

# Powers and Principalities/Signs and Wonders

**Kent R. Hunter**

**Abstract:** The power of God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, though our culture, training, and worldviews challenge us to believe this. Comfort levels are stretched when we start to personally experience the power that is in the name of Jesus Christ. The supernatural elements of our faith (spiritual gifts, signs, and wonders) are still active and at work today. Many Christians in North America may be surprised to learn of the increasing numbers of deliverances and healing taking place in churches and ministries across the country. There is power in the name of Jesus, and revival is upon us.

**mir•a•cle** (mir-i-kəl) n. 1. An event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes, especially to an act of God. 2. A remarkable event or thing.

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*

My seminary education provided in-depth focus on Greek, Hebrew, church history, theology, preaching, and biblical exegesis. It was a good education, strong on theory but weak on practice. I learned nothing about spiritual gifts, including discovery of my own. Perhaps the greatest missing piece was the element of spiritual activities. No one seemed interested in teaching about demons, deliverance ministry, or prayer for healing. I heard nothing about the so-called “sign gifts”: tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, miracles, and exorcism. Through subtle absence, it seemed that Christianity operated largely by Webster’s second definition, not the first. God did miraculous work, but primarily through the power of Word and Sacraments.

My professors, in a conservative branch of Lutheranism, were strong on the Word of God. My denomination even battled for the truth of Scripture in an era when “those liberals” were demythologizing the miracles in the Bible. Yet, no one spoke of the everyday reality of the supernatural.

In Acts 2, one of the elements of the Christian movement is “signs and

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wonders.” It was generally “overlooked” in the seminary classroom. One of my professors spoke briefly about dispensationalism, an approach to biblical interpretation which states that God uses different means of working with people during different periods of history. In this context, it means that once the Scriptures had been written God no longer used signs and wonders. They were no longer needed. The Bible was enough. The professor didn’t propose it as a doctrine of Lutheranism, just alluded to it as a position held by some Christians. It seemed to me that the burden of proof was on those who believed certain selected elements of Scripture disappeared at some point in history, while other parts were worth dying for, or at least fighting over. Yet, who was I, a student, to question my professors about some aspect of Scripture which, it seemed, they ignored?

While scanning channels on television, I would come across one of those “charlatan” TV evangelists. The evangelist would pray for people who were healed, or had fallen down. None of that ever happened in my home church. Honestly, that stuff scared me a little. If you asked me, I would say, “It made me uncomfortable.” However, what gnawed at me was that it doesn’t take much study to encounter such events in Scripture.

The Apostle Paul, who is practically a Lutheran saint, wrote that we are “fighting against principalities and powers” (Eph 6:12). What do we do with that? Martin Luther talked and wrote about the devil a lot. At one time, he threw an inkwell at the devil. It never came up in a class at the seminary. Around this time, the movie *The Exorcist* came out. I watched it out of curiosity. It freaked me out.

Most of my classmates went off to ministry after graduating from the seminary. However, I stayed at the seminary and entered a PhD program. One of the optional course offerings was a class in charismatic renewal. I expected the professor to discredit charismatic and Pentecostal behavior, but he didn’t. We read authors from the charismatic and Pentecostal branch of Christianity. I discovered some credible theologians who made a good case for the supernatural elements of Christianity. Then I discovered there was a “Renewal Movement” among Lutherans. They received a lot of heat from denominational officials, but they were a growing number of pastors and their churches. I remember that one of my Lutheran college classmates was required to leave because he admitted he spoke in tongues.

One of the requirements of the class on charismatic renewal was that we attend a charismatic worship community. There were many of these communities in the area. My wife and I chose one closest to where we lived. They were a group of Catholic charismatics, meeting in a high school. We were a little nervous, but since it was a requirement for the class, we crossed the threshold of comfort. It helped that the people were warm and welcoming. On the surface, they looked like any Lutheran congregation. The greatest difference was that they were mostly young adults. Most Lutheran churches I attended were an older crowd.

