

SESSION 4

STRENGTHENED BY GOD'S POWER



*What are some tools or appliances
you can't live without?*

QUESTION #1
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THE POINT

*God does not leave us on our own,
but empowers us through His Spirit.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My wife's parents came to visit. We lead busy lives, so my in-laws thought they would help by vacuuming the house while we were at work. Not a problem, since we bought a brand-new vacuum cleaner the day before.

When we came home, they were sitting on the couch, red faced, sweating, and exhausted! "That new vacuum cleaner is so heavy, we can hardly push it! We had to sit down and rest after vacuuming each room."

My wife and I began to laugh! This brand new vacuum cleaner has a great feature—a power assist that makes vacuuming almost effortless. It only takes a feather-like touch to push the system. My in-laws, however, were trying to vacuum the entire house in neutral. They never put it in drive.

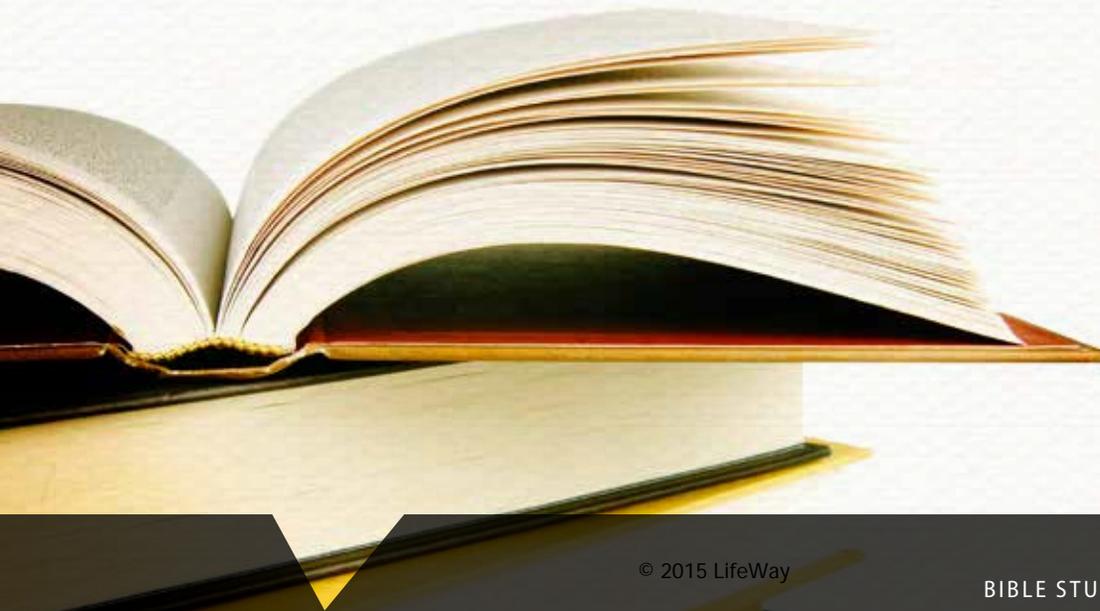
How many of us do the same thing in our spiritual lives? God has given us an incredible power, a supernatural power, in His Holy Spirit. This power is there for us all the time. We simply need to use it.

WHAT DOES **THE BIBLE** SAY?

Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV)

- 14** For this reason I kneel before the Father,
15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,
21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Your inner being (v. 16)—Paul was not referring to the eternal nature that all people possess. Instead, he was talking about the redeemed spiritual nature of believers, which is accomplished through the work of spiritual renewal by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.



Ephesians 3:14-17a

What is power? Ask that of anyone on the street, and they'll probably give you a definition in terms of either energy or influence. In the sense of energy, power is the ability to get up and get moving. In terms of influence, power is the ability to exert your will on that of another.

As Christians, however, we need a different kind of power in order to live the way God designed us to live. To put it simply, we can't live the Christian life in our own strength. We need another source of power. Or, as Paul phrased it in verse 16, we need to be strengthened "in your inner being." The good news is that God, who is rich in glory, is also rich in power and strength.

The Holy Spirit gives us access to God's power for our lives. But just because the Spirit lives in us doesn't necessarily mean we are fully experiencing everything He has for us. God's power is always available, but we don't always rest in that power. Like a vacuum cleaner stuck in neutral, we often forget to apply the Spirit's power to our lives. We try to make things happen through our own strength.

So how do we take advantage of the power available to us? We experience the Spirit's power as we continually surrender control of our lives to God. When we submit to Christ's lordship and stop relying on our own resources, we put ourselves in a position for God to do His work in us and through us.

As we rely on the Holy Spirit, He will "strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (v. 16). As a result, the Father leads us into an ever-deepening experience with Christ.

