

# THE POWER OF **POWERLESSNESS**



**ROBIN OAKE**

WITH SHEILA JACOBS

**10** Publishing  
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First published in Great Britain in 2015

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-910587-08-9

Designed & typeset by Pete Barnsley (Creative Hoot)  
Cover image copyright: mikeexpert / 123RF Stock Photo  
Printed in the UK by CPI

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# PREFACE

'Stop thief!' 'Hey, come back ...' 'Oi, stop ...' 'Copper, chase him, he's just nicked a bundle of money from the counter ...!'

I had been standing at a busy junction watching the traffic and had my back to the noise and hullabaloo. Some 100 yards away I saw a figure running from view and the cry of a dozen or so men. It was the women who were shouting at him and me!

I was standing with an older colleague, who quickly said, 'After him, Robin. You're fit. He can't get anywhere running that way. He will arrive back with me if you chase hard.'

I heard the last bit and relished the run. Helmet in hand, I soon caught up with and went through the chasing group, and gradually gained on the track-suited man. He was evidently quite fit too, but eventually, as I got near, I shouted harshly and loudly, 'Stop. The game's up!'

He ran into the courtyard of an estate agent and then behind the building, where he leant against the fence as I caught his collar. There was no real struggle and, I think with my size and the police uniform, he just gave up. Phew! I was panting hard – probably more than he was – and had to catch my breath, but was about to start the caution when he dropped a bundle of £10 notes which he had in his left hand. Before I could issue the official caution he just went limp and said, 'I'm so sorry. I don't know what came over me.'

I was able to breathe out a question, 'Where did you get that

money? Did you steal it?’

He could only look at the ground and then at a small crowd which had gathered to watch. He then mumbled, ‘I was at the tube station and saw this bundle of notes by the window. Spur of the moment, without thinking, I snatched it.’

I simply said, ‘I am arresting you for stealing the bundle’ and cautioned him. I picked up the notes and took hold of his arm, and then marched him back through the crowd to the nearby police station.

My sergeant, with whom I played rugby, wasn’t that pleased to see us arrive as he was about to go off duty, but when I related the facts of the theft and the chase, he whispered to me, ‘Well done, Robin. We’ll make a copper of you yet!’

The young man was charged and later released on bail. However, when I put him in a cell while his lodgings were verified and the paperwork done, I asked him what made him do it. He said, ‘I am an athlete, an international one, but have a recurrent injury for which I take pain killers. I can’t do without the drug now yet the dealer is costing me too much and I have little money.’

This was not an isolated incident either in my early career or with life in general. Picture a fit young man with a good reputation and well known for his athletic ability. As often happens with any athlete, usually at very inconvenient times before a championship or high-profile meeting, an injury occurs and doesn’t immediately heal. Suddenly, as with this young man, the expectation of doing well at the next athletics meeting has evaporated. The physiotherapist tries hard to massage the injury, the medical staff do their best, but nothing is helping ... except the pain killers. The drugs are only effective for a short while as their potency diminishes, but the bills pile up, the dealer is angry ... and the once honoured and lauded athlete is

now powerless. He has lost his agility – even a young copper in full uniform can catch up with him. He ends up in court and with a prison sentence. No longer selected for his team, he experiences a dreadful spiral of defeat, depression and disaster. What's left? The power of fitness, the elation of winning races and the adulation of the packed grandstands have all gone.

I use this illustration of many I could recall to help us all realise that there are times when we feel so low that we are helpless and hopeless. We are powerless to do anything about it. This book typifies the many in this world who come to the end of their tether – who have failed either because of their own ill-judgment or through circumstances beyond their control. Gradually or suddenly they are feeling worthless and powerless so either give up completely or, like this athlete, do something foolish in an effort to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

I am illustrating failure but not defeat, and bring into perspective many who have fallen off the ladder of life but in their despondence have found, one way or another, that powerlessness is not the end. Even in the darkness of a black tunnel, there is a bend which reveals the light and ultimately a new power in their lives.

The pages of this book are, of course, for everyone to read, but are primarily aimed at two groups of people – those who are feeling lonely and down at the heel, and others who want to help them.

The Power of Powerlessness might seem a strange title for a book, but when one is powerless, the only way is up ... in a new power, with a new start and then with a testimony to help others who are where the powerless once was.

I draw on many years in the police service, in all ranks, to illustrate the excitement that there is when life is renewed. I have

had to camouflage some of the instances to ensure that no one is embarrassed, but from some I have had the encouragement of the words: 'Use my story if it will help others in a similar predicament.'

