

S. D. GORDON



**QUIET
TALKS
ON POWER**

S. D. Gordon

Quiet Talks on Power

EAN 8596547368076

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHOKED CHANNELS.

THE OLIVET MESSAGE.

THE CHANNEL OF POWER.

THE PRICE OF POWER.

THE PERSONALITY OF POWER.

MAKING AND BREAKING CONNECTIONS.

THE FLOOD-TIDE OF POWER.

FRESH SUPPLIES OF POWER.

CHOKED CHANNELS.

[Table of Contents](#)

An Odd Distinction.

A few years ago I was making a brief tour among the colleges of Missouri. I remember one morning in a certain college village going over from the hotel to take breakfast with some of the boys, and coming back with one of the fellows whom I had just met. As we walked along, chatting away, I asked him quietly, "Are you a christian, sir?" He turned quickly and looked at me with an odd, surprised expression in his eye and then turning his face away said: "Well, I'm a member of church, but—I don't believe I'm very much of a christian." Then I looked at him and he frankly volunteered a little information. Not very much. He did not need to say much. You can see a large field through a chink in the fence. And I saw enough to let me know that he was right in the criticism he had made upon himself. We talked a bit and parted. But his remark set me to thinking.

A week later, in another town, speaking one morning to the students of a young ladies' seminary, I said afterwards to one of the teachers as we were talking: "I suppose your young women here are all christians." That same quizzical look came into her eye as she said: "I think they are all members of church, but I do not think they are all christians with real power in their lives." There was that same odd distinction.

A few weeks later, in Kansas City visiting the medical and dental schools, I recall distinctly standing one morning in a

disordered room—shavings on the floor, desks disarranged—the institution just moving into new quarters, and not yet settled. I was discussing with a member of the faculty, the dean I think, about how many the room would hold, how soon it would be ready, and so on—just a business talk, nothing more—when he turned to me rather abruptly, looking me full in the face, and said with quiet deliberation: "I'm a member of church; I *think* I am a deacon in our church"—running his hand through his hair meditatively, as though to refresh his memory—"but I am not very much of a christian, sir." The smile that started to come to my face at the odd frankness of his remark was completely chased away by the distinct touch of pathos in both face and voice that seemed to speak of a hungry, unsatisfied heart within.

Perhaps it was a month or so later, in one of the mining towns down in the zinc belt of southwestern Missouri, I was to speak to a meeting of men. There were probably five or six hundred gathered in a Methodist Church. They were strangers to me. I was in doubt what best to say to them. One dislikes to fire ammunition at people that are absent. So stepping down to a front pew where several ministers were seated, I asked one of them to run his eye over the house and tell me what sort of a congregation it was, so far as he knew them. He did so, and presently replied: "I think fully two-thirds of these men are members of our churches"—and then, with that same quizzical, half-laughing look, he added, "but you know, sir, as well as I do, that not half of them are christians worth counting." "Well," I said to myself, astonished, "this is a mining camp; this certainly is

not anything like the condition of affairs in the country generally."

But that series of incidents, coming one after the other in such rapid succession, set me thinking intently about that strange distinction between being members of a church on the one hand, and on the other, living lives that count and tell and weigh for Jesus seven days in the week. I knew that ministers had been recognizing such a distinction, but to find it so freely acknowledged by folks in the pew was new, and surely significant.

And so I thought I would just ask the friends here to-day very frankly, "What kind of Christians are you?" I do not say what kind you are, for I am a stranger, and do not know, and would only think the best things of you. But I ask you frankly, honestly now, as I ask myself anew, what kind are you? Do you know? Because it makes such a difference. The Master's plan—and what a genius of a plan it is—is this, that the world should be won, not by the preachers—though we must have these men of God for teaching and leadership—but by everyone who knows the story of Jesus *telling someone*, and telling not only with his lips earnestly and tactfully, but even more, *telling with his life*. That is the Master's plan of campaign for this world. And it makes a great difference to Him and to the world outside whether you and I are *living* the story of His love and power among men or not.

Do you *know* what kind of a christian you are? There are at least three others that do. First of all there is Satan. He knows. Many of our church officers are skilled in gathering and compiling statistics, but they cannot hold a tallow-dip to

Satan in this matter of exact information. He is the ablest of all statisticians, second only to one other. He keeps careful record of every one of us, and knows just how far we are interfering with his plans. He knows that some of us—good, respectable people, as common reckoning goes—neither help God nor hinder Satan. Does that sound rather hard? But is it not true? He has no objection to such people being counted in as christians. Indeed, he rather prefers to have it so. Their presence inside the church circle helps him mightily. *He* knows what kind of a christian you are. Do *you* know?