When the worship began, the songs were modern in both words and style. This was my introduction to contemporary worship. The seminary chapel services were enthusiastically focused on *The Lutheran Hymnal*, which provided songs and tempo from another century, and another continent. In this worship service, I experienced an indigenous, incarnational connection. It was a wonderful experience to worship in my heart language. At the end of one of the songs, many of the four hundred worshipers continued singing, a cappella, in tongues, and in harmony. It was, at first, frightening. I had never experienced that before. Then I became curious: "How do they do that?" It was beautiful.

## **The Realm of the Supernatural**

By the time I finished my PhD in theology, I was confident in my training. I felt prepared to discuss theology at any level, with anyone. However, as I soon discovered, I was not prepared to lead the church where I was placed.

My first assignment was to become senior pastor of a church with 1,200 in attendance. The congregation worshiped five times a week, with three services on Sunday and a different service Wednesday morning and Wednesday evening. It was an inner-city church in Detroit, Michigan. The congregation was 100% white. The neighborhood and surrounding area was 87% African American. Most of those in my congregation were elderly. By contrast, most of those in the neighborhood were young families with children.

The church had declined by 67% in the previous ten years, prior to my arrival. It had been a model church several decades earlier, in the 1950s. At one time, the congregation had the largest Sunday School and largest Vacation Bible School in the denomination. Now, the community had radically changed. Most of the members commuted into the "old neighborhood" from the northeast suburbs.

To understand what happened next, it is important to understand my passion for reaching the lost. I grew up in an active Lutheran family. The evidence of strong faith was clear in both my parents. In spite of their faithfulness, by the time I was in high school, I was a nominal Christian. My church attendance was at the insistence of my parents. My life in high school was football, girls, and my guy friends. My grades were poor. My interests in academics were almost negligible, and my spirituality registered near zero.

A football injury put me in the hospital during my senior year. While recovering from knee surgery, my hospital roommate almost died one night. I watched as the medical staff worked with him. They brought him back from the brink of death. It was sobering. A person my age could die? I was not ready, spiritually. God moved my faith from my head to my heart. God put in me a strong desire to reach lost people for Jesus Christ.

When I began leading this dying church, I had a passion for reaching those in our community. I discovered most of the black families in our area did not attend church. We began an outreach program. We equipped twenty people from our church to make evangelism calls in the community. After a year and a half, it was clear: nothing worked. We failed to reach even one person. I was distraught. How can I be educated with four years of college, four years of seminary, and four years of graduate school, with a PhD in theology, and have no clue how to reach those in our community? I was frustrated.

## **The Fuller Experience**

One day I read a brochure that arrived from Fuller Theological Seminary. It was about a DMin program. What caught my eye was the paragraph that claimed the largest school of missions in the world. I thought, “That’s it. I’m like a missionary on a mission field in this cross-cultural challenge.” At the time, it didn’t occur to me that every Christian in every place is to be a missionary.

The leaders of our church agreed to give me the time to attend Fuller, two weeks, three times a year, for three years. My wife agreed: we would pay for tuition, lodging, and travel. She added, “Are you going to be a student forever?” It was a rhetorical question. I had to know: Is it possible to reach people for Christ cross-culturally in Detroit? What is the strategy I hadn’t yet learned?

My work at Fuller brought me into contact with some of the top missiologists in the world. I consumed my classes. This was what I have always wanted to learn. Over time, our church developed a culture of mission and reached our community. We began to grow, in a multicultural setting. However, there was another dimension of my work in the DMin program.

At Fuller, my professors opened class each day with a prayer. That may not seem monumental, but I had rarely experienced it before. In my class with C. Peter Wagner, he prayed for DMin students—pastors—who were healed. I watched as one of the pastors was healed: I saw his leg grow to the length of the other one. The spiritual atmosphere opened me to greater awareness of the supernatural. It had an impact my ministry at the church.

