

*Do you yearn to live every day filled with God's power instead of struggling through life on your own? Unfortunately, most of us do not experience God's power in our ordinary, everyday lives. This book looks at two fundamental reasons for this lack of power and provides a five-step process to draw close to God and experience His power every day.*

**More Than Words:  
Living an Empowered Christian Life**  
by Larry Shoup

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# **MORE THAN WORDS**

**LIVING AN EMPOWERED CHRISTIAN LIFE**

EXPERIENCING GOD'S POWER  
IN YOUR ORDINARY, EVERYDAY LIFE



**PRACTICAL REVELATIONS FROM THE HEART**

**LARRY SHOUP**

# More Than Words

Living an Empowered Christian Life

Larry Shoup

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Jaunita Kramer Shoup (it's not a typo, that is really how she spelled her name.) She left us for her heavenly home much too early at the age of 54, but not before passing on a faith in God to all her children that endures to this day. She demonstrated her faith every day as she lived through many trials and hardships. She surely was welcomed home by Jesus and heard those words we all hope to hear, "Well done my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

## **Acknowledgements**

I thank my wife, Robbie, who has been my companion through this marvelous Christian journey for over forty years. I could not have done this without her encouragement and support.

I thank my son Adam, my daughter-in-law Christine and my three grandchildren, Sawyer, Lilyana and Ella. I praise God every day for the joy you bring into my life.

My biggest thank is to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gently nudged me into writing this book and the Holy Spirit who provided the words. My prayer is that this book brings honor and glory to God and furthers His Kingdom on this earth.

Larry Shoup

June, 2018

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## **1. Introduction**

Inconsistent is how I would describe the majority of my Christian life. I went through periods where I attended church every Sunday and participated in most church events. I went through periods where I attended church very infrequently. I once did not attend church for an entire year. I had times of a strong prayer life and felt close to God. I had long stretches where I never spoke with God and felt very distant from Him.

The problem is that I was making my Christian life all about me and not about God. I was more concerned about what I got out of worship than actually worshipping God. I was more concerned about winning arguments in the church than actually discerning God's will. I am ashamed to admit that I was a holder of grudges and participant in gossip.

I was living my Christian life on my own power and for my own benefit. As a result, I did not experience God's power in my ordinary, everyday life. Christianity seemed to be all about words and nothing about power.

Through a long process (long mostly because of my resistance) God brought to the realization that Christianity is all about Him. He is God

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and I am not. He is worthy of worship and praise. He loves me for me, not for what I can do for Him. God cares about and wants to provide the power for my ordinary, everyday life.

I have a long way to go but I thank God for opening my eyes and changing my thinking. I have tasted God's power in my ordinary, everyday life and never want to go back to living life under my own power.

My prayer is that God uses this book to draw you close to Him and that you experience His power and presence in new and fresh ways. I encourage you to read this book with an open mind, asking the Holy Spirit to show where your thinking needs to change.

## **2. Where Has All the Power Gone?**

God's Way is not a matter of mere talk; it's an empowered life.

*1 Corinthians 4:20 (MSG)*

This verse from 1 Corinthians might be one of the hardest for today's Christians to believe. Yet it is what we yearn for. We want to have an empowered life. We want our faith to make a difference in our lives, our children's lives, our neighborhoods and in our churches. We want to face the challenges and difficulties of life relying on God's strength, not on our own. We want freedom from our daily stress and want to experience the "peace that passes understanding" promised in Philippians 4:7. We want our lives to exhibit the fruit of the spirit.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

*Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)*

But our lives don't feel much different than our non-Christian relatives, friends and neighbors. We seem to have the same level of stress and worry as they do. We struggle with divorce and addictions. We worry about our kids, work and retirement just like everyone else.

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Having trouble shouldn't surprise us. Jesus told His followers that they would have trouble.

I (Jesus) have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

*John 16:33 (NLT)*

But Jesus also said that we can have peace in the midst of our troubles. He tells us to not worry because He has overcome the world. We see the best thing about God's peace in Philippians.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, *which exceeds anything we can understand*. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Italics mine.)

*Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)*

We can have peace when it makes no worldly sense. We can have peace when the world tells us that we should be tearing our hair out and screaming. We can have peace when we can't see any way out of the darkness that surrounds us. We can have a peace that others notice. One of the most effective witnesses to the world is when Christians exhibit the peace of God in the midst of troubles and trials.

