



Servant Leaders

Volume 4, Issue 6

June 2008

International Leadership Institute: Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs in the US and Europe since 1985

Love Power

By Sara Tusek

When I was in high school in the 60's, there was a song on the radio called "Love Power." The gist of its message was that the power of love was the greatest power of all, and those who stick together in their love for each other can't fall.

I liked this song and thought it was a nice idea that love was the greatest of all powers on earth, but I really didn't know what that power meant in daily life. As I grew older, I found out, but not before I had asked and answered a series of questions.

IS IT AN OXYMORON?

One question about the power of love would be this: is 'love power' an oxymoron? Are the terms "love" and "power" too much opposed to be combined into one phrase? Like "jumbo shrimp" or "pretty ugly," is "love power" an impossible idea?

Sometimes love is seen as defenseless, and treated as a weakness. Giving way to others and putting their welfare before your own can seem like the act of a person with no ability to exert his or her own will—a person with no power.

Love is known to make you vulnerable. You no longer think only of your own happiness and convenience, but of your loved one's needs. Their needs can overcome your own fulfillment and put you in a position of thinking more about the needs of someone else than of your own—you voluntarily put yourself into their hands.

Then how can there be power in love? Does the one who loves have any power in the lover/loved relationship? Is 'love power' even possible?

IS IT A ROMANTIC NOTION?

One rather romantic idea of love states that the lover impresses the loved one with his or her faithfulness and devotion, gradually winning the other person's gratitude and love. This idea provides the plot for many a sweet movie about love conquering all.

But think about real life. Imagine deciding to love a tyrant or dictator, with the hope that the power of your love would make him change his ways.

Do you imagine that love power could overcome any of history's infamous villains (Nero, Herod, Caligula, Ivan the Terrible, Genghis Khan) and turn them into mild-mannered softies?



Does anyone believe that giving way to an evil person's will is a way to exercise love power? Or is it simply a naïve, romantic idea that love can conquer hatred and greed?

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"My grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak."

II Corinthians 12: 9

IS IT CHRISTIAN?

Most Christians would agree that Christ showed true love power. His power flowed from His love, and it changed the world.

But the process of teaching His followers about the power of love was not always smooth. Often Jesus' closest disciples were confused about the power of love, thinking it could be used in the same way that earthly rulers use power. Jesus quickly set them straight when two disciples claimed special treatment:

"When the ten others heard about this (upsetting incident), they lost their tempers, thoroughly disgusted with the two brothers. So Jesus got them together to settle things down. He said, "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads.

It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave.

That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage."

Matthew 20:24

The Message version

There is awe-inspiring power in God's pure and holy love, but Jesus sternly rebukes His followers when they try to use that power for their own betterment. Not only does He warn them not to try to become great through the power of love, but He also takes it a huge step further: His followers must become servants and give away their lives.

Where's the power in that? It's one thing to tell Christians not to misuse God's power to benefit themselves. It's quite another thing to tell them to essentially give away any power they may possess and to become a servant. And it's really rather outrageous not to stop with servanthood, but to give up your life itself.

How many people would become Christians if they really understood this passage? No sooner have they found the

sources of all power (God, as revealed through Jesus) than they are told to give it all up. It's like serving a child with a big, gooey ice cream sundae, then whisking the sundae away before he even tastes it. Tears are sure to follow!

LOVE POWER IS REAL!

Yes, love power is real. It's not an oxymoron, or a romantic concept, or an anti-Christian message.

But it is a paradox! Love power as seen in the life of Jesus has two opposing, co-existing aspects: it is all-powerful and just, at the same time that it is all-tender and merciful.

God does not use His limitless 'love power' to give humans what we deserve for our rebelliousness. Imagine if He did! None of us could stand face-to-face with God and deny His power to punish us as we deserve for our sins. If He exercised His loving power with full justice, none of us would survive.

But His love power is, while strong and inescapable, also tender and merciful. He doesn't deal with us as we deserve; He deals with us through His Son Jesus who "gave away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage," as Matthew 20:24 states.

Jesus uses His love power to redeem and restore us. His love power is life-giving and refreshing. And He asks us, His followers, to be like Him: to use His love power for good.

As St. Paul says,

"I could have become proud of myself because of the amazing and wonderful things God has shown me. So I was given a problem that caused pain in my body. It is a messenger from Satan to make me suffer. ⁸ Three times I begged the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, 'My grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak.' So I am very happy to brag about how weak I am. Then Christ's power can rest on me."

II Corinthians 12: 7-9

New International Reader's version

