

## Powerless

[00:00:13] Good morning everybody. Good morning sanctuary and probably hundreds of you watching on line this morning. Thousands. There you go. We're glad that you're all with us as Pastor Nate said I am pastor Adam. I am not Pastor Jody. Even though that's what your worship Folder says today he had a meeting in Phoenix this week and his travel was delayed getting back because of the storm yesterday. So before you feel bad for him remember what I said. He was in Phoenix Arizona this past week anyway so we called an audible to use a football analogy as many of us will be watching later today and I'm going to deliver the message today. So. I get to deliver messages pretty regularly at this church just not often on Sunday mornings and I do that at Celebrate Recovery on Monday nights in the room right below us here in the baker center in the SMC. And what Celebrate Recovery is a community of people who have come together under an umbrella of desiring healing for their brokenness. A group of people all of whom you're invited to become these people as well who have decided to say I'm going to take off my masks and I'm going to say I'm broken. I'm in need of restoration. I'm in need of healing. And we worship and we learn and we develop community really important community in that context. And as I'm teaching and I'm preaching through the principles of healing and recovery. And when I say the word recovery I don't want you to just think about drugs and alcohol. Yes you can think about those things but I want you to also think about anxiety depression anger lust loss. Those are things we need healing from as well. And as I'm preaching and teaching through these principles and steps that are common to an intentional effort toward healing I want to share some of that with you this morning.

[00:02:01] Just a little bit of what we've been digging into. And I'll start at the beginning with this principle number one that we've been digging into on Monday nights. It says realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.

[00:02:21] Step one for those of you who might be familiar with more traditional recovery circles like AA or N.A. is very similar. It says we admitted that we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors that our lives had become unmanageable. So two words or ideas I want to put out here are the idea of coming out of denial from our issues in the idea of coming to a point of powerlessness and what that means for us.

[00:02:49] It's as simple as saying that like it says on the screen. I realize I'm not God. This is the very first step in healing be it from an addiction or from a sin pattern or from a loss. When we try to control our sinful behavior or the effects of others sin on us we make ourselves out to be our own god. This ultimately is a denial of our sin and a denial of the very one who can address it for us. And that is Jesus Christ. We come out of denial to an admission of powerlessness. These things go together in many ways and that's where I want us to land this morning. Despite the vulnerability and exposure that makes us so uncomfortable in our powerlessness I want us to see that this is actually part of God's plan for our healing. So in the mid to late 1950s it was just a little bit before my time but in the mid to late 1950s there was a scandal in the US involving cheating rigging and deception.

[00:03:44] In a nationally televised game shows is there anybody here who remembers that or has a clue what I'm talking about. There were a few hands in the first service. But anyway I'm going to tell you all about it. So here we go.

[00:03:56] There was a man named Charles Van Doren and he agreed to be a contestant on a show called 21 for the sole purpose of being sort of a puppet to unseat a successful but unpopular returning champion. Of course Mr. Van Doren got a little bit richer along the way for his participation as well. Now remember the date I said 1950s. This is not like today we're all entertained by a plethora of things like sports drama comedy Netflix Hulu social media. Take your

pick. This was what was on TV was the thing that was on TV much different than now right. This grabbed national attention. So as accusations started to leak about this scandal. Congress decided to get involved. Can you imagine that Congress would do something like that. Apparently they do this kind of thing from time to time for somebody in my generation who might like it to like Roger Clemens or Mark McGwire before Congress during baseball's steroid era. Mr. Van Doren decided to come out of denial and he realized that his only path to freedom from the intense guilt he was feeling for having participated in this scandal was to tell the truth. This was dramatized in the 1994 movie called Quiz Show.

[00:05:08] And I want to show just a short clip of that right now and for the most part the words acted in this clip are the actual words of the testimony that Charles Van Doren spoke before Congress. Let's take a look at that. We are advised that you have a prepared statement that you would prefer to give at the outset sir not I first had a glass of water cost me.

[00:05:46] Maybe prosy.

[00:05:57] I would give almost anything I have to reverse the course of my life in the last year.

[00:06:05] The past doesn't change for anyone but at least I can learn from the past.

[00:06:13] I've learned a lot about life. I've learned a lot about myself.

[00:06:20] And about the responsibilities any man has to his fellow man.

[00:06:26] I've read a lot about good and evil but not always what they appear to be.

[00:06:35] I was involved deeply involved in a deception.

[00:06:43] I have to save my friends and I have millions of them I lied to the American people I lied about what I knew and then I lied about what I did not know.

[00:07:10] In a sense I was like a child who refuses to admit a fact in the hope that it will go away.