One day, I discovered Billy Graham’s book on angels. It was fascinating to me. Graham included teaching on fallen angels—demons. In grade school, with my father, I had watched Billy Graham preach on television. He was not an evangelistic charlatan and TV preacher. He was someone who was credible. And he was writing about demons?

By this time, our church had an associate pastor. With my growing interest in the supernatural, the assistant pastor and I agreed to develop and teach a class at church: “The World of Evil and Supernatural Powers.”

We did our homework. We read a number of other books, talked to a palm reader, investigated articles about witches and warlocks, tarot cards, and Ouija boards. We advertised the Bible class, which would last six weeks. It was the largest attendance at a Bible class anyone could remember.

### **All Hell Breaks Loose**

We were not prepared for what happened next. The first incident occurred late one afternoon. The church office received a call from one of our elders, John, who sounded frantic. He said something very unusual and troubling was happening to his wife, Dana. I stopped at my associate's office on the way out the door. "Want to go with me?" I asked. He grabbed his coat, we were on our way.

When we arrived at the house, John met us outside. "She's not herself," he said. I was thinking mental breakdown. As we sat in the living room with Dana, I took the lead. I asked her a few diagnostic questions. Neither my gifts nor training were in the area of counseling, but I thought I could discover enough to point them in a direction for help.

Dana looked distraught. I took John out of the room for a moment. "Any chance she took drugs?" I asked. He was certain she had not. I really didn't know what to do, so I offered to pray. What occurred next would change my worldview forever.

In my prayer, I mentioned "Jesus Christ." Her countenance changed. A male sounding voice came out of her mouth. I felt I was in a horror movie. I was slightly overcome with disbelief. I wondered, "Could this be real?"

I spoke to her—to it—the voice. This is where I made a mistake. It was a lesson I would not forget. I tried to argue, rationally, with this voice. How stupid! A human being arguing with a supernatural being? I had not processed that yet. I wasn't sure what we were facing. Perhaps I didn't want to believe what was happening. I continued to argue. At that point, the voice told me—in front of my associate and an elder, about something I had done years before. It was a shameful act. So shameful, I had not told anyone, not ever. No one on this earth knew what I did. I knew I had been forgiven. I had almost forgotten about it. How could this be? I was embarrassed, way out of my comfort zone. I was definitely not equipped to deal with this.

This encounter with "whatever" was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was frightening, and it was clear I was beyond my level of competence. As we got into the car, I thought, "It is a lot easier to talk about this in theory, in a Bible class. But, to come face-to-face with it?"

Dana needed help. I didn't know where to turn. I recalled that our neighboring Lutheran pastor, Jim, was part of the Lutheran Charismatic Renewal Movement. On

the occasions when local pastors gathered, I was impressed with his spiritual depth. I gave him a call and described what happened at John and Dana's house.

He calmly replied, "It sounds like a situation that calls for a deliverance." He continued, "She is probably oppressed by a demon." I thought, "This is language I've ignored. How does he know about this?" Jim asked me to talk to John and Dana and invite them to my church office at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday. I responded, "Can't it be before that? That's two days." He said, "That is as early as I can send this lay couple over. They are out of town."

"You're sending a lay couple?" I asked, astonished. "Aren't you coming?"

Jim replied, "No, I don't need to be there. Besides, I have a counseling appointment. I have meetings the next two nights, so I'm covered up. These folks can handle it. They have a deliverance ministry. We trained them years ago. They have a lot of experience. They have handled this ministry for a long time."

I was speechless. I made the appointment with John, to bring Dana, to my office. The couple from Jim's church came early, and we met and talked before John and Dana arrived. They were an older couple. They didn't look like a "deliverance" ministry team at all. I'm not sure what I expected. They were lifelong Lutherans. Really? They were calm. I was not. But I tried not to show it.

