



"My grace is sufficient for you..."
2 Corinthians 12:9

Finding
Strength
In
Weakness

John Matthews

Finding Strength in Weakness

Some years ago a healing evangelist was visiting our city to hold a seminar on God's power in healing. He was known by many to have a ministry accompanied by many signs, wonders and miracles. The first time I ever saw this man (who is now a friend) was when I attended this seminar. I remember scanning the front row before the meeting began and thinking the speaker had not yet arrived. I saw no man who I thought could be the one with such a remarkable and powerful ministry.

Soon he was introduced, and stood up from the row of people I had scanned earlier. Needless to say, I had passed right over him. His appearance was less than remarkable, of slight build, not someone who would command attention on entering a room. I will

always remember his first words. Actually his first words weren't even words. He stuttered. Then he said, "G-G-G—God will d-d-d-d-demonstrate His p-p-p-p-power through you to the extent that you are w-w-w-w-weak."

I don't remember the rest of the seminar. But this small man stammering out those words, a man who was a giant in the spirit, became an object lesson to me. The image is engraved on my memory.

One of the great truths of the Bible is this: God's strength comes in the place of our weakness. This is good news, because it means there is always hope in any circumstance, always the promise of something good happening, even in the darkest hour when all hope seems lost. Many times God intervenes when we are "at the end of our rope", when natural

strength has failed and there seems no way out.

There is some bad news in this. It is bad news for our flesh, for our natural strength. For just as it is true that God shows Himself strong in our weakness, it is also true that He hides himself when we show ourselves strong. In other words, if we think we can do something, He is liable to stand back and let us do it without His intervention.

There is a way of living that grows out of this truth, that requires death to our natural self. It is a way of life based, not on human abilities, but on supernatural grace that is given by God Himself. It is, simply, the life of faith – total reliance on God for everything.

Even though our abilities are God given, in the sense that we were born with them, all of them must go to

the cross before God can use them for His purpose in our lives. Dying to our natural strength and our natural abilities, we begin the adventure of experiencing the strength and power of God. The adventure begins at the point of total dependence on the Lord. It begins at the point where we know deep in our hearts that only He deserves the glory — for anything good that comes out of our lives!

Saul became Paul

That is how the apostle Paul began His life with God. He was rudely interrupted one day by Jesus as he went about His daily routine of harassing Christians. This bold, smart, proudly religious and educated man was struck to the ground by a laser-bright light and was temporarily blinded. Though naturally gifted and of a strong temperament, God was apprehending him for a life of

adventure with the Holy Spirit. That life would require power and wisdom far beyond His natural abilities. Paul had to be stripped of natural strength so he could get hooked up to the strength of God! God would later use his strong temperament and abilities in bringing the gospel to the nations, but first he had to be humbled by the glory of God!

The story is in Acts 9:

“All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master’s disciples, out for the kill. He went to the Chief Priest and got arrest warrants to take to the meeting places in Damascus so that if he found anyone there belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he could arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem.

“He set off. When he got to the outskirts of Damascus, he was suddenly dazed by a blinding flash of light.

'As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you out to get me?"

"He said, "Who are you, Master?"

"I am Jesus, the One you're hunting down. I want you to get up and enter the city. In the city you'll be told what to do next."

"His companions stood there dumb-struck—they could hear the sound, but couldn't see anyone—while Saul, picking himself up off the ground, found himself stone blind. They had to take him by the hand and lead him into Damascus. He continued blind for three days. He ate nothing, drank nothing.

"There was a disciple in Damascus by the name of Ananias. The Master spoke to him in a vision: "Ananias."

"Yes, Master?" he answered.

"Get up and go over to Straight Av-

enue. Ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus. His name is Saul. He's there praying. He has just had a dream in which he saw a man named Ananias enter the house and lay hands on him so he could see again."

