

Series: GOD...*BIGGER THAN MY BOX!*

**UNBELIEVABLY POWERFUL!
Psalm 33**

I. INTRO

- A. You know how much I love power stuff—I've talked about it a lot! The biggest, baddest most powerful trucks, boats, drag-lines—you name it, I'm interested. As I've told you several times before—when I was living right smack in the middle of the **muscle car** era, all I had was a Ford Falcon muscle-car wanna-be.

It wasn't even a muscle car **hope-to-be!**

1. I never even looked for potential race competitors—I just hoped no one would hear those little six-cylinder pinging away. But **one** day, I saw something I thought I could potentially beat. I was sitting one day at a red-light, and next to me was some bean-eater in a junky looking pick-up, revving his engine and giving me this sly smile.

-I knew it was a challenge, and I thought, "I can beat this piece of...rusty metal. So, I revved too. And then he revved. The count-down was on. When the light changed...he **smoked** me. Humiliated me. I opened the door and almost got out—I thought I'd stalled. Well, not quite. But I was embarrassed. So, I pulled off to the side and **sucked** my thumb till I felt better!

2. Power almost **always** a distancing effect, doesn't it? When someone is driving a car next to you that costs as much as your house; when someone's body is sleek, tanned and smooth, and yours has lumps—you feel small and far away. True power both awes and distances us from whoever has it. There have been times when I've thought about telling someone my most honest, truest thoughts about them—till I saw the muscles rippling under their shirts.

-We read the warning labels on powerful chemicals, fast cars, sharp twirling blades that say, "Don't get too close, you could get killed by this!"

- B. Our culture is really into this stuff. Remember the whole thing on **power dressing in power suits, power ties?** Power naps, power walks—and sometimes people do this stuff to **keep** people from seeing the weak person under the costume. "Pay no attention to the little man behind the curtain...!"

-All that to say--sometimes God's power puts us off. I don't think anyone can look at creation—the earth, the universe—and not be **absolutely astounded** by Who He is and what He does. The question we **may** struggle with is the same question we would ask about lightning, "How close do I want to get?"

-I'll tell you specifically what we have problems seeing and believing--that He actually lends His power to weak, frail, struggling humans like you and me.. Two thousand years ago, an angel told a teenage girl that **nothing is impossible with God!** Right now, in my life, I could use some power. Anyone else who feels the same?

II. YOU'VE GOT TO SEE THE POWER

A. Here's the deal with God's power; you need both an electron microscope and the Hubble telescope to see it. It is absolutely immense—and infinitely small and intricate.

1. Some of you may remember Richard Swenson, who wrote the book, *Margin*. He has another book entitled, *More Than Meets The Eye*, and it's astounding—especially in describing a part of creation you know very well. **You!** Listen to some of these details:

a. "The body contains between 10 and 100 **trillion** cells. These cells, like just about everything else in the body, are continually being torn down, remodeled, and replaced. Think of it like this: If your body were a house, and the house were the size of Texas, imagine knocking down the walls in a million rooms every second and hastily rebuilding them again with new materials.

-For example, every couple of days we replace all the cells that line the intestines--faster if we eat Mexican food. Every couple of weeks we replace all the cells of the skin--where did you think all the house dust comes from? Every seven years we replace the entire skeleton."

b. Did you know that your body has about **60,000 miles of blood vessels? A distance that would stretch nearly 2 and 1/2 times around the earth?**

-When he explained how the lungs work, how many times the heart beats in a lifetime, the nervous system and brain, I was on overload! For example, did you know that the brain holds 10--with 14 zeros after it, power bits of information--1000 times that of a Cray-2 supercomputer--information that would be the equivalent of 25 **million** books?

That in our brains we carry around a mental DVD containing the equivalent of 3 **trillion** pictures? Did you know that you have 5 million hair follicles on your body--okay, some people have 4 million--and that in a lifetime you grow over 2 million feet of hair on your scalp?

-He goes on to explain the unbelievable intricacy of a cell, and how it works. Then he says, "If God put all this together, He must be very clever. And powerful. And precise....The point is: such a God can be trusted with the details of my life. After rearranging subatomic particles all morning, the specifics of my life probably seem a bit unchallenging to Him."

c. And that doesn't even touch space, stars, galaxies--the universe. Psalm 33:6-9.

The Lord merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born. He assigned the sea its boundaries and locked the oceans in vast reservoirs. Let the whole world fear the Lord, and let everyone stand in awe of him. For when he spoke, the world began! It appeared at his command (Psalm 33:6-9 NLT).