I was prompted to write this short book by the words of the Apostle Paul who said, 'For when I am weak, then I am strong.' This would seem to be complete nonsense and quite illogical but the context gives the true substance of the assertion. You can read of this in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 12 verses 7–10. Paul had some sort of medical affliction which is not detailed except to say that it was so bad that it tormented him. This obviously was not a common cold or a stomach upset. It was quite probably a long-term illness which never seemed to be alleviated – Paul called it 'a thorn in my flesh'. Paul pleaded with the Lord to take it from him, to heal him, but, from his close relationship with the Lord, Paul felt God's words to him were the real answer to his prayers. The Lord said, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Paul goes on to describe the battle he constantly had with life: 'I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions in difficulties.' He concludes with those defiant yet triumphant words: 'For when I am weak, then I am strong.'

The same Lord Jesus can speak with you like this, lifting you from depression; sadness; an unhappy marriage; difficulties at school, university and work; and all manner of things that make you feel powerless to do anything about them. His grace is sufficient for you. That's the power of powerlessness!

**ROBIN OAKE**



## CHAPTER 1



# HOW REAL IS THIS CHRISTIANITY?

As young constables in the Metropolitan Police, my colleagues and I were directed by our sergeant to keep our eyes and ears open for an intruder – not a burglar, but someone who was imitating a police officer. Several local residents had been visited by a polite, middle-aged, well-spoken gentleman making ‘house-to-house enquiries about local burglaries’. He had produced a card which he said was his warrant. I smelled a rat, as did the sergeant – a Metropolitan police officer who was smart and well spoken?!

By chance, I was nearby in Marlborough Hill when a gardener told me that he had seen a man of a similar description call at the home of Bob Monkhouse, the comedian. Mr Monkhouse had opened the door and, after a very short conversation, had shouted at the man to ‘clear off’. From the gardener I was given the direction in which the man had disappeared, and it wasn’t long before I saw him in the distance, in Springfield Road, where I knew other celebrities lived.

## THE POWER OF POWERLESSNESS

I caught up with the man at a front door, which a maid was opening. As I was in uniform, there was no need to introduce myself. The man stammered something about being at the wrong house even before I spoke. Yes, he was the man we were after. Yes, he was respectably dressed and well spoken, pretending to be a police officer, with a forged warrant card in his hand. The weak excuse he gave me was that he was an autograph hunter! In fact, he was a very clever housebreaker.

This was, to all intents and purposes, a police officer to those with whom he conversed. He had that air about him, and many people would have mistaken him for a genuine officer of the law. But, however he acted and whatever the facade, he did not have the power or authority of a properly sworn-in police officer to the point that I did as a qualified officer (albeit in my probationary first two years). I was able to arrest, caution and eventually have him convicted of impersonating a police officer and of the burglaries to which he pleaded guilty.

In the same way, there are those of us who believe we are right with God, that we are Christians and that we are about God's business. But it's a sham. Others may be fooled, but God never is. Galatians 6:7 says, 'Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.' The Greek here is 'cannot be sneered at'. So this is a warning. If we recognise our position as a 'pretend Christian' rather than as a 'real Christian', we know that we don't fool God. It is only when we see the sense of being honest with Him that we can sense our place of powerlessness without Him as our Saviour.

## **Being born again**

Jesus is ready always to bring salvation to all who call on Him. To be a follower of Christ means much more than mere attendance at church, either regularly or spasmodically or on special occasions such as Christmas and Easter. No church ritual, no mumbo-jumbo nor any other ceremony has the power or the authority to translate one's ordinary life into that of a Christian. The powerlessness of the 'church' is often down to pew-fillers who regularly attend, in whatever denomination, because it is the thing to do, or because they have been brought up to do it by their parents. Consequently to them it is a ritual that achieves no more than a 'tick in the register' that they were there on Sunday. They engage in no mission to others, have no concern that others might need to be converted and exhibit no real sense of worship or motivation.

We might know that there is something amiss with our lives – that things are not quite as they should be. But we deceive ourselves if we think going to church, turning over a new leaf or making a New Year resolution and so on should make a difference. Through sheer hard work there may be a temporary change, but it doesn't last.

Are you trying to change your own life? Have you asked Jesus to change you?

To become a Christian includes, firstly, a recognition that we fall far short of God's perfect standard. The Bible teaches that God is holy – He is totally pure. But as we read on through the Bible, it shows us that we are not like this. We've all done wrong, and fall short of God's perfect standard. The Bible calls it 'sin'. We don't like to admit it, but if we are honest we know we are unworthy and by our own efforts we cannot be any better.