

## Study Guides Available as a Way In!

“There is something quite valuable in imagining the powers as beastly creatures. Every creature has weaknesses; all flesh has vulnerabilities. [...] We must take up this work of exposing and repelling [these beasts] until we resurrect such an abundance of life in this land that every vulture of death is starved.”

– Dallas Nord, *The Beasts I’ve Seen*, page 11

### STUDY GUIDE GEEZ 59: POWERS AND PRINCIPALITIES

#### ABOUT GEEZ

Geez magazine is a quarterly, nonprofit, ad-free, print magazine about social justice, art, and activism for people at the fringes of faith in Canada and the U.S.

Geez is committed to not just raging against oppression but offering the hope, beauty, and power alive in local communities doing their work.

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

**Geez 59: Powers and Principalities** pull us back to roots of our biblical tradition. Just as we often describe today’s struggles through the language of systems, structures, and institutions, our scriptural ancestors spoke of powers and principalities, acknowledging how these more-than-human things took on a kind of creatureliness: a life, a spirit, of their own. Whether we perceive institutions as alive or not makes all the difference in the way we relate to them – and specifically, the way we might struggle against them. In a season where the powers and principalities are running rampant, our struggle with them is indeed a matter of life and death.



**Page 8** – Editorial: Dispatch from a Dragon’s Belly by Kateri Boucher

“**Geez Out Loud**” is a listening series that offers audio accompaniment by the author for select stories, [geezmagazine.org/geez-out-loud](http://geezmagazine.org/geez-out-loud).

For copies of Geez 59: Powers and Principalities, visit [geezmagazine.org/store](http://geezmagazine.org/store).

#### HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

*These study guides are created for use in community – in the classroom, in book groups, with your faith circle – or for quiet reflection on your own.*

We have split this Study Guide into three parts: **Naming, Exposing, Engaging**. Based on biblical precedent, activist theologian Walter Wink named these three essential acts. We must first **name** the powers, acknowledging the ways they show up in society and in our own selves. We must **expose** the powers, illustrating the webs of lies, distortions, and violence that they have spun. And we must **engage** the powers through active resistance, holding them accountable, and exorcising their grip on our own lives and spirits.

#### PART I NAMING THE POWERS

#### RECOMMENDED READING

**Pages 0-5** – Opening poem

**Page 11** – The Beast I’ve Seen by Dallas Nord

**Page 14** – Not Against Flesh and Blood by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

#### DEFINITIONS

**Good, fallen, redeemed:** A framework developed by Walter Wink positing all powers as inherently good, but having fallen from their original purpose. It is our work to redeem them by bringing them back to their vocational goodness.

**Vocation:** The inherent calling of any creature (individual or institutional) that allows it to best serve Life and Creation.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

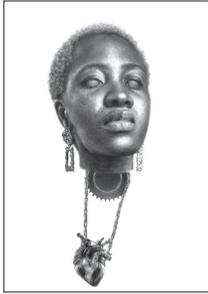
1. Does naming white supremacy as a principality change your conception of it? How might that affect the way we struggle against it?
2. In our opening poem, we write, “How often is it that some things cannot be seen until we name them?” Why do you think this is? Is there a time you’ve experienced the power of naming in your own personal life or political activism?

## PART 2 EXPOSING THE POWERS

### RECOMMENDED READING

**Page 12** – Parable of the Spear by *Owólabi*

**Page 13** – “odí se mai chaméni psychí” (An ode to a lost soul) by *Sowemimo Daniel*



**Page 23** – The Bone Lodged In Our Throats by *Ruby Sales*

**Page 30** – Social Seduction

**Page 32** – One Does Not Speak Truth to Power by *Bayo Akomolafe*

### ACTIVITY

1. Dallas Nord describes the “beasts, serpents, demons, and dragons” that arrived to Turtle Island on board Columbus’s Santa Maria. Close your eyes and imagine some of the creatures that arrived then and are still inhabiting these lands today. Draw or write about them with as many details as possible.
2. Gather a circle and do Lectio Divina with Ephesians 6: 10-17. Go around the circle three times. First, name a word that shimmers. Second, share how that is resonating in your life. Third, offer an action step you want to take in response. Read the text between each circle sharing.

### DEFINITIONS

**Thing power:** a concept developed by feminist scholar and political theorist Jane Bennett to describe “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (from *Vibrant Matter*).

**Demonic:** In this context not necessarily referring to “evil” per se, but the state of fallenness exhibited by a death-dealing power.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Jacques Ellul encourages us to think critically about the technology that we engage in our lives. Read through his list of questions and answer some.
2. Ruby Sales writes of the “emptiness of the spirit that has plagued an entire globe.” Is it possible for the powers to be both globally powerful and essentially empty at the same time? What would this mean about our ability to resist or redeem them?

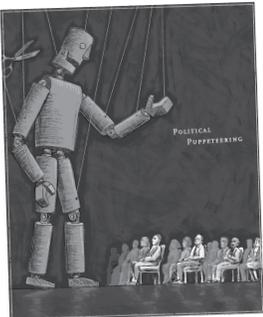
### ACTIVITY

1. Owólabi explores the ways the powers seeped into his family system. Write your own story of the ways the principalities sneaked into your bedtime stories or dinner conversation.
2. Take a social media fast. Pick a time frame – once a week, a whole week, a day. Don’t engage in social media. Take note of your feelings and life without it.

## PART 3 ENGAGING THE POWERS

### RECOMMENDED READING

**Page 22** – Political Puppeteering by *Darryl Brown*



**Page 24** – DIY Exorcism for Your City Hall by *Nichola Torbett*

**Page 38** – Forged in Fire by *Corey Simon*

**Page 46** – The People’s Church by *Matt Bernico*

### DEFINITIONS

**Exorcism:** A process of ridding a person or place of a demonic spirit.

**Transformative justice (TJ):** “a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence” (Mia Mingus).

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Darryl Brown’s art hints at the places where the powers are weak and could be prodded towards their redemption. Think about powers that are running rampant right now. What are their weaknesses? What ways are people working to deflate their power or call them towards their vocation?
2. Do you believe the powers can be redeemed? Or should they just be dismantled? Can something like a bank be called back to serve creation rather than itself?

### ACTIVITY

1. Follow Nichola Torbett’s recipe on page 24 or find some other folks who are already cooking. As you think of protest as a theological exercise in confronting the powers, does it change your experience or how you show up?
2. Create art! So much of engaging the powers has to do with deep imagination and unbound creativity. Step out of your comfort zone and draw, paint, take photographs, collage, and help artfully make these creatures come alive.