

Fil-Am Community Church

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12 July 2012

“THE EXTRAORDINARY POWER OF GOD TO CHANGE LIVES”

The ark of God remained with the family of Obed-Edom in his house for three months, and the Lord blessed his household and everything he had.”

1 Chron. 13:14

Our power sources wane sometimes. But consider God’s power. With a wave of His hand, he can carve out a canyon, shift the tides, or fling a million stars into space. He can topple a mountain or slice an atom, rearrange the seasons or redesign a snowflake.

So then why doesn’t He change the circumstances of our lives with the same “wave of His hand” kind of power? Let’s be honest, we all go through time in our lives when we wish God would just “fix things.” I can’t tell you how many times I’ve prayed that God would just snap his fingers and make everything right during certain periods of my life. But in my experience, that rarely happened. And the more I get to know people, the more I see that scenario play itself out.

So what gives? If God has the power to change our circumstances, why doesn’t He? Does He not care? Is He punishing us? Is He weak?

This morning, I'd like to suggest to you that every one of us who are followers of Jesus can experience God's power in every area of our lives. The same God that we have seen powerfully working in the lives of his people, even ordinary people in the Bible is the same God that you and I serve today.

And this same God wants to give us lives that are full of purpose and vigor. But how many people do you know that really live lives of full of purpose and vigor? If we're truthful, not many. Most of us consider our day a success if we find a good deal on gas somewhere. Especially without the help of that app called "Gasbuddy". It will be a topic of conversation at the dinner. We'll brag to our family on the phone. We'll recommend the station to our co-workers. We may even testify at church that God helped us saved 7 cents a gallon on gas!

Maybe He did, but I can't help but think that God wants so much more for our lives than cheap fuel. And I can't help but believe that God wants to reveal His power in our lives in more ways than just 7 pennies per gallon.

So why don't we see His power revealed in our lives the way we feel it should be? That's a good question. Let's follow it up with two more: Could it be that your circumstances aren't what needs to be changed? What if, instead of simply waving a magic wand and changes your circumstances, God changed you...from the inside, out?

Imagine how things in your life would if you experienced that kind of power. The power of a new outlook. The power of a new mind. The power of a new heart. That's the kind of power our God has. And that kind of power makes all the canyons and tides and mountains and stars pale in comparison. And that is what God wants to do for each of us. But there are forces at work against us...forces that keep us from tapping into that power. And until we allow God to fundamentally change us, we will never experience that kind of power. And the circumstances that we keep praying for God to change...will rarely get any better.

So this morning, let me share with you the forces that keep us from experiencing God's power, and how God helps us to overcome them in our lives...if we will let Him.

The first of these forces that prevent us from experiencing God's power in our lives is

1. Fleshly Resistance

This is the kind of resistance that comes from our own selves. This refers to our desires, our inclinations, our dispositions, and preconceived notions. That means we get in the way of the blessings God sends our way.

We act like the little girl who had been trying for months to learn the art of tying her shoes. She finally grasped the knack and was able to do it by herself.

Her parents expected her to be delighted, but were surprised by her disappointment. Her father asked why she was crying. She sobbed, "I just learned how to tie my shoes." He told her, "That's wonderful, honey, but why are you crying?" She told him, "Because now I'll have to do it all by myself for the rest of my life."

She didn't want to experience change because it was too much work for her. It was out of her comfort zone. Just like some of us.

Have you ever had a hard time getting out of your comfort zone? Imagine for a moment that you never resisted changed in your life. Imagine that you were always open to anything God wanted to do with you. What would your life look like? How would your life be different?

Let me read from Acts 19:8-9, *"Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus."*

We see in this passage that Paul taught in the synagogue for only three months. Why not longer? Because some of them became obstinate. That's kind of a big word, "obstinate." You know what a simpler term for it is? "Stubborn." Just plain, ol' stubborn. God was unable to work in the hearts and lives of this small group of religious people in Ephesus because of their stubbornness.