'Ananias protested, "Master, you can't be serious. Everybody's talking about this man and the terrible things he's been doing, his reign of terror against your people in Jerusalem! And now he's shown up here with papers from the Chief Priest that give him license to do the same to us."

"But the Master said, "Don't argue. Go! I have picked him as my personal representative to Gentiles and kings and Jews. And now I'm about to show him what he's in for – the hard suffering that goes with his job."

"So Ananias went and found the house, placed his hands on blind Saul, and said, "Brother Saul, the

Master sent me, the same Jesus you saw on your way here. He sent me so you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” No sooner were the words out of his mouth than something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes—he could see again! He got to his feet, was baptized, and sat down with them to a hearty meal.

“Saul spent a few days getting acquainted with the Damascus disciples, but then went right to work, wasting no time, preaching in the meeting places that this Jesus was the Son of God. They were caught off guard by this and, not at all sure they could trust him, they kept saying, “Isn’t this the man who wreaked havoc in Jerusalem among the believers? And didn’t he come here to do the same thing—arrest us and drag us off to jail in Jerusalem for sentencing by the high priests?”

“But their suspicions didn’t slow Saul down for even a minute. His momentum was up now and he plowed straight into the opposition, disarming the Damascus Jews and trying to show them that this Jesus was the Messiah.

“After this had gone on quite a long time, some Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul got wind of it. They were watching the city gates around the clock so they could kill him. Then one night the disciples engineered his escape by lowering him over the wall in a basket.

“Back in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. They didn’t trust him one bit. Then Barnabas took him under his wing. He introduced him to the apostles and stood up for him, told them how Saul had seen and spoken to the Master on the Damascus Road and

how in Damascus itself he had laid his life on the line with his bold preaching in Jesus' name.

"After that he was accepted as one of them, going in and out of Jerusalem with no questions asked, uninhibited as he preached in the Master's name. But then he ran afoul of a group called Hellenists—he had been engaged in a running argument with them—who plotted his murder. When his friends learned of the plot, they got him out of town, took him to Caesarea, and then shipped him off to Tarsus.

"Things calmed down after that and the church had smooth sailing for a while. All over the country—Judea, Samaria, Galilee—the church grew. They were permeated with a deep sense of reverence for God. The Holy Spirit was with them, strengthening them. They prospered wonderfully."

That was Acts 9:1-31, The Message

This Saul, later known as Paul, certainly had a glorious conversion!

From a persecutor of the church to a lover of Jesus, he was destined to be an apostle to the nations. But as you will notice in this story, his first days as a believer were noted more for confrontation and trouble than for fruitfulness. He was strong and bold for sure, witnessing on the streets and confounding the Jews. He was courageous, but there is no record of anyone being saved in this account. The main result was trouble –which increased so much that there was a plot to kill him. His friends had to intervene and got him out of town. They sent him off to Tarsus, which was his hometown. In other words, they sent the great preacher home.!

Did you notice the result after they sent Paul home? “Things calmed

down after that and the church had smooth sailing for a while. All over the country...the church grew...the Holy Spirit was with them...they prospered wonderfully." They got along better WITHOUT Paul!

Paul spent the next few years in the deserts of Arabia. There a great change took place in him. His natural strength gave way to an even more awesome revelation of Jesus. His name even changed along the way. The name Saul means "demanding". The name Paul means "to pause, to check, to be made small". God changed his nature and his name! Those years brought him to an end of his natural strength, and to the beginning of his commission as an apostle of Christ. He was taken up into heaven and saw things he could not even utter! (2 Corinthians 12:4) What he did utter has come to us in the letters of Ephesians, Colossians,

and his other letters. They contain the grandest descriptions anywhere of the Lord Jesus Christ and His church.

