

POWERLESS



JAMES B. CORBETT

PRINTED BY
888.473.6870



INTRODUCTION

This Life Series offering was supported by my wife Susan with editing, amendments, and reviewing. Thank you, Susan, for your patience and encouragement.

Special thank you to Lanita and Steve Boyd for their encouragement and editing expertise.

Thanks to Bernie Torrence, our encourager, and Bob and Johnny Ruth for the “Tone” melody.

To Wannetta Wagner and Jamie Johnson, our communication team at Glory to God International Ministries.

Above all, thank you, Lord, for allowing us to be a conduit of your love to the brethren in this story. Through “the Reporter” many have heard of the “Power in Powerlessness,” giving their lives to the journey.

My hope is the reader will experience this Life Series vignette in one 45-minute investment of time, allowing the story to meander you past the characters to a place of awe and reverence of a God who is still in the miracle-working business. May you land as I have, knowing “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27.)

James B. Corbett

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A LIFE SERIES

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In a time of quiet reflection. I heard the Lord say, “My people suffer from powerless faith!” This statement has motivated the Life Series vignette, “Powerless.”

JBC



CHAPTER ONE

IT BEGINS





IT BEGINS

Mike, the reporter, asked Captain Johnny Fisher, one of the captains of a national championship college football team in Pittsburgh, “What is the one thing you wish you had known earlier in life?”

Without hesitation, Johnny replied, “How much power was in powerlessness.”

Well, that was the first of many surprising responses he received from the Captain, Johnny Fisher, during his assignment to tell his life story for his employer, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Fisher was somewhat hard to find and even harder to get to agree to this story. The reporter was not quite sure what changed

his mind, but on the third call, they began.

“Johnny, tell me about your childhood.”

“Well, Mike, first let me thank you for keeping after me. When you called to do a story for the Pittsburgh paper about the national champion captain, I really didn’t want to open those memories again. I am appreciative and know this is your work. After your last call I realized maybe it’s time to reopen that chapter.

“Oh, yes, you asked of my childhood.

“We were poor, but I was not aware of it until our Mom had to return our Christmas presents one year, because Dad lost his job. My father was an epileptic who had grand mal seizures even with medication. In those early years, his employers would let him go once they witnessed his seizure episodes. You know, it’s funny just talking about this now brings back the shocking pain and powerlessness of those days. My parents having to ask for their kids’ Christmas presents back. Wow! Constantly being rejected by

employers and moving your family multiple times each year. That had to be tough on my folks. My sister was very young then and my brother and I just kept playing ball outside wherever we were living at the time. For Mom and Dad to never know when the next seizure would come and destroy what little bit of normal we knew must have been difficult.

“I remember one Sunday we all went to church as a family. We had been in this New England town long enough to have a church and a baseball team with uniforms. My father went into a grand mal seizure while we were in line for communion. I can't believe how vivid this still is to me. I haven't talked about it to anyone in probably 30 years. It's as if we are right there! I was always right by my father, and would kneel by him, and make sure he didn't hit his head on anything. Even at 10 years old, it was my natural reaction to jump on him and buffer his head to keep him as safe as possible. The seizures only lasted a few minutes, but left the afflicted exhausted, disoriented, and humiliated. I will never forget lying

on that church aisle floor with blood all over both of us as Dad had bitten down on his tongue.

“As we slowly started to raise him up, I noticed those eyes of the parishioners. So startled, bewildered, and condemning. No one said a word to us, no one! Dad got up slowly and we walked out the closest door we could find. We cleaned up the floor the best we could, but the ushers just wanted us to get out. It was easy to forget how powerless a moment that was. Epilepsy back then was so misunderstood. Mike, this was the mid-1960s, to put it in context. That night the priest and a deacon came to our house and had a conversation with my parents in the kitchen of our apartment. We kids didn’t really think that much about it. But we never went back to church! Mom told me years later they said Dad had a demon and we were not welcome back to church. So much for deliverance and understanding! It wasn’t my parents’ fault. It was 1965 without any of the understanding we have today about epilepsy.

“Wow, Mike! I’m sorry to shake that out on you.”

“No, Johnny, you were one of the captains of a national championship college football team here in Pittsburgh. Whenever stories are told about the captain, Johnny Fisher, no one ever mentions anything like this. It’s always what a great time everyone had back then. How successful those days were in Pittsburgh sports. What a fun-loving wild man you were. It’s eye-opening as a reporter to realize you are a real person. I believe your willingness to share transparently will touch many.

“How did things change after you had this experience, Johnny?”