I want you to notice something here about these people. There is definite resistance to God moving, but there is no mention of Satan, or temptations, or spiritual forces at all. All that is mentioned is that "some" of them became "obstinate." Truth was, that small group of people didn't want God to do something new in their lives or in the midst of their fellowship. They themselves got in the way. Not Satan. Not evil spirits or demons. They did.

There is some powerful truth here for us to learn. When it comes to our own lives, most of the time the only thing standing between us experiencing God's power is us.

This was the force that challenged Paul and it is almost always the force that keeps us from experiencing God's presence and power in our lives today: the force of fleshly resistance.

There other things that can hinder our walk with God, but we have got to get over ourselves first. I'll say again: if you want God to change your life, if you want to experience Him in a fresh way, if you want to tap into His power for

living, you must...you must...get over yourself. Take out the fleshly resistance at its source.

You can do this by making your heart receptive to what God wants to do in your life. To overcome fleshly resistance you have to have a receptive heart. So, when Paul left the people in the synagogue because of their stubbornness he went to the lecture hall of Tyrannus. We don't know whether Tyrannus is a place or a person but in that neighborhood the Bible tells us that, *“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.”* (Act 19:11-12)

Once Paul went to Tyrannus and started teaching to people who had receptive hearts, God did “extraordinary things.”

The second force that prevents us from experiencing God's power is

2. Spiritual Resistance

This is the kind of resistance that comes from forces outside of our physical experience. We live in a physical world or so it seems. We say it's physical because we can see it, we can touch it, we can we can hear it, we can taste it and we can smell it. But the physical world is not all there is. There is also a world that is beyond the reach of our five senses. We call this the spirit world.

In this spirit world, there is God and there are angels who work for our good. But there also beings that don't wish us well. The Bible refers to them as "spiritual forces of evil". They are our enemies. Ephesians 6:12 says, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* We call these "powers of this dark world", demons who are led by Satan or the Devil.

Satan is real. And he is crafty. In fact, he wants us to think that he is that scary guy with horns and a tail, holding a pitchfork, with a menacing look in his bemoustached face. You've seen that picture before. There's even a hot sauce called "Diablo". Well, that sauce really doesn't harm you spiritually but it will harm you physically, that is, if you get too much of it in your tongue.

Now, we may picture Satan as that red, scary guy, but the truth is, he disguises himself as an angel of light as the Bible says. Meaning, he can come to you like a real gentleman, clean-shaven, dressed in nice clothes with a well-kept hair. And usually he comes offering to you what seems to be like something that will make you feel good, something that will satisfy your deepest and most basic desires. He dangles something right in front of you that makes you salivate and you start thinking about it and you say to yourself, "Maybe it really tastes good. I must try it." Then you reach out and boom, you're caught in his trap.

It's hard to get out of his clutches once you give in. Give the devil a foothold in your life and it will be hard to evict him. So, don't give in to his temptations. Usually, the devil attacks you at the point of your greatest weakness. He knows that. He can observe you. And don't even think that because you come to church, or you read the Bible or you pray that you're beyond his reach. The Bible says, *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"*

(1 Corinthians 10:12). Satan and his minions will throw anything at you to keep you from experiencing God's power. Be aware that as Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8b, *"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."* What should you do then? The first part of that verse says, *"Be self-controlled and alert."*

Control yourself. Whatever your weakness is. Money, sex, gambling, smoking, alcohol, drugs, gossip, impatience, even food that make you unhealthy, control yourself. But don't do it on your own. Ask the help of God. Submit yourself under his control. Cooperate with his Spirit.

3. Material Resistance

Jack Benny, that comedian who always acted the part of the miser, told of the time he was held up. The robber stuck a gun to his back and said, "Your money or your life." After a long pause the robber repeated his threat, to which Benny replied, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!"

Have you ever known someone like that? Someone so attached to their stuff that their stuff became what they lived for? Here's the question for us this morning, though: Do you feel the tug of materialism in your life?

