

## EMBRACE YOUR FAITH and STRENGTH

Week #1 of a 6-Week Series, "Embrace Your Power"

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Just who do you think you are?!? [Congregants laugh] How many people have ever thought that or said that to someone or about someone? And how many people have ever had someone say that to you? Generally hearing, "Who do you think you are?!?" is not a compliment; it's not a positive or a good thing. It's usually a rebuke towards someone who has been really rude or disrespectful or super judgmental.

But that's a good question in some ways: Who do you think you are? Because who we think we are makes a difference and impacts and affects our self image – you know, how we see ourselves -- and the amount of peace or happiness or joy and success that we have and experience and feel worthy of.

I found this African tale and it illustrates the point I'm trying to make:

*Once upon a time on a large mountain side, there was an eagle nest with four large eagle eggs inside. One day an earthquake rocked the mountain, causing one of the eagle's eggs to roll down to a chicken farm located down in the valley below.*

*The chickens took care of the eagle egg and sat on it, kept it warm, and eventually the eagle egg hatched and a beautiful eagle was born. Being chickens, the chickens raised the eagle as a chicken. The eagle thought he was a chicken and acted like chickens act -- scratching on the ground, looking for worms -- and thought he was a chicken. And he loved his chicken life; he loved his chicken family, but his spirit cried out for more.*

*One day the eagle looked to the skies above and noticed a group of mighty eagles soaring in the sky. The eagle looked up and said, "What kind of animal is that? Look how graceful and powerful and free it is." And then he asked another chicken, "What is that?" And the chicken said, "Oh, that is an eagle. They fly, but we can't fly."*

*"Oh," cried the eagle. "I wish I could soar like one of those birds."*

*The chickens roared with laughter at hearing the eagle say that and knowing that he couldn't soar. And he they all said, "You're a chicken. And chickens don't soar."*

*The eagle continued staring at the eagles, dreaming and wishing that he could fly and soar. Then, over time, he stopped dreaming about it and just kept scratching and looking for grubs and worms. He continued thinking that he was a chicken and believed that. And time after time, he was disappointed until he finally stopped dreaming about it at all.*

*Finally, after a long life of living as a chicken, the eagle passed away and never experienced the grand life he could have had; never experienced the joy and the experience of soaring to greater heights and to having a perspective and a view of life from a higher place. He thought he was a chicken even though he was an eagle.*

He thought he couldn't fly, even though he really could; he just believed that he couldn't. And it's kind of a sad story, but in some ways we're like that. We have incredible potential: incredible abilities to build dreams and lives and create and achieve all kinds of levels of success and happiness. And often we don't believe we can. We don't believe that we have it in us. And it all relates to who we think we are.

So who are we? You know, the Bible says over and over again, this is who we are. It says, "You are a child of God." "You are the light of the world." "You are the temple of the living God." "You have been given a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline." "You can do all things through Christ who strengthens

you." *"Christ in you, your hope of glory."* Jesus said, *"You shall do the things that I've done and even greater things shall you do."*

In the book of Romans, Chapter 8, Verse 16-17 it says, *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if they are children, then we are heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."* It says clearly: I am a child of God. I am a powerful spiritual being. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Repeat after me: *"I am a child of God."*

Together: [with congregants] *"I am a child of God."*

*"I am a powerful spiritual being."*

[With congregation:] *"I am a powerful spiritual being."*

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

[With congregation:] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Take a deep breath. And can you own that? Can you feel the truth and accept and embrace the power of those words?

What I find interesting is: even though we're told that over and over again, we have a hard time actually believing it. I think sometimes we have an easier time telling ourselves put downs about ourselves and negative things about ourselves rather than powerful and amazing things of the truth of who we really are. Sometimes I think we're more comfortable saying, *"I am such a loser or such a knucklehead. You know, things never go right for me. I'm a victim. I am powerless. I'm helpless. I'm hopeless."*

These are absolutely not true and not who we are, and yet we seem to believe them, affirm them, and live our lives out of that mindset and that belief.

Today we begin a six-week series -- and it's really the theme for our ministry for the year -- and it is called "Embrace Your Power." Because we don't always believe we have the very power that we actually have.

You know, we hear things like -- and we say it all the time -- *"The kingdom of God is within you. God's spirit lives in you. You are one with God."* But what does that really mean? How do we live that? What does that actually look like?

You know, Charles Fillmore in 1930 wrote a book called *The Twelve Powers of Man*. And he wrote it to help us understand, access, and demonstrate this Christ potential that we always talk about that we have. He absolutely believed that everyone is born and receives 12 God-given spiritual powers, and that we have those within us. And his work and desire was to help us learn how to express those; how to embrace those; and how to believe that truth about ourselves.

