

Healing Our Broken Humanity

Chapter 4: Relinquish Power

“To relinquish something is to voluntarily choose to give it up. The church will never be the new humanity in Christ until it embraces relinquishment. The gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to relinquish (or give up) our own righteousness, status, privilege, selfish ambition, self-interest, vain conceit, personal gain, and power.”

Jesus practiced this relinquishment and Paul cites him as our example in Philippians 2:3-8: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

“For most of us our power (or powerlessness) is found in our wealth, education, age, intellect, cultural capital, social standing, gender, profession, religious status, political access, ethnicity, and race. Power can be destructive and divisive. But it can also be healing and nurturing when it is released, when it is used for other’s well-being and human flourishing.”

“We relinquish power when we truly listen to those who’ve been marginalized. We receive from them as we genuinely listen to them and respond. We relinquish power (and we use what power we have for good) when we use all our energies to make sure the marginalized are heard, respected, honored, and responded to... We relinquish power when we say no to opportunities so that others can be heard.”

Relinquishing Power and Embracing Powerlessness

Relinquishing Racial Power

Relinquishing Political Power

Relinquishing Religious Power

Relinquishing Linguistic Power

“Jesus call us to relinquish our power. He invites us to embrace a different kind of power—one rooted in powerlessness, weakness, and foolishness. After washing the disciples’ feet Jesus asks them, ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ (John 13:12). ‘Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you’ (John 13:14-15). The astonishing and countercultural power is the power of the cross and resurrection. We find this power in empathy, repentance, relinquishment, humility, integrity, justice, equality, diversity, reconciliation, and life together.”

Practices, Challenges, and Activities for Small Groups

Stop organizing all-white male panels and conferences, and stop speaking at them. Commit to developing a rich theology of diversity that deals with relevant biblical, theological, and missional themes. Commit to using the power you have to empower others. Begin to develop a list of names of people of color and women who can speak at events.

Take a “power audit”: <https://theglobalchurchproject.com/power/>
The aim of this Power Audit is to enable people to realize the different types of power that they have and go beyond the idea of straight hierarchical power. The types of power listed in the Power Audit are a representative selection of the many different types of power. The audit can be adapted to the specific cultural context or country that it is used in, but some types of power will be across cultures. Being a disciple of Jesus involves acknowledging what power we have, giving our power away, using our power to confront injustice and the status quo, and using our power for the wellbeing of others.

Get involved in grassroots organizations seeking to bring change to your neighborhood or community that are seeking to build initiatives and actions that confront power that is authoritative, exploitative, self-serving, and so on. As you participate in these groups, talk with others about what you are learning about power and its redistribution.

Explore self-emptying power. Spend some time in group discussion asking questions such as: How was the power of God revealed in Jesus’ self-emptying and vulnerability? How can we pattern our own lives in this way? How does this powerlessness confront and subvert worldly and abusive expressions of power? Pray together for the courage to pursue a life of vulnerability, self-emptying, and submission.

Discussion Questions

What do we learn about relinquishment from the way Jesus gave up power?

Who do you know who models this well?

What kinds of power do you and the people in your church need to give up?

What needs to change for you and your church to relinquish power?

What steps will you take to apply this practice fully and in the long term?