[00:07:17] Of course it did not go away. I was scared scared to death.

[00:07:28] I had no solid position no basis to stand on for myself. There was one way out and that was simply to tell the truth. It may sound right to you but I've found myself again after a number of years. I've been acting Arrau.

[00:07:54] Maybe all my life of thinking I've done more accomplish more produce more than I have his full statement before Congress in November 1959 ends with these words and I'll read him to you.

[00:08:09] There was one way out which I had of course often considered and that was simply to tell the truth. But as long as I was trying to protect only myself and my own reputation and as I thought the faith people had in me I could not believe that was possible. But it was coming closer and closer to a true understanding of my position. I was beginning to realize what I should've known before. That the truth is always the best way. Indeed it is the only way to promote and protect faith. And the truth is the only thing with which a man can live. A letter came to me which I read it was from a woman who was a complete stranger who had seen me on the Garroway Show and who said she admired my work. There she told me that the only way I could ever live with myself and make up for what I had done was to admit it clearly openly truly. Suddenly I knew she

was right and this way which seemed for so long the worst of all possible alternatives suddenly became the only one. Whatever the personal consequences and I knew they would be severe. This was the only way. In the morning I telephoned my attorney and told him my decision. He was happy that I had found courage at last. Charles Van Doren in what for us was minutes. But for him took several years came out of denial and admitted the truth of what he had done what had happened and that he was entirely powerless to fix or change any of it on his own. He knew the only way in which he could hope for change for a new path in his life was to come clean so to speak. I believe he realized two things.

[00:09:43] Number one he knew the truth. Left him powerless in this case. And number two I believe he knew being powerless left him vulnerable.

[00:09:54] But being powerless kind of stinks doesn't it. It's certainly not the culturally popular position to hold. Winning is popular strength is celebrated so often in our surrounding world identity is found in temporal victories. This is why there are no longer ties and ice hockey fans want a winner right. This is why some people have a seemingly totally different life on Instagram than they do in real life.

[00:10:19] And this would be me. This one right here. It's not actually but it could be. I'm sure that's what I looked like that one time I tried that or this one.

[00:10:28] All the parents in this room you know this is true right. Here's the life that we want other people to think we're living. And here's the life that we're actually laughing right. Winning is winning in our culture even more widespread. Winning is winning in the sinful and corrupt human heart. So what are we doing here. When in the church we are seeking to tell the truth about our junk. Admitting that we are powerless that our lives in many areas have become unmanageable. That is extremely extremely countercultural. Now these are trite examples of course ice hockey and social media but for Jesus powerlessness helplessness was a chosen marker of his entire existence and Philippians 2 6 8. Paul describes Jesus human beginnings in this way. Being in very nature God. Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross. Now this is upper story stuff. But remember how it plays out in the day to day life of Jesus. His lower story if you will. He was born in a cave among the stink of animals don't think sterile Christmas time nativity scenes right. He grew up in Nazareth. Do you remember Nathaniel's assessment of this place in John. One he says. Can anything good come from Nazareth apparently did not have a winning reputation. Jesus associated with sinners. Tax collectors prostitutes lepers the demon possessed the uneducated all while rebuking those who are in power. He died a disgusting humiliating and excruciating death. Again don't think sterile Churchie crosses with a calm Jesus with a clean linen wrapped around him. John Piper one of my favorite preachers and author says he believes Jesus would have screamed until his voice was raw. This Jesus the one that many of us follow here despite being God chose to be what many then and many now would call a loser. Associating with the powerless at times helpless from the wrong side of the tracks and having all the wrong friends. There appeared to be no winning in him. There appeared to be no strength in him. But we know the end of the story right. Out of powerlessness comes victory from death comes life. I would go so far as to say that true lasting and eternal victory rises only from an admission of powerlessness. This is what we see in the stories of those who Jesus touches isn't it. These are the types of folks he rescues throughout the Gospels. The adulterous woman about to be stoned and John 8. What was she powerless the change in possessed man identified by his demons as legion and Mark five powerless the blind man by the pool of Siloam and John 9 powerless Gyrus his dead daughter who Jesus raised in Luke 8 powerless Lazarus who had already been dead in entomb for four days and John 11 powerless terrified disciples fearing they will drown at sea in a bad storm in

Matthew 8.

[00:13:46] Totally powerless. This list could go on all day.

