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Power

We are surrounded by people who are trying to sell us power. If you take a certain pill each day, more power and energy will imbue your body and soul. If you play your cards just right, an invitation awaits you to join the inner circles of power at work and within your social networks. If you amass enough wealth, everyone will want an audience with you.

But, ironically, the greatest power of all comes from a complete surrender to our own powerlessness as humans, and a longing for the grace of God working in our lives.

Tragically, many people who call themselves Christians feel no power from God in their lives. A personal, life-giving relationship with God is something they have never felt or experienced. They want it, but they do not know how to get it. After all, the Gospel is confounding to the world. It is mind-bending indeed to understand that power from God comes only from our willingness to confess our inherent powerlessness, weakness and sin, and to cry out to God for help.

Sadly, many churches in our western world teach, however subtly, that we are in charge of our own "spirituality." We can dabble, pick and choose whatever form of spirituality best suits us. But we are the ones in charge. A little Native-American spirituality, mixed with a touch of Buddhism, and sprinkled with our favorite teachings of Jesus can make us feel good for awhile, even cause us to believe we are intelligent. Moments of enlightenment can masquerade for Christian community or church; as we draw the colors and make the mural of our own spirituality, we often do so in isolation, not wandering any farther than our own, favorite reading chair.

But at the same time, as satisfied as we may be intellectually, we often long, however secretly, for more direction, purpose and power in our lives.

There is only one avenue toward more power in your life, and that is through a simple devotion that Jesus is indeed the son of God and Savior of the world. As the 10th chapter of the book of Romans says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Yes, the beauty of Jesus can be found imbedded in many different religions and philosophies in the world. But Jesus himself is the only, full revelation of God; surrender to his Lordship in our lives brings to our souls immeasurable beauty, wisdom and power.



I will never forget when I took a group of 20 people to Uganda in 1994. After hours on the plane, a train ride between Kenya and Uganda, and a last push in Jeeps in the middle of the night, we arrived in an open field with sounds of music rising from behind the trees. Eventually, we walked through the trees and emerged in another clearing. There in the midst of a field was a group of Ugandans dancing and singing beneath a light bulb that hung from a wire, powered by a generator on the ground. Darkness was everywhere, except for the light from this one bulb.

As we approached this outdoor dancing congregation, I thought for sure everyone would stop dancing and begin formal introductions. Instead, they kept dancing, singing and smiling at us. I could not believe it. Here we were thousands of miles from home, having traveled for days, in the middle of the night, hardly knowing anyone, and no one was stopping to shake our hands and introduce themselves. But after awhile, it finally dawned on me that we were being invited to dance with them. So, we joined the circle and began dancing, singing and hollering with them. It was a great moment of joy, but it was also an essential lesson in cross-culture communication for me.



African Christians
Welcome dance

After many songs and dances, the music finally stopped. We all just stood, staring at each other, eyes wide-open. We could hear the beauty of the night, the silent and powerful presence of the Lord in our hearts. After a few poignant moments, the leader of the Ugandan people stepped forward and welcomed us with a huge embrace. He delivered a beautiful speech describing him and his Christian congregation. And I responded in kind.

Then it dawned on me: in Africa, you dance first, then talk. In America, we talk first, then dance.

African Christians believe deeply in the power of the Holy Spirit. They understand the profundity of the Christian faith -- that a single devotion to Jesus will lead them to an emancipation of spirit, body and soul. They often see more clearly than we Westerners the many spiritual battles that surround us on a daily basis. They know the dark clouds and evil forces that keep humans distracted and imprisoned. They sing and dance as a form of intercessory prayer. Before they talk, they pray. Before they plan, they dance and sing, confronting whatever evil and selfishness may surround them.

During my stay in Uganda, my good friend and Anglican priest, Dr. John Senyonyi, had a brother, Peter, who was running for a national office at the time. The person he was opposing was a worldly man and experienced politician. I was shocked to learn that this other candidate had sacrificed his own son in a deadly ritual because a local witchdoctor and voodoo consultant had warned that he would lose the election if he failed to do so. Peter Senyonyi was campaigning with all his heart to replace this man in the Ugandan Parliament. While we were in Uganda, dead bodies were found floating down the river from the slaughter and massacre that had just taken place in nearby Rwanda. Even one Ugandan in the community where we stayed died during the course of our 10-day visit because of AIDS, which was ripping through villages and even Christian families.



But despite these travesties, the Church in Uganda continues to grow today and is getting stronger by the day. My friend, John Senyonyi, is now one of the top administrators of a new Ugandan Christian university with 7,000 students. His brother, Peter, is a leading lawyer in the country and now a member of Parliament. During those 10 days of our visit, our Ugandan Christian friends modeled for us what it is to participate in the power of Christ in the world.

Being a follower of Jesus is the single most important decision of your life. Christianity is not an intellectual or moral exercise; it is a call to help God establish his kingdom on earth. All power and wisdom comes from