Then there is the great outer circle of non-christian people—*they know*. Many of them are poorly informed regarding the christian life; hungry for something they have not, and know not just what it is; with high ideals, though vague, of what a christian life should be. And they look eagerly to us for what they have thought we had, and are so often keenly disappointed that our ideals, our life, is so much like others who profess nothing. And when here and there they meet one whose acts are dominated by a pure, high spirit, whose faces reflect a sweet radiance amid all circumstances, and whose lives send out a rare fragrance of gladness and kindness and controlling peace, they are quick to recognize that, to them, intangible something that makes such people different. The world—tired, hungry, keen and critical for mere sham, appreciative of the real thing—the world knows what kind of christians we are. Do *we* know?

There is a third one watching us to-day with intense interest. The Lord Jesus! Sitting up yonder in glory, with the

scar-marks of earth on face and form, looking eagerly down upon us who stand for Him in the world that crucified Him—*He knows*. I imagine Him saying, "There is that one down there whom I died for, who bears my name; *if* I had the *control* of that life what power I would gladly breathe in and out of it, but—he is *so absorbed in other things*." The Master is thinking about you, studying your life, longing to carry out His plan if He could only get permission, and sorely disappointed in many of us. He knows. Do *you* know?

The Night Visitor.

After that trip I became much interested in discovering in John's Gospel some striking pictorial illustrations of these two kinds of christians, namely, those who have power in their lives for Jesus Christ and those who have not. Let me speak of only a few of these. The first is sketched briefly in the third chapter, with added touches in the seventh and nineteenth chapters. There is a little descriptive phrase used each time—"the man who came to Jesus by night." That comes to be in John's mind the most graphic and sure way of identifying this man. A good deal of criticism, chiefly among the upper classes, had already been aroused by Jesus' acts and words. This man Nicodemus clearly was deeply impressed by the young preacher from up in Galilee. He wants to find out more of him. But he shrank back from exposing himself to criticism by these influential people for his possible friendship with the young radical, as Jesus was regarded. So one day he waits until the friendly shadows will conceal his identity, and slipping quietly along the streets, close up to the houses so as to insure his purpose of not

being recognized, he goes up yonder side street where Jesus has lodgings. He knocks timidly. "Does the preacher from up the north way stop here?" "Yes." "Could I see him?" He steps in and spends an evening in earnest conversation. I think we will all readily agree that Nicodemus *believed* Jesus after that night's interview, however he may have failed to understand all He said. Yes, we can say much more—he *loved* Him. For after the cruel crucifixion it is this man that brings a box of very precious spices, weighing as much as a hundred pounds, worth, without question, a large sum of money, with which to embalm the dead body of his friend. Ah! he loved Him. No one may question that.

But turn now to the seventh chapter of John. There is being held a special session of the Jewish Senate in Jerusalem for the express purpose of determining how to silence Jesus—to get rid of Him. This man is a member of that body, and is present. Yonder he sits with the others, listening while his friend Jesus is being discussed and His removal—by force if need be—is being plotted. What does he do? What would you expect of a friend of Jesus under such circumstances? I wonder what you and I would have done? I wonder what we do do? Does he say modestly, but plainly, "I spent a whole evening with this man, questioning Him, talking with Him, listening to Him. I feel quite sure that He is our promised Messiah; and I have decided to accept Him as such." Did he say that? That would have been the simple truth. But such a remark plainly would have aroused a storm of criticism, and he dreaded that. Yet he felt that something should be said. So, lawyer-like, he puts the case abstractly. "Hmm—does our law judge a man without giving

him a fair hearing?" That sounds fair, though it does seem rather feeble in face of their determined opposition. But near by sits a burly Pharisee, who turns sharply around and, glaring savagely at Nicodemus, says sneeringly: "Who are you? Do you come from Galilee, too? Look and see! No prophet comes out of Galilee"—with intensest contempt in the tone with which he pronounces the word Galilee. And poor Nicodemus seems to shrink back into half his former size, and has not another word to say, though all the facts, easily ascertainable, were upon his side of the case. He loved Jesus without doubt, but he had *no power* for Him among men *because of his timidity*. Shall I use a plainer, though uglier, word—his cowardice? That is not a pleasant word to apply to a man. But is it not the true word here? He was so afraid of what *they* would think and say! Is that the sort of christian *you* are? Believing Jesus, trusting Him, saved by Him, loving Him, but shrinking back from speaking out for Him, tactfully, plainly, when opportunity presents or can be made. A christian, but without positive power for Him among men because of cowardice!