-And you have to understand. God **spoke** this into being with a word--whatever took place from there. The Psalms talk about God collecting up all the oceans on this planet and putting them in a little jar--holding them in

his hands. They describe his power as bringing the stars out one by one and giving them pet names.

All 10 gazillion--this, friends, is **no exaggeration**. His power is absolutely limitless.

2. Of course, that's just what we **can see**. Think of what we **can't** see. The spiritual world. We can mimic God a little with the little things we create--where we amaze ourselves, take pictures, brag, and then write it up in medical and engineering journals. God treasures us—but compared to what He does, it is totally **under-**whelming. Our body, as amazing as it is, starts to wear out. It begins to get dents, wrinkles--then sag and leak and shrink. I know, it's not very nice to think about--but true.

-But there's more to us than a body; we have a soul that lives forever. Think about that for a minute. How do you **make** an soul—invisible, dynamic, self-conscious—and **eternal**? God alone has the patent on that one—and He ain't tellin' us--as if we could even understand. And He has created billions of them!

-I think you understand that God is brilliant and powerful. How many of you would like me to just keep going—dieseling on here? How many of you would like me to stop right here altogether? Sorry. I'm not done.

- B. Now, let me tell you this. I really think people **get** God's power. I think it's undeniable. The Bible doesn't explain everything about God's power—or even how far it extends. It is, however, the record of how God has used his power to intervene in the lives of real people—like you and me. A miracle is simply God setting aside the natural laws that **He** created to do something special. Sometimes His acts of power are spectacular. Like creating a highway—right through the sea—for 2.5 million people to cross. Like bringing water from a rock in a desert to care for them and water their livestock. It really isn't hard to imagine a star-creating, spirit-forming God doing that. But sometimes his work is more subtle—like giving a woman struggling with infertility a child; like extending a bottle of oil so it never runs out.

1. Know what I find amazing? As powerful and amazing as God is—what He wants most from us is intimacy. Think about it. The Bible takes about 2 chapters to describe how God simply spoke into being a universe we still don't understand—and then spends the next 1100 pages describing how God's power works in his relational world with humans.
2. To make **sure** we knew Him, God the Son emptied himself of all the power and privileges of Deity—and showed up here. It was hard to recognize Him, because He looked just like everyone else. But over time as those who were closest watched—it became clear that every thing Jesus said about Himself was true. He was Almighty God. I Am. That, for some amazing reason, He loved sinful people—even the ones who were far, far away in every aspect of life.
 - a. And it wasn't just Jesus **talking** about the fact that He was the Son of God. He proved that He was master of the laws of nature.
 - 1). At a friend's wedding, when the wine ran out, he turned 120 gallons of water into **exceptionally** high quality wine. Jesus Christ is master of **quality**.
 - 2). On at least two occasions, Jesus multiplied food and made it clear that he is the **master of quantity**.

- 3). Several times he **instantly** calmed really nasty storms at sea—scolding waves like they were naughty children.
 - 4). Another time when Jesus had been left on shore—he walked on the water to the boat his disciples were in! Any of you seen anyone do that lately? He is **master of the laws of gravity**.
 - 5). Over and over again, Jesus made it clear that he was master over the laws of aging and disease and deterioration--restoring eyesight, touch, paralyzed limbs, diseased skin. The one I like the best is that Jesus is the **master of the laws of death!** He not only reversed the decaying process on Lazarus--he defeated death once and for all when he walked out of the grave. When I stood by my parent's caskets—I could say, "This is **NOT** the end!"
- b. Through Jesus, friends, it's clear. God's power has broken into our world, broken into our circumstances, broken into our weakness. And His power is almost always used to love, to show compassion, mercy, kindness, generosity.
- In fact, because Jesus went to a cross and paid for sin and rose from the dead—His Kingdom, His power is now available through the Holy Spirit **right inside our souls!** He—and His power—is **that** close to everything that makes you tick!
3. Let's just all tell the truth together. How many of you, besides me, know of something deep down inside that you really want to change? We look pretty cool, pretty together—but the **truth** is that there are attitudes and habits and patterns of behavior that chain us down and destroy what we want most. It can get to the point where we think, "Change is **hopeless! I can't do it!**"
- There's good news! The Holy Spirit, when we invite Him into the very core of who we are, uses that power that created the universe to transform us from the inside out. Anyone here away of an institution or program that doesn't just change people's behavior—it **transforms their hearts?** I can't think of a single one.
- Through the Holy Spirit, we have power to endure, to say no, to not get crushed by the pressures and hassles of life. And because of Him, we literally have the power to have a transforming influence on this world!
4. Now, do you see how all this fits together? The Father shows the awesome scope of God's power--transcendent--maybe even a little scary. **Nothing** is impossible for a Being this awesome and magnificent. Jesus Christ, God the Son, shows how God's power is lovingly, compassionately, and generously used in real human lives with real human problems.
- God the Spirit, at Jesus' request, brings the unbelievable power of God right into our hearts--right into our lives. Not power to blow things up or create universes. Or even move paperclips at will. It's **transforming** power. Power to love, to forgive, to persevere--and especially, power to change