Learning to live and rely on the Spirit's power is a lifelong journey. You learned to walk when you were a small child. But that learning process didn't happen overnight—and it didn't happen without someone helping you. Both of these things are true of us spiritually. We might be spiritual toddlers right now, but God's will is for us to grow up into walkers, and for us not to do it alone.

I'll repeat that again: we're not alone. God the Father dwells in our hearts through His Son and empowers us through His Spirit. And that's good company.

When have you felt empowered by the Holy Spirit?

QUESTION #2

PLUG IT IN

Paul's prayer was that you be strengthened "with power" by the Holy Spirit. Record at least one example of disciplines, people, and places that help you "plug in" to the Spirit's power.

Spiritual disciplines that help you plug in:

People who help you plug in:

Places that help you plug in:

What obstacles are currently preventing you from being empowered by the Spirit more deeply?

Ephesians 3:17b-19

Strong winds can be dangerous for most trees. But you may have noticed that one tree may get knocked down in a yard, while another tree stands firm not even ten feet away. What made the difference? The roots. The deeper the roots go, the sturdier the tree will be.

Roots also matter for Christians. As the psalmist described, an obedient follower of God is “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers” (Ps. 1:3).

Where are your roots? What gives you stability and nourishment? Paul wrote that when we are empowered by God’s Spirit and Jesus dwells in our hearts, we become “rooted and established in love” (v. 17b). When the winds of difficulties and even opposition blow against us, the love we experience through Christ keeps us grounded and strong.

Paul’s prayer for us is not that we would have this love—it’s already ours in Christ—but that we would “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (v. 18). We can talk about the dimensions or directions of God’s love, but we can’t define its limits.

Paul’s desire is for us to “know this love,” but he contended that such love “surpasses knowledge” (v. 19). How can we know something that exceeds knowing? That sounds like an oxymoron—a contradiction of terms such as “jumbo shrimp” or “plastic silverware.” The answer is that we can know the truth of God’s love, even though we will never fully know it. We can continually be discovering the depths of God’s love without ever touching bottom.

In other words, God’s love is something we can’t fully explain, but something we can fully experience.

What are the similarities and differences between the way we love and the way God loves?

QUESTION #3

How does our connection with other believers deepen our experience of God’s love?

QUESTION #4

Ephesians 3:20-21

Do you hear Paul's excitement as he wraps up this prayer? He's already prayed that the Holy Spirit would strengthen and empower us, that Christ would dwell in our lives, and that we would increasingly comprehend and experience God's love. In verse 20, he affirmed God's power to answer each of those prayers—and to do so in a way that goes far beyond what we can imagine. God is able! We can reject all thoughts of giving up or running away, because God can do the impossible.

I wonder if we often don't pray as we should because we don't want to ask "too much" of God. Or we can't see how God could possibly answer. We need to remember that the way God answers isn't our concern; our task is to go to Him and ask. As James said, "You do not have because you do not ask God" (Jas. 4:2). Jesus invited us to ask when He said, "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7).

For the loving and powerful God who would do this for us, Paul had only one response: praise. "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!" (v. 21). Everything is for God's glory. God empowers us for His glory. He immerses us in His boundless love for His glory. He does more than we can ask or imagine for His glory. Our lives—and His work in our lives—are all for His glory.

You may feel ordinary, but God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things for His glory! The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now residing in you (see Eph. 1:19-21).

And that is far from ordinary.

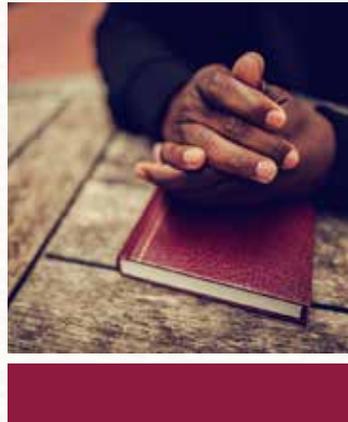
What can we do to regularly tap into the Spirit's power?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

God has promised to empower you through His Spirit. Consider the following options for taking advantage of that gift this week:

- ▶ **Start each day with prayer.** Make a commitment to pray at the beginning of each day this week. Use these moments to echo Paul's prayer that you would become more and more aware of God's presence and power in your life.
- ▶ **Surrender.** Take a moment to evaluate whether you've been attempting to follow Jesus in your own power. If so, acknowledge the lordship of Christ in your life and allow His Spirit to strengthen and empower you.
- ▶ **Set goals.** As you pray for God's Spirit to empower your life, you may find it helpful to set specific goals that you can use in your conversations with God—big goals. Make God-sized requests, and then submit to His authority. *(Note: you may find it helpful to record these goals in the prayer request pages at the beginning of this resource.)*



It's a sad truth that so many Christians attempt to live out their faith in neutral. Don't be part of that crowd. You have the immeasurable power of God's Holy Spirit in your life—use it!

My thoughts