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

(Matthew 6:19-21, 24)

Becoming attached to worldly things is quite possibly the number one reason we do not experience change in our lives.

We become so engrossed in pursuing a life of comfort and pleasure and wealth (just like our culture tells us to)...that we become cold and calloused to what God may be wanting to do with us. But man, we love our stuff, don't we?

But unless this force is overcome, we will continue to live in a sort of spiritual mediocrity. We can overcome the force of materialism through personal sacrifice. Perhaps, we don't need that extra vacation, we don't need that extra bag, we don't need that extra TV or gadget or what-not. We don't have to keep up with the Joneses. We can overcome the force of worldly

attachment in our lives, but only when we become willing to make the personal sacrifice that is necessary for Him to change us.

My question to you today is this: are you willing? Do you want God to change your life? Do you want to experience His power in your daily walk with Him? Then let's look at the story of one of the less-known characters in the Bible. I'm talking about Obed-Edom.

Let me read again our text for today:

“The ark of God remained with the family of Obed-Edom in his house for three months, and the Lord blessed his household and everything he had.”

Let me give you a little background.

David, the great king of Israel wanted to go and retrieve the Ark of the Covenant which represented the very presence and power of God. The Ark had not been in the midst of the people for some time. It had been stolen by the Philistines, then moved to Beth Shemesh and finally ended up at Kiriath Jearim where it had been since the reign of Saul.

1 Chr. 13:5 says, “So David assembled all the Israelites, from the Shihor River in Egypt to Lebo Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim.”

On the way back one of the Israelite men, Uzzah, touched the Ark and died.

So instead of taking the Ark into the City of David, the King decided to take the Ark to the house of a man called 'Obed-Edom'. Obed-Edom was a Gittite, someone from the Philistine city of Gath, which was the birthplace of Goliath. But he knew the God of Israel.

Now, you can imagine the surprise of Obed-Edom. Here is the entire assembly of Israel outside his home. They knock on the door, he answers and the king of Israel is in front of him and says, "Excuse me, Mr. Obed-Edom, we need to leave this Ark with you for a short time". Would he say, "Sorry, can you try the next door?" I don't think so. This is the King of Israel. How could he decline? But he must have heard about what happened to Uzzah. The king himself was afraid of the Ark. Would he then let the Ark in his house? Yes, he did and what happens after that was beyond his wildest imagination. He overcame his fear with faith that resulted in blessings in his life and his family's life.

By letting the Ark in his home, Obed-Edom welcomed the very presence and power of God in his home. Let us look at what God's presence and power did in his life and circumstances.

I. The Presence and Power of God changed Obed-Edom's home life.

The Bible says that his house and ALL that was in it was blessed. Now I don't think his life was perfect, but it was blessed. He probably started

noticing his life changing. His car ran a little better, his wife looked a little more attractive and his kids actually started listening.

Well, the Bible doesn't actually say the kind of blessings that he had. But I'm sure there was a blessing in terms of improvement in relationships in his family. You see, when you let God be the center of your family life, you will see changes in the way you relate with one another. You will be more patient, more loving, more understanding and everything. There will still be problems, of course, like disagreements and arguments but they can be easily overcome.

Now, when they are not easily overcome, the question needs to be asked, "Is God really in the center of this home? Have we really welcomed his presence and power in this home?" Then, you check and look at your own personal life and also your spiritual practice as a family. Do you spend time alone with God? Do you spend time as a family with God? Those are hard questions. But they need to be asked answered honestly if we want God's blessings in our home.

I know a pastor in New Jersey who said that when they were young, he and his brothers were all like thugs. They like to get into a fight with others and with each other. Until one of them became a Christian and he started to act differently, became a peaceful person and treated his other brothers well. Then, the other brother became a Christian too and his lifestyle changed as

well. Until all of them became Christians and then there were no more fights.

