



Sermon Growth Guide

October 19, 2025

Power

Luke 22:24-30

Key Verse: Luke 22:26 “But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”

Big Idea: True security and significance comes not from seeking power but choosing to follow Jesus.

Foundations

In Matt. 4:1-11 we read of the Wilderness Temptations. Jesus turned down power. In Matt. 26:53 while being arrested Jesus said to Peter, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father and he will put legions of angels at my disposal?” In Matt. 26:61-63, 27:12-14, Jesus remained silent before the accusations in the Sanhedrin and then again before Pilate. In Matt. 27: 39-42, while nailed to a cross, he was goaded to use his power, “You were going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!” “Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God” “He saved others but he can’t save himself.” Jesus’s response, in Luke 23:24, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Jesus didn’t embrace power even though he was given all power by the Father. (John 3:35). “Rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross.” Phil 2:7-8

Pastor Tim asks us, “What image pops into your mind when you hear the word power?” Did anyone picture Jesus nailed to a cross? And yet, is that not the greatest demonstration of power in our world. Victory over the power of sin and death. Unimaginable personal power restrained in obedience to the will of the Father.

Understanding God’s Word

Read together Luke 22:24-30. Why might the disciples have been discussing who would be the greatest in the new kingdom? What had Jesus said as they prepared to eat the Passover? (Luke 22:15-16) What was the promise Jesus made to his disciples. (Luke 28-30) What might Jesus have been doing when he said “For who is greater, the one is at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at table? But I am among you as one who serves. (John 13:10-15)

Applying God’s Word

What is the attraction to power in your life? Is it security? Is it control over circumstances? Significance? How is power demonstrated and how is it honored in our culture today. Jesus was very powerful. How did he use his power? Do you choose to align yourself with the powerful? How can you take a peaceful step down into humble service?

Witnessing God’s Word

Pastor Tim asked us, “Are you calling yourself a Christian or are you following the way of Christ?” How can you descend into greatness and thereby draw others to Jesus?

What pops into your head when you hear the word “power”? A President walking into the room with the band playing Hail to the Chief? A CEO holding court at the Annual Meeting? Tanks and missiles on parade? One time I got to go to a Broncos game. I was sixteen and gifted tickets in the last row of the highest section. This was a long time ago. John Elway was quarterback. The crowd cheered and shouted and stomped; the whole stadium bounced around. Then Elway needed to make an audible. He put his arms out like wings and moved them up and down. 75,000 people went silent. I thought, woah, that’s power. Or I was in Kenya on a mission trip sharing communion with the staff of a hospital. The hospital chaplain was a giant, Kenyan, Presbyterian minister, three-hundred pounds if he was an ounce. He preferred, as Kenyans do, the old Presbyterian trappings—a black clerical shirt and collar with Geneva tabs hanging down. But the communion set he used was a travel set, like the Deacons use. It was very small. Small plate, small bit of bread on it, small chalice, small cup. Here was this enormous man—he could crush the little chalice in a fist—focusing all that energy on the careful, reverent distribution of Christ’s body and blood for us and for the people. That’s power, I thought. Great strength in humble service.

This is a series called How to Get What You Want. We all want things, and when we go the wrong direction with those desires and needs, things go fiercely off track. Today in How to Get What You Want, we want Power. We all want some agency, some authority, some ability to control the world around us. We are fascinated with power. Just look at the Marvel Universe. We love these characters with their special powers. What can she do? What about him? What’s his special power? Think of Superman. I myself was known to run around the house as a boy in my Superman Underoos with a bath towel tied around my neck pretending I could fly. There’s a picture out there somewhere, when it comes time to

blackmail me. What is my special power? How can I have more power? How can I get what I want? Is it more time at the gym? Physical power. More time conquering others at work? Professional power. More time dominating my opponents? Argumentative power. At the root of it is a desire for autonomy. I want control; I want to have all I need to make my own decisions and execute my own will, and I want enough reserves to never require help. Power.

“A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.” (Luke 22:24) A dispute. A debate and quarrel. I wish we had the transcript. “Well, James, yes you got to go with Jesus in to heal the girl who had died, but are you the one who always sits closest and is called the beloved friend?” “Peter, of course you were first to jump in with all this, but, man, have you screwed some things up. Let’s be honest.” What happens to get these men to this point where they are genuinely arguing, “Eh, I really do think it’s me. I’m probably the greatest.” How patient is our Savior?

The human heart needs so many things. Among them is to know, as we have seen, that we can be washed and cleaned. Purity. To know that there is a lawgiver who holds this world and its actions to account. Justice. To find a place where we can be settled and safe. Peace. To know that we are not forgotten. Value. Do you ever feel looked over, unseen, like a ghost? Pick up Pastor John’s sermon from last week. I love to hear John talk about valuing people. There are few who do it so well. We also long for agency, for power. The disciples allowed that need to bubble up into a dispute, a quarrel.