III. POWER ALONG THE WAY

- A. Let me get back to my trusty Ford Falcon. It looked hot. I once had a friend ask, "Wow, what do you have under the hood?" I said, "Oh, a 429 Cobra Jet." But I couldn't keep up the lie. "To be honest, the car looks hot, but it's a real dog." A **hot dog**. A weenie.

-Our culture gives us lots of ways to **look** powerful. But a lot of it is impression management. Wearing the right clothes, mentioning the right names--titles, cars, business cards. We can even put on a good act--that we are together, cool, on top of our game. But in the quiet moments, when we stare at the ceiling at night; in those moments when we can't get our children to do what we want—when we can't make a dying friend well—or even comfortable--we **get it!** We know how little power we truly have over our lives; how little power we have to actually change ourselves and our attitudes and our circumstances.

-I think the question people in a culture like ours need to ask themselves is, Will I be satisfied with just shining up the exterior—**look** like I've got it together—like I'm the master of my destiny! Or—or will I get serious about making the **interior** of my life work? Maybe you need to think about that!

-I think most people might say, "God's power is a little like Bill Gates' money. I know it's there and I know it's huge; I just don't know how to **get** some of it." Okay. **Bad** comparison. The real question **is**, "How does the power get from **God's** arsenal to **my** life for the stuff I face every day?"

Frustrating relationships; hurt from what others do to me. How can God give me power to keep my thought life going in the right direction? How can He help me love and serve the people in my life—keep me from drowning in a sea of demands?

1. Let me give you some general principles I see in how God's power generally works in our lives. **Power Principles.**

-Remember the **manna** principle? Where God's people realized that they couldn't stockpile bread for the next year or so? Well, **we can't stock-pile power ahead of time (slide)**—you know, like where we plug ourselves into God like a battery charger. God's power comes in the moments we need it--and not usually before hand.

-Something else. If you look at Jesus' life, you'll see that **God's power tends to be secret**; quiet; unobtrusive. Did you ever notice how often Jesus healed people and told them not to make a big deal of it? Jesus didn't do magic shows for birthday parties. He never performed on demand.

-Third, **God's power is power under control.** Does he have the power to turn your enemies into grease spots? Obliterate the line of cars in front of you at the Tim Horton's drive-through? Blast the extra fat cells out of your body without you breaking a sweat or missing a dessert? Of course! It's **universe creating power!** But his power operates more like a nuclear power plant than a nuclear weapon. It's power for the long haul, tempered by love, creativity, patience, grace, and mercy--some qualities we could use when **we're** tempted to power up on people.

-When we're in messes, we tend to think, "Come on, God! Winch me out of the mud!" And God's response is often, "My power is made perfect in **weakness.**" But weakness feels really, well, **weak**; unspectacular. **Humiliating!**

2. Let me tell you how it works in almost every instance I know of in the Bible. You've heard me talk about this before. **Power along the way.** For example.
- a. The Bible tells the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt—and there were a **lot** of miracles, but it was a tough, thankless job! When you look at the set of directions God gave them right off the bat, you're tempted to say, "God, what were you thinking!" The directions led them right to a place where they were trapped between the mountains, the sea and the approaching Egyptian army. And they were both terrified--and angry.

-God's next instructions are quite interesting. **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and divide the water (Exodus 14:15 TNIV).**

The immediate question, of course, is, "**How** are supposed to move on! We're trapped!" Of course, the rest of the story tells us that God parted the sea. It wasn't until they actually reached an impassable point--and began to **move forward** that God's power was seen. **Power along the way.**
 - b. It's even clearer under Joshua's leadership. The Israelites are back at the Jordan River waiting to cross to the land God had promised. They'd chickened out the first time. The question was, "Will we trust God or **not?**"

-Now, the Jordan River is not all that impressive--like the Niagara or the Mississippi. At it's widest point, it's about 90 to 100 feet wide--and about 10 feet deep. But at this point, it was at flood stage. Floods are nasty—you've seen the pictures. And they'd been raised in the desert! No one had taken swimming lessons or gotten lifeguard certification.

