

STUDY GUIDE

# THE WAY OF THE DRAGON OR THE WAY OF THE LAMB

SEARCHING FOR JESUS' PATH OF POWER IN  
A CHURCH THAT HAS ABANDONED IT



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## INTRODUCTION

1. Write down some of the characteristics of a biblical notion of power as you currently understand it. How exactly is Jesus' notion of power "antithetical to the world?"

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2. As you look back over your Christian life, how have you and those around you talked about success and impact? What were the signs that things were "going well" in life or ministry?

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3. How has your understanding of a “powerful” Christian life shifted (if at all) throughout your Christian life? What is it that makes a person’s life “powerful?”

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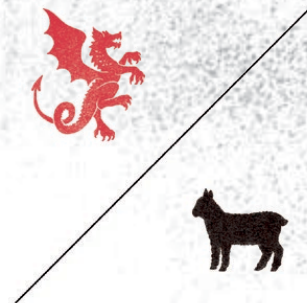
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## CHAPTER 1

# THE WAYS OF POWER

1. Have you experienced toxic power in the church? Were you able to talk about it with others, or was that taboo?

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2. James 3:13–18 narrates the “way from above” and the “way from below.” Reread that section and consider how those two ways are characterized. How have you been tempted by the way from below? Can you see ways that you have been tempted to use the way from below in an attempt to live in the way from above?

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3. Christian power is power *from* God and power *for* God, as it is power through our weakness and for love. Which one of these two—the from and the for—do you struggle with more? Are you more willing to accept that power is for love than that it only comes from God? Or, on the other hand, are you quite open to power being from God but want to seek other ends than love? How does this play out in your life and in the Christian context in which you live?

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## CHAPTER 2

# POWER IN WEAKNESS

1. In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Paul hears that the Lord has given him a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him humble and to teach him that Christ’s “power is made perfect in weakness.” Where has the Lord called you into your weakness? Are there times you can recognize where your struggle was really a gift to keep you focused on Christ’s power rather than your own? Have these experiences led you, like Paul, into humility, or did they lead you into something else? Why?

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2. J. I. Packer claims that “weakness is the way” to follow Christ. Where do you struggle to believe that? How do you see weakness embraced in the church, such that the power of Christ is illumined? Are there areas you see where power is embraced against this way? Are you tempted to seek out and follow “super Apostles” like the ones Paul attacks in Corinth?

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3. J. I. Packer talks about the temptation to feel “special” as a Christian and as a church. What are some ways you have been tempted to this? If anyone asks about your church, are there things you say to play up the “specialness” of it? How so?

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4. Does your worship, devotional life, and praying lead you into your weakness to depend on the power of Christ, or does it lead you depend more fully on yourself? What would it look like if it did lead you into your weakness? Is this something you are honestly open to?

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## CHAPTER 3

# BECOMING POWERFUL

1. Are there ways you use your strengths to compensate for your weakness?  
Are you willing and able to lead, honestly, with your weakness, or do you see your weakness as something to hide, avoid, and reject at all cost?

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2. In what ways are you called into your weakness in your work, relationships, and ministry? Is your weakness the temptation to rely on your own natural strengths and gifts, or is your weakness that you are called to do something you are genuinely not good at? How have you been (or have not been) open to your weakness in these places?

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- 3.** Jesus articulates the kingdom as a place where the first are last and the last are first (Mark 9:35), where flourishing is found through service (Matt. 20:25), and where we are called to faithfulness in the little things as we embrace the roles that are “less honorable” (1 Cor. 12:21–26). When you think about living this way in the world today, what, if anything, gives you pause? Do you struggle to think it will “work?” Do you struggle to believe that this is the way to true human flourishing? What would it look like to pray honestly here and tell Jesus, “Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief?”

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## CHAPTER 4

# STANDING AGAINST THE POWERS

1. Consider your Christian background and think about which of the three aspects of evil were focused on most the world, the flesh, or the devil. Has this changed throughout your life as a follower of Christ? How? What ways do you struggle to recognize all three of these and how they function in unison? Another way to ask this question could be: If I see a problem in the church or in a Christian leader, where do I focus the blame? Is it just their flesh? Do I recognize systems of evil? What role does the demonic play in this?

