

Bible Studies for Life Series for March 23: Alive with power

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Alive with power

- Ephesians 1:18-21; 2:4-9; 3:16-21

By Gary Long

Willow Meadows Baptist Church, Houston

There are a lot of fakes in this world. Modern painters make copies of masterpieces that are almost indistinguishable from the original. Cubic zirconium is passed off as a real diamond. Counterfeit cash is passed off for the real green. We even put vinyl siding on our homes—plastic that has a fake “wood grain” in it. Even our bodies are becoming less real and more fake by way of surgical enhancements of all kinds.

A little critical thought yields the conclusion that we are willing to settle for imposters, and you’d likely be right in assuming we do the same in our spiritual lives; we settle for something less than the real power of the living God.

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Easter offers the chance to reflect on the power of God to raise the Christ, but it also offers the chance for your students to reflect on the power of God to change their lives for good. Better than any self-help book, the power of God can do more than create “your best life now.”

The God of Easter offers awesome power

Paul offered a prayer for the church at Ephesus and the central part of that prayer is Ephesians 1:17-23. Paul wanted the church to know the power of God was so awesome it was able to overcome death completely. What's more, the Scriptures speak to us today, teaching that we are able to tap into that same awesome power when we believe in Jesus and his resurrection. This is new hope that is real and substantial—a true diamond, not a cubic zirconium fake.

Practical pointer—the power of God is on display throughout our cosmos. The Christian band Third Day expresses it well with the simple lyrics: “God of wonders, beyond our galaxy, You are holy, holy! The universe declares Your majesty.”

Consider asking your learners to listen to this song during class and answer questions about where they see and experience God's power in their world. This is a good time to remind them that the Easter event displays God's ultimate power over all forces—especially the forces of death.

The God of Easter offers saving power

By the time Paul gets to the second chapter of Ephesians, he is ready to talk about the saving power of God. In Ephesians 2:4-9, Paul teaches it is by faith that we are able to receive the grace of God—which is able to save us

from our sin and brokenness. The result is that the power of God comes alive in us through Christ, and we are able to know this power and be redeemed by it. This is the power needed in this world, and it is power that is real—not like the wood grain on your vinyl siding!

It's easy to miss the amazing nature of this saving power until it becomes personal. My firm belief as a pastor is that until a believer can articulate what God's saving power means in her life, she will be missing out on what that power can do on the spiritual plane.

Students in your class who've never made the decision to follow Jesus will appreciate hearing your story of how saving power has changed you. This is a great opportunity for you as teacher to tell the story of what God's saving power has meant in your life. If you're having trouble framing it, consider completing this set of sentences:

1. Before I came to faith in Jesus, my life was _____.
2. I first recognized my need for Jesus' saving power when I _____.
3. Since I admitted my need for the saving power of Jesus, the following things have changed in my life: _____.

If you're teaching a class of seasoned Christians, this is a good opportunity to help them articulate their own story of salvation so they might be better prepared to tell others when opportunities arise.

Put your class through those same three sentences above and ask them to share their answers with a partner in the class. Then challenge them to keep their spiritual eyes open in conversations with friends to tell their story.

This is an exceedingly important exercise in light of the “fakes” in the

world. Having thought about how God's power has changed your life will help you and your students offer an authentic story to a world that is hungry for truth and is sick of the shallow appearances of truth.

The God of Easter offers spiritual power (Ephesians 3:16-21)

Paul's prayers for the Ephesians return to the topic of power, but this time it is not about resurrection power or saving power, but about real spiritual power for the believer. Three times in the passage Paul uses the word "power": Once in reference to the power within us that comes from the Holy Spirit (v. 16), once in reference to the power that comes from understanding the depth and width and breadth of God's love for us (v.18), and once in reference to the power of God at work within us to do more than we can ask or even imagine (v. 20).

Because of this spiritual power, it is possible for those who trust Jesus to depend of him for strength in the face of hardship and difficulty.

It's also a positive reminder that God is at work doing things bigger than we can even imagine, and we are able to see that God's strength is deeper than our finite minds can grasp.

My youngest daughter learned to swim about the time she turned 2. Because she had older siblings that "pushed" her to swim, she advanced quicker than the older sibs did when they were little. As a result, she is a great swimmer. It became her favorite thing to swim all the way down and touch the bottom of the 10-foot section of the pool. It took her a while to learn how to swim down, but over time she worked hard and gained the strength necessary to push herself to the deep bottom. After her first time accomplishing the goal, she erupted back to the surface of the pool and gasping, exclaimed, "I touched the deep, Daddy! I touched the deep!"

That was almost five years ago, and that story has become a strong metaphor for me about understanding the power of God. Here's what I mean: With the power of God at work in our lives, we are able to dive deep, swim hard and gain strength for the living of life, even when the water is over our heads.

Unlike my daughter's ability to "touch the deep" of the pool, we are never able to "touch the deep" of God's power. There is no end to his saving power and the spiritual power he gives us. We gradually grow stronger by way of the spiritual disciplines but we need—and have accessible to us—the power of God for the living of life and the understanding of the deep mysteries of God's essence. And there's no faking that.

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