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An example of this witness to the world is the response of the Amish to the October 2, 2006 shooting of ten Amish girls ages 6-13 in the one-room West Nickel Mines Amish School, located about 12 miles southeast of Lancaster City in Pennsylvania. Charles Carl Roberts IV entered the school that morning, shot the girls, killing five of them, and then committed suicide. The shooting became a national and international news story. However, in the days following the shooting a second story developed of Amish grace and forgiveness. The Amish reached out to comfort the Roberts family. The Amish expressed forgiveness to Charles Roberts. The world noticed.

The foundation of Christianity is the free gift of God's forgiveness, borne of God's incomprehensible love, through the sacrifice of Jesus, for our rebellion against Him. As a result of that forgiveness we are assured of living forever in heaven where:

He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things will be gone forever.

*Revelation 21:4 (NLT)*

This is a wonderful promise but for most of us there is a lot of living between accepting Jesus as Savior and going to heaven at the end of our life. Sometimes we think "I've got my ticket to heaven. Now I'll

trudge through life until I finally use the ticket to get into heaven.” There is more to the Christian life than forgiveness of sin and eternal life. In John 10:10 Jesus said “My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” Jesus cares about our ordinary, everyday life. He intends for it to be rich and satisfying. Not in the things of the world but in peace and contentment no matter what life throws at us.

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord will keep me safe.

*Psalms 4:8 (NLT)*

### **Why is Finding Peace So Difficult?**

With such strong promises in the Bible about peace, why is it so difficult for most of us to experience it? Are these promises not true anymore? Has God lost His power to grant us peace? Maybe God just doesn't love us anymore. NO, none of this is true.

The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

*Isaiah 40:8 (NLT)*



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Praise the Lord, all you nations. Praise him, all you people of the earth. For his unfailing love for us is powerful; the Lord's faithfulness endures forever.

*Psalm 117:1-2 (NLT)*

"Heaven and earth will disappear, but my (Jesus) words will never disappear."

*Matthew 24:35 (NLT)*

I can personally testify that God still provides "peace that passes understanding" because I have experienced it in my life. I was the founder and CEO of a software company. Like most startups we went through a period when we were running out of money. I was facing not being able to pay the employees who were very good and dedicated to the company. I was sitting in the Denver airport praying and worrying (mostly worrying) when I had this warm feeling come over me and a very deep sense that everything was going to be alright. It was like God had given me a hug and said "Don't worry. I've got this." Nothing about my circumstances had changed in that moment, but my anxiety was gone. That peace stuck with me and a couple of days later some unexpected money showed up so we could make the payroll. I have experienced that peace on other occasions in my life, but not as often as I would like. The fault is mine because most often I chase after human solutions first. After I have exhausted all of my

ideas and am hanging on to the end of the rope by my fingernails, then I turn to God and ask for help. That is really stupid on my part. I have access to the creator of the universe, who loves me more than I can ever comprehend, and I turn to God last.

### **Lack of Power is Our Fault**

This lack of power is our fault, not God's. God has not changed. God is immutable, which is a fancy way of saying that God does not change. This unchangeableness or constancy is part of God's divine nature. Nothing in God's being, perfections, purposes, promises, nature or character ever changes. God is always good, loving, righteous, holy, all-knowing, all-powerful, etc. God does not vary. God is constant.

Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.

*James 1:17 (NLT)*

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

*Hebrews 13:8 (NLT)*

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Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth and made the heavens with your hands. They will perish, but you remain forever; they will wear out like old clothing. You will change them like a garment and discard them. But you are always the same; you will live forever.

*Psalm 102:25-27 (NLT)*

Whatever God has done in the past, God can do again today. You might be thinking that our church is too small for God to use us. The entire Christian religion started with eleven disciples who locked themselves in a room after the crucifixion because they were afraid (see John 20:19). If there are more than eleven members in your church, you are already ahead of where the disciples started. It is never about how small your church is. It is about how big your God is.

### **God Welcomes Imperfection**

You might be thinking that God could never use me because I am too (fill in the blank). We think that God can't use us because of our imperfections. However, it is hard to imagine a more imperfect group than the first disciples. They did not have much education. They bickered among themselves about who was greater. Thomas did not believe the other disciples when they told him that Jesus had risen from the dead (see John 20:24-29). After being with Jesus for three

years and witnessing the miracles first hand, Philip said that he needed to see the Father (see John 14:8). All the disciples ran away when Jesus was arrested. Peter denied Jesus three times and yet Jesus called Peter the rock on which Jesus would build His church (see Matthew 16:13-20.) In Acts 2 we see Peter, the rock, preaching a sermon on Pentecost that added three thousand people to the church.