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2. How have you understood the “powers and the principalities” throughout your life as a Christian? Has an understanding of these played an important role in how you live and understand the Christian life in this “present evil age?”

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- 3 Read Mark 7:21–22 and Galatians 5:19–21. Talk about how broad these lists are, and think about which sins on these lists hit closer to home. What does it tell you about sin, and our condition in sin, that alongside of murder you find slander, or alongside sorcery you find divisions? Which ones on this list surprise you a bit, or make you wonder if they belong in a lesser category? What does this tell you about how you view sin?

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## CHAPTER 5

# THE POWER OF LOVE

1. More than nearly any other sin, we find that folks struggle to be honest about racism. Typically, they turn to one excuse or another, or else brand racism with some radical ideology in order not to see the obvious facts of racism in North American history. There is much of what the Bible would call “bearing false witness” concerning racism in the evangelical church. How have you seen racism at work in your own life and in the church?

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2. Standing against the powers and the principalities often causes them to awaken and reveal their true evil. To bear witness to the kingdom of Jesus will necessarily awaken these powers. Is this something you are open to? If this isn’t “what you signed up for,” tell the Lord that. As you think about this calling, take your worries, anxieties, and troubles to the Lord, and allow him to meet you in the truth.

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3. Paul tells us that we have been reconciled to God and now partake in his ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Where does reconciliation need to happen in your life or in the life of your church? In the church specifically, does your church relate to other churches as those who have together been reconciled to Christ, or are those other churches seen as competition?

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# THE POWER OF THE LAMB

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2. When you think about a powerful pastor, or a powerful sermon, how are you using the word *powerful*? Is this powerful in a kingdom sense? When a pastor is considered powerful, we have found it almost always has to do with their rhetorical ability. If power is known in and through our weakness, what might that mean for a pastor and for our expectations of what a pastor should be?

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3. Similar to the last question, churches are often seen as powerful based on size and influence. In the flesh, we assume that if things are being done well, then the church's size, bank account, and influence will grow with it. How might we weigh a church's kingdom power? What does it mean to speak of a church's faithfulness in this present evil age, and how should we expect that to look?

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4. If you ever interact with people that have a lot of power or influence (or even if you just imagine yourself doing so), how do those relationships differ from others? Do you get nervous because you don't want to ruin your chances to benefit from their influence or wealth? Do you try to make yourself look impressive? Where are you tempted when it comes to influence?

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## CHAPTER 7

# THE POWER OF FAITHFULNESS

1. Can you name a toxic relationship or form of leadership that has soured your relationship with a church? How has that shaped you and your expectations? Have you struggled to embrace life in the body of Christ since then? Alternatively, have you seen and experienced faithful leadership in the church? How has that reshaped your understanding and expectations of life in the church?

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2. Consider the difference between something that is *successful* versus *faithful*, and write down how our expectations should differ depending on which one we are aiming for. How do our expectations shift when our focus is on faithfulness rather than success?

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3. If ministry is “bringing the life of God” and is a form of “ministering the kingdom of God,” as Dallas Willard said, then how does that reshape our understanding of what we are doing when we seek to minister in and out of the church? How might that reshape our calling?

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4. Are there ways you are called to bear witness against a system or culture concerning their definitions of greatness or leadership? Can you do this in a way that does not focus on yourself but on the presence and example of Jesus? Are you tempted not to bear witness to this way but to just do what others are doing? How has this played out in your Christian life?

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# DISCERNING THE WAY

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- 2.** I find that folks tend to fall into one of two camps: **1.** Willingness (probably over-willingness) to name evil when they see it in the church, or **2.** The belief that naming evil in the church is somehow not faithful. For the first folks, they can almost relish naming evil in the church. When a pastor's sin comes to light, these folks can struggle not to gloat if it is from a church they have problems with. The latter folks want to avoid these things because brushing them under the rug can feel like "turning the other cheek." So we avoid the difficult call to name evil in the church in truth and in grace. Which side of this spectrum are you tempted by? Has this shifted throughout your Christian life?