Paul reports on the result of those desert years: "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this, I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He said to me 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

I Corinthians 12:7-10 NASB

Some say that Paul's thorn was sickness or disability. It is true that the word "weakness" is sometimes used for physical infirmity, but more times it is used for a variety of weaknesses and difficulties. A careful reading of these verses settles the issue. Paul describes his "thorn in the flesh", not as sickness but as "weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties, for Christ's sake." He also made it clear in the previous chapter: "Are they servants of Christ? — I speak as if insane — I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. revelations of the Lord.

I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness." 2 Corinthians 11 NASB

This is the account of his "thorn in the flesh", his "weakness". In keeping with the original prophecy that came through Ananias about how much Paul

would suffer for the gospel, it is not the account of a physically disabled man, but of someone in constant trouble – trouble stirred up repeatedly by the devil where ever he traveled to preach. This trouble which followed him everywhere - this was his thorn in the flesh. The continuous “insults, distresses, and persecutions for Christ’s sake” is what kept this naturally strong man from getting too bigheaded. He had too much trouble and too many enemies to get proud! He had to stay humble and dependent on God for everything, and could never expect a life of natural ease and comfort.

In the midst of the trouble that wouldn't stop, God brought a great understanding to Paul. It was this: God's own strength is brought to completion in our weakness. We don't need to feel strong to be strong. We don't need to have everything

go right to have victory. We don't need favorable circumstances to see a breakthrough. In fact, it's better that we have great need! It's better that we be completely dependent on God. It's better that we need God all the time, and that we never out-grow that need, for then the power of Christ can rest upon our lives. Once Paul saw this, he began to glory in his weaknesses, so that the strength and power of God would be in him, and so that God would be glorified over and over in his life!

His letters show that he ended up putting no more confidence in natural strengths and abilities. He wrote that all those things became like rubbish to him once he came to know the presence and power of Jesus!

"Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of

knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him." Philippians 3:8

The Message

He also wrote confidently concerning the end result of all his trouble:

"All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. We have plenty of hard times that come from following the Messiah, but no more so than the good times of his healing comfort—we get a full measure of that, too." 2 Cor: 1:3,4

Jacob became Israel

Another hard headed guy in the Bible was Jacob. Jacob was a conniver and manipulator through much of his life. He came out of the womb grabbing his twin brother Esau's heel. That's why he was named Jacob, which means "supplanter or heel holder". It proved to be his nature. He grabbed what he could get. He was called by God to a great destiny, but not because he was of great character. When his brother Esau came in from hunting and was hungry, Jacob the "deal maker" had a "deal" for Esau: "Sell me your birthright, and you can have the stew", he told him. Esau, not wise in the important things, let Jacob have his birthright as the first-born in exchange for one meal! Even though it was prophecy coming true; it did not justify Jacob's behavior. With a little help from his manipulative mother, he later stole Esau's

blessing from their father. He used a little hairy disguise to do it. Jacob was old and almost blind at the time and was deceived into giving Esau's blessing to Jacob. Now Jacob had the birthright and the blessing! Esau was furious. Jacob had to run for his life, fleeing to the old country where all the relatives lived.

Jacob went to see his relative Laban, another hard headed man. Jacob met his match in Laban. They deserved each other — they butted heads for twenty years. It was because of a woman that Jacob first got involved with Laban. He looked at his gorgeous daughter Rachel and it was love at first sight. He asked Laban for her, but on the marriage night Laban switched women on Jacob! Don't ask me how Jacob could not have known he was sleeping with the wrong woman. Unbridled passion, I guess. No lights in the tent, perhaps. I don't

know. Anyway, Jacob woke up with Leah instead of the ravishing beauty he thought he had married. Tricked by the old man, he was. The crafty father found a way to marry off the "not so pretty one"!

He made Jacob work seven more years in order to marry Rachel. It was the first of many deals between Jacob and Laban. Amazingly, God blessed Jacob and after twenty years he was a rich man. (See Genesis 29-31) When Jacob realized that his father-in-law Laban was about to cheat him again, he fled with his four women and twelve children.