Stemming from what? They have just come into Jerusalem for the last chapter of Jesus’ life. They have watched the temperature rise as religious leaders built up hostile opposition. They watched Jesus lead them through a Seder Meal which he said was the last time they would have supper together until the Kingdom comes. “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them,

saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'" (Luke 22:19) They watched Judas singled out as a betrayer from inside, and they watched Jesus strip himself down to servant's garments and wash their feet. What of all that led them to want to fight about who among them has the most power? It wasn't anything Jesus did or said. It was the brokenness inside, the thirst in their own hearts, the unmet desire for control, agency, autonomy. I want power. Which of us is the greatest?

"Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.'" (Luke 22:25) This is just how the world is, divided between the weak and the strong. Those with power use it to control the weak. If they choose to be nasty, they can. They can lord their authority over the weak and demand obedience and service. They can make themselves feel big by making others feel small. Just flex. I have the power. But even if they decide to be kind, much the same thing can happen. The needful depend on the good graces of the prosperous and plentiful. The weak depend on the generosity of the strong, the poor depend on the rich. Jesus says they like to call themselves Benefactors. They thrive on the superiority, and if one walks into the room and does not receive attention, maybe the next check won't be so big. The giving is not a free act. No freedom. Both the giver and the receiver are tied up in bonds of transaction. That's how the world works, Jesus says. We want power, and we want that power recognized.

I was on the phone with a younger pastor I have mentored over the years. The subject came up of a man we both know, a pastor who leads a very large church. He said, "I don't know about him." "Why?" I asked. "Well, whenever I talk to him, his eyes seem to be scanning the room for someone more important. As soon as that person comes, our conversation is over. I'm glad you're

not like that, Tim," he said. "Thank you," I said, and thought, I truly hope I am not. Sometimes I do the same thing. The world is like that. Find the power in the room. Maybe the band isn't playing Hail to the Chief for an authority figure, maybe they're playing You've Got a Friend or Lean on Me for the generous philanthropist. Jesus says either way, watch out. Watch your heart. You were meant for something different. What is it?

"But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves." (Luke 22:26) But you. "I have a different pattern for you. It is a descending path, a descent into greatness. It is not a desperate power grab, but a peaceful step down into humble service." Here is another way: genuinely love and serve those around you, not out of your inner need to be the powerful one, but taking all the power and energy and agency you have and focusing it on the life of another. Giving yourself away, in other words. "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:27) Do you call yourself a Christian or do you follow the way of Christ? Jesus says, if you want to follow me, if you want to live your life after me, to live the way I lived, and do the things I did, then look. Everybody knows how the world works. The person paying the bill is on top and the busboy is on the bottom. "Which position am I in?" Jesus asks. Jesus, who has only just put his cloak back on after the foot washing, if you cross reference the other Gospels. Jesus who said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) But you, follow me into service. Step down. Follow me down.

A researcher in psychology was trying to get to the root of terrorism and acts of violence twenty years ago, and she put it

down to “group narcissism,” a belief that the exaggerated greatness of one’s group is not sufficiently recognized by others. We are not seen. We are not heard. We are not respected, we do not have power, so we will be feared. Violence erupts. We all suffer the same aching desire. What do you do with your need for power? I am so grateful when I see glimpses of power put in the service of others. We pray for the fragile peace brokered in the Holy Land. I wept to see hostages returned to their families. I weep for the continued loss of life, as we have all wept to see so many lives lost. I pray for a wave of conviction to grip every heart with the truth that every single life is valuable, made in the image of God. Brokered peace takes a lot of people laying down power for a greater end. Nobody involved is perfect, but when power is put into service of others, good things can happen. Great things can happen.

How can we take a step closer to that, each of us, a step down into humble service? Next week is what we call Stewardship Sunday. That’s very churchy language if you’re not used to it, but at First Pres we take time to make thoughtful commitments to invest in the work of the church in the coming year. Most churches have given up on this practice, frankly. Either no one wants to do it, or the pledges are meaningless because people move or switch churches or what have you. But here this practice defines three-quarters of our budget, and when we pledge, we keep our pledge. We have a 98% follow through! Amazing. So, we do this, not as a fundraiser, but as a way to declare our boldness in following Jesus into humble service. Money can be a measure of power in our minds. The bank account is like a gauge. How powerful am I? How autonomous am I? How secure am I? Just look at the number. Is that true? Is that where our true confidence lies? There is a sword the church has to slay that dragon. It’s called the tithe. We are asking you to consider at least a 5% increase in your

commitment to next year’s ministry. The mission of First Pres has some challenges to overcome. But I want, most of all, for this to be your declaration: my power, my confidence, my hope is not in my wealth, but in my Jesus.

Did the disciples need to quarrel over greatness? No. They are not unseen. They are not forgotten. Jesus said, “You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22:28-30) There is plenty of power and significance to go around; all you need is the eye of Jesus on you. But the call to follow Jesus is the call to follow the God who went to the cross. The God who descended from heaven to take on flesh, the God who died for us and descended into the deepest depths of death and hell to purchase forgiveness and eternal life for us. We want power, physical power and vitality, spiritual power, financial power, social power... Jesus wants us to be free from the thirst for power. Free. We find our freedom by following him, trusting him enough to lay down our lives for him and for one another.