When John and Dana arrived, Dana seemed to be herself, talking in her normal voice. She had no recollection of what the voice said at their house. It was like it never happened. The lay couple from Jim's church asked Dana a few questions and then asked her if they could pray. When they mentioned "Jesus Christ," Dana's looks changed, and so did her voice. The couple remained calm. They prayed in the name of Jesus. They ordered the demon out. They kept praying in the name of Jesus. Dana made a coughing type noise and, according to the couple, she was delivered.

They asked Dana to read the Bible every day and told John to keep her around Christians. Dana was compliant, but she showed no evidence of knowing what happened. They gave John a business card with the name of a Christian counselor. They gave one also to me and told me to go with them. After John and Dana left, the couple talked with me for a few minutes. They said this demon would likely return. "How would they know that?" I thought.

Three days later, we were at the counselor's office. I saw the certificate on the wall indicating that he was a certified counselor in the State of Michigan. I was a little surprised when he prayed with Dana. The voice came out again. It sounds strange, but when the voice started, the room temperature turned very cold. In a matter of seconds, I could see my breath. I have no explanation. The counselor acted as if it was "business as usual." Dana was delivered. The counselor said the demon had come back. He would see her again.

She saw the counselor three more times and then was released from his care. John kept his number, just in case. He never needed it. Dana had no further episodes. A year later, John left his job and entered the seminary. In a few years, Dana became a pastor's wife.

## **Belinda**

My next encounter was about eight months later. A woman who attended our church made an appointment to see me. I didn't know her very well, just as a face in the crowd. We met in my office at church. She explained that her daughter, Belinda, was a resident in a mental hospital. On several occasions, Belinda tried to take her life by cutting her wrists. She had been under doctors' care for a year. Occasionally, she would have a day pass to spend time with her mother.

The mother asked if I would see Belinda. She said the doctors were not making progress. She wondered if something "spiritual" was going on with Belinda. It was then that I remembered: This woman had attended our Bible class, "The World of Evil and Supernatural Powers." The woman was curious to know whether I might help. I said I would meet with them.

A week later, Belinda and her mother arrived at my office. They sat on the couch. I pulled up a chair so I could get out from behind my desk and be a little closer. Belinda spoke normally and showed me her wrists. I saw the scars of her tortured life. Actually, she seemed quite normal, except for the scars. I asked her why she thought she cut herself. She said, "I don't really know. Sometimes it just feels like something takes control of me."

I looked straight into her eyes. With authority, I said something that takes a lot of faith: "In the name of Jesus Christ, who am I talking to?" I had seen the counselor do this. You must realize, I honestly half expected her to say, "What? My name is Belinda. What are you doing?" She did not say that. At first, she didn't say anything.

Then, a male sounding voice said, "You leave Belinda alone. She is mine! I am going to take her life." I said, "You are not! In the name of Jesus, by the blood of Jesus Christ, I demand you leave Belinda right now." Belinda's body moved with some mild contortions. I said it again, "In the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of Jesus Christ, leave Belinda right now."

Belinda's body went limp, her eyes closed. Then she opened her eyes and said, "What were you saying?" It was as if she picked up the conversation that occurred just before the deliverance. She was completely unaware that anything occurred.

I gave Belinda a modern translation of the Bible and asked her to read it. I asked her and her mother not to tell the doctors they had visited me. I asked her mother to read the Bible with Belinda when she visited the hospital. They both agreed.

Almost a month later, the mother called. The doctors had told her, “We can’t explain this, but we have come to the conclusion that Belinda is emotionally healthy. It is not necessary for her to be hospitalized any longer. She seems fine.” Belinda’s mother took her home. Belinda is living a normal life.

## **International Ministry**

Our church continued to grow. It was unusual in my denomination for a church in the inner city to experience a turnaround, reaching out cross culturally. Some of the denominational leaders asked me to write a book. Over the next few years, I wrote several books. During that time, I spoke at several conferences and conventions. With the help of an attorney, I incorporated a not-for-profit ministry. Eventually it became Church Doctor Ministries.