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- 3.** In 1 John 4:1–6 we receive a call to "test the spirits" by discerning whether someone is *from* God or *from* the world. How does this testing take place in your own life, and in the sphere of Christianity in which you live? Does it? How does your church or community participate in the call to discern the spirits? Is there an awareness of the "schemes of the devil" and how Satan always seeks to warp the church through evil power and selfish ambition?

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4. On pages 156–57, we have listed attributes of speech that the book of James names as ways to discern faithfulness from worldliness. Read back through these lists and consider how you weigh the speech of others (*speech* may be sermons, personal conversations, or social media posts). Have you underemphasized the importance of someone’s speech in discerning whether they are walking in the way of Jesus? Do you “put up” with duplicity, bearing false witness, and foolish self-confidence in someone’s speech because they are impressive in other ways?

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## CHAPTER 9

# WALKING IN THE WILDERNESS

1. Is the church a “secondary” reality in your life with Christ, or is it foundational to your identity as a Christian? How do you understand your calling in relationship to the church? Is the church a means to something else (impact in the world) or is it the place where the Lord has called you to be as a sister or brother among sisters and brothers?

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2. Look back through your Christian life and consider what the rituals of the family of God have been. How have you understood these acts of faithfulness? Have there been seasons where you did them mindlessly? Have there been seasons where you did them and had no idea why? How are these leading you to abiding in Christ and depending on the Lord? Are they means by which you present your members as instruments of righteousness? (Rom. 6:13).

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3. As acts that help you reenact the exodus, and show you what is in your heart (Deut. 8:2), what do you do when you feel bored, notice your mind wandering, or just realize that you are not interested in the kingdom of Christ? Does this revelation of your heart lead you to God or to yourself? Do you try to “be better” when your heart is revealed, or does this lead you to throw yourself on the mercy of God?

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4. What are ways you have seen (even in yourself) that the church's practices have been co-opted by the powers and principalities of this age? How have you seen these oriented to the world rather than the kingdom?

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## CHAPTER 10

# THE WAY OF RESISTANCE

1. What sort of heart have you cultivated throughout your life? Have you tuned your heart to the ways of the kingdom or the ways of the world? How has your formation oriented you to, or away from, the practices of the church?

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2. We are called to cultivate a generosity of heart (or to use Paul's phrase from 2 Corinthians 6:11, to have a heart that is "wide open" to others). How is your life forming your heart in either generosity or stinginess? Does the news you watch, or the social media you consume, lead you to think of others as more

significant than yourself (Phil. 2:3)? In what ways are you being called to practice a generosity of heart?

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- 3.** The power system of the world, the flesh, and the devil is cultivated almost everywhere we look. All Christians are called to the path of non-divisive resistance when we see these powers at work in the church. What forms of non-divisive power do you believe you are called to? Why these and not others?

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## CONCLUSION

# LIVING THE WAY

1. In Titus 1:7–11 we find the character traits of elders, as well as what elders should not be like. This is the vision of mature leadership in the church. Read over those traits and consider the vision of Christian living that is being revealed here. How has this shaped your vision of Christian maturity? Has it?

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2. When you experiencing suffering, maybe particularly suffering in the body of Christ, are you able to suffer with and within Christ? Do you have a vision of the Christian life without suffering, making suffering something to always reject? Is your suffering a suffering for Christ's sake (Phil. 1:29–30), or do you suffer in isolation? How is your suffering an invitation to know that Christ's power is made perfect in weakness?

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- 3.** Consider the unique practices you engage in as a Christian (for example: reading Scripture, prayer, giving to the poor, going to church, justice). How do each of these practices lead you into your weakness to discover God's power? As you are led into weakness, are you meeting the Lord in these places, or are you seeking to use weakness as another strategy to know strength? How does this vision of power in weakness lead you to the Lord in truth?

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