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CHAPTER I

Power and Promises

A number of years ago, I took the family on a vacation to see one of the great wonders of the world. We had already been to the Grand Canyon and gotten to *ooh* and *ahh* about the scenery there. Personally, I didn't completely understand why we had to drive that far to see a hole in the ground, but it was on the list of "Great Family Vacation Destinations" so we went.

This vacation, we went to see another hole in the ground—or what looked like a hole in the ground from up above. The difference, though, was that this hole was filled with an enormous amount of water. It didn't take me more than one look to understand why we had come. It was overpowering in its beauty. I couldn't look away.

Niagara Falls proved to be a great adventure for us as a family, but as we spent a few days there, something else stood out to me about the experience in relationship to prayer and our experience of God Himself.

We had chosen to stay on the Canadian side of the Falls for our vacation, and so when we had arrived at our hotel room the first night, that became our initial opportunity to see the

mammoth horseshoe-carved landmark, flooded with an on-going surge of water causing it to be soaked with foam at the bottom. I'll never forget looking out the window of our hotel room that very first time and being overwhelmed by the magnificence of this natural wonder. It seemed close. It seemed enormous. I recall mouthing the word "wow" and just standing at the big window with the family, staring in amazement. We were all impressed at the majesty flowing in front of us.

But it was too late that evening to actually go and visit Niagara Falls up close. Instead, we unpacked, grabbed some dinner, and went to bed. The next morning, Lois and I woke the kids and headed out to show them a closer, more powerful view. We headed out the hotel, went down a walkway, and then took a short ride on a hillside tram to get to a little park and visitor area right at the top of the Falls.

Now, the view from our room had been spectacular. There were no complaints mumbled at all. But the view from the park area right where the water literally lunges over the edges of stone and rock—well, that view was breathtaking. I didn't just mouth one "wow" like in the hotel room. This time as I stood there witnessing the immeasurable amount of water nose-diving off the rim of the upper riverbed, I voiced my amazement out loud. Several times. The thunderous roar of the water hitting the basin never stopped. The rainbow painted in the sky shone above it, immovable—almost like a sentry positioned on duty.

We stood there bathed in the constant sound and sight of pure wonder. If you've been there yourself, you know we also got a little wet as the water's spray would fly through the air, sprinkling us as it went about its way.

Witnessing the Falls firsthand—close enough to feel as if I

could reach out and touch it—evoked a profound sense of awe within me. Hours went by in what seemed like only minutes.

But there is a third way to experience Niagara Falls, one many visitors on the Falls' American side enjoy. It's called the Maid of the Mist, a magnificent boat you can ride close to the foot of the Falls. If you have been on it yourself then you know that the word "mist" is an understatement. When you ride the Maid of the Mist, you don't get misted at all. You get drenched. But "Maid of the Drench" probably wouldn't go over as well in marketing the riverboat ride!

Everyone is given a raincoat before they board the boat. This is intentional because the owners of the boat know you are about to get really wet. Before long, the cold, penetrating river water that just fell fifty-seven meters (one hundred eighty-seven feet) from the cliffs at Niagara soaks everyone on board. Passengers on the boat don't merely see the Falls. They don't merely hear them. They don't merely get sprinkled with droplets on the breeze. No, on that boat they are drenched as they experience Niagara as close as is humanly possible without actually going over it in one of those barrels that many adventurous daredevils have tried.

CLOSE, CLOSER, CLOSEST

These three very different experiences offered visitors to Niagara Falls reminded me of our relationship to prayer and our experience of God Himself. Some of us approach our prayer lives and relational experience of God from the hotel room of our hearts. We see Him from a distance. Yes, we are duly impressed, but not really impacted. We admire His work from afar but then we become easily distracted because it's just an image out a window. We might mouth a word or two. But before long we have

turned to do other things, or simply gotten bored with the view.

Then there are others of us who engage our prayer lives from the park. We're closer. We abide a bit more. We stay a little longer. But we are still safely behind the steel and rock barriers of our own will and minds. We don't allow the current to connect with us or direct us in any way. Yes, we may feel His engagement and hear His voice, like answers blown to us on the breeze, but then there are other times where we become easily distracted by the visitor center souvenirs to purchase, or the hamburgers, ice cream, and pretzels nearby. Before long, we've left His presence and entered the store.

