

NEW LIFE VINEYARD

Power Encounters

March 15, 2015

It's good to be with you again. For those of you I haven't met, I serve as a Regional Leader for **Vineyard USA**, and that's the tribe that you are a part of: 1500 churches worldwide with 560 of those in the U.S. and in our region, 38 churches that are connected together relationally for encouragement and accountability.

Today I want to talk about something that's near and dear to me and absolutely critical to the Vineyard movement. It's all over the New Testament...but it's often been neglected or abused by the Church: it's this idea of *power encounters*...and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me add a disclaimer here: if you're new to all this church stuff or someone promised to take you to Chipotle if you came with them this weekend or you're not sure you even believe in God and stumbled in here, the Vineyard is thrilled that you're here. I believe you're the primary reason this church was planted years ago...and if you'll keep coming, you're going to be surprised at how life begins to look differently for you.

But today might be a bit of a stretch for you as we talk about *power encounters*. So if you leave today thinking you're not sure about this place, come back next week and I'll be gone and Ken will be back and it will be way better.

When we talk about *power encounters*, we're talking about experiencing the transrational, not-working-anything-up-emotionally, authentic *power of God*. And experiencing it in two ways: *to you*...and *through you*. And when we open the door to believe that, our faith exponentially grows. That's why the crowds around Jesus would say, "*He's not like the other rabbis; He speaks with authority...and moves in power...with signs and wonders.*"

To you...and through you. So since I haven't met some of you, let me tell you just a little bit about myself and why this idea of power encounters is so important to me...and I'll start with the "to you" part...and in this case, *to me*.

(Tell my story...)

Because here is the reality: Christianity is not another philosophy. It's not a moral viewpoint. It's not another pathway to inner bliss. It is the transforming of spiritually dead and alienated people into a vibrant, spiritually-energizing, life-giving relationship with God based on our surrendering to the Lordship of His Son, the God-man Jesus—the messiah of all, the savior of the world. *Not a nice-guy teacher. Not another enlightened guru. Not a philosopher.* Savior. Lord.

The apostle John—who was an actual eyewitness to Jesus and part of His posse—put it like this: *He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. John 1:10-13 (New Living Translation)*

This is transformational. You become a *child of God*. Prior to the infusing of the Holy Spirit with your soul, you are *not* a child of God. I don't care if you've gone to church all your life or if your uncle is Billy Graham or you know the Pope personally—you're *not* a child of God. That always offends some people who believe we all have the *Divine Spark* inside of us. That *sounds* good, but it's not biblical.

My girls are uniquely my kids because they have some of my genetic material inside of them. They're nearsighted. They are pretty easy-going. They're perfectionists. They're procrastinators. They have some of me—*my DNA*—inside of them. When you are born of the Spirit of God, He places some of Himself—via the Holy Spirit—in you...and you are forever transformed in that power surge, that *power encounter*. It's the greatest miracle that can happen; the very power of God birthed in you. You begin to take on some of the attributes of God. You're going to *be* a little bit like Him. This goes beyond behaviors, beyond what you do...because you're going to start *thinking* like Him. This is about *who you are becoming*.

That's a power encounter "*to you*"...as you learn to trust Him.

Now the "*through you*" is, in many ways, just as exhilarating and surprising, but it really only happens after the "*to you*" encounter.

Years ago—before the Vineyard and back when dinosaurs ruled the earth—I was traveling and playing music in a Christian rock band, after a concert in New Mexico I invited people to surrender their lives to Jesus. As we gathered the young people who came forward (most of them were teenagers), a woman probably in her early 30's crashed into the circle of teenagers and began shouting obscenities and making fun of what she called "religion." Their eyes got as big as saucers. I pulled her aside and asked her "*What's going on with you?*" There was a man with her who just stood behind her and smiled the whole time—he never said a word. It was kind of creepy; I couldn't figure out what the deal was with Smiley Guy.

She told me she had tried religion before and it was nothing but a *blankety-blank* joke and told me she was buzzed on coke at this very moment...so there!

I asked her if I could just pray for her because I thought that would just shut her up for a little bit while I tried to figure out what to do. She said, "*You can blankety-blank do whatever the blankety-blank you want!*" So I said, "*God, in the name of Jesus come and touch this woman.*"

Boom! She immediately fell to the floor like a bag of rocks—out cold.

The Smiley Guy with her looked at me...then looked at her...then back at me...and the teenagers who came forward were watching all of this with their mouths open—*this is not your average mosh pit.*

And I thought "*Dang, Jesus. You killed her!*" I wasn't sure what to do so I just kept praying like this was normal. A couple of minutes later, which seemed like an eternity, she suddenly jumped up to her feet and ran out of the auditorium. I ran after her, trying to do a little post-counseling cleanup, but she was out of there looking like she had seen a ghost...and I would say she had. The *Holy* Ghost, thank you. She was rocked...and so was I. I was like, "Whoa. This stuff is pretty powerful..."

What I was experiencing was a clash of Kingdoms. And here's where it gets weird...so let me try to explain. When John, that same guy that we just read what he dictated, was in his old age, he was exiled to rocky little island in the Aegean Sea because of his faith. Toward the end of his life he wrote the letter we now call 1 John in the New Testament.