Most likely, Obed-Edom also received material blessings. His livestock must have increased or his business must have prospered. God could have miraculously provided for him. Like if he was praying for a job, he could've received a call the next day for an interview. Things like that happen to us, no doubt about that. But you see, something more significant happens when you allow God's presence in your life. Your perspective about money changes. You realize that God owns everything and that you must be a good steward or manager of God's resources. Once you realize this biblical principle, you become more careful with your spending, you save money, and you give back to God what he deserves. I'm sure Obed-Edom gave back 10% of his income to God. In return, God increased his possessions.

The blessings that Obed-Edom received was in response to the presence and power of God moving into his life. What's the lesson here?

When we allow God to come in and make his presence dwell in our lives he will start blessing us, He will change our lives. Without the power and presence of God in our lives, we will be living under our own power.

How many of us are happy to live our lives without the power of God? How many of us are willing to have church without the power of God?

II. The Presence and Power of God changed Obed-Edom's Priorities

After three months, there came another knock on the door of Obed-Edom's house. It was King David again, returning for the Ark. I can imagine that old Obed-Edom didn't want to part with the presence of God. But he had to let it go.

Then, David began recruiting people for singing before the Ark as they prepare to bring it to Jerusalem. 1 Chronicles 15:16 says, *"Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy."*

So, they gathered people and asked if anyone was interested in joining the praise and worship team and a hand went up in the back – it was Obed-Edom (15:18). He said out loud, "The Ark needs singers? I'll sing!" But he wasn't a Levite, was he? Well, it turns out he was. He was just born in Gath and grew up there, but his parents were Levites.

Then, after that David then looked for people to be ushers. A hand went up again – it was Obed-Edom (15:23). Here he is again saying, "The Ark needs a doorkeeper – that's me!"

So, he was not only a singer, he was an usher too.

Then David asked for people to be ministers before the Ark when it was finally in place within the new tabernacle David had built for it (16:4). So, he enthusiastically raises his hand again and says, “The Ark needs a Director? That’s me. And he changes his name to Rey.”

Finally David said, we need gatekeepers to minister before the ark regularly (16:37). He is to lock and unlock the door and make sure they are secure. Obed-Edom didn’t miss a beat. He became a regular custodian of the tabernacle. And he changes his name to...Nelly. Now, don’t get me wrong. He changed his name, not his gender.

Do you see the point here? He was always available for God. When there was a need, he was there to fill it. Maybe he really doesn’t know his SHAPE yet, but he was just so filled with enthusiasm for God and things of God that it didn’t matter. Just like some of you here who may not know your SHAPE yet, but are serving anyway because you want to serve. And I appreciate and applaud you for that. But don’t worry, in the fall we’re going to hold a ministry fair so that you’ll know exactly where you fit.

Obed-Edom totally allowed the power of God to change him to the point that his priority was on the worship of God and nothing else. He so experienced the power of God that there was nothing asked of him, that he was unwilling to do.

III. The Presence and Power of God changed Obed-Edom’s Family

Not only did Obed-Edom become a singer, an usher, a Director, and a custodian. But we read in chapter 26 and verse 8 that he had 62 descendants that followed in his footsteps. 1 Chronicles 26:8 *“All these were descendants of Obed-Edom; they and their sons and their relatives were capable men with the strength to do the work—descendants of Obed-Edom, 62 in all.”*

He not only allowed the power of God to work in his life, but he was an example to his family of how the presence and power of God changes lives.

We can sometimes feel overwhelmed when our family members are not Christians – but it is only by allowing God’s power to flow through us that we will ever be able to see a change in them.

Obed-Edom allowed God to make a change in his life, which in turn influenced his family. If you want to influence others for Christ, you first have to allow God to take control and empower your own life.

Let me call someone here to give a testimony of how God’s power has changed his life and his family.

