

EMBRACE UNDERSTANDING and WILL

Week #4 of a 6-Week Series, "Embrace Your Power"

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In the second chapter of Timothy, Chapter 1, Verse 7, it says, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline." God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.

"God has given me a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline."

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"God has given me a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline."*

This year's theme and focus for this six-week series to begin the year is entitled, "Embrace Your Power." And the reason is: because as powerful as we are -- as powerful as we've been told that we are -- sometimes we do not always embrace our power. Sometimes we shy away from it; run away from it. Sometimes we choose to play small. Because we don't always believe at some level. We don't always trust -- we don't always own or use -- the power that God has given us.

How many people would agree that you don't always use the spirit of power, love and self-discipline as fully as you can use that is in you?

So, we're in Week #4 of this series where we're taking a closer look at Charles Fillmore's concept of the 12 Powers of Man. Fillmore says that we are born and endowed with these 12 spiritual attributes -- these 12 spiritual qualities that he calls the Christ qualities, which makes up the fullness of the potential of the Christ within each and every one of us. And the concept of these 12 [powers], and learning how to use them, is to help understand, apply and fully express our divine potential ... our Christ potential.

You know, there are 12 spiritual powers. Week #1 we looked at faith and strength. Week #2 we looked at love and wisdom. Last week we looked at power and imagination. If you missed any, you could check those out online. Today we're going to look at the spiritual power of [UNDERSTANDING](#) and the spiritual power of [WILL](#).

You know, [UNDERSTANDING](#) is that ability to see beyond the appearance to glean the deeper spiritual meaning: to be able to see things from a higher perspective and to be able to comprehend, connect the dots and see the bigger picture. It is our ability to take information and see it in a greater context. This quality of understanding is inborn in every one of us, and sometimes we underuse it, and sometimes we overuse it.

When we underuse it, the understanding quality in our lives can show up as only being able to see things on a surface level. You know that saying, "You can't see the forest for the trees"? Sometimes we focus on the individual problems and can't see the bigger context of our lives and our situations. Sometimes underdeveloped understanding can show up in a way where we feel like we just don't have a clue; we don't know which way is upside down. We just cannot find that level of clarity. And the final way, in its extreme, a lack of understanding can show up as a lack of empathy and a lack of awareness.

Now, when it's overdeveloped, understanding can show up in a way where we come across as a bit of a know-it-all; where we think we understand everyone; where we think we understand everything, and we've just "got it" in terms of how life works.

You know, today, we have more access to more information and knowledge than we've ever had. We have facts, statistics, photos; we have people analyze, reason; all kinds of things that are out there. And for all the facts and information we have, we can still not understand ourselves; not understand our world; not understand our families; not understand our relationships.

Einstein said, "Any fool can know." He said, "The point is to understand." Do you understand? And is there some error in your life that you'd like to have more understanding?

In the Book of Proverbs, it repeatedly highlights the importance of understanding, stating that understanding is more precious than silver or gold! And in 1 Kings, when Solomon became king, God came to him in a dream and said, "I will give you whatever you ask; whatever you ask." And he prayed and thought about it, and he asked for an understanding heart and an understanding mind so he could lead the people and be a good king. God was so impressed that he didn't ask for long life; he didn't ask for wealth; he didn't ask God to kill all his enemies. He asked for an understanding heart and an understanding mind.

Again, how many people in here would like to have a greater level of understanding of yourself, your life, and your purpose? And how many people know that having more understanding would create a fuller and a more meaningful life for you?

You know, I love that line in the Book of Proverbs. It says, "In all your getting, get understanding." That, in all our chasing for money and power and success, one of the key elements that underlies a healthy and meaningful and happy life and relationship is understanding ... the spiritual power of understanding that we have all been given.

And we all need to ask ourselves: "How well am I demonstrating understanding in my life?" Here are the three ways that we can increase and improve our spiritual power of understanding.

And the first one is to desire an understanding heart, just like Solomon. He had a desire that he wanted to rule with an understanding mind and an understanding heart. He wanted to live his life with a greater understanding of himself and people and the world.

In the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 3, Verse 5-6, it says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, but in all ways acknowledge God and He will make straight your paths." And so, it's saying if we want straight paths -- if we want a happier life -- lean into the understanding and awareness of God. Don't trust our own understanding: our human understanding. Lean into a divine understanding; a divine wisdom; and the divine intelligence.

You know, many traditions say that there is one thing that helps us go to a deeper level of understanding; one spiritual practice that will help us have a deeper understanding. Anybody know what it is? Okay, I'll tell you. [Congregants laugh] It is silence. The more we can be still, quiet our minds and just listen to the still, small voice of God, it begins a flow of clarity; to have a greater level of understanding that is beyond the appearance. That, whatever is going on in our lives, to pray and have a desire for greater understanding. We have to just quiet our mind and listen and be still.