Back in Israel, Jacob heard that Esau was coming to see him. He panicked, suspecting that Esau was coming to kill him. To appease him, he sent off all his goods and all his family in various detachments, hoping to disarm Esau's hatred with gifts. Jacob

stayed behind afraid, all alone the night before meeting Esau.

The angel of God showed up in the middle of Jacob's fearful night. Jacob did the only thing he ever knew to do: he got in a fight. He fought with him! They wrestled all night. The strange thing was that Jacob seemed to be actually winning this fight with the angel! So this divine being put Jacob's hip out of joint!

Would you keep fighting if your hip was dislocated? Jacob did. And he said to the angel: "I will not let you go unless you bless me!" What persistence! What desperation! After all the years with Laban Jacob was grasping for the right thing: he desperately needed God's blessings! Though flawed in his character, Jacob put high value on the things of God. The birthright and the blessing of his father were of high value for

sure, and he had fought for those. (not fairly, of course.) Now he was insisting on God blessing him, or he wouldn't let His angel go – even though the angel had dislocated his hip!

We can learn a great lesson from Jacob. Instead of wasting our energy fighting with people or grumbling in self pity, we need to do what he did. He got hold of God and held on until he got His blessing!

Is it possible to prevail with God? Jacob did. That night he was changed. God gave him a new nature and a new name. His natural strength was gone, and he had a new beginning.

There is an old saying: "God can't really use a person until he walks with a limp." Jacob was limping when he left his encounter with the angel of God. We all must come to a time of reckoning with God and with our

flesh, when our confidence in our natural abilities are broken. Once this has happened we "walk with a limp." We loose our arrogance, our naïve self confidence. We are ready to trust God. By ourselves, we may have prospered in certain ways like Jacob, but now we are finally desperate and humbled. Jacob had such a night of reckoning. He hung onto God until God changed him. The angel of the Lord said to him, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob (manipulator), but Israel (overcomer), for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Jacob was never the same again. He had entered a spiritual walk of maturity. He had begun to really trust God.

A final picture of Jacob is in Hebrews 11, which is God's "Faith Hall of Fame". It's amazing that Jacob ever got into that hall of fame, considering his beginnings. It's also amaz-

ing that we can be on the list as well, considering our own tendencies to be just like Jacob the manipulator!

“By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.” Hebrews 11:21

This verse pictures Jacob a very different man from the earlier years. His natural tendency to self-reliance and self promotion had finally given way to the life of faith. He is recorded there in Hebrews as “worshipping, leaning on his staff”. He’s no longer the dealmaker of the early years.

Jacob was now ready to do a very important thing, something that required Him to hear God and be in the Spirit. He was to affect the course of history by the words of his mouth. He blessed his grandsons – and if you look at the account in Genesis, you will see that he also blessed all his

sons. He prophesied over each of them. (Genesis 49) In perhaps an hour, in his fatherly priestly prophetic role, he set in motion the future of the whole nation of Israel.

This may have been his most important act in life: in his final hour, to bless his sons and grandsons. To speak the word of faith over them. He had finally become a man of the spirit, and his true ministry was released in the last moments of his life. It was as if all God's dealings in his life had led to this time, so that he would speak from the Spirit the revelation of God into the lives of those sons and grandsons.

He did it "as he was dying". Thinking of that I sometimes say, "Lord, I'm glad Jacob entered a life of the Spirit before he died. But...I would like to become a man of the Spirit BEFORE I am on my deathbed!"

Isaiah 27:6 says "In the days to come Jacob will take root, Israel blossom and sprout and they will fill the whole world with fruit." In every one of us is a Jacob that needs to take root – in other words, a manipulative self life that must die, so that the Israel in us – the overcoming life of faith in God – can blossom and bring forth fruit.

Abraham and Sarah become parents...

