

Have you ever felt like it should be easier to, as they say, “*Let go and let God*”? As Christians, we are to release our will into the hands of Christ, who (according to John chapter 1) called the world into being. Releasing our will can be hard! After all, if we give things over to God, we might not get what we want... And we are surrounded by advertisements in all parts of life that tell us that we deserve to have what we want – that it is not only *alright* to satisfy our desires, but that it is *our right*. Those who truly embrace Christ’s message have an advantage over others, because to fully embrace Christ is to let go of all else that we hold onto, or that holds onto us. The message of the Old Testament that so many interpret as God sending his people out to plunder and rampage, taking what they want because it has been promised to them by God...this message is undone when God is understood through the teachings and the actions of Jesus Christ in his life, ministry, and death on the cross. I have already spoken to you of how God took the pain, hate and shame of being hung on the cross and turned it into a symbol of God’s love, of his choice of personal sacrifice to bring us freedom from shame and sin and death. The Old Testament message is also turned around when one reads it through the lens of Christ, the lens of God’s love, instead of the lens of privilege through promise.

In [Deuteronomy 31:6](#) God speaks through Moses before they enter the promised land, charging his people to “<sup>6</sup>Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you nor forsake you.” His message is much the same to this people several centuries later, when they had turned from following him and had been carried into exile. In [Isaiah 41:10](#) God says through his prophet, “*Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. **I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.***” God’s message to those who follow him is a promise of strength in him, by his hand, which is righteous. Christ, who acts as the Father’s right hand putting God’s will into action in the world, acts in righteousness. Whether we remain in Christ or come before him in supplication when we have strayed and find ourselves in a bad spot, we can expect action. We can expect God to act even when we do not see his hand in action. We can take refuge in him, for in him we will find more than refuge. We find strength and help.

Throughout the Old Testament we see testimony to God’s intervention in human lives, including testimony of strength God imparts to his followers. In [Psalm 118:14](#), the psalmist, declares “*The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.*” Traditionally, this psalm is ascribed to King David. David knew his power came from God. He knew it was God who had him anointed by Samuel to become king. Samuel was sent to anoint a new king at a time when Saul had departed from following God. Saul had begun to believe in his own might and left off from ascribing all glory to God, and so sent Samuel to find a son of Jesse with a heart after God. God chose the youngest and most unlikely appearing of Jesse’s sons to be the next king. God looks beneath the surface (unlike the world), seeing to the heart of each his children.

Looking to Exodus 15 we see a song Moses and the Israelites sang to God after he delivered them by parting the Red Sea. While they were spared, their *foes* (who denied God’s power) *perished* in their foolishness, as they had set themselves against the one true God. Intent on the destruction of God’s people whom God had liberated, Pharaoh’s army perished as the waters came crashing back behind the Israelites, once they had reached safety on the far shore. We can know this to be our reality as God’s people even today – IF we wait upon the Lord, watching for his righteous right hand to act, to deliver us from the hands of our enemies.

God's deliverance may not look anything like we are expecting, which is why we might not recognize it until much later. Often, it is only in looking back that we see the hand of God has truly worked mightily on our behalf, blessing us beyond what we had imagined was possible in the midst of our troubles. Only afterward can we recognize the truth of the words of the song Moses taught to the people of God in [Exodus 15:2-3](#), that *"the Lord is [indeed our] strength and [our] might, and has become [our] salvation."* Then we may sing, as they did, *"<sup>2b</sup>...this is my God, and I will praise him... <sup>3</sup> The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name."*

The truth of God's intervention in our lives when we trust in him is something that often has to be experienced to be believed. Such trust builds within us as we recognize God acting according to his promises. God empowers us to stand and face the realities of our day even as fear rises within us, just as fear rose within those who watched Pharaoh's army approaching while they seemed trapped by the Red Sea. When they felt most powerless, they cried out to God.

The Israelites, although shaped over generations to worship God alone, although descendants of Abraham and heirs to the promise of blessing and a land of their own...even they believed their eyes more than they believed in God's delivering power. And their eyes had witnessed the plagues God had so recently let loose upon the Egyptians while sparing them along with their lands, their crops, and their livestock. This speaks to the nature of humanity – **we prefer what we can see and touch**. We find physical reality most convincing and reassuring. But God is greater than physical reality, as *all that is and ever has been* was created by his hand, called forth from the void by his voice. God can fill with new life any void within us, if we but trust in him.

There is no shame in recognizing one's own powerlessness before the forces that amass against us. So much seems out of our control. But we are never without power when we walk in the footsteps of our Savior. Jesus said as much to his disciples right before his Ascension. In [Acts 1:6-8](#), it says, <sup>6</sup>...they asked him, *"Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"* <sup>7</sup> [Jesus] replied, *"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* All who follow Christ, who walk his Way, are witnesses. We are sharers of the truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. **All who walk Christ's Way are people of God, and are promised power that comes from the Holy Spirit**, who abides within us.

This is God's power, not our own. It is imparted for the well-being of his children, who are to bring God glory as they follow where he leads. The Great Apostle, Paul, bore witness to this God-given power when he declared in [Philippians 4:13](#), *"I can do all things through him who gives me strength."* God's will for us is made possible in our lives by his strength, not by ours.