[00:13:50] Many of us in this room could add ourselves to the list as we remember and as we celebrate how Jesus pulled us up from utter fear and powerlessness into safety and restoration and others of us our longing and waiting and praying for that day to come for us. But regardless Jesus has given evidence after evidence that he has strength when we are weak that His power is made perfect in our weakness and in our vulnerability that he can and does rescue even the most powerless of souls. I mean dead people. Gyrus his daughter Lazarus dead people raised. It's interesting to think that in the Bible though even those of some cultural stature at the time that Jesus rescues come first to a point of powerlessness. Think of Nick Demus or the apostle Paul. It should be no surprise then that you and I. I believe will experience our own victory after the point at which we to admit that we are powerless. But powerless is not fun being powerless feels intensely vulnerable and it's a scary place to enter because it's hard to see the finish line for the fear that often clouds our eyes. Sometimes being powerless is not a chosen state. However sometimes it is the result of something that has been done to us or happen to us. Sometimes it comes as the result of the grip of an addiction or the grip of a loss. But I believe power comes in the admitting that we are in fact powerless. In 2010.

[00:15:19] About eight and a half years ago it was I was probably at the height of personal fitness for me or for my whole life and I know that's really hard for you all to believe looking at me right now. But I was actually in better physical shape at a different time in my life.

[00:15:33] I was in such great shape at that because I was mountain biking like three or four times a week. When I say mountain biking don't think like. Flat grassy kind of friendly trails. Think like rocks boulders mountain streams. You know the real kind of mountain biking anyway on a beautiful August morning I was enjoying enjoying a ride near Lake Ray's town when the next thing I knew I was lying on the ground screaming like I had never screamed before. I don't know what happened. I still don't really know what happened. I didn't hit anything. I don't recall being out of control but somehow my back tire spun out and I lost my balance at a high rate of speed and the weight of my body and my bike came crushing down on my right femur perpendicular to a narrow like indented single track so track femur.

[00:16:18] That's a horrible representation but that's what happened.

[00:16:22] Apparently it was broken in seven pieces and to this day I have some pretty extensive hardware right from my right knee the whole way up into the ball of my hip kind of hold my leg together.

[00:16:34] Here's some pictures from that day. Happy happy sad is how the progression when I was an unbelievable pain like I can't even describe.

[00:16:45] And there was no easy way out. Two and a half miles into the back country no cell phone service but thankfully one friend who happens to be sitting right here today. And if we had time I would invite Mark up to tell this story from his perspective but I'll save myself the embarrassment Anyway Mark left me lying for a while by myself to go find service to call 911. It took a total of six hours to get me to a hospital and a longer story short I ended up on a blackboard. The head of which was tied to an ATV and the legs of which were traded off among no kidding. Was it like 20 fully uniformed firefighters like taking turns carrying the rest of my body. And they hiked challenging terrain for a couple of hours to try to keep me safe and comfortable. When I say comfortable I am so grateful for these guys. But let me tell you that's a very relative description of

how I was feeling. It's kind of a dramatic story. It's totally true. It's certainly not a powerlessness that I chose rather one that happened to me. But I tell you not to talk about the incident or the drama itself but to recall with you how afraid I was.

[00:17:47] Especially before I knew the outcome or even a diagnosis and the thoughts that ran through my head as I laid on that blackboard with ATV fumes spewing over my face. Will I ever walk again. There's a really important artery in that part of the body. I guess if I were gonna bleed out I would have done so by now. How will Melanie my wife survive with a husband who can't walk. I might never play baseball or hockey with my boys. What if I lose my leg. I'm sure these firefighters and EMT would have had would have rather spent their day doing something else. This is probably going to cost so much money. If I ever get through this is gonna take a really long time. Now I know that many of you in this room many of you watching online over in the sanctuary have faced these types of questions and much much harder ones much harder ones. I don't pretend that this injury is the be all and end all of hardship by any means. It's certainly not or even close but it is part of my story. I remember weeping as I thought and even verbalized some of these things during that ride the ride on the back of the ATV and it did take a while at least relative to where I had been before. I didn't walk for about eight months. The whole thing was terrifying but it changed my life. I wish I had some kind of amazing spiritual awakening story cap this off. I don't really but small perspectives began to change. After this powerlessness of sorts was forced upon me fitness. I looked at it differently prioritizing my family over myself if I recall I think I skipped church take that ride. Handicapped access ramps the height of water fountains. The value of automatic transmissions which I had previously no appreciation for and pretty much still don't the skill of medical professionals and the need to ask for and receive help from all kinds of people for a long time. I do believe that my life is better and that I'm a stronger man and the Lord for having come to healing out of that incident of powerlessness. Now there's a story in scripture in Genesis 32. Of a man that you have heard of I'm sure named Jacob. He also was brought through some issues with his hip into a state of powerlessness by by God and I want to take a look at his story as he wrestles with God some of you'll be familiar with this story. Had Bibles or smartphones. You can grab them but also have it up on the screen. Celeste's Regenesi 32 22 3 32.