A son was promised by God to a couple of old timers named Abraham and Sarah. They never had children. The possibility of conceiving and giving birth at their age was so amazing to them that they both laughed at the prospect! So, the child of their old age was named Isaac – which means "laughter"! They were near one hundred years old when Isaac was born!

I wonder how many wonderful things God would like to do in our lives

- things that we might laugh at as unbelievable or crazy ideas! What God calls possible may seem impossible to our natural mind.

For Abraham and Sarah, the promise of a son came twenty five years before the child arrived. Even then, they felt like they were too old. So Sarah decided to help God out. She gave her maid Hagar to Abraham to conceive a child. (Abe didn't seem to resist the idea.) From that union came Ishmael, and the results are still being felt among nations. The declaration of Genesis 16:12 to Ishmael, that he would be at odds with everyone, is at the root of irreconcilable tensions in the Middle East. The lesson? Wait for God. Doing something in your own strength will only produce an "Ishmael" - which will end up more of a problem than a promise! Finally they learned to wait for God;

and at the right time, God opened Sarah's womb and Isaac came forth, the child of promise. God had done the impossible. His strength was made perfect in their weakness!

Isaac was the promised seed, but his birth was prophetic, pointing ahead to a future "seed of Abraham". In the fullness of time God would bring forth His own Son in an even more impossible situation. He would be born in a virgin's womb.

Nothing is impossible with God! The young virgin Mary received the supernatural life of Jesus within her by faith in God. In her inability, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary simply said, "Let it be done to me according to Your Word." It is the way of God in our lives. When you read God's Word or hear His voice, respond just like she did.

Many others were made strong...

So many more accounts could be told of God's strength and ability coming in the midst of man's weakness and inability. Let the writer of Hebrews sum it up:

"And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection..." Hebrews 11:32-35 NASB

And then there's us...

Do we sometimes back away from opportunities that God may put before us, thinking of them as impossible or impractical? Do we see ourselves lacking strength or are we unwilling to take a risk beyond our known abilities? If something is different than our normal life or an unexpected challenge, do we cancel ourselves out because we feel inadequate?

Our adequacy comes from God. The problem is, we think we should feel adequate if God has given us adequacy. If God makes us strong, shouldn't we feel strong?

The Bible says clearly, "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." (Eph. 6:10) In times past I assumed that this meant that I would become strong. Notice, it says "strong IN THE LORD...IN THE STRENGTH OF HIS MIGHT." Being

strong in the Lord is not the same as feeling strong. In fact, as Paul learned, when we feel weak we may actually be strong! (...and not know it!) Paul himself said it: "When I am weak I am strong". It is the Lord's strength coming in the very midst of our weakness.

Too often, we miss the opportunity to experience His strength, out of fear of being in a situation that we may not be able to handle. But it is in the middle of need that God comes. It is in the circumstance we can't handle that we experience His power and ability. There...in that place of our weakness and desperation, He loves to show Himself strong and able. If we are satisfied to live within the limit of man's possibilities, we will not see His glory revealed. If we reach out in faith and obedience for God to come, He will show His faithfulness, His strength, and His glory.

When teaching, I often ask "How many of you enjoy miracles?" Most raise their hands. Then I ask, "How many of you like to actually need a miracle? Most ponder this without response. To like miracles is universal. To be the one who needs and expects that miracle – that is not as enjoyable! What is it like before a miracle happens? What is it like before God intervenes? That situation can be described as being frightening and uncomfortable. It is like Israel at the Red Sea just before it parted. The Egyptians were behind them. They couldn't go back. They couldn't go forward. They couldn't do anything. But God said, "Stand still and see the salvation of God!" To stand still and wait for God is not easy. It is a time of feeling totally vulnerable and lacking the ability to do anything. It is a time for total trust in God. No one naturally likes to be in this place.

Only those who have become confident in God's character and His Word can abandon themselves to Him and wait for their miracle to come. Many give up too soon.

