

1

Your Days of Powerlessness Are Over

“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

2 Timothy 1:7 NIV

In the Preface, I mentioned crossing paths with Trevor, a Christian friend and fellow minister at a community prayer event. Though we live and lead in the same city, and sincerely care for each other, we hadn't seen each other for quite some time. There we were, standing in the aisle waiting for the event to begin, enjoying our reconnection. I had asked him how his family was doing, and he was telling me about his children.

With his chin up, his chest out, and a proud smile on his face, his joy beamed out as he shared that some were doing well. But then came that fallen countenance, the hurt, the evident embarrassment, disappointment as he referred to those not walking with the Lord. Concern and resignation were in his voice. It was as if he was saying, “With that one, with those, there's nothing I can do.”

God keeps bringing these people across my path. They hurt. They hope. There is something they can do. I can help. Your days of powerlessness are over.

“We knew to be responsible—we were raised that way.”

I was raised in church but didn't walk with God. Joy and I married young — I was 17, just having graduated from High School. Joy had been 16 for ten days. She is the love of my life. We knew to be responsible — we were raised that way.

I am so proud of how Joy embraced the responsibility of motherhood. Our kids should be forever thankful. She was awesome. I had a solid job in the family business. We had a strong support network of family and church family. The longer I live, the more I appreciate them and how they were there for us.

We knew we had to be responsible — but we had no vision for our future. Studies of human development tell us that the human brain isn't fully formed until sometime in a person's third decade of life. In many ways, we were just kids who married in the face of barbs from schoolmates, dismissal of pastoral counsel, and the concerns and doubts (some spoken, some unspoken, until years later) of family and friends.

“You know, you don't have to get married” was our pastor's heartfelt counsel, and we knew we didn't. I had proposed. She'd said yes, and we were gladly, maybe naively, already on our way together.

We were the royalty in our domain, having purchased our first home and a newer car to bring our son home from the hospital (a '71 Dodge Charger, light royal blue with a white hard top, two door, chrome reverse wheels. I added a very cool pinstripe with the tape I picked up at the parts store. I had it going on.)

I was proud of my beer can collection, displayed on the high shelf in front of the window, high above our dining area. We got into Amway and were on the platform as examples of recruiting success in

a matter of weeks. “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—what more could a teenager want?

But our marriage was tenuous at best. Two years in, though Joy wasn’t raised in church, she knew that unless we “got God in our life”, we weren’t going to make it. This year, we celebrated another 50+ wedding anniversary. We have three grown kids, all married to great spouses, eleven grandchildren, including one grandson-in-law, plus two we’ll meet in heaven. All are serving the Lord.

It’s incredible to see how deeply entrenched in our souls the experiences of our childhood become, what power and sway early training has over our lives. It shook my world as a depth charge rattles a submarine.

Raised in a Mennonite church, I was a recovering pacifist. I learned to believe that the righteous path of non-violence meant that even if someone was to come into our home to violate my wife, to harm my children, for me to raise my hand violently to stop them was sinful. It sounds bizarre looking back, but it was what it was, and good sense, God’s word, and the Holy Spirit within me warred against that stronghold.

Early in our parenting, I came to a point of crisis. A question rocked my confidence by touching on that unresolved inner conflict over personal boundaries and authority in my own territory. It caused me to question my position and role as a father and the head of my household.

I’m a morning person. First thing in the morning, time alone is where my battery gets charged. In that early morning time of reflection and contemplation before anyone else rises, transformation takes place, and I get centered and set for the day.

Most days, I spend time with the Lord in His Word, prayer, and praise. After that, I get to the rest of my day. But my routine was disrupted that morning.

I had finished my morning quiet time, made a quick stop in the kitchen, and was on the way to get showered and dressed. As I crossed through the dining room that question hit my mind. It went straight to my heart.

It was at that exact season in my older kids' lives when they were transitioning from childhood into adolescence. In their early childhood years, children learn various things. When kids begin that process of becoming their adult selves, things are *absorbed*. I was aware of the reality that our kids were entering a stage of development in which they would examine the beliefs they'd inherited and take ownership of their faith.