[00:20:14] That night Jacob got up and took his two wives his two female servants and his 11 sons and crossed the Ford of the Jabbok after he had sent them across the stream. He sent over all his possessions so Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him. He touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. The man said let me go for it is daybreak. But Jacob replied I will not let you go unless you bless me. The man asked him what is your name. Jacob he answered. The man said Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel because you have struggled with God and we humans have overcome Jacobs said. Please tell me your name. But he replied Why do you ask my name. Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place peniel saying it is because I saw God face to face. And yet my life was spared. The sun rose above him as he passed pinnacle and he was limping because of his hip.

[00:21:17] What do you remember about Jacob from old testament studies or from Sunday school classes. If you were around church as a kid. Maybe it's a lot maybe it's a little it's ok either way but something that maybe wasn't taught on flannel graphs for longtime church folks was that Jacob was a liar a deceiver and a cheat. The name Jacob means trickster or literal literally he'll grabber referring to him being the second born along with his twin brother Esau.

[00:21:45] Jacob had a serious inferiority complex. He tricked Esau out of his birthright and blessing. He ended up in bondage to his uncle. He ended up with two wives which is a sermon for another day and a family filled with jealousy and resentment. He divided his own people into two groups soon assuming he could only save one from them. One of them from the wrath of his brother

while saving himself and yes on purpose. I am pulling out lowlights but from these verses that we just read I want to see a couple of quick points here. If you ever Bibles look back at verse 23 and 24 after he had sent them across the stream he sent over all his possessions.

[00:22:21] So Jacob was left alone. Jacob was alone. He sent away his people his stuff his fam it was in this moment that he encountered God when he engaged in his struggle. I said earlier when I was talking about Celebrate Recovery That community is important and it really really is important. But often the depth of the journey that happens that the depth of the journey happens excuse me when we get alone with God apart from all the distractions that keep us focused on just about everything other than him. Second this is a really long wrestling match. Did you catch that. First 24. A man this man we now know was God wrestled with him until daybreak. I guess we don't know exactly how many hours this was from night to DAYBREAK. But if you have ever wrestled at all. You know how exhausting it is for more than just a few minutes. This may have been one night but considering the activity and the opponent it's safe to say that this struggle this fight was really really long. Jacob was having nothing of giving into the Lord here I see him as both determined. And also stubborn.

[00:23:33] And I bet most of us can relate to that. Determined to get what we want but sometimes too stubborn to let go of what we need in order to obtain it. Determined to get what we want but sometimes too stubborn to let go of what we need to in order to obtain it.

[00:23:49] Third in Verse 25 when the man saw that he could not overcome him he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. God wasn't getting through here without sending Jacob to a point of weakness to a point of powerlessness perhaps a personal rock bottom for him God always has a purpose for pain.

[00:24:10] He does not waste the hurt he does not the story. But why. Why does he do this in this interaction with Jacob break here. I mean it seems kind of mean almost unfair. He's guy right. Hardly a fair fight. But God has the upper story in mind doesn't he. Jacob wants a blessing. But God had even bigger plans. He wanted to give Jacob a new name a blessing that Jacob didn't even know to ask for. What is your name. We read in Verse 27 Jacob answered. But what is he really saying when he says his name. He's not saying it the way you and I say when somebody asks Are name. I believe he is identifying the very meaning behind it. God is asking for the very essence of who he is. Do you remember what Jacob means. I just told you liar deceiver cheat. Jacob answered honestly when he said Jacob. He answered with his worst condition. And what is God's response.

[00:25:15] Just like we see throughout all different parts of scripture. His response is grace. He moves in mercy in Verse 28. Your name will no longer be Jacob. But Israel because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.

[00:25:32] Do you see this when Jacob says his name. He says I'm a cheat I'm a deceiver. There is not much good about me. I am determined and stubborn. I have shown you that I will fight for my way. I'm getting that blessing. And God says.

[00:25:48] You are indeed determined but you don't even know what I want to do with you. I had to mess up your hip make you powerless so I could give you your blessing and give you a new identity.

[00:26:00] He says trust me my way is even better than yours. So yeah I'm taking some liberties and expanding the conversation here but I want us to each consider how we too are wrestling with God how our determination can be a good thing. But how God might want us to be rendered powerless. So his power may be made perfect in our weakness.

[00:26:21] That is hard. That is so so an American isn't it. It's so countercultural.

