

Power

When I was young we moved into a home on a busy street with a 'huge' backyard. It felt like several acres when I had to mow the yard with our yellow push-mower. It was a very efficient and cost-effective machine; no plugs to change, no fuel to buy-it ran on Steve-power. When I was a teenager we moved up in the world and had a home with a pool and a postage stamp lawn-great trade-off to me. Oh, and we had a gasoline-powered mower. Power is good, right? Rather than retread Lord Acton's famous, but shopworn quote (you can Google it; 524,000 results in 0.12 seconds) I will use my wife's less known, but equally insightful proverb: "Power makes people go absolutely crazy!" This political season makes the point. Incumbents, having tasted the nectar, will seemingly say or do anything to get elected. New candidates, only able to imagine the rush, are quite different: they will seemingly say or do anything to get elected. Actually, this year's contest seems to feature a number of solid citizens, more everymen and everywomen; a refreshing and encouraging shift from the professional politician. I hope this begins a trend-less hypocritical career politicians, more genuine public servants. One has to hope the sincere servants, if elected, can keep their innocence and avoid being sucked into the insatiable maw of the corrupting influence of power.

Power at the peak must be like experimenting with highly addictive drugs-one hit and you're helplessly hooked, enslaved. The elemental essence of leadership-power-has done more harm to more people than any other force in the universe. Power has, to be sure, been used for good, but the scale is completely lopsided in favor of the bad. Those who, with Machiavellian-skill and ill will, inhale power like a leech draws blood are corrupt and evil. But, not all who abuse power are evil: some are weak, some are incompetent.

I've seen power do some pretty weird things to formerly normal, good people. I've seen:

- Mild-manned Clark Kents instantly transform into intolerable, Attila-the-Hun-like tyrants;
- Freshly minted leaders struck with acute amnesia so they fire their former peers for doing the same things they used to do;
- Honest people, confused by new responsibilities, begin to justify and employ spin;
- Consciences seared, morals compromised, values abandoned, and natural affection blunted.

But, one argues, we must have great power to do great good. Doesn't the end justify the means? My wife, Mary, an astute discerner of human character, doubts any modern politician can win in a national election without compromise. Maybe this November will be different. Is there a better way?

A couple of thousand years ago a rugged carpenter, appearing as the son of man while being the Son of God, taught His disciples a few foundational principles that should have turned the political world upside down. He taught that if you want to be great, serve others. If you want to lead, act like a slave. If you want to be honored like an elder, act like the younger. Jesus Christ is counter-intuitive so our systems are out of alignment.

You and I may not be running for office but we can be a great servant leader. How? Do you want to serve your way into greatness? Then help someone else reach his or her full, God-given potential. That is power to change the world!