

Leah Jordache
Theo742
Mark Baker
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Everything We Need (How Do You Add to Everything?)

(This message is written to be presented at a spiritual retreat for high school students or young adults)

Every day I am reminded of how important electrical power is to our lives. From the moment I wake up I use it for almost everything I do. My lights, heat and air-conditioning, hairdryer, vacuum, kitchen appliances, tv, computer, phone, internet, the list goes on! Every single one of these things has an ingenious design and is valuable and useful for the purpose that it was made. But every single one of them needs power to operate and to perform their purpose. If they are not plugged in, they cannot function or do what they were designed to do. Even those with battery can only go for so long before needing to be plugged in again.

There is probably no greater example of this than our smart phones. If you're like me, the last thing I do before going to bed is make sure my phone is plugged in. The first thing I do in the morning is check my phone for the time, the Bible verse of the day, the weather, my tasks and appointments for the day, and so on. We will do almost anything to make sure we are not without these devices that seem to be able to do and store everything we need. We even carry around our chargers just in case throughout the day the battery runs low and we need to give it a power boost to make sure we are not caught without our most valuable tool. That's the thing about it though, this amazing invention, in all its complexity, functionality and usefulness, cannot do what it was designed to do without connection to power. If I were to never plug it in again, it would eventually run out of battery, the screen would go dark and this device that has the potential to do amazing things, this miracle that was designed for greatness, would sit there, not useful for anything.

Now we don't usually think of ourselves in terms of an electronic device, but in many ways we are not that different. As human beings, designed and created by God, we also have been designed for greatness. In fact, the Bible tells us in Genesis 1:26-27 that we have been made in the very image of God; that by design we were made to represent and reflect the character and presence of God in the world that he made for us to inhabit and rule over. From the beginning, our identity, our purpose, our value was defined and powered by the one who created us in his own image. We were the crowning act of his creation, set apart in special relationship to him, made in his image and created for fellowship with him and to rule over creation with him.

In Genesis 3, the enemy of God, in the form of a serpent, speaks a string of lies to cast doubt on that special relationship and to introduce a false identity for both God and humanity. That fateful day, the serpent convinced the first humans that separating themselves from God was the best way to power their lives and to truly be themselves. But it was a lie. He knew that separating them from God was the only way that he would have power over them.

There was a time at the beginning, that God's will and human will were the same. But ever since this separation entered the picture there has been a huge battle of the wills that is raging! When Adam and Eve believed the serpent, it created a separation of the wills of God and humanity, and the dominion of the earth that God had entrusted to them to rule in his image, was corrupted. When human will was exercised separately from and in opposition to the will and character of God, it created an alienation known as sin. This created a set of consequences that was set in motion. Our God-given identity and purpose was lost and so was our connection to the source of life that powers it all, God and his image in us. The constant connection, the power

cord of unified will and selflessness, was unplugged and humanity began to run on battery power. The moment they were separated from him, the power of life and the image of God began to drain from them. Humanity began to live and rule selfishly, and the consequences of that selfishness separated us further and further from God and from his image in us. Our lives, powered and purposed by the image of God, would slowly run out until we could no longer recognize him as our loving creator and our reflection of his image was all but obliterated by the corruptive power of sin. Separated from God, we would be unable to live out the intention for which we were created, to bear his image and to rule with him and on his behalf. Without intervention, humanity would run out of battery power and die.

Though humanity embraced the deception, God never allowed this to deter him in his purpose to be in intimate relationship with his creation. But the cost would be great. He would need to join them in their circumstance and give his own life to power theirs. He would come with a full charge, only to give it all. Offering the power of his own life, giving all that he had so that they might live. Though humanity would try to plug in to other power sources, using many other chargers and adaptors, only one had the power to give them life. Since humanity could no longer repair the connection for themselves, God would form himself into the perfect power adaptor, connecting human and divine, by becoming one of us. In Jesus Christ, God came in human form to counteract the lies about both the identities of God and humanity, to give his own life to power theirs and to reset the connection between them. Jesus has become the new charging station. The separation that humanity had made in its selfishness, God had undone in his selflessness. In Christ's death, saving knowledge of God's self-sacrificing image had been revealed, and in his resurrection, his power over death was demonstrated. Humanity was once again given a clear pathway to embody its true identity and purpose, to be alive in the image of God.

There are many places in Scripture that could elaborate on this, but one of my favorites is found 2 Peter chapter 1. It can help us continue with our imagery of plugging in to power. Beginning in verse three, Peter proclaims that, "*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in this world caused by evil desires.*" In other words, God has provided a way, through the merit and power of Christ, that humanity may be renewed in the image of God. The cross and resurrection of Jesus give us complete knowledge of God, who removes the barriers of sin and alienation by giving his own life and restores in us the power to live.

