

*<sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. Acts 2:16-18*

I had a very vivid dream while I was away on vacation. I find those are often from the Lord to speak a message to our hearts. Since that day, I have found opportunities to share it with many people who found it to be a timely message of encouragement. I shared it on FakeBook and with men who I have mentored over the years. I felt prompted to write a sermon on it, so we are taking this Sunday away from our journey with Paul through 2 Corinthians to consider the Scriptures that underly the message. Whatever we think God is speaking to us should be confirmed with Scripture.

At one point in the dream, a man turned to me and looked me straight in the eyes. I can still picture his hazel eyes and the flecks of black in them. He was about six inches from my face. He said, "What you need is strength, courage, and endurance!" That was it. Then I woke up with that sentence imprinted on my mind. Here is a little of what the Bible says about those qualities. I never realized just how important those three words are throughout Scripture.

**Strength:** Next Sunday we will be in the passage in 2 Corinthians where Paul redefines what strength is. 2 Corinthians 12:10 *<sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* I do not want to dwell on this too much as it will be in the sermon next week, but I do want us to begin to consider this Biblical concept that is the opposite of how the world sees things. When we realize the truth that Jesus declared when He said that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5<sup>i</sup>), we are in touch with eternal reality. Oh, we can do all kinds of things, even things that appear to others to be good deeds, but nothing of any eternal worth, nothing of lasting value without Christ. It is a concept that changes the way we look at everything.

*<sup>10c</sup> And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*" Nehemiah 8:10c These words were spoken to the remnant that returned to Jerusalem and had finished building the wall around the city. They gathered together to hear Ezra read the Book of the Law. They were weeping and repenting because they realized they were doing the very things that caused their fathers to go into captivity. The Levites explained to the people what had been read in much the same way that a preacher elaborates from a passage of Scripture. They were convicted. But because they repented, God told them to celebrate, eat some rich food and drink some wine and share with people that did not have any. *And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*" (See Nehemiah 8:5-8<sup>ii</sup>) Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and source of spiritual strength.

Gratitude for God's forgiveness becomes a source of strength. Why? