



Session Three Transcripts

Power

I wonder what you think when you hear the word power?

Power is something that can often be talked about negatively, or warily. It can be seen as something that some people possess, and others don't. But power takes many forms. It isn't fixed or static, nor is it harmful or bad or destructive in itself. Power is something we might all have in different ways, and it is part of Church life.

The Church as a human organisation and the Body of Christ has means by which it organises itself and enables Christians live and work and worship together. It therefore has structures of oversight, care and governance that involve the use of power.

All communities depend upon the responsible exercise of power by those entrusted with it. Any kind of abuse involves an abuse of power; exploiting or misusing the imbalances of power in a relationship or community. So it is important to pay attention to where power is, who has it and how it is exercised in all parts of the Church's life and not just to those in positions of responsibility and leadership.

There are all sorts of different kinds of power. People may have power because of their role, personality, expertise, age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and many other factors. Power can be given, expressed and conferred through many different means.

For example: through what is said from the pulpit; or when people are trusted with intimate secrets (think of the power of pastoral carers); or in how meetings are constituted and conducted (think about who is in the room and who is not, think not just about the power of the Chair, but of the minute-taker or secretary).

There is the power of the 'majority' in shaping the ongoing life of the Church, and there may be the power of the 'minority' when particular strong voices persuade a number of others to undertake a course of action; and there is the power of silence.

Power can be used to enable or to destroy, both through action or through failure to recognise and responsibly exercise the power that one has.

Questions about the use of power especially apply to all who have a leadership role in the life of the Church, lay and ordained, as they have both actual power and authority in a specific area and the symbolic and representative power that accompanies it.

The power might be in what responsibilities are actually given, or in what is perceived as going on. In appointing someone, for example to be a church steward, the Church is understood as indicating that this is a person is to be trusted. Or the person giving out the notices might be perceived as the person having power because they stand and address a congregation.

Those who are ordained have a representative role, not just within the Church but in relation to God. Their words and actions have an authority beyond their immediate community and are often perceived to have spiritual meaning and power. Indeed, all who are seen as acting and speaking on behalf of the Church (particularly local preachers and worship leaders) are understood to have some kind of spiritual authority, so what they say and do is seen to reflect something of God. It's particularly important to pay attention to the exercise of this kind of spiritual power as it can have a deep impact.

The way we are to understand God's power is through the costly self-giving love shown in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There may be much we need to unpack in that, as there are dangers in some ideas of what self-giving means, particularly in relation to abusive behaviour. But Methodists are challenged to think about the power they, and others, have in different situations; to ask how it might be perceived

by others, and to question whether it is being exercised responsibly, wisely and lovingly.

Does the way in which we handle power reflect the abundant grace and love of God?

Publisher's Note: Scripts may not be exactly as spoken in the films, but are always substantively so.

If you have any questions or comments about the God Welcomes All course, please contact gwa@methodistchurch.org.uk