Have the intention for an understanding mind ... but the willingness to listen to allow that understanding to flow in and through us. You know, the silence can really bring us wisdom and inspiration.

You know one of the great things about understanding? It also brings a sense of calm and peace. The more we understand, the more calm and centered and at peace we are. The more clarity that we have, the easier whatever it is for us to do comes in and through us. The more we immerse our mind in the mind of God, the more we have the wisdom -- the intelligence -- and are able to have a level of greater understanding.

The second one ... The first one is to ask for and have a desire for an understanding heart and mind. **The second one is to question your old ways of thinking and to look for a different perspective on a situation.**

Think of a situation in your life right now that isn't working as well as you'd like. And for that situation, think of the perspective you have right now on it. How are you looking at that? And ask yourself the question: *"Is there a better perspective I could hold on this situation?"*

And ask yourself the question: *"Is there something that I'm not seeing in this situation that I'm supposed to see? Is there something that I'm not learning that I'm supposed to learn? Is there something that I meant to change or let go of that I'm still holding on to? What is the lesson or the blessing in this for me?"*

Everybody knows the story of Joseph, who was hated by his brothers so much that they sold him into slavery. They really wanted to kill him. And then all these series of bad things: he was left for dead; he was sold as a slave; he went to prison. All these things did not go well for him. And he could have easily held a perspective and mindset of, *"Poor me. Why me? My family rejects me and hates me. Life is unfair. Life stinks."*

He could have thought all these negative things and, instead, a different awareness and perspective came to him in the words from God that said, *"Man meant this for evil, but God means this for good."* He was able to shift his thinking on this into understanding Paul's words when Paul's word said, *"All things work together for good for those who love God."* All things are working together for our highest good.

And, in [Joseph's] situation, it really did! Because eventually he became the governor of Egypt and was able to actually reunite and have a healing with his family. That, even in that situation – being thrown in a pit and left for dead -- he had the understanding that all things are working together for his highest good.

How many people believe that everything happens for a reason? Everybody? How many people believe that? You ever had a situation in your life that you didn't understand, and a couple years later it's like, *"Ah; so that's why it happened."* Anybody ever have that?

See, it is that level of understanding and that perspective ... even when now is not looking so good, you can know that it's working for our highest good. You can have the understanding that things happen in our lives for a reason. This came to teach me, to bless me, to make me stronger; to maybe lead me to something that I need to prepare myself for in the next phase.

"I am understanding."

Say it – repeat after me: [with congregants] *"I am understanding."*

"I see the spiritual truth in every aspect of my life."

Together: [with congregants] *"I see the spiritual truth in every aspect of my life."*

So, a desire for an understanding heart and mind. Being able to question and get a perspective of understanding. **And the third understanding is the hardest one. and that is: trying to understand people.** [Congregants laugh]

How many people have someone in your life that you just don't understand them? And you'd like to understand them, but you just don't get them; you just don't get them! And how many people have someone in your life that doesn't understand you? And you wish they would understand you better. Anybody have that?

Understanding is an important thing: more valuable than I think that we even understand and realize. I was reading an article this week, and it was called, "The Importance of Being Understood." And it says, *"Every human being at our very core wants to be understood."* Everybody! It is a basic psychological human need to want to be understood. Because being understood makes us feel safe: safe to be

ourselves, to feel accepted. Being understood actually helps us feel a greater connection to people and a greater sense of intimacy and closeness. Understanding actually helps us modulate our emotions and process our feelings.

Anybody read Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*? And one of those seven habits of highly effective people was seek first to understand, then to be understood. Because Covey realized all human beings -- if we really want to be more effective -- we need to be willing to be understanding to ourselves and our relationship with the people we work with in our lives. Understanding has to be a high priority and an important spiritual practice.

And the way to increase our understanding of people: first, at some level, is that we need to care. We need to care; have a desire for their well-being; have a desire to get to know them and support their well-being.

The second one is that we need to practice listening: to be present; to feel engaged. One of the greatest gifts we can give someone is the gift of our undivided attention.

And then the third one is compassion: an awareness that they mess up just like us, and they deserve a chance. They're a child of God, and we need to have compassion for themselves as well as for ourselves.

You know, sometimes we can practice understanding when we're having negative energy towards us in certain situations. Like, if your five-year-old child is saying, "*I hate you! I hate you; I hate you!*", we have the understanding that they don't hate us, but they're hurting; they're confused; They're upset. That's just the way they're expressing it.

