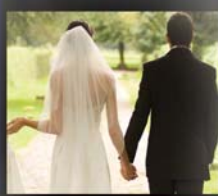


Powerful Love

An Introduction to Christianity



Rev. Dr. Lloyd Strelow

You've got questions – God's love provides the answers!

Powerful Love gets to the core of the essence of our Christian faith. The first chapter opens the window to God's love for each of us. It is through that window – guided by the Holy Spirit – that Christians see, believe, and live the rest of God's Word.

Throughout *Powerful Love*, Pastor Strelow uses the inductive method, using our questions to lead us to search God's Word and find His answers for faith and life.

Written as a basic guide to the Christian faith, *Powerful Love* also includes thoughtful study questions and an introductory guide to Bible reading. It can be used for adult instruction classes, as well as a resource book for personal faith-sharing with others, and for individual and small group devotions.



Rev. Dr. Lloyd Strelow has served six congregations in Michigan and California. He currently serves on the pastoral staff of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Hemet, CA, where one of his primary emphases is to teach the basics of the Christian faith to all who seek to know the Lord.

Pastor Strelow and his wife, Joyce, have been blessed with two children, three grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. His primary passion is to share God's powerful love in Jesus Christ with others.



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Table of Contents

Powerful Love

Chapter	Page	Chapter Title	Theme
1	7	Love That Saves	“The Window” – Justification
Now – as a Christian, I have:			
2	17	Love That Sustains	God the Father
3	25	Love That Redeems	God the Son
4	36	Love That Generates Faith	God the Holy Spirit
5	44	Love That Produces a New Birth	Baptism
6	52	Love That Strengthens	Holy Communion
7	60	Love That Gives Us Fellowship	The Church
8	71	Love That Tells It Like It Is	God’s Word
9	79	Love That Directs Life – Toward God	1 st Commandment
10	85	Love That Directs Life – Toward God	2 nd & 3 rd Commandments
11	96	Love That Directs Life – Toward Others	4 th – 6 th Commandments
12	105	Love That Directs Life – Toward Others	7 th – 10 th Commandments
13	112	Love That Lasts Forever	The End Times

Study Guidelines

Any book is only as helpful as it is understood and used. It is my prayer that these *Guidelines* will be a helpful tool in your personal inquiry into and study of God's **POWERFUL LOVE**.

1. This book is a “resource manual.” A generous mixture of prayer, the Scriptures, the guidance of a capable teacher where possible, and many other resources – together with a searching student – are needed to be combined with this book for meaningful study and learning to take place. May God’s Holy Spirit guide and bless your study!
2. In this study, the *NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)* – is used unless otherwise noted. In many places, passages are quoted at length to give you the context in which they are used in the Bible. You are encouraged to read entire passages directly from the Bible.
3. Words of Jesus in Scripture are printed in **bold, red** font.
4. The first chapter, regarding man’s basic relationship with his Lord, is the most important lesson. It is also the “window” through which all other truths of God’s Word must be seen!
5. Skills in Christian living – especially in worship, prayer, witnessing, and stewardship – are presented as part of the Christian life in the Ten Commandments.
6. If you are studying in a class, your questions and participation in discussion are heartily encouraged. If you are studying privately, ask your pastor for help and guidance.

7. Each lesson concludes with a special section that includes:
 - a. A “worksheet” (referred to as “Food for Further Thought”) designed to help you review, personalize, and apply God’s Word to your own faith and life
 - b. A Scripture reading guide of one chapter per day, which in 13 weeks will enable you to read:
Mark, 1 John, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and several Psalms
 - c. A weekly Bible verse that you are encouraged to commit to memory
8. My goal is to use accurate, understandable language in this study. Where technical “theological” terms are needed and used, I have explained their meaning.
9. My goal is to share God’s powerful love with you. In other words, I have not attempted to anticipate and answer every false teaching. Instead, I present what God says in His Word. It is the standard by which all teaching must be compared.
10. As you desire to grow in knowing and using God’s powerful love in your life, regular worship is vitally important. In worship, God’s people are renewed in faith and equipped for daily life – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
11. The greatest resource and asset is God’s love richly and freely given in Christ and revealed in His Word!

Rev. Lloyd Strelow, D.Min. – Author & Pastor

Chapter 1

Love That Saves

Help! You have been called to the bedside of an old family friend, who has suffered a very serious heart attack. He confides in you that he is afraid to die. What will you say to him?

I. OUR NATURAL CONDITION

A. *Where are we in life?*

“The whole world is going ‘mad’!” – Read the daily news.

“**But** – I’m pretty good!”

B. *How Good Are You?*

1. By comparison with others?
2. By comparison with God’s standards?

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

SO GOD’S WORD TEACHES:

We are to live and evaluate our lives by God’s will, rather than the world’s standards. God demands total – 100% – obedience to Him and His will.

C. *The Truth*

1. *How I am naturally:*

Psalm 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned –

Genesis 5:3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

Genesis 8:21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I

curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.”