[00:26:30] Where are you powerless. Where do you need to be powerless. In what area what situation what habit in what relationship is your admission of powerlessness. The beginning of your healing.

[00:26:43] Earlier a couple of times I mentioned Celebrate Recovery and often on Monday nights we look at some acrostics of words that live inside these principles and steps to help us remember and apply what we are learning and what God is doing. So the word to pull out for this discussion. You may have guessed by now is powerless. Now I'm going to rattle off a whole lot of stuff in the next couple of minutes because this whole sermon change happened kind of quick. There are no sermon notes online for this today but I would encourage you to grab one or two things from these points of application. So in your Sunday schools and your small groups you have something to take with you something to flesh out together as you discuss. So the first letter is P. As it is stands for pride are false pride undermines our faith and it cuts us off from God and others when God's presence is welcomed. Truly welcome. There is no room for pride because he makes us aware of our true self.

[00:27:42] The O stands for only it's only if he hadn't left. Only if I had stopped drinking. Only if this. Only if that our minds reluctantly consent to reality don't they. But when we admit that we are powerless we start walking in the truth instead of in the fantasy land of rationalization.

[00:28:02] The W stands for worrying all worrying is a form of not trusting God. Instead of worrying about the things we cannot possibly do or control we need to focus on what God can do. A verse that many of us are familiar with is Matthew 6:34 and it gives us the prescription. I like the translation of it in the Living Bible it says don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow to live one day at a time. Live one day at a time one hour at a time one minute at a time. The E stands for escape. Before we admit we are powerless we try to hide from our hurts habits or hangups by abusing one thing or another but abusing someone or another.

[00:28:47] Trying to escape pain drains us of energy. But as we take this crucial step of coming out of denial of admitting our powerlessness. God opens us up to real and lasting escape routes to show us his power and grace. The R stands for resentments.

[00:29:08] If our resentments are suppressed and allowed to fester. They can act like an emotional cancer. As we learn to walk this road to healing which is which in part requires stepping into our powerlessness. We will learn that in letting go of resentments and offering forgiveness to those who have hurt us we are not just freeing that person but we are freeing ourselves as well. The L stands for loneliness when we try to maintain our false power we become isolated and alone when we admit that we are powerless and start to face reality. We find that others are in the same boat as we are in so many ways and we don't have to be alone.

[00:29:46] Community is so important.

[00:29:50] The E stands for emptiness when we admit that we are powerless in ourselves. We start to give this up to you know that feeling. You could describe it as that cold wind that blows through you emptiness it starts to go away. Jesus said in John ten 10 that he came that we may have life and have it to the full. Yes I believe that is it's Jesus talking about eternal life but that's also Jesus talking about life of freedom. Here now.

[00:30:19] First death stands for selfishness as we admit our powerlessness we notice that we

become less self-centred. It's not always about us. Simply put selfishness is at the heart of most problems between people I think we would probably agree with that.

[00:30:34] It's also the root of most problems within ourselves.

[00:30:39] In that second stands for separation. This is another thing that we give up along with our sense of false power. We give up separation from God. We give up separation from each other. We come into a stronger community. Certainly separation from God can feel real but it's never permanent. Remember he seeks the last.

[00:31:00] And he seeks those who feel that way. So I'll close this morning by rehashing the final statement in Charles Van Doren's testimony before Congress. Suddenly I knew this way which had seen for so long the worst of all possible alternatives became the only one.

[00:31:18] Whatever the personal consequences and I knew they would be severe. This was the only way. In the part of that testimony that I didn't read the first time the very last words of the official statement that you can find on line or those of Mr. Van Dorn's attorney to him when he found out that he was going to tell the truth and admit that he was powerless to do anything else. The words his attorney said to him were three simple words that we say to each other all the time but carry on a whole lot of weight as a prayer when we step out into our powerlessness he said. God bless you. So in what areas of your life and to whom today will you admit your powerlessness as a humble step on your journey of healing restoration and wholeness. May God bless us together and individually as we admit we are powerless and start working and living this stuff out in a real way.

[00:32:13] Amen. Pray with me. Lord God you are powerful.

[00:32:20] And we are in need of you this morning we were in need of you yesterday. We are in need of you tomorrow. We ask Lord for humility of heart for people in this room to be overcome with a desire to give their cares and anxieties to you that she would take on our powerlessness that you would take on the truth of who we are where we've been and that you would transform us God that your power would be made perfect in our weakness and that we would be developing in this church and Kingstree church a community of people who sees one another. And sees what you see in us and that is the saving work and the transforming work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[00:33:04] Or it's in his name that we pray.