“Mike, we were just kids in a hard-working, low-income family. We didn’t realize how tough it was. We just kept playing ball out in the fields and streets. It’s in retrospect that you see all the tentacles of our early lives through my parents’ eyes. What kind of church does that? Answer, not a very good one!

We never talked about it as a family. We just kept moving and working and surviving. My Mom did

everything she could to give us a normal childhood. Whatever that was! She would work in the local grocery store all day and come home and whip us kids into shape. My brother and I started working ourselves at 12 years old, washing dishes at a local restaurant. About the same time, we were getting noticed for our football and baseball talent. The little bit of money we were making gave us some independence. It also allowed us to buy our beer and whiskey instead of stealing it from friends' parents. Little did we know then that having a little money would open doors to some real character defects.”

“Johnny, what do you mean ‘character defects?’”

“Mike, it all started with a recurring dream at age 15. I call this dream, “The Warning.” A silhouette of a man of my size and shape, leaning against a street light pole. It’s a damp chilly night at 4 a.m. He’s drunk, hanging onto the pole to center himself before attempting to cross the city street. As Captain Johnny Fisher, I thought, ‘Surely that can’t be me. I am an All-American football player.’ Then, I awaken, startled

from the dream.

“As I got older this “Warning Dream” came more frequently. It was easy to shove it to the side as the hero sheet grew. My brother became a professional baseball player. Me, a full scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh. Then drafted into the NFL. How could Captain Johnny Fisher be an alcoholic?”

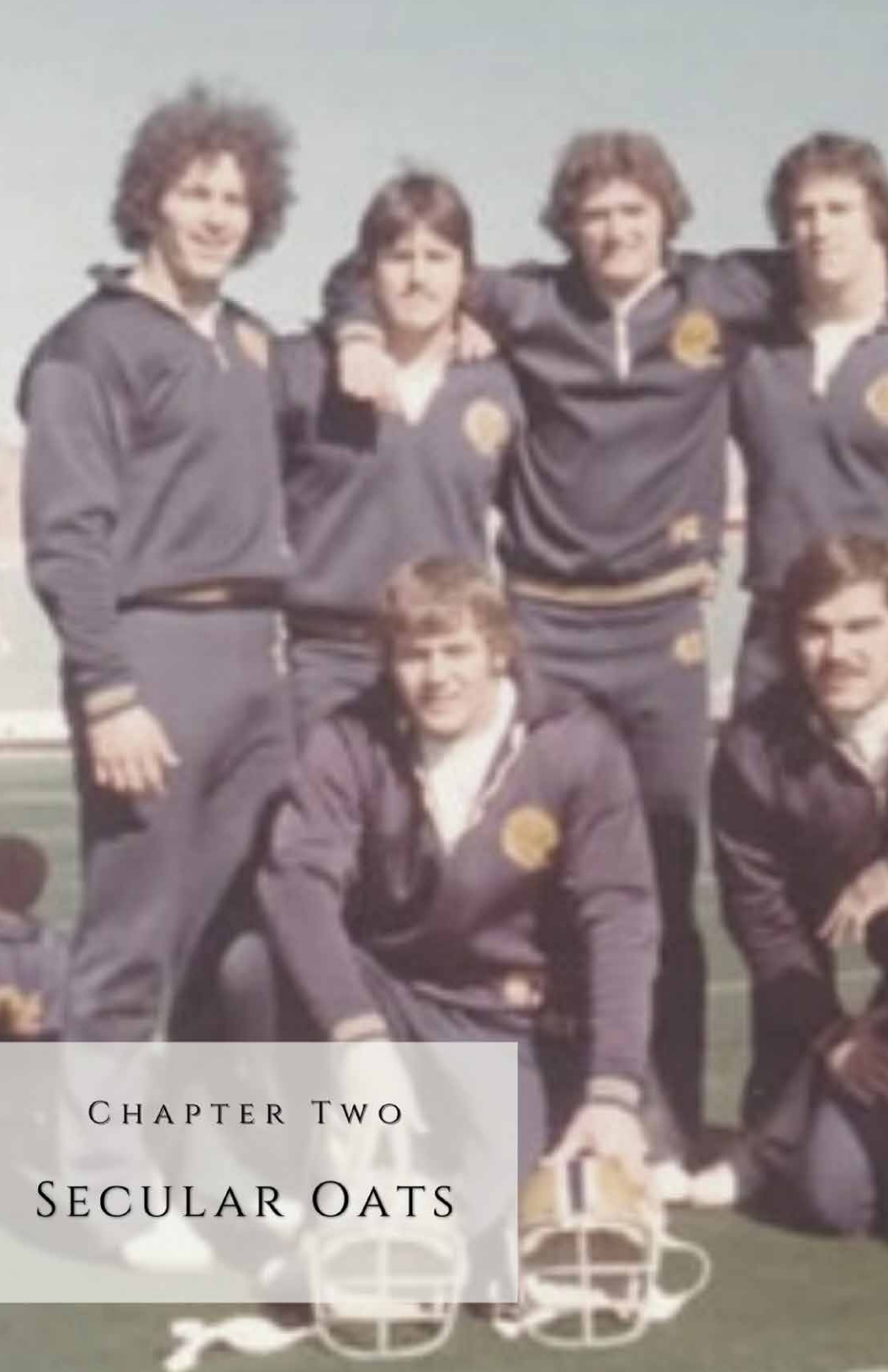
So his new reporter friend seemed a bit bewildered.

He said, “Captain, are you saying you’re an alcoholic, because of your difficult childhood?”

To which Johnny replied, “Oh no, Mike. I didn’t need the childhood. Just the freedom, to be powerless!”

DEUTERONOMY 8:17 (NIV)

“Then, you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth!”



CHAPTER TWO
SECULAR OATS



SECULAR OATS

Reporter Mike opened their second Zoom call. “How is our Captain Johnny Fisher today?”

Johnny replied, “Mike, I’ve been a bit nervous, to be truthful. I’ve been looking at the photograph you sent me of our offensive line from the Sun Bowl. Such a fun picture with a lot of memories I’d rather forget.”

Mike answered, “Why? What can be so painful about a Sun Bowl victory, followed by an undefeated senior season, capped off by a national championship Sugar Bowl victory?”

“What a good question!” Johnny replied. “Mike, I look

at that picture and I feel how lost I was inside even though I knew to the public, we were their idols. We had what seemed like everything. Fame, scholarship, purpose, adoration. How could one feel lost and still perform to expectations? The physical aspect was easy. I know that sounds strange. But the physical game was natural, instinctive, easy. It was the guilt of knowing the heart was off.”

“Johnny, what do you mean by ‘off?’”

“Well, Mike, like off track, off task, totally off target. After many years in quiet conversation with God about this, the answers have been revealed.

“I was playing for the wrong team! The “ME” team was my team. Dressed in a University of Pittsburgh helmet.”

Mike replied, “What? You, the captain, Johnny Fisher? The guy everyone says was always smiling, full of fun, never serious, yet always made the catch on third down? Come on, Johnny! Are you pulling my leg?”

“Mike, I can understand your confusion. It’s taken years for me to unpack this dichotomy. Mike, you said earlier that I am the captain, Johnny Fisher. That is the first hurdle we need to step over. Mike, I was the captain. That is not who I am today. This is why I’ve been so reluctant to accept interviews and social events.

“Mike, the captain is dead. He no longer exists! Whenever these photographs and articles surface, I don’t even recognize that person anymore. It’s like dying on the operating table and getting a new heart. Mike, I am no longer the captain you’d hoped to interview.

“I’m sorry if you are disappointed, and I understand if you don’t want to continue.”

After a long pause, Mike replied, “Johnny, if it’s okay with you, I’d like to continue. I will readily admit to you that I thought for sure by now in this interview I’d be feverishly writing story after inside story of the envious antics of the captain and his team. But somehow now

I've been personally drawn into knowing more."

"All right, Mike, ask your questions. For some reason I'm feeling more comfortable now that you know about the demise of this captain of yours."

Mike asked, "Johnny, how did you do it? Grade school, punt, pass, and kick champion in Florida. High school All-American in Pennsylvania. All-American tight end at the University of Pittsburgh. Captain of one of the best teams in history. Professional NFL player for four years. How could you do all that feeling lost and guilty?"

"Mike, this entire time the captain was slowly dying. He just didn't know it. Once the physical skills were stripped, it still took several more years of secular demoralization for the death of the captain."

Mike asked, "Johnny, explain what you mean."

"Mike, I was losing the edge on the field, and I knew it. All the drinking, drugs, undisciplined lifestyle were taking me down. Then the knee injury in an NFL game

in Cleveland put the final spike on the field captain. Even after the injury he tried to live the captain's life. Until one drunken day, I remembered my "warning dream" that was given to me as a young man.

"Mike, I realized at 28 years old what God was mercifully trying to show me 15 years earlier. I was literally standing on an isolated, four-lane highway in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was 4 a.m., damp, and I was leaning against a street light pole, stabilizing myself for the long walk across the street. Then, Mike, as clear as if I'd had nothing to drink, I felt a loving voice say, 'You are still my son! Please let me help you.'

"Mike, it was as if I was shocked sober. I slid down that pole and sat on that damp dirty sidewalk. Quiet and in awe. Why would God have anything to do with me? I had thrown away every blessing and good thing he had sent my way. So I said, 'Why, Lord? Why help me?' I felt his voice again, say, 'You are no longer the captain. You are mine!'

"I asked, 'How Lord?'

He said, 'Kill the root, and you kill the old man. Death is the requirement for your new life.'

“Mike, I know this sounds odd. But I knew instinctively I was powerless over my life. Keeping the captain alive was killing me! For the first time in my life, I was willing to admit powerlessness and ask for help.”

POWERLESS

Oh, my father, how could this be?

Have we also forgotten to get down on our knees?

With the urgency coming and your remnant slumbering.

How will your Great Power flow?

Take heart, my child, for my remnant is ready to glow.

They will not miss their time!

The tares are top-heavy and beginning to bow.

Soon my remnant will take to the plow.

Powerless, no more!

JBC

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROOT





THE ROOT

As Johnny clicked on the link to the final Zoom call with his new reporter friend, Mike, he was thinking about how far they had come in their two previous sessions.

“Hi, Mike, how are you today?”

“Johnny, really interested to see how we end. Sad also that this might be our final encounter.”

Johnny replied, “Mike, nothing’s final in this life when we have eternity.”

“Another surprise statement from my captain,” said Mike.

Johnny asked, “What is surprising?”

Mike answered Johnny, “As I review the notes for my article, I have yet to write down one single story that was what I expected. As much as I know our readers want to hear all the legendary stories about the captain and his team, I am very interested in your comments as we closed last session: ‘Kill the root, and you kill the man. Death is the requirement for your new life.’

“All week I’ve been wondering what this parable means.”

“Michael,” Johnny said, “you ask a marvelous question. You see, my entire life up to when my warning dream actually happened, I felt guilty and unworthy of success and fame. God showed me that selfishness and self-centeredness was the root of my problem. It’s such a hard realization to wrestle with as

it is so brutally true. That is how I was—selfish, and self-centered. Even now, Mike, all these years later it is still hard to really admit. However, it is still a bit of a default emotion in my life to this day.”

Johnny Fisher had more to say to the reporter. He continued his long explanation.

One day years ago after a selfish outburst on my part, God had a fatherly conversation with me. He said, “So are you willing to start dealing with this defect of character yet?”

How does one answer that? The truth was not really; however, my behavior was making life miserable. So that little voice inside replied, “I think so.”

*It was as though He smiled and said, “Finally, let’s get to the root of the problem. Any life lived on self, must eventually fail. That is not how I made you! You were made to live in relationship with me and my creation. **Greed and selfish ambitions are outside your intended purpose.**”*

“But, what about the Captain Johnny Fisher?” I asked God.

*“Johnny, the captain was **your** idea, not mine. I want you to be a son, a Fisher of men.” God said, “To kill the weed, you must get out the root. If we don’t get it all, it keeps growing back.”*

I asked, “How can I possibly do that, Lord?”

He said, “You can’t. You’ll need me! Are you willing?”

*How could I answer that question? Am I willing to die to everything I’ve ever known so new life can sprout? My response was surreal and automatic: **“I’ve never died before!”***

I heard Him say, “Take my hand, and we will do it together.”

So, my reporter friend, perhaps God is speaking to you today. Your interest is not just a coincidence. Perhaps God is being anonymous. If you think it through, what are the options? You know in your heart

there is a piece missing and you instinctively desire it. So...what are the options? To live a life with an itch you can never totally scratch with secular success? Or surrender that itch to God?

A short silence took them both as they considered what was happening. Neither one of them had any idea what God had planned.

FORGIVE ME

Lord what are you doing with me?

Are you pulling everything off me?

No one has interest in me!

I thought I was liked and brought value to thee.

Only to see everyone flee.

Oh, me! Me! Me!

Is that what I needed to see?

It's still all about me.

Oh, me! Me! Me!

Please, Lord, forgive me.

JBC

CHAPTER FOUR
AWAKENING





AWAKENING

Mike finally broke their silence. “Johnny, can anyone do what you’re telling me?”

“My question exactly,” Johnny said. “Mike, we can’t. But God can! How do I know? The team, the dream, the captain fleeing the scene! Over many years, God has demonstrated how our admission of powerlessness brings us his power. That by dying to self, we are powerless no more!”

“Come on, Johnny,” Mike replies. “No one in their right mind is going to walk from everything they know for the unknown!”

“Well, Michael, perhaps the world’s version of “right mind” is really meant to keep you from the power God always intended his children to enjoy. When I think it through, Mike, what did this “Captain” mirage ever do to bring peace in my life?

“Michael, so what are your mirages? Do you have a secret captain? Is it a source of peace in your life or frustration? Keeping our captains alive is an impossible task.”

Reporter Mike replied, “I just don’t know. It is much easier just to keep the Captain Johnny Fisher alive. I don’t think I can take this conversation to my editor back at the Gazette. He’ll think I interviewed the wrong guy!”

“Mike, we’ve really put you in a pickle. Now I know why God wanted us to do this interview. I’ve turned down dozens of these requests because the captain you seek no longer exists. However, after your second call, I felt a nudge to accept you. This entire process was for you, Mike! God wants a personal relationship

with you. He is very patient and considerate. I know, once you experience his presence, you'll know the **power in powerlessness**. Michael, the power in powerlessness has been a treasure in my life. Why don't you tell God how powerless you feel doing this story with secular zeal? He'll show you the way to put the pickle in the jar depending on how genuine you are!

“Goodbye, Michael.”

Well, that was the last time the reporter talked to Johnny Fisher. He wrote some meaningless article with all the statistics, put it in the newspaper archive, and there it sat. Johnny was right; God found a way to keep the editor busy that day. That meaningless article still sits in the queue, becoming more and more meaningless.

A few years went by, and Mike, the reporter, was assigned to report on the largest annual sports banquet in Pittsburgh, the “Dapper Dan Sportsman of the Year Dinner.” He was sitting in the press area

when an award was announced for the greatest college team in Pittsburgh history, the 1976 Pittsburgh Panthers.

One of his colleagues turned to him and asked, “Mike, whatever happened to Johnny Fisher, the captain of that great team?”

He looked his colleague in the eyes and replied, “He’s dead!”

“Oh, my goodness,” said the colleague. “I didn’t know that!”

“Yeah!” Mike replied. “He told me so himself!”

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Sometimes the most powerful statement is...  
**SILENCE.**

## **REVELATION 2:26 (NIV)**

And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him, I will give power over the nations.



# THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Thank you for going on the journey of “Powerless” with us. May we offer a few thoughts to ponder, as we ask the Lord for a deeper understanding.

## “Powerless No More”



## IT BEGINS

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How is there power in powerlessness?



In what one area of your life are you most powerless?

Try to be as specific as possible.

# PERSONAL NOTES



## SECULAR OATS

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Do you have a “Captain”?



Are you ready to drop the mirage?

What specific action can you take today to get started?

# PERSONAL NOTES

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## THE ROOT

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Where are you most vulnerable to selfish actions?



What action can you take today to start rooting it out?

# PERSONAL NOTES

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## AWAKENING

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What symbolism do you glean from the picture?



Are you willing to share your life story with others?

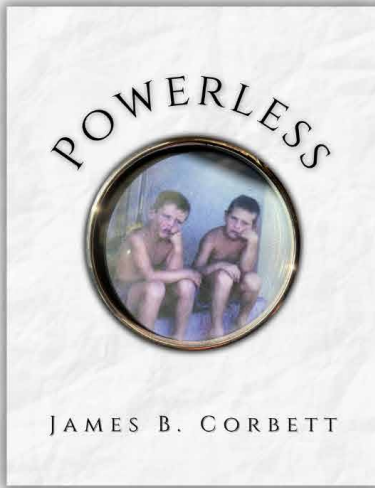
Can you share the “Power in Powerlessness”?



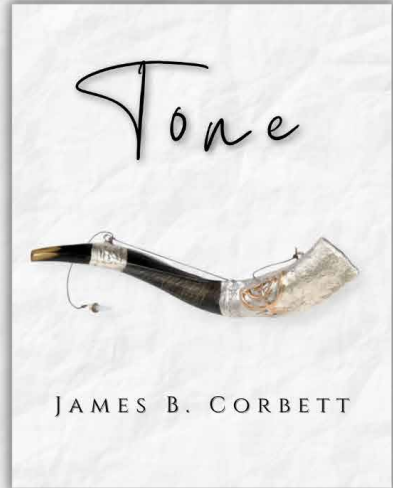
# PERSONAL NOTES



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