But there are some who refuse to settle for a hotel room window or even park experience of prayer. They are the ones who put on their raincoats, raise their umbrellas, and venture into the basin to get as close as they can. They long to be drenched by God's presence. Drenched by His purity. Overwhelmed by His glory. They see not just the rainbow of His promises but move into the actual light of His promises. They may get uncomfortable sometimes as the boat gets rocky or they get drenched, but it's worth it as they fully engage with the One who truly is the voice on the waters. As the psalmist writes, "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord is over many waters," (Ps. 29:3). That is the voice you hear, know, and experience. And with His voice comes His power.

Did you know that Niagara Falls is not only a spectacle of wonder to behold? It is also a source of power, great power. In fact, a fourth of all of New York State as well as Ontario are powered by these falls alone. The Niagara generating stations create hydropower that can turn on 24 million 100-watt light bulbs at one time. There is nothing quite like Niagara Falls in

physically illustrating a spiritual principle with regard to prayer. Both promises (the rainbows) and power (enormous hydroelectricity) come from this one place.

But it is up to you whether you choose to simply view the postcard or the calendar photo featuring the Niagara Falls. You could go a step further and take a trip to a hotel close to the Falls and look out the window. Or you could choose to make the walk down to the park and line up at the edge where the water cascades for a closer look. *Or* if you will decide to go all the way—put on the raincoat, get on the boat, and be drenched by both the power and promises of that place.

It's your choice. But while you do get to make your choice, you don't get to choose the outcomes of that choice. The choice itself will influence the results. If you want the full power and promises of God's presence, you will have to get close and go deep in your relationship with Him.

TRUE POWER

Prayer has been studied, written about, talked about, and preached on by countless people in countless ways. Yet it remains an elusive element to most of us. In over four decades of ministry, I have encountered only a few who truly seem to grasp and understand prayer. For far too many people, even those who follow Jesus Christ, prayer is like the National Anthem before a sporting event. It gets the game going but has little to no relevance on what is happening on the field. It is merely an exercise of routine.

For example, when most of us pray before we eat, we don't really utilize our minds to do that because we say the same general things each time. Or when many of us pray before we go to bed at night, we simply recite a call for blessing and protection

with a little bit of gratitude thrown in for good measure.

Prayer has become a habit for far too many of us.

Yet prayer is powerful. Kingdom prayer is *the divinely authorized methodology to access heavenly authority for earthly intervention*. Such prayer is earth giving heaven permission to intervene in the reality down here with the manifestation of the spiritual reality up there. That is a definition few of us really grasp. God is waiting to be involved in our activities and yet because we were given freedom He does not force Himself on our situations. He waits for us to ask—to connect with Him in prayer.

There was a lady who lived way out in the boondocks for years without any electricity, but finally the power company was able to get electricity installed where she lived. But after several months, the power company noticed that very little power was being used at this woman's home. They did some tests and saw that the power was getting to her house just fine, but she didn't seem to be using much at all. So a representative decided to visit her home and ask if there was a problem.

God does not force Himself on our situations. He waits for us to ask—to connect with Him in prayer.

“Ma’am, are you using your electricity here that we’ve run to your property?” he asked.

“Oh, yes!” she replied. “It’s been very helpful.”

“Can you explain to me how you use your new electric power?”

“Well, it’s very simple,” she said. “When it begins to get dark,

I turn on the lights long enough to light my kerosene lamps and then I turn the lights off again.”

I’m sure you will agree with me this lady didn’t understand the use of the power. She had it, but she wasn’t maximizing it; she wasn’t getting all of the power that it was designed to deliver. It’s the same way with prayer. In order to experience maximum spiritual power, we need to understand how this thing called prayer is designed to work.