Most of us do not like to be in a place where only God can help. The doctor may say, "There is nothing we can do. Only God can help you now." That is needing a miracle. To hear "only God can help you now" is for many people the same as a death sentence. But that is where the life of faith takes root – in the circumstances where you have no other option but to trust God. Most of us do not become great people of faith because we want to, but because we have to. We have lost our options. It is time for us to lose all options but to trust God completely, to hear what He wants us to do, and to obey His voice. Even if it requires a "Red Sea" to divide in front of us!

Let's lose our options...

Courageous people – heroes — are usually ordinary people who have lost their options. When someone who has just done something heroic is interviewed, they rarely see themselves as heroes. They report that they saw someone in trouble and realized there was only one thing for them to do. They had no other alternative. They took heroic action because they saw only one choice – to do the right thing.

We may try to plan our lives in such a way to have every visible need met, every possibility planned for, every conceivable problem provided for. We can choose never to be in a situation we cannot control or to be in a place where we don't know what might happen. One sure result will be this: we will have very little adventure with God! We won't require

divine intervention, and so we'll never experience a miracle! We can try to avoid all trouble, avoid all risk, and avoid all those who live at risk. If so, we will find ourselves in a little safety "ghetto" – if such a place exists. We will live hiding from a world that God loves, a world for whom Jesus died.

God is looking for us to live outside our natural comfort zone (where we always feel we can handle things well). Not that we are to naively look for trouble, but if we listen to God, he may send us to a trouble spot! We were made to run to trouble, not away from it – so that we can be of help to those in need. We were not made to run away and hide. We were made to rescue the perishing and carry the light of Christ into the darkness to those who have no hope.

Are you hiding somewhere?

Let's come out of our holes...

Jonathan and his armor bearer were led by God to attack a small army of Philistines...all by themselves. (1 Samuel 14) Jonathan told his armor bearer, "If they say 'come here', then we'll know God has told us to go up and overtake them. If they say, 'stay where you are', we'll stay."

The enemy said "Come here!". So up went Jonathan and the armor bearer – two men against an army. But God had told them to go! The Philistines said, "Look! The Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have been hiding!"

Jonathan and his armor bearer defeated that whole army, just the two of them! Jonathan had said, "God is able to save by many, or by few". They came out of their hiding place and God empowered them to slay the enemy.

What hole have you been hiding in? Have you been shrinking back from obedience to His Word in some way? Have you retreated in fear of the unknown from a dream or vision, since you can't figure out how to do it, or you think yourself inadequate? Are you waiting for all your questions to be answered before you do anything? Some questions will have to wait for answering in heaven. Hey – if they were ALL answered, no faith would be needed at all!

Do you have a vision, but have run away from it because you don't think you have what it takes to do it? A vision is worth doing, not because you think you can do it, but because God thinks it is worth doing! If it is God, He is the one who provides what is necessary to do it!

A great man of faith, George Mueller of Bristol, England fed and housed

thousands of orphans with no visible financial support. He trusted God one day at a time. He said: "Where God guides, He provides."

Gideon comes out of hiding...

Israel was suffering repeated attacks from the Midianites. Gideon, like many of his fellowmen, was trying to survive in one way or another. One day Gideon was hiding in a wine press, beating out wheat so that the Midianites wouldn't steal it. The angel of the Lord approached him as he was beating the wheat:

"Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, "Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?" But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

The LORD looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" He said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." But the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."

Judges 6 NASB

That day God called Gideon to war. He called him to a challenge requiring courage and strength. He declared him a to be valiant warrior, and that

the Lord was with him. The angel spoke God's truth to him, the truth from heaven's point of view. That word became strength to Gideon. He finally rose to the challenge and led Israel to a great victory over the Midianites.

Perhaps you are hiding somewhere, just trying to get by, hoping the enemy will leave you alone. Gideon surely did not feel like a valiant warrior that day, nor did it seem that God was with him. But the angel brought the word of the Lord to him. He called him a valiant warrior. He declared the Lord to be with him.