I can scarcely imagine Nicodemus walking down the street in Jerusalem, arm in arm with another Pharisee-member of the Sanhedrin and saying to him quietly, but earnestly: "Have you had a talk with this young man Jesus?" "No, indeed, I have not!" "Well, do you know, I spent an evening with Him down at His stopping place, and had a long, careful talk with Him. I am quite satisfied that He is our long-looked-for leader; I have decided to give Him my personal allegiance; won't you get personally acquainted with Him? He is a wonderful man." I say I have difficulty in

thinking that this man worked for Jesus like that. And yet what more natural and proper, both for him and for us? And what a difference it might have made in many a man's life. *Powerless* for Jesus because of timidity! Is that the kind *you* are? Possibly some one thinks that rather hard on this man. Maybe you are thinking of that other member of the Sanhedrin—Joseph of Arimathea—who was also a follower of Jesus, and that quite possibly he may have been influenced by Nicodemus. Let us suppose, for Nicodemus' sake, that this is so, and then mark the brief record of this man Joseph in John's account: "A disciple *secretly* for *fear* of the Jews." If we may fairly presume that it was Nicodemus' influence that led his friend Joseph to follow Jesus, yet he had led him no nearer than he himself had gone! He *could* lead him no higher or nearer than that.

John in his gospel makes plain the fact that Jesus suffered much from these secret, timid, cowardly disciples whose fear of men gripped them as in a vise. Five times he makes special mention of these people who believed Jesus, but cravenly feared to line up with Him.[1] He even says that *many* of the *rulers*—the very class that plotted and voted His death—believed Jesus, but that *fear of the others* shut their lips and drove them into the shadow when they could have helped Him most. These people seem to have left numerous descendants, many of whom continue with us unto this day.

[1] John 3:1.
7:50. 12:42
with 9:22.
19:38, 39.

Tightly Tied Up.

Turn now to the eleventh chapter and you will find another pictorial suggestion of this same sort of *powerless christian*, though in this instance made so by another reason. It is the Bethany Chapter, the Lazarus Chapter. The scene is just out of Bethany village. There is a man lying dead in the cave yonder. Here stands Jesus. There are the disciples, and Martha, and Mary, and the villagers, and a crowd from Jerusalem. The Master is speaking. His voice rings out clear and commanding—"Lazarus, come forth"—speaking to a dead man. And the simple record runs, "He that *was* dead"—life comes between those two lines of the record—"came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin." Will you please take a look at Lazarus as he steps from the tomb? Do you think his eyes are dull, or his cheeks hollow and pale? I think not! When Jesus, the Lord of life, gives life, either physical or spiritual, He gives abundant life. That face may have been a bit spare. There had been no food for at least four days and likely longer. But there is the flash of health in his eye and the ruddy hue of good blood in his cheek. He has life. But look closer. He is bound hand and foot and face. He can neither walk nor work nor speak.

I have met some christian people who reminded me forcibly of that scene. They are christians. The Master has spoken life, and they have responded to His word. But they are so tied up with the grave-clothes of the old life that there can be none of the power of free action in life or service. May I ask you very kindly, but very plainly, are you like that? Is that the reason you have so little power with God, and for God? Perhaps some one would say, "Just what

do you mean?" I mean this: that there may be some personal habit of yours, or perhaps some society custom which you practice, or it may be some business method, or possibly an old friendship which you have carried over into the new life from the old that is seriously hindering your christian life. It may be something that goes into your mouth or comes out of it that prevents those lips speaking for the Master. Perhaps it is some organization you belong to. If there is lack of freedom and power for Christ you may be sure there is *something* that is blighting your life and dwarfing your usefulness. It may possibly be that practically in your daily life you are exerting no more power for God than a dead man! A christian, indeed, but *without power because of compromise* with something questionable or outrightly wrong! Is that so with you? I do not say it is, for I do not know. But *you* know. The hungry, critical world knows. Subtle, keen Satan knows. The Lord Jesus knows. Do you know if that describes you? You may know with certainty within twenty-four hours if you wish to and will to. May we be willing to have the Spirit's searchlight turned in upon us to-night.

The Master's Ideal.

There is another kind of christian, an utterly different kind, spoken of and illustrated in this same Gospel of John, and I doubt not many of them also are here. It is *Jesus' ideal* of what a christian should be. Have you sometimes wished you could have a few minutes of quiet talk with Jesus? I mean face to face, as two of us might sit and talk together. You have thought you would ask Him to say very simply and

plainly just what He expects of you. Well, I believe He would answer in words something like those of this seventh chapter of John. It was at the time of Feast of Tabernacles. There was a vast multitude of Jews there from all parts of the world. It was like an immense convention, but larger than any convention we know. The people were not entertained in the homes, but lived for seven days in leafy booths made of branches of trees. It was the last day of the feast. There was a large concourse of people gathered in one of the temple areas; not women, but men; not sitting, but standing. Up yonder stand the priests, pouring water out of large jars, to symbolize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the nation of Israel. Just then Jesus speaks, and amid the silence of the intently watching throng His voice rings out: "If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink; he that believeth on Me, as the Scripture saith, *out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*" Mark that significant closing clause. That packs into a sentence Jesus' ideal of what a true christian down in this world should be, and may be. Every word is full of meaning.