-Listen to God's instructions this time: **Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant, 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, GO AND STAND IN THE RIVER (Joshua 3:13 NIV)!** Then we read what God does. **Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing (Joshua 3:15-16 NIV).**

-It's power along the way. Start moving in the direction God is calling you to go--and when you need the power, **step into the water**, and the power you need will be there. But that takes faith. Trust.
- B. Where do you need God's power this morning? God usually asks us to move ahead in some area--in some place where we need to obey, in some place where we feel exhausted and weak and small, sometimes in a place where we've failed before--and just **step into the water.** It's like He says, "Trust me. The strength, the courage, the help will be there **when you need it.**"
1. Years ago I had this dinosaur laptop. Like, you had to pedal it. So, one day as I pounded out a message the power light started blinking. I didn't get up to plug it in, because I thought I had enough time. I had just hit the "save" button when it conked. That was **Friday** and Sunday was a comin! I lost half of my message—and a whole pile of time!

-My point is that **loss** is really what terrifies us most, isn't it? Loss of someone we love, loss of a job or a reputation, loss of money. Sometimes we see the power light blinking, loss seems imminent, and we feel helpless to do anything about it. -Loss would describe an era of life for two friends of mine--Bill and Kathy Titus. I'll never forget the call I got--that their 8 year old son, visiting relatives in Kitchener, had suffocated in a freak farm accident. As I spoke at his funeral, there he was, right in front of me. And as I looked into that little coffin where he laid so still, wearing his cub scout uniform, holding his ball glove and his teddy bear—my heart broke over their loss.

-Not long after that, Kathy was hit from behind in an accident that left her with chronic back pain. A couple of years later, Bill, who had a cabinet making business, cut most of the fingers off one hand on a table saw.

-Truth is, as much as we hate it, living in this world brings losses that are **totally unexpected**. And in our times of loss, God pours on His power which we so **desperately** need.

If you were to talk to Bill and Kathy this morning, they would tell you that as painful and unbearable as loss is, God's power is enough.

2. We also need God's power for the temptations we can't resist. We all know what it's like, don't we? There's this nagging sense of how we **ought** to live, but we have temptation dragons breathing down our necks. Temptations, as you know, are custom-fitted to each person, whether it's taking the edge off our personal pain with alcohol or cheating around the edges financially; or a temper that singses the people around you. What are your custom-fitted temptations?

-See, God can give us power to turn away--to **just say "no!"** But it will be power along the way--power that comes when you feel **extremely** weak and drawn, but turn away, call for help, or ask a close friend for accountability or call a Christian counselor.

3. And we need God's power to do the things we **should** do. God says, "For the sake of your soul, your heart, you need to forgive--even if you don't feel like it." Sometimes God is telling us to slow down. To stop and notice his blessings. To fully engage in what He's up to in the world. To talk to a friend about how Jesus has changed our lives. To trust God fully with our money. To give our lives away for others who need someone to care. To understand how much we have—and open our hands and our hearts and our home to the incredible need and poverty that stalks this world.

-When I see what God is calling me to be, calling me out of my comfort zone, away from my La-Z-Boy.--I **have** say, "God, **I just can't do this on my own!**" And God's response is, "My power is made perfect in weak people—**just like you!**"

- C. So—**How!** How do you access God's power for your daily life? I want to suggest five steps. This isn't original with me—but I think it could help us all.

1. First, you need to just **know** what God can do and **remember** what He's already done. Sometimes we have spiritual amnesia, you know. We need reminders. Denise Macnab is asking for volunteers to help put together a memory book for

The Olive Branch. Photo albums help us remember. Why we had kids, why we got married, what happened to the years! That's why I have this photo album up here.

-Sometimes you'll hear me talk about taking time to study the Bible and really think about what it's saying. It's not just to get more cool information; it's a kind of verbal photo album to remind you of Who God is, how He loves you, what's important in life—what's not, and how God works with ordinary people like you and me.

-We also need to review our own history. I'll bet if you and I reviewed some of the tangled stories from our own lives—we'd see God's fingerprints all **over** the place! Take time to **remember**. If you do, you will remember **not just the power of God, but His willingness to HELP YOU!**

2. Secondly, you need to admit something. I have this mirror here. When I look in the mirror in the morning--I see this tired bleary face with lines, stubble, and bags looking back.