Your strength is in His promise...

If God says something, it is so...it is so because he says it! All the promises of the Word are God's Word to you. Those words produce what they say, when you believe and obey what those words say! Those words

have the power, the strength of God inside of them. In God's declarations is the very energy of heaven. If God says you are his child, then you are. If He says He will never leave you or forsake you, then He won't.

He says nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He says He will provide all your needs according to His riches in glory. He says you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. He says you are a new creation, that old things are passed away, all things have become new.

God says you have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He says you have been raised up with Christ and made to sit together with Him in heavenly places. He says Christ has been made head over all things to the church. He says these things are so, therefore they

are the truth! Those words, those promises, those declarations from the throne of God are the source of your supernatural strength. Those covenant words of His are the most powerful force in the universe. When you understand them, when they become real to you, when they get inside of you, your weakness turns to strength! God's written Word is to you just like the angel's words to Gideon. His words are just like those words: "The Lord is with you, valiant warrior!" His declarations of who you are in Christ put spiritual muscle in you. Those words drive away the intimidation of your circumstances and your failures and put within you the results of the finished work of Jesus Christ. In God's Word to you is the power of the resurrection. His words put a backbone of steel in you. They are armor that cannot be penetrated. The Word of God...and your faith in that

Word...that is what makes you "strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might."!

Your strength is in the blood of Jesus...

The first kind of strength you need is to draw near to God, that you might receive His love, be changed by being close to Him, and learn to listen to Him. Sin, fear and shame causes us all to hide from God, just like Adam and Eve did in the garden after they had disobeyed God and eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God came into the garden, and unlike other days, he did not see His friend Adam. "Adam, where are you?", He said. Adam called from the bushes, "I was afraid...so I hid myself." Are you hiding yourself from God? The shame of our failures keeps us from being close to Him.

Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. But God did what was necessary: He made the first blood sacrifice, and clothed them Himself in the skins. This spoke of the blood of Jesus which would be later shed for you, so that God might clothe you in His righteousness. Now He gives you a clear invitation to come near to Him:

“And so, dear brothers, now we may walk right into the very Holy of Holies, where God is, because of the blood of Jesus. This is the fresh, new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us by tearing the curtain-his human body-to let us into the holy presence of God...let us go right in to God himself, with true hearts fully trusting him to receive us because we have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean...” Hebrews 10:19-22 The Living Bible

The blood of Jesus not only clothes you; it cleans you out in the very core of your being. It removes the legal ground for the devil to accuse you. You overcome (Revelation 12:11) by "the blood of the Lamb." Through the blood you are totally forgiven, and your sinful history is wiped out from the records of God. Through the blood you are made new. The life of the blood is the very life of Jesus, and His life is your life. It is a covenant of blood. The blood guarantees to you all that Jesus died for, all that He was raised for. This blood becomes your armor, your strength, your assurance of victory.

Your strength is in the Name of Jesus...

Because you are joined to the Lord through your faith in Christ, you have the legal right to use the name of Jesus. In fact, Colossians 3:17 says,

“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...” The power of Jesus is focused in His name. So is His holiness and everything about His person. The power of the person of Jesus is released in our lives through faith in His Name. “God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him a name which is above every Name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow...”
Philippians 2:9,10

Once you have come to the end of your own strength, and have been joined to Christ, the possibilities of life lived “in the Name of Jesus” can only be described as experiencing the life of Jesus Himself! Peter and John put this to the test after Pentecost as they spoke to the lame man at the temple. “In the name of Jesus the Nazarene – walk!”. The result was the same as if Jesus Himself had said the words. The man walked!

Your strength is in the Holy Spirit...