But it's a little tougher when they're older, and they're expressing in that way. [Laughs with congregants] Everybody remember Ryan White? You remember Ryan White: first kid with AIDS in the country? And one of the things that was really interesting and challenging about him is that they didn't want him to go to school. And here he is -- 13 years old; he's got AIDS; he's sentenced to death -- and he's fighting just for the right to go to school, to have some degree of normalcy and to be a part. And they're throwing rocks; breaking windows; slashing tires of his family. I mean, it was horrible!

They were doing his interview. I was 21, going through a tough time. He was 18 in the interview. And the interviewer said, "*So how does it feel to be hated by all of these people?*" And he said, "*They don't hate me. They're just afraid. They're just afraid of the unknown, but they don't hate me and I don't take it personally.*"

Talk about an old soul! Eighteen-year-old person ... But here's the message, though. That same level of understanding is available for all of us in all areas of our lives and all of our relationships We can extend a level of understanding at that level of depth for others and also for ourselves.

You know, understanding doesn't sound like it's a game changer and a huge deal, but I think it's hugely powerful. I think it could bring healing and clarity and peace and understanding. It can give levels of insight and wisdom. And help us feel better about ourselves! Help us feel better and understanding about the people in our lives, our relationships, our families.

"In all you're getting, get understanding." Because if you really want to be happy at a deeper level, then understanding and being understanding needs to be an important aspect of that.

The second spiritual practice we're looking at today is WILL. Will -- to be able to will -- is to be determined; to decide; to take command; to choose. You know, to move forward and to move to action.

You know, Charles Fillmore says that will is the executive power of the mind, because it is the thing that executes whatever we determine to be the best action. And so, will activates all the other powers, he

said. That's why it's the executive power. You know, it is our will that moves us to love; that moves us to practice faith; that moves us to use the power of our imagination. It is will that activates all of our spiritual powers.

That's why he says -- Chapter 9 -- He says, "*The will is the man*," because we become what we think and what we do. And what we will ourselves to do -- and practice and demonstrate in our lives -- Is the result of our lives.

Bobby Knight, the great college basketball coach, said the will to win is not as important as the will to prepare to win ... as the will to do the work necessary to succeed.

Underdeveloped, will can express itself as just wanting to do nothing. Not feeling driven; not feeling determined; not taking charge of our lives. Just kind of going through the motions of our lives; just kind of wandering and living in a way that's kind of resigned.

Overdeveloped, will can show itself as wanting to get our way all the time -- "*My way or the highway!*" Being bossy; telling everyone always what to do. Now, sometimes if that's your job, that's okay ... but I'm talking about not showing up like that in all your relationships all the time.

Will helps us focus on using and engaging and putting into action all the spiritual powers to help create the kind of life that we want, but also to demonstrate that Christ-like potential and behavior.

Here are the three things we could do to engage and develop the power of will in a greater way.

And the first one is to take action. The Apostle Paul said, "*Whatever you've heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice, and the peace of God will be with you.*" In the Book of James it says, "*Be doers of the Word -- not just hearers, but doers -- and you will be blessed in your doing.*"

What's the first book after the Gospels? The Book of Acts. Thank you for the minister in the front row saying it. [Congregants laugh] The Book of Acts!

Nike says it in three words: "*Just do it.*" Larry the Cable Guy says it in two words: "*Git-R Done!*" [Congregants laugh] But either way, we're talking about action. Action!

Einstein said, "*Nothing happens until something moves.*" There was something powerful and amazing about action. That's why in the Old Testament it says, "*Faith without works is dead.*" And I would flip that: Faith with works comes alive! That, when you take action, it begins to move energy. You begin to build momentum. You create an attracting force. People will come towards you: the right people, at the right time. I mean it is a powerful thing! More solutions, more ideas, more possibilities start being generated as you take action ... as you do the work, apply the principles.

We human beings, I have to tell you, we love ... We love looking for the easy way out. I mean, there's nothing wrong with being smart and efficient. That's absolutely! But we often try and get something for nothing. We want to find the easiest way out. And let me give you an example. So I've got some friends that have lost a lot of weight. And someone will say, "*Hey, how'd you lose all that weight?*"

"*Well, I really worked hard and was disciplined. I didn't eat this; I didn't eat that. I worked really hard at it.*"

And the response is like, "*Ohhhhh.*" [Congregants laugh] Being disappointed because it was hard work that got the results.

I had a friend who once said, "*You know, in life, easy is not an option.*" If you want to succeed as much as we say we want to succeed -- whether it's spiritually or in our career, in our relationships or any area of life -- it takes work. It takes action and it takes effort.

So, the first one: take action to improve our will.

The second one is self-discipline. How many people here have ever procrastinated? Anybody ever been a little lazy? Hard to break through the inertia? Okay. And how many people know that your life would get better if you were just a little more disciplined? Disciplined!