, I sometimes have to say, ***I am not God! God is God! And I need His help. Desperately.***

-Your life might be a little like my Falcon; it looks pretty hot on the outside—but there ain't much under the hood! If you and I are going to access God's power, we have to admit our own weakness and frailty. Sometimes we're too proud to do that.

-A number of years ago, I had this aluminum boat on a trailer that I kept in the garage during the summer, and on the back deck in the winter. So, one day in late Fall, it was time to take it to the back yard. Do you think I'd ask for help? Of course not, I'm just like you—I'm too proud! So, I hauled it out of the garage, huffing and puffing, rigged up a ramp to get it up to Lori's flower bed, and figured I could muscle it on my own. An hour and a half later when Lori got home, the boat had slipped off the ramp and wedged itself up against the neighbor's fence, and I was trying to pull it up the ramp on a cheap come-along. Lori had mercy and helped. The power of **two** is amazing!

-This Fall, we're going to be studying an ancient letter an early church leader, Paul, sent to a really screwed up church. In the second of the two letters Paul wrote to them, he talked quite candidly about the humiliation he felt in his struggle with personal weakness. He tells them what God said to him at that time. Want to know what it was? ***He-e-ere I come to save the day...!*** No, that wasn't it. ***Do you feel lucky?*** That wasn't it either.

-The message was: ***My grace is all you need. For MY POWER WORKS BEST IN WEAKNESS (2 Corinthians.12:9 NLT).*** Your first step toward power is a four letter word desperate people have been saying for years: ***Help!***

3. The third step is harder. It's illustrated by this level. Anyone know what a level is for? Duu-uh! It's so you know if something is **level** or not. If you're putting in studs--the level tells you whether they're going in straight. It even works for hanging pictures. This is my point. To access God's power, you will have to **ALIGN** yourself with God's purposes--God's will.

-This is the nasty truth about me: I'd love to set my **own** course, stake out my **own** trail, draw my own blueprint--and have God put His official seal of approval on it. **God, bless my plan!** How many of you think God works like that? If you do, you're wrong. He says, "No, no, no! You line up with **me!**"

-Why would we ever assume that God would give us supernatural power to get in His way, or destroy our own lives--or someone else's, or travel down the wrong path at Mach III with our hair on fire? We have to say, "God--**You** are the potter--I am the clay. I will do things **your** way." And then he fills this little clay pot, cracks and all, with his power. See, He knows exactly what lies ahead and how we need to be shaped for it.

4. The next step ought to be a no-brainer. The phone represents that fact that we need to just **ASK**.

-The Bible says, **You do not have because you do not ask God (James 4:2 NIV)**. It's really very simple. And you don't need a cellphone or e-mail or a megaphone. The Spirit lives inside. We just...**Ask**. Ask **often**. Ask **confidently**. Especially in temptation. Tell God exactly what it is you're being tempted with. Believe me, He won't be shocked. Maybe you need to just say, "God, I can't seem to forgive like you tell me to. So, first help me **want** to!"

-But let me warn you about something. You may ask for power--expecting to feel like the **Incredible Hulk**--some pant-splitting, button-popping infusion of superhuman energy. That could happen, but you may feel absolutely nothing. That's why there's the final step.

5. **Flippers**. I thought this might remind you of stepping into the water. You've gotta **ACT**. Act out of obedience to God--no matter **what** you feel like, because, see, God's power usually comes as **power along the way**.

-I mentioned earlier how late one night in the middle of a horrible storm at sea, Jesus showed up as his disciples were trying to make their way across a lake. When Peter asked Jesus if **he** could take a stroll on the water with him--what do you think happened before he stepped out of the boat? Think he felt a tingling sensation--or saw a vision? I don't think he felt **any** different! But in his fear--in the dark--he **did** have to step **out** of the boat--and there was power along the way. **That's the way it's always been!**

-Friends, it's the same with us. Most of us have to get started walking in the right direction, forcing ourselves to put one foot in front of the other, and guess what! God gives us power as we go. It's called **faith**.

IV. **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

I'd be willing to bet that there's a place in your life where you need to ask God for power today. He has it--I think you know that. And He wants to share it with you and me. That's what He's told us. Where is it that you need to look in the mirror and admit that you **desperately** need supernatural strength? And, whose plan are you on--His, or yours? Ask. You could do that right now. And then you'll have to stick your toes into the water. Take a deep breath. Make the phone call. Say the excruciating words, "I was wrong--and I'm sorry." And if you will--you find **power along the way**--the power of an unlimited God--for whom **nothing--NOTHING** is impossible.