Part of our imparted strength comes through understanding the *difference* between what is needful in life for happiness and what is nice, but not necessary for us to have the true joy that comes from living by the Spirit. We can understand this better by considering the context of Paul's statement to the believers at Philippi... Speaking to those concerned for his welfare, he said, <sup>11</sup> *Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.* <sup>12</sup> *I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.* <sup>13</sup> *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

This is the wisdom available to us when living in Christ – this is the strength that is ours: We are able to rejoice in plenty and in scarcity, for we can learn to do without anything except our Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit, God's presence in our lives! With God we have strength to face anything because we are assured by the presence of God's Spirit that we never face things alone.

We can speak to God, asking for strength in any moment, and he hears. When we ask for more than strength, God hears that too. Sometimes he answers "yes," sometimes "no," and sometimes his answer is "wait; be patient..." All of these answers we should rejoice in, but we find it hard to do so when God's answer isn't an immediate and resounding "YES!"

Here, too, we can learn from the wisdom Paul gained in his own journey with God. Paul had personal experience with God's loving "NO..." In [2 Corinthians 12:7b-10](#) he shares this, saying,

*7b to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, 9 but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.*

Such an attitude is foreign to us. In this land of plenty, we are conditioned to want what is available, which is so much more than our needs. We are taught to covet what our neighbors have but we do not, taught to "keep up" with others, as if it is most important to be compared favorably to those around us. We fear being found wanting and so, ironically, we want more. Our wants become so strong that our head convinces our heart that we NEED the things we want, or we cannot be happy. But I have seen a lot of people who can have whatever they want...that is, they can *possess* everything...except happiness. The truth is that if we are not enough without the "things" we can acquire in this world, then we will never be enough with them either. Such desires can rob us of our strength; we become weak before the temptations of the world. The power we might have by the Spirit who dwells within us dwindles as the strength of our *desires for material things* grows, sometimes even taking over our wills.

We may find ourselves turning to prayer, asking God to supply us with the very things that distract us from *desiring a deeper relationship with him!* In his love, God cannot say yes. And, like Paul, we do not like hearing "NO" as an answer to our prayers, or even "WAIT". Sometimes we are tempted to rage at God and doubt his good will for our future. We lament our poverty, blinded by our perception of our needs. In today's world where technology and production allow us to have access to so MUCH...humanity is easily blinded to the richness that we experience within when we are required to lean on God for strength, that he might sustain our souls.

We forget that it is **when we are weakest that we are most willing to surrender everything to God** and wait upon the Lord. And so it is that Jesus could proclaim in [Luke 6:20-21](#) to those who followed him: "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*"

This is the truth of what Paul was trying to teach in 2 Corinthians... After we have experienced *want and need, hunger and sorrow*, the blessing to us as our needs are met – not by us, but by the hand of our Creator – such blessing becomes not only apparent but *so much more real*,

made poignant by the juxtaposition of knowing both *need* and *needs met*. And our compassion for those who suffer from needs we once experienced is also increased, motivating us to action for others, allowing us to be the hands of Christ in the world. **Once we have experienced weakness that brings us to our knees before God, we are ready to claim the power and the strength we have been promised**, to make a stand for what Christ has shown us to be right. Then we feel the power available from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and give praise to our God. Feeling that power, we too will know the truth of Paul's proclamation: *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me..."* for God's strength is *loving* strength that enables us and others, not dominating strength that thinks only of the self. Such loving strength is the strength of Jesus Christ, the strength of a loving God who entered creation to deliver on his promise of salvation. Those who do not know God cannot recognize such strength; it goes beyond their comprehension. Those who walk in Christ, who have God's Spirit within them, can accept the strength God promises, even if we do not understand it.

God, in Christ, has turned humanity's understanding of many things on its ear. **Mark 10:31** says, *"many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."* In **John 12:24** Jesus said, *"those who love their life will lose it while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life"...* Why should God's power within us being made perfect in our weakness be any different? In such things, God highlights the difference in his kingdom from any earthly kingdom. Expectations are reversed regarding position and reward.

Both the Old and the New Testaments make clear that in God's kingdom the humble are exalted while the proud are brought low (**Proverbs 29:23; Isaiah 2:11; Ezeqiel 21:26; Matthew 23:12; Luke 1:52; James 4:6; & 1 Peter 5:5-6**). Finally, in **Acts 17:6** we hear that those who preach Christ are turning the world upside down. That is what the promises of God allow us to do – turn our world upside down by living in God's kingdom now. So let us rejoice in our weakness and in our poverty just as much as we do in God's strength and God's providence. Let us turn our world upside down as we claim our promises as children of God; for in him, no matter the state of things in our lives or in our world, we can find joy and happiness in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us learn the secret of being, of living content in Christ, as Paul did, for that is where all happiness lies.

*To God be all blessing and honor and glory forever...Amen!*

Use for call to worship **Isaiah 40:28–31**

L: <sup>28</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

**P: He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.**

L: <sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.

**P: <sup>30</sup> Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted, <sup>31</sup> but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;**

L: they shall mount up with wings like eagles;

**All: Those who wait for the LORD shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. Therefore, we shall wait for the LORD as we gather to worship God.**