And these are the powers; we're going to go over them, two a week, over the next six weeks. Faith and strength; imagination; zeal; power; life; will; understanding; love; wisdom; order; and release. You see, these 12 powers are an incredible concept that's created a system of soul growth for us. And it helps our minds to connect on a deeper level with Spirit through these 12 spiritual attributes.

So we all have a Christ potential in us. But the question is: How do we really bring it forward? How do we express that and demonstrate that in our lives? And it is through embracing our spiritual power.

The first spiritual power we're going to look at is a spiritual power we all have: **THE SPIRITUAL POWER OF FAITH**. You know, faith is, by far, the spiritual power of the 12 that Jesus spoke the most about. You know, the importance of having faith -- the importance of believing -- was a huge part of Jesus' ministry.

You know, over 41 times he used the word faith; over 69 times he used the word belief, and how powerful and important they are in our lives.

When you think about it, faith is really the foundation of life. Faith is the foundation of what makes all things possible, from healing and abundance or transformation or change or any good that we desire, faith is absolutely at the foundation. That's why Jesus said, *"It is done unto you according to your faith."*

So how well do you embrace your spiritual power of faith? How many people have ever been running a few quarts low of faith? That you didn't quite have? Anybody ever felt like you lost your faith?

The fact is: every one of us has faith. The question is: How much do we use it? How much do we actually believe it? And how much do we express it in our lives?

First, let's talk about what faith is. Faith is the ability to see beyond whatever's going on in life right now -- whether it's got lack or limitation or challenge or struggle or pain -- and being able to see beyond it and know there's something better. To know that there are solutions; to know that there their positive possibilities; to know that life can get better and improve in all those different areas. And we have this power and ability available and accessible to every one of us.

And it is that knowing -- even though we can't see it -- that knowing that greater things are possible for us; that things will and can get better, you know, even if we can't see it. That's why Paul said the words that we must walk by faith, not by sight ... not judging by what we see with our outer eye, but what we see with our inner eye. Those greater possibilities that cannot be seen with our eyes.

In Hebrews it says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." That all the things that we see have come from what is not seen, and it is faith that calls those things forward.

So we have this faculty of faith built into us, but sometimes we don't use it as well. and when we don't utilize it as well, misuse it and under develop it, faith shows up in our lives as fear ... and doubt and mistrust. And being skeptical or suspicious. Or being unwilling to believe in anything. Or tending to believe things are always going to go wrong, or bad, or to worse.

Now, when our faith is overdeveloped, it can lead to being narrow-minded and mentally inflexible. Thinking rigidly that only this way is the right way; that this is the only way it can happen. We get so rigid with our faith.

So, we have this faith faculty in us, but we need to use it effectively and use it wisely. And when we do, faith expresses itself as our inner knowing; as trust; as belief; as an intuitive awareness of the presence of God and the possibilities of greater things. And the important thing for us to remember about faith is it doesn't come all at once. You know faith has got to grow; it's got to expand; it's got to develop.

You remember Peter's name before Peter was Simon. And he was a bit of a crude fisherman. But, over time, his faith grew and he became Peter, and the most dedicated of Jesus's apostles. You know and that's the thing about faith: it must grow and expand.

You remember in the Book of James when it says, *"Faith without works is dead"*? And it is saying that means faith must be developed. It must be cultivated. It must be expressed. We've got to work on our faith; express our faith; we've got to grow our faith.

You know, we always hear -- people use that phrase -- like, *"Oh, we just need faith the size of a mustard seed."* Like, trying to believe that all we need is a little, little bit of faith. And the only reason that's said is because a mustard seed is one of the tiniest seeds, but it grows into a huge bush. So, our faith is supposed to be growing and expanding and cultivating.

You know, faith grows when we delight ourselves in God. Here's what it says in Psalm 1, Verses 2-3. It says, *"Those who delight in God and meditate on this law day and night, they are like trees planted by streams of water. They shall bear fruit in season, and their leaves shall never wither. In all they do, they will prosper."* That expanding and growing our faith is like a tree that's planted in their streams; that its roots will be fed and it will be able to grow and flourish in amazing and wonderful ways.

So here are four ways that we can grow and expand our faculty of faith

And the first thing to do with faith is: Don't think or look at the problem. You know, sometimes when we have a situation where our life isn't going well, we just look at what's not working and what's not going well. And we tend to sometimes go into a level of negativity and a level of fear. And so, it's important -- like when you're trying to build your faith -- the first step is **DON'T FEED YOUR FEAR.**

You know, sometimes we need to look away from the situation, because we keep ourselves kind of stuck in it. And what we think about expands and grows. Remember Jesus with the loaves and fishes? That the first thing he did was he told everybody: sit down; take a deep breath. And then he took the bread and he looked up. And he intentionally looked away from the experience of lack to look to a higher place of possibilities, a higher place for solution and success.

