

# Power for what?



## A powerful memory.

When I look back to the memory, I always arrive mid-scene. A 10-year-old kid standing in the middle of the classroom.



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Shamed. Paralysed. Tears uncontrollably streaming down my face from feeling helpless. I was a new immigrant of just a couple of weeks and my Year 4 teacher was towering over me and repeatedly yelling, 'Do you understand what I am trying to say!' I did, indeed, understand – I just felt powerless to respond.

His strong voice struck fear into my young heart and it made me feel like I didn't belong. I am almost certain that wasn't his intention, but it is what I remember vividly as my welcome into a country I now call 'home'. Since then, there have been many similar incidents which have upheld the narrative that I was different and I didn't belong.

It's taken many years to work that stuff out, including seeing counsellors. I am in a much better place now but that same feeling still creeps in here and there, when an authoritative teacher-like figure raises their voice towards me.

That feeling of fear, alienation and powerlessness. Though a different story, it is a similar cry that our First Nations brothers and sisters expressed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. In absorbing the inequalities that their peoples experience, I can hear their heartache when they say, "This is the torment of our powerlessness."

The dynamics of power.

A quick Google search will help us understand a biblical word study on 'power'. I looked up the different kinds of Hebrew and Greek words that paint a picture of how the ancient world viewed 'power'. But I am less interested in its definition and more curious about its function – how power is used.

In human history, we have seen 'power' used horribly. I am sure we could all think of times when human beings thought they had the solution to the world's problems, only to discover that it is usually at the cost of other people's freedoms, rights and even lives. It has been a 'torment of powerlessness' indeed. Unfortunately, in many instances – including sadly, in Christian mission – power has been used atrociously.

*Partnered with colonisers, power was used to dominate, tower over and scream at cultures whose primary posture was welcome.*

This includes the peoples of my ancestors, in the archipelago now called the Philippines. In the city where I grew up, the colonisers arrived on gunboats. They greeted the villages with raining canon shells – a show of power.

**My point is that in our human sin, power can be used to dominate, destroy and oppress – to colonise.**

Unlike the ancient gods and kings, we see throughout the Bible that our God is fondly consistent in aligning Himself with those who felt powerless. While kings justified their oppressive power under their gods, our God allied Himself as a defender of the widows, a father to the orphans and a comforter to the marginalised. And He invites His people to do the same.

**And like the Father, the Son's kind of power gave voice to the powerless. This is where I am continually challenged by Jesus in how He understood the dynamics of power.** Just as He modelled it, Jesus corrected our use of power by pointing to serving others, rather than being served. (Matthew 20:25-28)

As Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako wrote, "Jesus' way was one of engagement and involvement through a new way of overcoming, arising from a unique concept of power – power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination."

Jesus had a non-dominating use for power. In fact, in Philippians 2:5-11, it describes Jesus choosing to give up any rights to the kind of power our world obsesses over – domination through authority, popularity and force. Instead, He uses power to humble Himself.

*He uses power to serve, to love... even to sacrifice Himself to the point of execution. Jesus kept His heart humble and left it to the Holy Spirit to do the filling, lifting and empowering.*

In other words, Jesus uses His power to move into our neighbourhoods, get alongside those at the bottom rung of the ladder and lift everyone towards the Father.

What is our power meant for? Well to follow Jesus' counter cultural way... our power is for freedom, love and justice.



There's more! Listen to Marbz explore the dynamics of power on our podcast.

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