It was at that season when the question came to me. It wasn't out loud. Just as a *thought*, it blew open my well-ordered scheme of living. One question: "Was it right?"

We were doers of the Word concerning parenting, which we'd learned and believed. The people God had connected us with were wonderful examples and mentors. Our children had come to Christ Jesus at an early age, even receiving the Holy Spirit in our living room. We were raising them in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord."¹ But in a moment, one question challenged what I thought was my *well-established* paradigm.

I realize now that it was also a devilish attack on my sense of self-worth and self-confidence. One question caused me to question myself — Who was *I* to think *I* actually knew the way *they* should go? How arrogant.

It caused me to question whether it was right and fair for me to stake my children's future on what I believed to be the truth—after all, *their* values, habits, and lives would be shaped by the training I had planned for them. I needed to ensure that what I believed was truly the right way to go.

I began to question whether I was robbing them of what they *could* have if they didn't learn to believe that this Way, and no other way, is the only way. And then, combined with the question of authority, there was the whole ethics thing—I had to be confident that it was right for *me* to set a course for *them*.

I was a "30-something" first-time pastor, feeling external career pressures along with the internal pressure created by my own desire to do things right before God and to steward my integrity, and frankly, a good measure of scrupulousness. There hadn't been any doubts up to that point—we were confident we were parenting righteously.

Suddenly, this was no longer something settled from which I could move on. Jesus is not the only one who asks questions. The Devil asks powerful questions, too.²

God alone knows all the factors that entered into that moment in my dining room—but I know this: God has used the occasion of that question to my heart and soul to anchor within me a confidence that has ordered the course of life for my family for generations to come.

You likely have not arrived here at this question of parental authority, method, and technique from the same starting point. Your background may not be one of pacifism, nor even passivity. Yet, every parent must answer the question.

The question calls for consideration of the lifelong impact on your child's happiness. It forces serious thought on their future — for *your* thinking right has an influence on *their* eternal bliss. And not only their eternity, but the way you think also impacts their success in *this* life. How will you go about parenting? Are you left to your own resources as a parent?

Does God care? Does God care enough to become personally involved as you wrestle with answering, “How do I parent *this* child?” Each journey is unique. Knowing what's right will impact you and your family for generations to come. What God taught me is what I want to share with you.

In addition to having a successful marriage and raising a thriving family, I have dedicated over four decades to full-time Christian ministry. With extensive ministerial training from Rhema Bible Training College, as well as a bachelor's and master's degree in theology, my wife, Joy, and I have ministered in over a dozen countries around the world. We pastored the same church for 40 years, which has taught us valuable lessons. People often tell me that my life is my message.

I've heard so many people talk about their family members, expressing discouragement and fragile hope over the spiritual state of their children. It's as though they are embarrassed to say their children are not really walking with the Lord Jesus or serving God, and the ring in their words is that they are powerless to do anything about it.

I can help. That's why I'm writing this book.

Could it be that they are in bondage because of holding a distorted sense of respect for their child's free will and a misbelief in hands-off parenting? Or are they like the proverbial prisoners who stay in their jail cell simply because they are ignorant of the fact that the door is unlocked? If they knew the truth, they'd realize they could walk out into freedom.

Your days of powerlessness are over.

The truth is, God has promised each believer in Jesus Christ the salvation and blessedness of their children today and of their descendants to come. The truth is, God has not given a spirit of powerlessness to those who call on the name of Jesus as Lord, but a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The truth is that to see your children serving things other than God, for you to live anticipating a future of sorrow and longing for your lost, wayward, or prodigal kids—for you to pine away in agony and be powerless to do anything about it—is a curse. It is a curse from which you have been redeemed.

The truth is that God has gotten involved with each believer *so that* they can command their children and their household after them, *so that* the Lord may bring upon them the blessing which He has spoken of them.

Don't get hung up on the word "command." You're going to come to see that, though it is authoritative, it's not authoritarian. It's relational. It's love. It's powerful. It's right.

If you have come into God's family by faith in Jesus Christ, God has brought you to Himself with this end in mind—that you would take charge, take command, so that He could bring His blessedness upon you and yours.

Your days of powerlessness are over.