Anybody ever heard of "The Golden Key" by Emmett Fox? He says, *"The golden key, the magic to any situation."* Here's what he says. He says, *"All you have to do is this ..."* He calls it "The Golden Key." "Stop thinking about the difficulty. Whatever it is, think about God instead. This is the complete rule. And if you'll only do this, the trouble -- whatever it is -- will presently disappear. It makes no difference what kind of trouble it is. It could be a big thing or a little thing. It may be concerning health or finances, a lawsuit, a quarrel, an accident, or anything conceivable. Whatever it takes, just stop thinking about it and think about God."

The way to build your faith is to, first, not feed your fear. Do not look towards it. Anybody have anything going on in your life right now you're thinking about a lot? [Congregants laugh] And the way to build our faith faculty will be to stop thinking about it. Start thinking about God ... which is number two.

Step number two is to **MEDITATE ON GOD.** And what does that mean: meditate on God? Well, it means you could meditate on love. You could meditate on peace. You can meditate on joy. Or you could just be still and feel the presence of God. Or you could take a breath and just open your heart and seek God with all your heart. Anything to immerse your mind in the mind of God. Just to relax and open your mind to the peace and the wisdom and the goodness of God.

And the important thing about that is: the more you immerse your mind in God and meditate on God, that it's important to make sure you're doing it for enough time. Sometimes we think, *"Oh, well, I meditated for a minute or 10 minutes."* And the thing is, then we go back to worrying about the thing!

So it's important for us: that the longer we meditate, the more frequently we meditate, what happens? Our mind gets calm and peaceful, and all the things that are not of God start falling away. Those worries start leaving us. And we are filled with a sense of faith, because we are filled with the presence of God.

So don't think about the problem. Turn and think about God and meditate about God as much time as we can. Because immersing for longer times really begins to shift our consciousness to be more faith-filled rather than fear-filled.

The third one is **REMEMBER THAT GOD LOVES US.** You remember that video with Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou? And Maya was telling about her experience with her minister; his name was Frederick Wilkerson. She was having a hard time and he said, *"Open that book and read those three words."* And the words were, *"God loves me."*

He said, "Again!"

"God loves me."

"Again!"

"God loves me. God loves me." She started just weeping, because she'd never really believe that God loved her. And as those words sank into her heart, into her mind, into her consciousness, it really began to transform. Can you really believe if we all truly believe that God loves us -- that we are God's beloved children -- could you imagine how much that might increase our faith? Can you imagine how much that might lower the sense of fear that we live with?

God loves me. God loves me. God loves me. God loves me.

Let's say that four times in a row. Together: [with congregation] "God loves me. God loves me. God loves me. God loves me." Take a deep breath. And open your heart and let that truth into your heart and mind.

And even softer now, four more times: [with congregation] "God loves me. God loves me. God loves me. God loves me." One more deep breath.

So, if we want to increase that Christ faith faculty in us, we need to not think of our problems, but think about God, And meditate; immerse our minds in the mind of God. And affirm and remember and let in that God loves me.

And the last one is to **REMEMBER THAT ALL THINGS ARE WORKING FOR OUR HIGHEST GOOD** ... which means that, no matter what the appearance is, there's a solution. There is an answer that things will somehow get better and improve and change. That the universe is actually conspiring to support us and bless us.

And so the question is: Are we willing to believe that all things are truly working for our highest good? You know, to me, this thing is really important. Because faith is the foundation of our lives and our goals and dreams. Faith is the foundation of all the other spiritual faculties. That, if we truly want to express our Christ potential, that this is the most powerful thing.

We've got to work on our faith and then we've got to walk our faith. Like the mustard seed, we must make sure we're feeding it and growing it by immersing our mind in the mind of God, and using – as Emmett Fox would say – "The Golden Key" to harmony and happiness.

Repeat after me. "Walking in faith ..."

[With congregation:] "Walking in faith ..."

"My steps are sure ..."

[With congregation:] "My steps are sure ..."

"Divine guidance is clear ..."

[With congregation:] "Divine guidance is clear ..."

"And my path is illuminated ..."

[With congregation:] "And my path is illuminated."

So, **the first step in expressing our Christ's potential is to embrace our faith: to grow our faith and to feed our faith.**

The second one is [THE SPIRITUAL ATTRIBUTE OF STRENGTH](#). Now, we think of, like, Popeye-like strength ... [congregants laugh] But it's really not a physical strength we're talking about. Although physical strength is a good thing ...

The kind of strength I'm talking about is a strong mind. A strong character. And also, spiritual strength: do you know what that is? It is the ability to endure. It is the ability to be steadfast; to stay the course; to persevere; to be persistent and resilient; to be stable and consistent.

