones that just entertain and tickle your ears with things you want to hear. The ones that open up God's Word and say, "Well, what's God saying to us today?"

And then take what they said home, open your Bible there where they left off and go and lay hold of God's *power unlimited* in your life.

on a personal note

Well, here we are, almost at the end of our time together. From my perspective, the whole point of this book was to help you to believe that God truly does want to unleash *power unlimited* in your life, and to open up His Word that you might see how to lay hold of that power.

*I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:17-23)*

That truly is my prayer for you too. That as you walk with the Lord each day, He would open your eyes and reveal to you the

certain hope, the riches of your inheritance, and the *hyperballistic, megathonic, dynamic* power – the same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the grave – that are available to you through Christ, here and now. Today.

With all my heart, I implore you to become a man or a woman of God's Word. I implore you to spend time each day in your Bible, wherever and whenever works best for you, receiving the life transforming power – *power unlimited* – that God has ready and waiting for you.

And whenever you doubt, whenever the ground beneath your feet seems like sinking sand, flee to God's Word. Turn to Him. The problems that you are dealing with in your life are no surprise to Him. They're nothing new. As the Apostle Paul discovered, our weaknesses, our afflictions, our trials and temptations do not limit God. To the contrary:

*Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)*



I am excited as I think about the mighty things that God is going to do in you and through you as you receive His Word in your heart. May you truly be blessed as He unleashes *power unlimited* in your life.

Your friend in Jesus,

Berni Dymet

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# power unlimited

Believe it or not, God promises each person who believes in Jesus, the power to overcome. The power to overcome temptation. The power to overcome sin. The power to overcome obstacles. The power to move mountains. The power to be who He made you to be and live the life that He planned for you to live. In this book – Power Unlimited – Berni Dymet opens God's Word to help you discover how to lay hold of that power. Power ... unlimited.



*Berni Dymet is passionate about seeing peoples lives transformed as he shares the Word of God right into the realities of everyday life. Your life. As the ceo + Bible teacher of the global media ministry Christianityworks, the radio and television programs that he produces are heard and seen by tens of millions of people each week, in over 160 countries around the world.*

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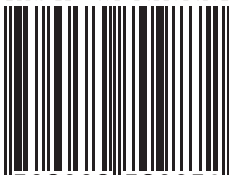
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