God has a history of using imperfect, ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Abraham was a liar. Moses had lots of reasons why he couldn't do what God asked. Jonah ran away rather than obey God. David was an adulterer and a murder, yet in 1 Samuel 13:14 we see that God sought David because he was a man after God's own heart. In 1 Corinthians we see why God does it this way.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

*1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NLT)*

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If you feel powerless, downtrodden, weak, not good enough, etc. then you are the type of person that God can use. If you are aware of your imperfections and shortcomings then you are the type of person that God can use. God is not looking for perfection in people before he uses them. God is looking for availability. God is looking for surrender. Sometimes we hide behind our shortcomings because we don't want God upsetting our lives. We give lip service to seeking and obeying God's will but deep down we are terrified of the idea. We don't want to get out of our comfort zone. We do not want to love the Lord our God with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength. We can't have it both ways. If we want to truly experience God's life changing power in our lives, then we have to do it on His terms not ours. We'll examine this in a lot of detail in Chapter 4 where we will explore what it means to love God.

## God Still Works in the World

You might think that God just doesn't work in today's world like He did in the past. God did all that stuff in Biblical times but He doesn't pour out his power now like He did then. Maybe God is done with us and we are on our own now. This also is not true. At any time in history there is evidence of God working and pouring out his power in the world. The following instances of spiritual revival and awakening in

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America come from Patrick Morley's blog "A Brief History of Spiritual Revival and Awakening in America."<sup>1</sup>

- The Great Awakening, 1734-1743, with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield.
- The Second Great Awakening, 1800-1840, with James McGready and Charles Finney.
- The Businessmen's Revival, 1857-1858, with Jeremiah Lanphier. This has also been called The Great Prayer Meeting Revival.
- The Urban Revivals, 1875-1885, with Dwight L. Moody.
- The Azusa Street Revival, 1906, with William J. Seymour. The Pentecostal and the later Charismatic Movement, which both exploded worldwide in the twentieth century both trace their roots to this revival.
- In the late 1940s, Bill Bright began Campus Crusade for Christ and Billy Graham began his ministry.
- In the late 1960s there was the Charismatic Renewal, the Jesus Movement and the 1970 Asbury College Revival.
- In the mid-1990s there was The Toronto Blessing, the Melbourne Revival, the Modesto Revival, the Brownsville Revival and the well-known Promise Keepers Revival.

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As I write these words, Christianity may be declining in the United States but it is exploding in other parts of the world. The Christian community in Latin America and Africa is estimated at 1 billion people. During the last century in Asia, Christianity grew at twice the rate of the population in that continent. Demographers estimate that more Christian believers are worshipping in China on any given Sunday than in the United States. Christianity has been quietly exploding in Iran and India.

### **God Still Works in Individual Lives**

A search of the internet will find hundreds of stories of God's power at work in individual lives. There are too many stories from too many varied sources to all be made up. They range from finding lost articles to healing miracles that have no natural or scientific explanation. In my own church, we had a very young girl with an aggressive form of brain cancer. Her tumor actually grew while she was undergoing chemotherapy. There were a lot of people in the community praying for her. Her parents took her for one last scan before she was going to enter hospice. The scan showed that the tumor had shrunk. The doctors were dumbfounded and had no explanation. Several of the medical people attributed it to God's intervention as a result of prayer. They said there was no other explanation.

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A friend of mine has been very involved with the persecuted Christian church and has made several trips to places where Christians are under severe persecution. He has shared with me amazing stories of miracles and God's power at work. He says that these persecuted Christians expect God to work in powerful and miraculous ways. This is so different than many of us who turn to God like buying a lottery ticket. We really don't expect anything to happen but what can it hurt? Maybe we'll get lucky and God will help us but we won't expect it.

Clearly God has been at work throughout history and right up to today. God is still in the business of calling people to Him and transforming lives with His indwelling Spirit and power. God's love for the world and His power to change it have not diminished one little bit. So, we come back to our original question "Why do so many Christians and churches struggle and not experience God's power in their individual and corporate lives?"