And when we don't develop that faculty of strength that's in us, you know what shows up? It shows up of having a hard time sticking to things. It shows up as wanting to give up quickly and easily. It shows up as starting projects but not actually finishing them.

Now, when we overdo this spiritual strength, it shows up as being stubborn and controlling. Anybody ever have a few moments in your life where you were stubborn or controlling? [Congregants laugh] It sometimes shows up as being forceful, you know, and being aggressive. So, we have this spiritual power that we could underuse or overuse, you overuse. We can under develop or overdevelop.

And when we are centered in our faith, it leads us to an inner strength. A power that comes of clarity: of knowing what is the right and best thing to do, and when it is important to hang in. When it is important to keep on keeping on. Keep working at it; that the breakthrough will come.

Interesting that strength and faith are connected in the way they are. Because, when you think about it, faith is saying, *"I know that things will get better; that my desires are possible; that change and transformation is possible."* And strength is the ability to hang in there and see it through until it transforms. Because things don't always happen instantaneously. They take time; they take work; they take effort.

Interestingly ... so the 12 disciples represent these 12 spiritual powers. And faith and strength are close. Interestingly, Peter, the disciple for faith, and Andrew, the disciple for strength, are brothers. And so, I don't think there's any coincidence that those two faculties are so important for each other, and they happen to be brothers.

Another aspect of strength isn't just perseverance; it is another aspect ... and I think strength shows itself in patience. How many people have ever been impatient? Anybody ever? [Congregants laugh] Anybody come from the *"I want it and I want it now!"* school of spirituality? [Congregants laugh]

You know, I think we all have that! I have a situation where there's always a little friction and a rub with my patience between my will and God's will; between my timing and God's timing. You know, there's always a little rub there of impatience. Because we want it, and we want it now! And that's a very important spiritual practice. Strength through patience.

In the book of Isaiah, Chapter 40, Verse 31, here is what it says: *"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not grow weary. They shall walk and not faint."* Patience is an important thing.

I bet if you think of all the things you would like to manifest in your life, if they all happened now at the same time, I just have a feeling it may not be as enjoyable and fulfilling. Or we may not be able to manage them, because it's not the right time. That sometimes we just need to trust that Spirit will unfold it in the right way that will bless us in the right time.

Anybody ever have something in your life happen? It wasn't happening; it wasn't happening. And then suddenly it kind of fell into place and everything went well. And I think that is no accident ... because that is God's timing.

I want you to think of something in your life right now where you need some faith to hang in there and know it will get better. But also you need some spiritual strength to hang in there and keep going.

And so I think it's an important thing. All these spiritual powers are calling us to develop them and to give them the time; give them the thought; give them the patience that they need to work through our consciousness so they could be fully developed and expressed in our lives.

*"My strength comes from the presence and power of God within me."*

Together: [with congregation] *"My strength comes from the presence and power of God within me."*

Take a deep breath.

In that awareness: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Spiritual strength: it's an important thing. An important thing! Life is not always easy; it requires faith and strength to get through, and to fulfill and do the work that's needed to manifest our desires, and to fulfill our spiritual potential.

Speaking of strength, it reminds me of:

*This bartender who considered himself the strongest person around. And he offered a gift of a bet of \$1,000 if he would squeeze a lemon into a glass and then hand it to any patron. And if they could even squeeze one drop after he had finished squeezing they would get \$1,000.*

*Many, many people tried. You know, firemen, weightlifters, longshoremen ... but nobody could do it. One day a scrawny little guy came into the bar wearing thick glasses and a polyester suit with a tiny, squeaky voice. And he said he wanted to try. After the laughter died down from the crowd in the bar, the bartender said, "Okay," grabbed the lemon, squeezed it, and handed the wrinkled remains to the little man.*

*But the crowd's laughter was silenced when the little man clenched his fist around the lemon and not only dropped one drop of lemon juice, but six. They were amazed. They were astonished. They were stunned.*

*The bartender gave the skinny guy the thousand bucks, and the bartender said, "What do you do for a living, man? Are you a lumberjack or a weightlifter?"*

*And the guy said, "No; I work for the IRS." [Congregants laugh] Whew! I love that.*

Our theme for this year is to embrace your power. And I'm serious about it, because I really think we don't always embrace our power. We don't always believe it. We don't always embrace it. We don't always allow ourselves to express it and truly enjoy the abundant life that we are here to live.

And the beginning of it is to answer the question: Who do you think you are? First, remember that I am a child of God; that I'm a powerful spiritual being. Over the next six weeks, we're going to work on how do we express our Christ's potential and these 12 incredible spiritual faculties that we have been given.

And we're going to start with the foundation, and that is by building and growing, embracing and expressing the spiritual quality of faith and the spiritual quality of strength.

God bless you all.