

MORAL EXCELLENCE

By Don Potter

I have spent no small amount of time hoping and wishing I could walk in a greater measure of spiritual power so that I could use this wonderful gift to lead others to salvation. In reality (meaning under the conviction of the Holy Spirit), I just wanted to have a supernatural gift so that I could look good in the church and then brag about how many souls I saved. After some time, the desire to impress the church wears off and wanting to obey God takes its place. That is when I started seeking answers as to why the church doesn't seem to be living in the power that was commonplace among the disciples (see Mark 16:20).

To answer that would be almost impossible without endless debate, so I decided to cut to the heart of the matter and ask God. The road He took me down was very interesting and I will try to explain it.

USAF

I had the privilege to go to Alaska and play with Wynonna Judd at the U.S. Air Force Base in Anchorage. It was the 50th birthday of Alaska becoming a state and the 60th year of the Air Force reserve. The celebration was called "Operation Gratitude" and it was sure to be a success with air shows put on by the famous Thunderbirds and a host of working planes open for tours. There were F-16s as well as the new CV-22 and many other fascinating aircraft that defied imagination.

We flew there from Nashville on an Air Force refueling jet and each of us got a chance to sit in the back and watch them refuel two F-16s that escorted us all the way there. These fighter jets are fast, but they have small fuel tanks and a big appetite.

The most exciting part of this journey was meeting the men and women who carry so much responsibility on their shoulders and seem to excel under the pressure rather than break. I was constantly impressed with their undying desire to serve.

LIVES UNDER DISCIPLINE

I've always admired those who brought their lives under discipline and succeeded in whatever they were trying to do. Outside of playing the guitar, I have struggled with self-discipline in many ways. So it was great to be around people who had this together.

Watching these young people do so well following the rules with joy, and in many cases, a true servant's heart was amazing. The image of the tough-guy soldier was not on this operation for sure.

There were several band members and some children in our group, and several high-ranking officers on board. During the flight, the officers offered refreshments to us all. On more than one occasion, the children would make demands of the officers, expecting the same preferential treatment they were accustomed to being the children of celebrities. I held my breath when one of the kids shouted, "Hey, can I get a Coke?" One of the Colonels on board got up and went to the cooler that was about 10 feet in front of this child and got a Coke without complaint or objection. I was amazed at what I saw, and started asking God, "what is this?"

The Lord answered me with a strange answer which is not strange for God at all. He said, "America does not win wars based on its power, but on its moral excellence." I, of course, began to choke on this statement and said, "Oh God, how is this possible? We are known all over the world for not being a moral people, how can You say this?" "Because you don't know the meaning of moral excellence," He came right back with. This began a search for me because God is never wrong and I needed an answer.

POWER AND AUTHORITY

The best place to look for the meaning of power is the Bible because this is what we are talking about. Dunamis is the Greek word for power in the New Testament, and when I looked up this word, I was surprised at the definition.

Dunamis: *Moral power and excellence of soul; power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature. Sin exercises its power (upon the soul) through the law, i.e. through the abuse of the law; the power which the resurrection of Christ has, for instructing, reforming, elevating, tranquilizing, used of the divine power considered as acting upon the minds of men, is ascribed to Christ, a power to heal disease proceeds from him, the power of Christ invisibly present and operative in Christian church formally assembled (ref. Thayers Greek/Hebrew Study Bible).*

I realized that Jesus did not heal anyone based on His power, but on His character being morally excellent. This is when I asked the Lord, "Why did You say America wins based on moral excellence, if this is the same power Jesus had?" Then the light came on, and the wisdom of God came in, and I understood that moral excellence comes from serving.

Jesus came to the earth as an act of obedience and service to His Father. God the Father was the commanding officer, if you can hear this, and Jesus carried out His orders to the letter. **"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).**

It is in this service that Jesus gained moral excellence which manifested in the power to heal, but more importantly it brought a *"Divine power that acted upon the minds of men."* It is our heart to serve that brings what we long for. The power of God manifested on earth through His servants serving Him will make the difference. Not those presuming to be His friend and trying to convince a dying world that God is a nice guy who won't really hold you accountable for your actions.

The armed forces of this country are known as the "service." It is the servant's heart that walks in morality, not doing all the right things. If doing all the right things and following the law made someone powerful, then the Pharisees would have been the most powerful people on earth.

I also had a wrong impression of serving because if anyone has ever been drafted or joined the armed forces, you know that your

obedience is based on fear of punishment and sometimes severe repercussions if orders are not carried out to the letter. However, when you join the service of God (which means worship by the way), you obey based on love (see John 14:21). I always thought serving God was this very nice, easy life with no real requirements or disciplines. Just feel nice about everything and life will be comfortable. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus loved God and it cost Him His life as an act of obedience.

Being a disciple of Jesus means you are a disciplined person for Christ. When you give yourself to Jesus and call Him Lord of your life, you no longer are in control of your own life or destiny. That flies in the face of a lot of things we have been taught, but sooner or later Jesus must be the Master of your life. When that happens, then the discipline of obedience takes hold of us and we become servants of the Lord, based on our love for Jesus.

You might be saying to yourself, it's time to quote John 15:15 to this guy. We are friends of Jesus. **"No longer do I call you servants for a servant does not know what His master is doing, but I call you friend."**

Jesus is speaking to His disciples who have just spent the last three years following Him. They gave up their lives to follow Him and they have been disciplined time and again for their unbelief and their short-sighted views of God and the Son He sent. These are the ones He calls friend, but He once called them servants.

I'm not sure if the servant part of following Christ was ever taught to me, and I can't remember feeling like I was serving Jesus in my early days of Christian life. That is because I thought serving the church was serving Jesus, but it's not. He may call you to serve the church, and if He does then serve with all your might. But if not, don't mistakenly think you are a disciple because you help out at the church.

KNOWING CHRIST

All this might lead you to believe that moral power is attainable through discipline, but the truth is that moral power comes from

knowing Christ, which is how Jesus walked in dunamis power—He knew God. The self-discipline part is getting a relationship with the Lord as well as cultivating that relationship. This does require a discipline for that to happen. The discipline of daily devotionals, keeping short accounts concerning sin, understanding what disobedience really is, staying true to the Word of God no matter the cost, and many other things outlined in Scripture.

JOINING THE SERVICE

Joining the service is the first time in many young lives they cannot control anything. Someone takes away your right to talk back or to grumble about your comfort. They refocus your attention on something other than self, and replace it with the idea of a community of people doing the same thing for a purpose more noble than your own. That seems to be a better description for church, but we have some work to do for that to happen.

Almost everyone has known a friendship in their lives that required some discipline for that relationship to grow or just continue. Meaningful relationships are not given to us, they are earned. Jesus loves us all, but only the relationships that have been cultivated and exercised gain any real power. Perhaps the biggest deterrent to this relationship is the will of one's own heart over the will of God.

It was evident to me that I needed to join the service of the Lord Jesus and begin to give all and be willing to sacrifice everything for Him. To learn what it means to trust Him with my life and accept the goodness of His house without selfish ambition in my heart. Then at some point, He may call me friend and then I will know Him and the secrets of the Kingdom as He chooses to reveal them to me.

From a place of friendship with my Lord I can begin to walk in moral excellence, which is the power to heal the sick and raise the dead. Most of all is to see the blind eyes of the lost opened to Christ.