MERBIN’S TESTIMONY:

“When pastor asked me to share a testimony on how God plays an important role in our lives, the first thing that popped in my mind was that I did not want to do it. I thought about how people will react and judge me while I’m

up here. Ever since in high school I would always get nervous and scared every time I would go up in front of the class to present a project or speak in front of everyone, I lacked self confidence. But when you become a Christian and pray for spiritual growth you worry less and less about yourself and instead focus more on God. You learn to step out of your comfort zone and gain that self-confidence. God changed my life when I met my wife, Christine. She is always the positive reinforcement in my life. A lot of times I felt like the Holy Spirit uses her to get to me. She helps me build that relationship with the Lord.

“The first time I met Christine was back in high school in 1996, we were on our 10th grade. She was one of those students who were very smart and athletic. She was always on the headmaster's list and MVP on basketball and volleyball. She was the type of person who gets along with everyone and all the teacher knew her and they always have nice things to say about her. We started going out when we were on our senior year. Ting was raised as a Roman Catholic, but when we were in high school she and her family were very active in the beliefs of Brahma Kumaris. It's a religious organization that nurtures respect for all faith traditions and it explains the nature of soul, God, time and karma and improves a person's lifestyle. They also practice and teach a form of meditation that relaxes the mind and nurtures a healthy balance between our inner and outer world. Through numerous social service activities and partnerships they promote spiritual understanding, leadership with integrity and take their actions towards a better world. They also do not encourage marriage, boyfriends, and girlfriends.

“When I moved here in the US in year 2000, Christine was able to work in D.C. and started living in Virginia a couple of years later. We started living together in 2004 and I was away from the Lord. I was hanging out with the wrong people (Pastor David always says "when you hang out with the wrong people you will make wrong decisions") and that was me. I wasn't not going to church and all I'm worried was work, playing basketball, myself and my daily bad habits. Christine helped me get back to the Lord by getting involved in a church and by setting a good example and by always praying for me. I saw the changes in Christine's way of living when we became members of Fil-Am church. She became active by helping out Tita Kaye and the praise and worship team. She liked it and she felt the challenges that came with it. When Ting was baptized I knew that this was more than Bramah Kumaris and I was kind of surprised by it. I just knew God was working in her life and she was growing spiritually. A couple of years later she became one of the leaders of the praise and worship team and she could not believe it at first, and if you would have asked her in the beginning she would have said there's no way! The church prayed for a praise and worship leader after Tita Kaye left and Ting stepped up to the plate.

“When my mom visited here a few weeks ago she witnessed how a Christian wife really should be. After my knee surgery Ting was forced to work from home while taking care of me. My mom saw how patient and loving she was. I'm really grateful and blessed to have Ting as my wife. We always pray to God that He would strengthen our relationship and sometimes He would use trials in our life to answer prayers. My mom has her share of trials in her life.

For the past several years she and my father had been going through a rough relationship. It came to the point where she started questioning her faith in God. She had mentioned to me and other believers that seeing Christine active and leading the praise and worship team here in Fil-Am had motivated and encouraged her to keep her faith. She also told me in the past eight years that she hadn't been receiving the communion for personal reasons. But on that day, her first visit at Fil-Am, the first Sunday of the month, God touched her and gave her peace of mind to accept the communion and let go of whatever it is that was holding her back. Actually, my mom before coming here was wondering why she should come aside from the fact that she should because I was injured. She was not completely at peace. But her experience here made it clear to her that it was God's purpose after all.

“I feel that because of all the prayers from church members, leaders and home groups, Christine is being used by God since the beginning. She has been a blessing to a lot people especially to me and to my mom.”

Obed-Edom could have chosen not to allow the Ark into his home – He could have responded negatively and never allowed God's power to change his life. Many of us are that way; we never allow God's power to make changes in our lives, we often feel like we can make the changes on our own.

Remember, only under God's power are we going to be able to make significant strides – in our families, in our worship, in our relationships, in

our lives. But it relies on our response to God. Is your response going to be negative? Or are you going to stand in the crowd with your hand raised and say, like Obed-Edom “God, pick me”?

So, it all starts with you. Are you going to make that choice today?