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...” Acts 1:8
The word “power” is “dunamis” from which we get the word dynamite!
It means “force, ability, strength, power, miracle, mighty work”! The dynamite of the Holy Spirit is what makes us “strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might”? “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit...” says the Lord of Hosts. The power of the Holy Spirit, comes on us as we open up to Him just like we received Jesus. It is by being freshly filled with the Spirit that our weakness turns to strength. Welcoming and yielding to the presence of the Holy Spirit becomes that habit of those who are “strong in the Lord”.

Your strength is in His command...

Spiritual strength is released to us

in the act of obedience to God. It is God's direction — God's command — that provides the strength. If He commands you, if He guides you, He provides all that is necessary right with the command that He gives you. It is His command that turns weakness into strength. Jesus commanded the man with the withered hand to "stretch forth your hand..." In obedience to that command the man did what he could not do — he stretched forth his hand! Peter and John met the lame man at the temple. They said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, RISE UP AND WALK!" His strength came as He took action! He walked and leaped in response to the command of Jesus Christ in the mouth of his disciples. In his utter weakness the man was made instantly strong by responding to the commanding word of the Lord!

Peter was in the boat. Jesus was walking on water. Peter cried out, "Lord, if it is You, COMMAND me to come to You on the water!" Impulsive? Yes. Foolish? Maybe not. It was the COMMAND OF JESUS that enabled Peter to do the impossible. He then took a step in obedience to that command, and in disobedience to natural laws. He walked on the water.

Every picture I have seen of this shows Peter sinking. This is man's view. Yes, Peter did begin to sink when He got his eyes off Jesus and on to the waves, but he cried out to Jesus. Jesus saved him, and THEY WALKED ON THE WATER BACK TO THE BOAT. Why don't artists instead paint Peter and Jesus walking on the water back to the boat?

To some, the message of that incident is to stay in the boat. To some the message is 'Help I am sinking!' But

the overriding message is that if Jesus tells you to walk on water, YOU CAN!

Remember the wedding at Cana that ran out of wine? (John 2) Jesus was there. Mary His mother said to the servants, "whatever He says to you, DO IT." (The company NIKE was not the first to say "Just do it!") Mary the mother of Jesus said it first. "Just do it!", she said. "Whatever he tells you, JUST DO IT."

They obeyed Jesus and took action. The result was a miracle.

I think the apostle Paul learned to like such situations after the Lord told Him that His strength is made perfect in weakness. I think Paul reveled in situations that required God to show Himself strong. I think He gloried in putting himself at risk in obedience to the direction of the Holy Spirit, because he knew that He would see the glory of God. I think he rejoiced at

the opportunity for God to make real and visible His power in the midst of human weakness. What do you revel in? What do you rejoice in?

It's time for you to put on God's strength!

God is looking for more Pauls. He's looking for other Peters willing to get out of the boat. He needs new Marys willing to receive the impossible with a response of "let it be done to me according to Your Word." He's looking for more Davids to face other Goliaths. He's needing another Abraham and Sarah to conceive – perhaps not just a physical baby – but conceive an impossible dream, a new vision, a child of promise for a new generation. He needs more Daniels available for anything including a lion's den, willing to be put in situations of vulnerability and weakness so that God can show Himself strong and faithful.

Will that Paul or that Mary or that Daniel be you? Will you be the one who will come out of your hole where you have been hiding and make yourself totally available to adventures with God? Something wonderful will happen when you do!

Remember: "God will demonstrate His power through you to the extent that you are weak". In your weakness, let Him be strong. It only takes a tiny "mustard seed" of faith to begin.

"Lord, I've lived too long in my own energy and strength. It hasn't produced anything glorious, and it hasn't ushered in your kingdom. I'm ready to step out in my weakness to do all that you tell me to do. It doesn't matter anymore if I feel ready, or strong enough, or smart enough, or rich enough. You are the Smart One. You are the Rich One. You are the

Strong One. I am ready for You to be my Riches, You to be my Wisdom, and You to be my Strength in all that You tell me to do. I place my confidence and trust in You. Here I am Lord. Send me.”