And so, you know, sometimes we joke around because we all procrastinate. But self-discipline is an important aspect. That's why it made "the big three." I mean, you can imagine in Scripture, they could have put a lot of things! *"God gave you a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline."* It could have been God giving power, love, forgiveness. There's all kinds of things that could have been! But it was self-discipline ... because self-discipline applies to all the spiritual practices and all areas of our lives. We need it because it takes work, and it is not always easy.

And there is a cost if we aren't disciplined. Because it costs us achievement and success. It costs us levels of health and care of our body. It costs us money that we could have earned. It costs us having a better relationship when we are not self-disciplined.

Napoleon Hill said, *"Self-discipline starts with the mastery of your thoughts, because if you can't control what you think, you will not be able to control what you do."* Self-discipline is about making ourselves do what we need to do when we need to do it ... even when we don't like it.

And the thing about discipline: it really makes us more efficient. It focuses our energy and our intention; our actions. We tend to be more laser-focused and not waste or dissipate a lot of our energy.

And so it's a really, really, really powerful and helpful practice. And yes, in the beginning, it's hard. But like any muscle, it will get stronger as we build it and practice it. And as we do it more, we get more rewards and things actually become easier. But the starting of it is hard.

And then the last thing to improve our will is to drop a bad habit and replace it with good habits.

Absolutely 100% of the most successful people in the world have good habits. That's why Covey called that book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Because it's the people who do the things more consistently and automatically towards their success who have the greatest amount of success.

Now breaking ... How many people ... anybody here have a bad habit? How many people have a bad habit? People have a few. Okay; good. And sometimes breaking a bad habit is not an easy thing. And here's why. Because of the repetition. And then it creates actually a brain pattern that gets triggered every time. And then the other one is when it touches our pleasure center in our brain. So, something like overeating -- which is not a good habit, but it could touch off that pleasure area -- so breaking that habit becomes harder.

You know, smoking ... You know, we can get a sense of relief from that. There's a lot of habits we have that sometimes trick ourselves into it being pleasure ... but we know it's not healthy or good for us. I read a thing that said 70% of the people who smoke want to quit. So, it is not always an easy thing.

But here's how we can do it.

The first one is: if you try to just quit the hard thing that sometimes you fail. So, what's a better thing to do? Start training yourself for self-discipline in other areas. I've said this before: everybody know the greatest habit to improve your overall life? Making your own bed every morning. It sounds silly, but what it does is it teaches the brain to go from disorganized to organized. And first thing in the morning, you do that, and you feel a sense of accomplishment. It's *"Oh; I made my bed!"*

And it sounds silly but, over time, it becomes a discipline. And as you get better with discipline in other areas -- like maybe having better posture or journaling every night -- any kind of consistent discipline

helps your overall discipline, so that you will actually at some point be able to break some of the habits that are difficult.

And the other thing about habits is: write down a list of the habits that are affecting you that you'd like to get rid of and start with just one. And then just make it a little bit harder. You know, it's like if you snack too much at the office every day, and you go down this hall where the vending machine with cookies and candy are, don't walk down that hall! [Congregants laugh] Walk outside; go around the building once; and come back and go to your desk. Find ways to make it a little harder for yourself. Don't make it easy; make it a little harder. Because you already don't want to do it. And this will make it a little harder.

And then the third is: visualize yourself successfully doing whatever behavior that you would like to achieve. Like, if you're trying to eat healthy all the time, and let's say, like, this coming Sunday, next Sunday, is Super Bowl Sunday. And you don't want to eat fattening foods and you're on a diet. Visualize yourself bypassing the nachos with cheese and the pizza and the chicken wings [congregants laugh], and then enjoying a piece of broccoli with some hummus. [Laughs with congregants] No, for real! Visualize! [Congregants laugh]

But the will is the man. We become what we think about and what we do. And the power of will is the executive power for us to take action. It's not easy, but It's well worth it, because the payoff is for you! The improvement in your life is for you! The demonstrating more of our Christ potential is for you!

A kindergarten teacher was trying a new little twist on "Show-and-Tell" with her class, and she gave everyone the assignment of bringing something that represented their religion to create more understanding.

So, the first child came to the front and said, *"My name is Benjamin. I am Jewish; this is the star of David."*

The second child got up and said, *"My name is Mary. I am Catholic; this is the crucifix."*

And the third child got up and said, *"My name is Tommy. I am a Baptist; this is a casserole."* [Congregants laugh]

You have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. And you know, we have these spiritual powers. Christ's power is in us. Let us put some effort into demonstrating and expressing them and living up to that level. It's already within us! You just take some work and some effort through our understanding and through our will. You know, let's keep living and striving to live our best life -- our more spiritually-centered life -- by embracing the power of understanding and will.

God bless you.