We sing songs about power. Our songs remind us of all of the deposits that God has made in us, yet so many of us are living as though we are powerless. Now, how can you live in God’s prayer power? It starts by first knowing Him—really being intimate with who God is. Being willing to get drenched on the boat and take a trip into the basin of God’s presence. Now, that doesn’t mean how many Bible verses you have memorized or how many theological concepts you have mastered. Those academic pursuits have their place, but knowing God personally in prayer is more than that. When you become intimate with God, it’s not a vague concept—it’s an ongoing conversation. It’s an experiential reality that produces results.

FINDING POWER BEFORE WE “LOSE HEART”

When you experience God the way He intended, you will experience power in your prayers like never before. The apostle Paul introduces this concept when he makes the statement in my favorite New Testament book, Ephesians, “Therefore I ask you not to lose heart” (3:13). To “lose heart” means to become discouraged, despondent, and finally, to give up. There is a lot today to lose heart over. It might be a financial situation, a relationship, a health concern, loss of a job, or emotional distress. Just watching

the evening news can cause anyone to lose heart very quickly.

So much that surrounds us today speaks of doom, gloom, and unfortunate situations. As a pastor, I am regularly called on to counsel people. There isn't a week—and often even a day—that passes when I do not speak with someone who is ready to give up.

Paul must have heard many similar accounts. And his concern for the believers at Ephesus—"saints" as he called them (so they were saved people)—was that they would not lose heart. This concern thus led Paul to pray one of the great prayers of the New Testament. This prayer for power, found in Ephesians 3:14–19, is often overlooked when it comes to Bible study, but I believe it to be one of the most insightful and powerful models of prayer that has been given to us.

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR OUR POWER

In verse 14, Paul writes, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." Now understand: When the Bible mentions that somebody has dropped down to their knees, it means this-is-serious-prayer time. This was a humbling kind of prayer.

Paul continues with this mighty prayer. He prays that God "would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (v. 16). Paul is basically asking that God would give the Ephesian believers some power. But what kind of power is Paul referring to? He's talking about power to no longer allow your circumstances to own you. He's talking about the power to deal with a losing-heart situation. He's talking to weak people who need to be strengthened because of what they are going through.

They don't have the power to get out of the situation, or even through it, by themselves. They cannot overcome the circumstance, deal with the pain, or find the answer. They feel so powerless that they are losing heart. That is the context in which Paul prays this prayer.

Through his prayer, Paul is saying to them—and to you and me—that the answer is not on the outside. It's not found in changing the situation. Paul is saying the power to not succumb to losing heart is based on the Spirit's work *inside* of you.

Many of us who are losing heart try to change the external situation. We don't think to make an adjustment on the inside, where real change can take place. This only makes us more frustrated. And then we wonder why there's no power and nothing happening.

Have you ever picked up your cellphone only to notice there is no power left in it? It powers down and now you can't access your contacts or even dial a number. You can't call out and no one can call in because there is an absence of power.

When this happens, you or I could scream at our phones and say, "Come on, someone talk to me!" But that wouldn't change anything. We could push the screen harder or shake the phone. We could say nice words to it or look at it longingly. Yet still nothing would change. Nothing would turn it on—except simply plugging it in. All efforts are doomed to failure and frustration unless something got charged in the inner casing.

Many of us who are losing heart in our physical, tangible lives and experiences are making ourselves more frustrated by trying to change the external situations and dynamics when there has been no adjustment on the internal connection. Then we wonder why there is no power and nothing seems to be happening.

Here is what Paul had to say about situations like this in Ephesians 3:16–18 (NIV):

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 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.

The Greek word “dwell” means to make yourself at home. That’s a key word to understanding the power of prayer. Let me illustrate it through this comparison. Many of us have a welcome sign outside of our front door. When someone comes to our home, we say “Come in! Make yourself at home.” But let’s face it—we don’t usually mean that. Rather, it’s just something polite that we say to welcome a guest. It would be more correct to say, “Make yourself at *room*,” because we don’t really mean that a guest can wander throughout our entire home. They can’t go into your bedroom or peek into your closets. Those areas are private. They are off-limits.

MAKING JESUS WELCOME IN OUR LIVES

Likewise, most of us have “Jesus places” in our lives. These are the areas of our lives where Jesus is welcome to enter. Those parts of our lives that are tidy and clean. But if you want real spiritual power, Jesus needs to be able to enter *all* the rooms in your house. He must be free to make Himself at home. You need to let Him in the dirty garage or the overflowing attic. You need to let him in the closets. You might be asking why this is. It’s because Jesus will only address what He has access to.

