

Hope and Power!

By Michele Hershberger

Key Verse: "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power." Ephesians 1:17-19

Faith Story: Ephesians 1:15-23

Faith Focus: After a glorious opening of blessing and praise (verses 1-14), Paul now turns to a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession. Paul is thankful for the congregation's faith and love for all the saints. He also asks God to give them resurrection power and the ability to recognize and believe that they have this power and the wisdom to use it wisely. This realization leads to hope. That hope and power ultimately rests in Christ. God has made Jesus head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of God who fills all things.

Session Goal: to help youth claim the resurrection power offered by God to empower them to live as mature disciples.

Session Objectives: Each youth will

- Make a collage of symbols of power and discuss the dynamics of power
- List Paul's thanksgiving statements and intercessions
- Create a skit or drawing illustrating what can be done if a person believes she has power
- Pray for help in accepting and using wisely Christ's resurrection power

Materials Needed and Advance Preparation:

Ask another adult from your congregation to be present for this session. At the **Respond** time, this person can be "Paul" praying a special prayer of intercession for the youth

Bibles

Bible dictionary

Magazines, scissors, glue and poster board for the **Focus** activity

White board and markers

Paper and colored pencils for drawing for the **Apply** activity

Candle and matches for the **Respond** activity

SESSION OUTLINE

Focus: (10 minutes)

Have magazines, scissors, glue and poster board ready for the youth as they come in. It's also great to have snacks available. As they gather, ask them to look through the magazines and find symbols of power. Each person is to make a collage of power symbols and be prepared to discuss what kinds of power the symbols represent.

Connect: (12 minutes)

Gather the group together and give each person a chance to share his or her collage, highlighting one or two symbols of power. Have a discussion about what the word power means, how power can be abused, and what might be the most powerful force in the world. Ask, *What takes more power—the power to kill or the power to bring back to life? Why do you think so?* After discussing these questions, transition into the Bible story with this statement, *The book of Ephesians has a lot to say about power, and for the congregation at Ephesus, a group that may have felt pretty powerless, these were life-giving words to hear. Life-giving that is—if they choose to believe them.*

Explore the Bible: (17 minutes)

Ask for a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:15-23. Explain that Paul, in his great love for these people, has broken out into a beautiful prayer that he put on paper. He has both a prayer of thanksgiving and a prayer of intercession. Ask if anyone has ever interceded. Make two columns on the white board—thanksgiving and intercession—and have the youth list everything Paul prays about for each category.

Get out a Bible dictionary and look up the word *resurrection*. Discuss how this term can refer to literally bringing a dead corpse back to life. Ask the youth these questions:

What does this mean for the Ephesians? Did it mean they had the power to bring other people back to life? (Before you give an automatic “no,” look up Acts 20:7-12.)

In a broader sense, what kind of power did they have?

Do you think the Ephesians realized they had this much power? What verse would give some evidence for your answer?

Brainstorm all the different possible reasons why the Ephesians may have had trouble believing they had this kind of power. Your ideas could include

They had never been told this fact before

As they looked around at the society they lived in, the evil seemed so great that it was hard to believe that Jesus was really defeating evil and bringing in the kingdom through them. They felt small and powerless.

They had tried to follow Jesus and had faced hardships and persecution. Where's the resurrection in that?

Explain to the group that in reality, the Ephesians did live in a harsh world, a world who thought Jesus was nothing more than a powerless criminal himself. All the congregations of this time period faced some kind of persecution and compared to other groups, they were small in number, somewhat poor economically and had very little political power. Yet Paul tells them to have hope: the world's symbols of power—political clout, wealth, big numbers—are nothing compared to the power of God.

Summarize these verses in this way: *God has given the Ephesians the same power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead. That's a lot of power. And it's not just the power that will raise us up from the dead some day either, important as that power is. It is the power to live out the mission that we discussed last week—to help others find God, to bring in the kingdom. But, at least for some of the Ephesians, they didn't realize this or had forgotten it. So they needed to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened. The Ephesians, maybe for a variety of reasons, had a hard time believing they had this much power. So Paul prayed that they could "get it."*

Apply: (15 minutes)

Say, *So, what about us? Is this resurrection power available to use too, as believers? And if it is, do you believe it? Do you use this kind of power? Does it give you hope?*

After discussing these questions, give the youth this assignment: in groups of three, work together as a team to make a skit showing what you would do if you had the greatest power in the world. After 7-8 minutes, call the smaller groups back and have them perform their skits for each other.

Option: The groups could draw pictures to illustrate what they would do with the greatest power in the world rather than creating a skit, if they prefer.

Discuss these questions:

Do you believe you have resurrection power?

Do you think most of the people in our church believe they have resurrection power? What makes it hard for you to believe you have this power?

Respond: (10 minutes)

Direct the youth to sit in a big circle. Place a lit candle in the center of the circle. Ask each person to answer this question: *If you could ask for one thing that you knew would give you hope, what would you ask for?* Give them a couple minutes in silence to reflect on their answer. Then, gently ask for responses. Be in control of your own fear that no one will respond. Let it be okay if one or two minutes pass in silence. They will share if they know it's okay if they don't share.

After the sharing, ask your adult guest to come to the center of the circle and hold the candle. He or she will then pray a prayer of intercession for the group, asking

God to open their eyes—and all of your eyes—to the great power and hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Insights from Scripture:

God is doing great things—marvelous things—for the church. But will the Ephesians have the eyes to see it?

In this prayer, Paul gives both thanksgiving and intercession. He is thankful for their faith in Jesus, and possibly also for their faithfulness in following Jesus and also their love for the saints. Note that having faith in Jesus leads to faithfulness and loving others. The main portion of the scripture, however, is the intercession. God gives so much wisdom, hope, a wonderful inheritance and this marvelous power, but Paul prays that this group of people can have the power, wisdom and insight—to use this power, wisdom and insight. They need to believe it.

And it's not just power, it is immeasurable power (the same Greek word which is the source for our word *hyperbole*). Even more, it is the same power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead!

Through all of these verses, God is the active one. It is God who raised Jesus and God who has put all things under the authority of Jesus. Through God Jesus now rules over all powers. But that raises a question. If God has exalted Christ to his right hand and placed all things under him, why do we still encounter hostile powers as presently active (the Ephesians faced this question too—see chapters 2 and 6)? Paul said this to the Ephesians: the victory has happened (in the cross and resurrection) and victory is yet to be. We need to believe in the immeasurable power that God has given us precisely because we are to participate in this cosmic battle too, doing our part to conquer evil. So the victory is secure and yet we have a part to play.