Tucked in that remarkable little letter is one verse that can absolutely rock you. He gives us the reason why Jesus came to Planet Earth. He writes: *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 1 John 3:8b (New International Version).*

What John is alluding to here is this idea that the world has been oppressed by a spiritual Mafia-like entity called *The Accuser*—or Satan...it's what his name means: Accuser or Adversary. A couple of chapters later he writes that the “*whole world lies in the grip of the Evil One.*” It's been in rebellion against God for millennia. And so when Jesus appeared, there was a clash of kingdoms: light against darkness, good against evil. And He came to destroy it and bring the Kingdom of God against it.

If you don't get this idea of spiritual warfare, you're going to get very confused in your Christian walk, because things are not always going to be a walk in the park.

We live in a world where the Kingdom of God is *now* and *not yet*. It has invaded enemy-occupied territory. Jesus didn't come to make us all nice people. He didn't write a book to help us with our issues. He parachuted into enemy-occupied territory to liberate us. His was a D-Day mission. He came to confront the lie that we had all swallowed. *He came to do battle.* Sixty-five years ago the Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullman wrote that we now live in the time between *D-Day* when Nazi Germany was in reality defeated...and *VE Day*—Victory in Europe Day—when they actually surrendered. But it took *nearly a year* for the inevitable to happen...with the most casualties of the entire war...even with a defeated foe. We are in a tough war. Until Jesus returns, we live in between those two realities.

You won't know how God wants to use you until you begin to take some risks, to storm some spiritual Normandy beach. The Bible is clear: until we understand that Jesus confronted a malevolent spiritual force—and that we are in the same conflict—we really don't understand Christianity. And if you *don't* get this concept of spiritual warfare, your walk with Jesus is going to get confusing when the proverbial manure hits the ventilator.

We—like Jesus—are on a “search and rescue” mission.

A few years ago Anita and I went to the Hyde Park Art Show. Back in the early 1940's when we were first married, Anita was a stained-glass artist and was in the show several times. We're walking around when I came to a booth with this print...

(painting—leave up for a while)

I was fascinated by it and stared at for a good while. Finally I asked the artist about it—a painter named Ken Swinson who lives in Maysville, Kentucky. It's the story of a freed slave named John Parker. John Parker was a slave who had purchased his own freedom, moved to Ripley, Ohio, started a business, but at night would cross the Ohio River to help slaves on the Underground Railroad—that network of safe houses. You can see the Rankin House that's still there today in Ripley, owned by a white Presbyterian family who risked his life as well.

Parker put himself in harm's way countless times, crossing the river into Kentucky, to help over 400 slaves escape. He later said, *"No night was too dark, or too cold for me to (go) on a mission of relief and to those who came knocking at my door."* I stared at that print and thought, *"Would I have done that? Would I have gone into the enemy's camp to bring fugitives to freedom? Would I have risked my life, the life of my wife and kids, for people I don't even know?"*

I would suspect that *one thing* really drove Parker: *an overwhelming desire for others to taste the freedom he had experienced.* He knew first-hand the pain of being considered soulless property to be abused and used as if you were no more than a farm animal. To never be able to have a family or opportunity or education.

What would it take for me to "go boldly over into the enemy's camp...and bring the fugitives to freedom"? I suspect it will take the power of the Holy Spirit...

After you leave here today, you'll probably grab something to eat and then eventually make your way home where you'll more-than-likely flip on the TV or crank up your stereo or pull up Spotify on your iPad and play some music or watch the game...and you'll never think twice about the 220 volts of electricity that come from the street to your home. But here's the deal: you can have a great new house that looks good, has the best appliances, the top-of-the-line stuff, got a killer high-tech lighting design, hi-def video systems, awesome surround sound, the baddest home computer

that controls your whole interior environment...but if you don't get hooked up to Indy Power & Light, you got nothing.

And I would say that many of us believers have our houses in pretty good order, our doctrine screwed on straight, and we love Jesus. But there often seems to be a disconnect with the Power of the Holy Spirit. And it's not just the transformative power for inner change—the *rebirth* experience, which is a remarkable miracle in itself—it's *power for others*, as we pray for other people, as we're bold in our faith, as we believe God to do *remarkable things that are beyond our own abilities...in the lives of others*.

The resurrection and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit produced 220-volt-followers-of-Jesus. And the really cool power encounters didn't primarily happen in their church services—it happened in the street...unless you want to count Ananias and Sapphira falling over dead during the offering. You'd think we'd pick that up...*that the power isn't really for us*.

We really get this mixed up...but the Bible is clear on this.

Think about this: *The final recorded words of Jesus to his disciples* were an answer to a question. The disciples asked him about when the end-times were going to happen and how Israel's prominence worked into all that. But Jesus, as he usually did, turns that upside down and says to them: *"The Father sets those dates," he replied, "and they are not for you to know. But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Acts 1:7–8 (New Living Translation).

In other words, *they're asking, "Now are WE going to get vindicated? Now are you going to flatten these Roman philistines for US? Now are WE going to finally get OUR justice?"*

Jesus, in so many words, reminds them that, *"It's not about you. It's about God and others. It's about what He's doing. It's not about you and your timetable and what you want to see happen."* It's embarrassing to me how the Church has misused this 220-volt power God gives us; the Fundamentalists want to argue that those days are over out of their *lack* of experience and the Charismatics want to have a private party each weekend. If I were God I'd say *"You church people are driving me crazy."*

Jesus would say: *it's not about you. Tell everyone about Me...and let me show my power through you—power to heal, power to live, power to change, power to forgive, power to deliver, power to comfort...*

Let's pray...