The church grew more, as did Church Doctor Ministries. I could no longer split the duties. There was too much demand. Our staff at church had grown from four to thirty people. We started an inner-city grade school with attendance of two hundred and fifty. It was a connecting ministry that met a felt need among the families of our community. It served as a platform for developing relationships and, through those relationships, sharing the Gospel. It became a mechanism leading to greater church attendance and church membership—with African-American leaders in the mix of our congregation.

I chose to move on. The associate pastor took over the congregation and I took a call to a small church in Indiana. They couldn’t afford a full-time pastor and paid for my leadership half time. This meant that in the time remaining, I could write, travel, and teach, growing Church Doctor Ministries.

I was in my second year at the church in Indiana, when I received my first invitation to serve overseas. A group was planning a pastor’s conference and asked me to teach five thousand pastors in Lagos, Nigeria. My wife, Janet, was with me on this first trip. The leader of this movement in Nigeria was Uma Ukpai. Uma held an evangelistic rally before the conference. As he preached, several whole rows of people fell over, “slain in the Spirit.” I had never seen anything like that. At the end of his message, people came forward for prayer to receive Christ. He asked if anyone had a need for healing. Several more people came forward. Janet and I were seated in the front row on the platform. A mother and father brought their young daughter forward. It was obvious—she was blind. The mother said she was born blind.

Uma asked one of the American pastors to pray for the little girl to be healed. Her eyes opened and it was obvious she could see. She was looking around for the first time in her life. She reached up and touched her mother’s face. Previously, it was the only way that she had ever identified her mother. She was seeing her mother’s face for the first time in her life.

The major newspaper in Lagos is owned and operated by Muslims. The next day, there was a picture of the young girl, with the story, on the front page. The experience was like living in the Book of Acts.

On another trip, we taught pastors in Moscow, Russia. As I prayed for a young woman, she fell over. One of the American pastors who had come with me later asked me, "How did you do that?" I said, "I did not do that. I have no idea how that works."

We taught a conference a year later in Almaty, Kazakhstan. At the beginning of the conference, one of the pastors who had come with me fell over in the main lobby of the conference center. He lay on the floor for about thirty minutes. People just walked around him. Later that night at the hotel, I asked him what happened. He said, "I don't know. But I felt so peaceful. It was a wonderful experience." I asked him if he was going to report the experience to his church members at home. He smiled and said, "Probably not!"

On another trip to the former Soviet Union, our team visited a city six hours south of Moscow by train. It was Sunday, and the people there had arranged for me to preach. In those days, communism was unraveling. There was new freedom across the former Soviet Union; but the government still did not allow anyone to own property, and so, many new churches met in rented theaters. I preached, with a young Christian student from the University of Moscow serving as interpreter.

After the worship service, I asked, through my interpreter, if anyone wanted prayer for any reason. A number of people lined up. As each one approached, I asked, "What do you want prayer for?" The young man interpreted the question and then would tell me, in English, what I should pray for. On this trip, a woman named Judy from our team was assigned my prayer partner. Judy was from a Pentecostal church in northern Michigan. During this prayer time, I laid hands on the heads of people. Judy stood behind the person and put her hands on the back of the shoulders to provide silent prayer support.

The last person in line reached us for prayer about forty-five minutes after the service ended. I asked about her prayer need. The interpreter said, "She has a cold in her throat and upper chest." I put my hands on her head and prayed for her to be healed. However, when I mentioned Jesus Christ, her body jerked, and she made a guttural sound.

I said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, who am I talking to?" The voice responded in English! At that point, my young interpreter almost fainted. He had already determined that she spoke no English. Of course, that is no problem for a supernatural being. The voice said, "I am 'group.' We are many."