We call this the lordship of Jesus Christ, which is giving Christ access to the ownership, rulership, over every place of your life. In order for Jesus to be Lord of your life, He must be invited to integrate throughout all of it—not just come for a visit on Sunday morning at church. You must allow Him to roam freely in every nook and cranny of your daily thoughts, needs, desires, despairs, and more. If you give Jesus Christ limited access to and engagement with you, you can expect to have limited power from Him. And limited power from Christ means more “losing heart” when the trials of life come our way as well as weak, anemic prayers.

For instance, you invite Jesus to Sunday morning church. It’s a big room He has been invited to. But after your church service is over and you have driven home, you let Him into your home’s entryway but not into any of the rooms. And that’s why you can be one way at church and another way in your car. It’s as if you are saying, “Church is Your room, but my home and its rooms are mine.”

But Jesus must be free in our inner person to dwell there, to make Himself at home rather than just drop by at the threshold of our home and a couple of hours at church. The reason Jesus needs to be free to roam is so that you can know the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of His love, just as Ephesians 3:17–19 says. And even when you come to know all of that, you will only be scratching the surface.

THE DEPTH OF HIS POWER IN US

I’ll never forget watching the enormous amount of water pour continually over the Niagara Falls. Over and over and over again, it never stopped. While we slept in our hotel room, it

still poured. While we went and ate lunch somewhere, it still poured. In time, I began to be more impressed with why the basin didn't begin to fill up and overflow like a bathtub with its faucet left to run. How did this relatively still-watered basin continue to absorb such a mammoth amount of water and remain at the same capacity? The answer to that is found in its depth. See, the basin at the foot of the Falls is as deep as the Falls is high. Both measure exactly fifty-seven meters. So when you see the water dumping into the relatively small looking area beneath the cliffs, it is going much deeper than you may have realized—look at its awesome height and realize its depth is just as great. This space allows the water the space it needs to keep coming at such a great pace.

When you are tied into Christ and His love for you, He creates the depth you need to receive the enormous amount of power God has to provide you through prayer. On your own, it would be too much. But when you dwell with Christ, His depth becomes your own and you will experience a whole new level of spiritual capacity.

God is inexhaustible and infinite, which means He has no concluding point. To give you a point of reference, look at how long man has been on the earth. In all that time, no one has ever made the trip to the end of the galaxy we are in. We don't even know *where* our galaxy ends. Sure, we've made a trip to the moon and landed space craft on Mars, but with all of the thousands of years mankind has been here, we are still trying to figure out what's in our own galaxy. And that's just *our* galaxy. We know that there are many more galaxies out there. And God created every single galaxy that exists. Just thinking on that makes it easier to realize how awesome God truly is.

Or let's consider our sun, which is ninety-three million miles from Earth. If you were to rocket at 17,000 miles per hour (the average speed of a manned space craft orbiting around the earth) to the sun without stopping for any breaks, it would take seven and one-half months to make the trip.¹ More than seven months just to get there, and yet our sun provides us with the daily, hourly life-giving supply of energy that our earth and its inhabitants need to survive. And it does so immediately, each second of the day. (Traveling at the speed of light, the sun's bright rays reach us in about eight minutes.)

I'm trying to help you understand who we're dealing with. Clearly, this mighty God is beyond our comprehension. He is higher than we can see, reaches deeper than we can dive, and is wider than we can wrap our arms around.

But the good news is that God isn't looking for His children to have academic knowledge of Who He is. What He wants us to have is the capacity to experience Him, "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19), to experience the reality of Him operating without limit in our lives through this process called prayer.

Friend, you may be losing heart. You may be tired or even discouraged. But Paul is telling us that being rooted and grounded in the love of Jesus will fill us up with all the fullness of God. When God is allowed to dwell in *all* of the rooms of your heart—when His power is allowed to freely flow within you like the water over the Niagara—you will be connected to a Source that provides more power and promises that you could ever even imagine possible. This is what kingdom prayer is all about.