John 3:6 “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”

Romans 7:18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

Romans 8:6-8 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

SO GOD’S WORD TEACHES:

This “natural condition” that Scripture describes is called “original sin.” This means that man is naturally separated from God, and by himself does not know, love, or serve God.

1. *What I do daily:*

Matthew 15:19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

Genesis 8:21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.”

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

SO GOD'S WORD TEACHES:

Because we are naturally self-centered, we daily do what we desire. We often *fail to do* what God desires. We also often *actually do what God forbids*. All this is sin.

3. *Am I a sinner?*

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Romans 7:19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

Romans 3:10 As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one”

Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

SO GOD'S WORD TEACHES:

I am personally responsible to God, but have failed to live perfectly as He desires. I am a sinner who sins daily. I need to examine my life this past week in the light of the Ten Commandments.

D. The Proper Result

1. *Spiritual Death*

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

2. *Temporal or physical death*

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned –

3. *Eternal death*

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

SO GOD’S WORD TEACHES:

Sin pulls the sinner (us) away from God. The result of sin is God’s just and holy anger. It is the nature of a holy God that he cannot tolerate sin; He must punish it. The sinner deserves separation from God.

E. *Let’s Make Up With God!*

Luke 17:10 “**So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’**”

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Ephes. 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

SO GOD’S WORD TEACHES:

Whatever good we do is only what God rightfully expects. It can never atone or make up for our past sins. Peace with God can never be earned by me or gained by my attempts to keep God’s law.

II A NEW LIFE

A. God's Desire For Us

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

SO GOD'S WORD TEACHES:

God has no joy in punishing sinners. Instead, He wants them to have a joyful, peace-filled, purposeful life now and forever.

B. There Is A Way

1. Our Substitute

2 Cor. 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 John 2:2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Isaiah 53:5-6 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2. To Satisfy God's Justice

Romans 4:23-25 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us

who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

3. *The Only Way*

Acts 4:10 “then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.”

Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

SO GOD’S WORD TEACHES:

Because He loves us, Jesus rescued us from guilt, the power of sin, and eternal separation from God. He did this by paying the penalty of our sin for us on the cross of Calvary. He is the only way to peace with God.

C. *God Says:*

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Romans 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

SO GOD'S WORD TEACHES:

Though we are sinners, God declares us “NOT GUILTY” because Jesus already paid our debt.

D. Faith

Acts 16:31 They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.”

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

Romans 4:3 What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Romans 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Romans 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

SO GOD'S WORD TEACHES:

We accept God's love and pardon by faith. Faith includes much more than merely knowing that there is a God, and agreeing that God and His Word are true. Faith is accepting His love, and trusting Him to forgive me fully, bring me into His family, and love me richly and daily.

E. Can I Be Sure?

Titus 2:1-2 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. ²Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Phil. 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

SO GOD'S WORD TEACHES:

We can be absolutely sure of forgiveness, life, salvation, and heaven itself! Our certainty is not based on our reason or feelings, but on God's changeless, rich love and promises.

SUMMARY

This is the most important truth you will ever study! In His great love, God comes and gives you: light for darkness, love for anger, Christ for you, forgiveness for your sin, and life for death! May this powerful love of God fill you and dwell in you richly!

FOOD FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. Why is "guilt" such a problem with people?
2. "Sin brings death." – Explain
3. Can God be – at the same time – both a loving God and a just God who punishes sin? Discuss your answer.
4. Why is Jesus' death and resurrection so important for Christians today?

5. Susan has read her Bible and agrees that Jesus lived and died on the cross. Is this enough to get her to heaven? Explain.
6. Define “grace.”
7. What would you tell Karen who complains: “I know Jesus died for me, but I just don’t feel like I’m saved?”
8. Write **Yes** or **No** for each statement as it applies to you personally.
 - _____ a I believe I am a sinner who has done what God forbids, and failed to do what He requires.
 - _____ b I believe that I naturally deserve to go to hell.
 - _____ c I believe I cannot save myself from God’s anger.
 - _____ d I believe that Jesus – as my Substitute – died for my sin and rose to give me forgiveness and a new life.
 - _____ e I am sure that when I die, I will go to heaven.
 - _____ f My certainty of heaven depends on Jesus, not on me.

9. Write **your name** in each blank, and then read the passage out loud:

For God so loved _____ that He gave His one and only Son, that if _____ believes in Him, _____ shall not perish, but _____ will have eternal life.

– *John 3:16 paraphrased* (Often called “*The Gospel in a nutshell*”)

DAILY GROWTH THROUGH BIBLE READING

1st Day – Mark 1

2nd Day – Mark 2

3rd Day – Mark 3

4th Day – Mark 4

5th Day – Mark 5

6th Day – Mark 6

7th Day – Mark 7

A SCRIPTURAL GEM – For the Memory:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved,
through faith –

and this not from yourselves,

it is the gift of God –

⁹not by works,

so that no one can boast.