

FAITH
IN THE FACE OF
FEAR

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Power to persist

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Col. 1:11-12, NRSV)

If you could have a special power, what would it be?

When I was a little kid, I remember standing in our kitchen and wishing that I could become invisible (probably because I was supposed to be doing the dishes). My brother took things one step further in his quest for special powers. Enamoured by Mary Poppins and her magical parasol that enabled her to float above the streets of London, he climbed onto our garage roof with an umbrella and jumped off. He needed a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down after that.

The idea of having special powers is appealing to us, fueled by the movies we watch and the books we read. We imagine taking our place in the Marvel Universe, or hanging out at Hogwart's, where everyday life is anything but ordinary.

It's not surprising that we would import these same desires into our spiritual lives.

We long to experience God's power in real and tangible ways! And as we read the Bible, that's what we are told to expect. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you," Jesus told his followers after his resurrection (Acts 1:8). The same "incomparably great power" that raised Jesus from the dead is at work within you, Paul assured the Ephesians (Eph. 1:19-20). We read the exploits of the early Christians in the book of Acts - physical healings, spiritual visions, miraculous insights - and we long for exploits of our own!

Thankfully, we're experiencing some of these wonders within our church. Since moving here in December, I have been amazed at the number of one-touch healings I have heard about. Others speak about the radical change that Jesus has brought about in their lives - addictions broken, hearts mended, marriages saved.

God's power is not just something we just read about - it is something we experience here and now.

But it doesn't always look the way we think it should.

I was reading Paul's letter to the Colossians a while ago and noticed that it started with a prayer that they would experience God's power. Nothing very unusual about that, but Paul's description of what that power would look like caught me off guard. Here's his prayer:

"May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power..."

That's a lot of power that Paul is describing! If anything, his words are even bolder in the original Greek; "being empowered with all power," is what he wrote. What a promise! What potential! So what does this power enable the Colossians to do?

". . . and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience."

Huh. God's power would enable them to endure their problems, not to do away with them. He would give them the strength to be patient. To persist when things were hard.

This is a surprising description of divine power; maybe even a disappointing one. Let's be honest - "Patience Man" would make a lame superhero. So would his sidekick, "Enduro-girl."

But the more I think about it, the more I find myself encouraged by Paul's prayer. It tells me that God's power is available for us in our everyday lives of frustrations, setbacks, and discouragements - it is not reserved for the miraculous and the spectacular. This is power for a pandemic, during which we are all enduring an uncertain and unpredictable situation. God's extraordinary power is made available for our ordinary needs.

So take a moment to let God know where you need him today. Be honest about the places where you are feeling weak or where your hope is wearing thin. Trust him to "empower you with all power" so you can endure everything with patience.

He will carry you through.

Further Reading:

Col. 1:9-14

Key Verse:

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. (vv. 11-12)

Calibrating Prayer:

Almighty God, I thank you for the promise of your power. I am amazed when I see your strength displayed in miraculous ways but today I am encouraged that your power is made available for my everyday life as well. Give me the strength to serve you and others, whatever comes my way.