The heart of the sentence is in the last word—"water." *Water* is an essential of life. Absence of water means suffering and sickness, dearth and death. Plenty of good water means *life*. All the history of the world clusters about the water courses. Study the history of the rivers, the seashores, and lake edges, and you know the history of the earth. Those men who heard Jesus speak would instinctively think of the Jordan. It was their river. Travelers say that no valley exceeded in beauty and fruitfulness that valley of the Jordan, made so by those swift waters. No hillside so fair in

their green beauty, nor so wealthy in heavy loads of fruit as those sloping down to the edge of that stream. Now plainly Jesus is talking of something that may, through us, exert as decided an influence upon the lives of those we touch as water has exerted, and still exerts, on the history of the earth, and as this Jordan did in that wonderful, historic Palestine. Mark the quantity of water—"rivers." Not a Jordan merely, that would be wonderful enough, but Jordans—a Jordan, and a Nile, and a Euphrates, a Yang Tse Kiang, and an Olga and a Rhine, a Seine and a Thames, and a Hudson and an Ohio—"rivers." Notice, too, the *kind* of water. Like this racing, turbulent, muddy Jordan? No, no! "rivers of *living* water," "water of *life*, clear as crystal." You remember in Ezekiel's vision which we read together that the waters constantly increased in depth, and that everywhere they went there was healing, and abundant life, and prosperity, and beauty, and food, and a continual harvest the year round, and all because of the waters of the river. They were veritable waters of life.

Now mark that little, but very significant, phrase—"Out of"—not *into*, but "out of." All the difference in the lives of men lies in the difference between these two expressions. "Into" is the world's preposition. Every stream turns in; and that means *a dead sea*. Many a man's life is simply the coast line of a dead sea. "Out of" is the Master's word. His thought is of others. The stream must flow in, and must flow through, if it is to flow out, but it is judged by its direction, and Jesus would turn it outward. There must be good connections upward, and a clear channel inward, but the objective point is outward toward a parched earth. But

before it can flow out it must *fill up*. An *outflow* in this case means an *overflow*. There must be a flooding inside before there can be a flowing out. And let the fact be carefully marked that it is only the overflow from the fullness within our own lives that brings refreshing to anyone else. A man praying at a conference in England for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit said: "O, Lord, we can't hold much, but we can overflow lots." That is exactly the Master's thought. "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

Do you remember that phrase in the [2] *Rom.* third chapter of Joshua—"For Jordan 5:5. overfloweth all its banks all the time of harvest." When there was a flood in the river, there was a harvest in the land. Has there been a harvest in your life? A harvest of the fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering; a harvest of souls? "No," do you say, "not much of a harvest, I am afraid," or it may be your heart says "none at all." Is it hard to tell why? Has there been a flood-tide in your heart, a filling up from above until the blessed stream had to find an outlet somewhere, and produce a harvest? A harvest outside means a rising of the tide inside. A flooding of the heart always brings a harvest in the life. A few years ago there were great floods in the southern states, and the cotton and corn crops following were unprecedented. Paul reminded his Roman friends that when the Holy Spirit has free swing in the life "the love of God *floods* our hearts." [2]

Please notice, too, the *source* of the stream—"out of his belly." Will you observe for a moment the rhetorical figure here? I used to suppose it meant "out of his *heart*." The ancients, you remember, thought the heart lay down in the

abdominal region. But you will find that this book is very exact in its use of words. The blood is the life. The heart pumps the blood, but the stomach makes it. The seat of life is not in the heart, but in the stomach. If you will take down a book of physiology, and find the chart showing the circulation of the blood, you will see a wonderful network of lines spreading out in every direction, but all running, through lighter lines into heavier, and still blacker, until every line converges in the great stomach artery. *And everywhere the blood goes there is life.* Now turn to a book of physical geography and get a map showing the water system of some great valley like the Mississippi, and you will find a striking reproduction of the other chart. And if you will shut your eyes and imagine the reality back of that chart, you will see hundreds of cool, clear springs flowing successively into runs, brooks, creeks, larger streams, river branches, rivers, and finally into the great river—the reservoir of all. *And everywhere the waters go there is life.* The only difference between these two streams of life is in the direction. The blood flows from the largest toward the smallest; the water flows from the smallest toward the largest. Both bring life with its accompaniments of beauty and vigor and fruitfulness. There is Jesus' picture of the Christian down in the world. As the red stream flows out from the stomach, and, propelled by the force-pump of the heart, through a marvelous network of minute rivers takes life to every part of the body, so "he that believeth on Me"—that is the vital connecting link with the great origin of this stream of life—out of the very source of life within him shall go *a flood-tide of life*, bringing refreshing, and cleansing,