I said, "How many are there of you?" The voice wailed. I repeated, "How many are there of you?" The voice made a screaming sound. I said again, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I demand you to tell me, how many?" The voice said, "Nine."

I prayed and the power of Christ cast out the first one, then the second, the third, and so on. When we got to the last one, number nine, I asked, “Are you the last one?” He said, “Yes, but you can’t touch me.” I said, “You stupid demon, He who is in me is greater than you, He is the King of the universe. You are a fool. You stupid demon. You weak coward.”

Just then, the demon made the woman put her right arm into the lower part of her chest, at the bottom of her rib cage. He buried her arm to the elbow. This woman had a shirt on, and a heavy wool sweater over the shirt. I can’t explain this, of course, because there is no way to get through that sweater. But I saw it, and so did my interpreter, who seemed stunned.

Just telling this part of the story makes me uncomfortable. I know it sounds like I was hallucinating. I can’t explain it. It just happened. I said, “You stupid demon, I’m going to send you to the pit, by the power of Jesus Christ by the blood of Jesus, the Ruler of the universe....”

Her arm came out. However, then, as I was focused and praying with total focus, my hands on her head, and my eyes closed, all of a sudden my arms were stretched higher and higher, as she “got higher.” I just kept praying. Finally, the demon came out as she made a sound like vomiting, followed by a screech. Her head and body went back to its original height. Her voice returned and she looked very peaceful. She knew nothing about what happened.

I got my interpreter back on the job with a little coaxing. I asked her about her life, where she lived. She said she lived with her brother. I asked what her brother did. She said, “He is a warlock.” I asked her if she had friends in the church she could stay with. She said that she did. I suggested she move in with them immediately. She left the church building.

After I thanked the interpreter for his work, I prayed with him. Judy and I left the now empty theater and walked toward the bus. There we would meet other members of our team, who had been serving in other churches in the city. When we got away from the crowd, I asked Judy, “You had your hands on her shoulders. Did they really go up?” She said, “Absolutely.” I asked, “Did the demon stretch her, or make her levitate?” Judy said, “I had my eyes closed. I was praying so hard, I don’t even know.” I said, “Me too.” Judy said, “But I know she did something, because to keep my hands on her shoulders, I had to stretch on my tiptoes.”

Fifteen years later, I saw Judy when I was visiting some support partners for our ministry in northern Michigan. I didn’t know she was going to be there. She was invited to a dinner gathering where my support partners had gathered.

Somehow we got on the topic of the supernatural and miracles. I asked Judy, “After all these years, I wonder if I have just embellished the story and added to it. I believe it is important to be accurate. It is such a bizarre story. I want to know if the details are as you remember.” She said, “Oh yeah, that’s exactly the way it

happened. I will never forget it.” I was glad to hear that, because Judy is more of a detail person than I am. For her, it was a singular experience. I have had many such experiences around the world. It is important not to embellish or exaggerate ministry.

### **Ministry in the United States**

In my work for Church Doctor Ministries, I have consulted with almost two thousand churches in the U.S. and Canada. They represent about seventy different denominations, networks, fellowships, independents, and nondenominational congregations. My interviews with pastors are always confidential.

In my perception, most North American Christians would be surprised by the number of deliverances and healings that occur on this continent. If my sampling is accurate, there is more of this ministry than most would imagine. In most churches, healings and deliverances are not reported in church bulletins or newsletters. They are personal ministries with individuals.

I have a theory, but it isn't original with me. I first heard it from an Anglican vicar who is a good friend of mine in the U.K. We have worked with him during the last thirteen years. We take North Americans to England to experience the revival taking place in the U.K. This vicar has a statement, a biblical worldview that reflects what I have witnessed in several countries where revivals are occurring. It represents, in my perception, Kingdom culture: “The God of the Bible is the God of today. Anything that occurred in the Bible can and does happen today.” It is my observation that this posture toward God, Scripture, and the supernatural is present wherever revival is breaking out.