We are powerless against the alienating and depleting power of sin, but Jesus is not. His connection to life in the Father remains unbroken. His reflection of the character of God remains untainted, and his power over death, the depleting power of sin, undefeated. Because of him, through him, we have everything we need. When he died on the cross for our sins, he became both the power of life and our connector back to the original source of power. God in Christ, now becomes Christ in us, the image of God in creation restored. Jesus becomes our power cord, restoring our direct connection to our original purpose and design, allowing us again to "participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

If you've ever been in a critical moment without your power cord or without an outlet to plug into, and your bars are getting dangerously low, you can get some small idea about what great news this is! For all of us whose life force is draining away, who are running on low battery

power and have had no way to recharge or be restored, an outlet has been found! A power cord has been provided!

This is amazing news! But what happens next? Verses 5-8 tell us how we can respond to and live in this new reality. Peter writes, *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these things in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

But if Jesus provides everything we need, why does verse 5 say to *add* to our faith? How do you add to everything? This is a fair question, but it should make sense to us that even the most well-designed, sophisticated and smartest phone does not live up to its full potential simply because it is charged and ready to go. It must be activated and used! It must be upgraded to the newest version with bug fixes and improvements. Now that we know that Jesus has accomplished reconnection and renewal on our behalf, in the power of his life we can live a life of addition and not subtraction. Not only is the power of life available to us again, but we have the opportunity upgrade to version 2.0 And as we do, the image of God will continue to be restored and become more and more visible in our lives.

Faith is a living thing that increases in measure as it is used. It is the same for the image of God as the qualities of his character are exercised in our lives. Normally when we spend or use something we have less of it, but in Christ, things do not work that way. If we notice that the image of God is waning in us, it is simply because we have forgotten that our alienation has been undone and we have reverted to operating on battery power. Just like a battery depletes and runs down, when we try to produce these qualities in our own power, our life force is depleted because they are coming from a non-renewable power source. But as we add to our faith in Christ, as we accept the power of his life to renew ours, we have continuous connection to the restored relationship and transforming power of the image of God in us. Being connected to God, in Christ, allows the right kind of power to flow into and through our lives; not the kind that takes life, but the kind that adds life. More good news is that no matter how long this battery has been dead or running on low, all I have to do is plug it back in and it will work like it was designed to. And who is all of this available to? *Anyone* who is willing to plug in.

There will be a day when the re-creation is complete, and the effects of alienation and sin are wiped away and visible no more. But we do not have to wait until the world as we know it comes to an end and God’s creation is renewed completely. The benefits are available right now as we begin to live out the image of God that is being restored in us as we are renewed in the image of Christ. Imagine what would happen if we were as vigilant to connect with Christ as we are to be sure that our phones and electronic devices are charged and ready for service? What difference would it make for our lives and our world?

My invitation to you today is to accept and believe what Jesus has done for you and plug in to the only power source that has given everything in order that you would have everything you need. And then add to your faith, living and growing in the power and image of God in Christ, both in your life and into the lives of others, as you were designed to do from the beginning.

Evaluation:

Like all images or metaphors, they can fall short of fully representing the reality they are meant to illustrate. Though I do believe this imagery is relevant and relatable to the current generation and will leave a lasting and memorable impression, it may fall a little short on developing the “how” of atonement and the “what” of sin, though it is alluded to in brief statements and focuses mostly on alienation and corruption of God’s image. Though the themes of re-creation, reconnection, restored identity and image of God are present, there is not a lot said about forgiveness and sacrifice, which could possibly be elaborated on in some follow-up presentations during the retreat weekend. I would also probably include a presentation on the “how” of plugging in since we as humans are not equipped with a literal power cord that would make it easy to know what being plugged in looks like. It would need some elaboration on what it means to be connected to Christ and what that looks like in our daily lives. Though the death of Christ is mentioned, this metaphor does not elaborate too much on the cross or the cross as lens, since the image of God is more the reference point for restoration in this presentation. Of course, the character/image of God is revealed in the acts of Christ, so in that way the cross is included. I also did attempt to include all four of the theological guidelines for keeping this proclamation of atonement biblical and to both connect with and challenge the context. All in all, I do feel that it does a good job at including the major or broader themes of atonement and may serve as a launching pad for further discussion or elaboration on some more specific themes. I believe the audience will remember the imagery and be reminded of the good news it depicts, which is the hope of any gospel message.