### **The Problem**

The problem is clearly with us and not with God. I believe there are two fundamental root causes. The first is that we have forgotten who God is. In our quest to make God palatable to our culture we have emphasized God's love but have lost sight of God's power, majesty



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and otherness. We have emphasized God as friend, provider and comforter but have neglected God as creator, sustainer and ultimately judge of the world. We have lost our awe of and reverence for God. The Bible uses the word fear at least 300 times in reference to God, so we make a mistake when we downplay having the correct understanding of the nature of God and our relationship to Him.

The second reason is that we have neglected “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” even though Jesus told us in Matthew 22:36-38 that this is the most important thing to do in our Christian life. The challenge in this is “all”. We like to love God with some of our heart, some of our soul, and some of our mind. It is a matter of priority. We tend to satisfy our own priorities, needs and wants first and give God the leftovers. We don’t want to be inconvenienced and moved out of our comfort zone. Once again, we can’t have it both ways. We can’t ignore God, give Him our leftover time, money, etc. and expect to fully experience His power in our lives.

### **Developing Reverence and Love for God**

So how do we develop a proper reverence for God and develop the intimate love relationship with Him that enables God’s life-transforming power to work freely within us? I propose the following four step process that the rest of this book will expand upon.

1. **Acknowledge** who God is. The foundation is establishing the proper reverence and awe for God. He is God and we are not. We'll explore this in chapter 3.
2. **Repent** of our false images of God. We need to let God out of whatever box we've put Him in. If we quit growing in our Christian life, that is a warning sign that we have formed a nice comfortable image of God and we are not interested in anything that is going to challenge us or "rock our boat." We will examine this further in chapter 4.
3. **Love** God with all our heart, soul and mind. We have to acknowledge that God wants an intimate personal love relationship with us. Just as we work and invest in forming intimate human love relationships, we have to work at forming that kind of relationship with God. We'll explore this in chapter 5.
4. **Obey** God because we love Him and want to please Him. It is easy to fall into the trap of making the Christian life all about doing things we don't really want to do in order to please God. If we truly love God, then working on His will and purposes flows naturally out of that relationship and we'll rely on His power, not ours. We'll examine this in Chapter 6.

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These four steps are not a magic process that we do once and then are filled with God's power for the rest of our lives. They are a way of life. We will fall off the wagon because we are a fallen, sinful and rebellious people. We will form new false images of God and once again get comfortable. We'll go back to loving God with some of our heart, soul and mind. So, the last step in this process is **Repeat**. We'll have to continually examine our hearts, repent and ask God to continue the process of transforming us into the likeness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord – who is the Spirit – makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

*2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (NLT)*

I encourage you to read this book slowly and reflectively, asking God to show you what veils need to be removed so you can fully experience His transforming power in your life. My prayer is that you don't just gather knowledge but experience God in new and more powerful ways as the following promise from Scripture becomes true for you.

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Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

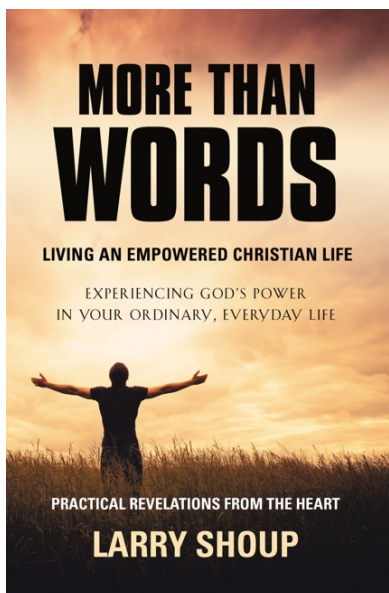
*James 4:8 (NLT)*

So, let's buckle up and together learn how to draw close to God using **ARLO-R** so that God will draw close to us and we'll give Him our full loyalty which leads to a transformed life that is filled with His power.

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### Discussion Questions

1. How is your life different from your non-Christian relatives, friends and neighbors? Why does this matter?
2. How is your life the same as your non-Christian relatives, friends and neighbors?
3. Share a time when you or someone close to you experienced God's power in their life.
4. In what ways do you keep God at a distance so He won't disturb your life?
5. In what ways is your loyalty divided between God and the world?
6. What are you willing to change in order to fully experience God's power in your life?



*Do you yearn to live every day filled with God's power instead of struggling through life on your own? Unfortunately, most of us do not experience God's power in our ordinary, everyday lives. This book looks at two fundamental reasons for this lack of power and provides a five-step process to draw close to God and experience His power every day.*

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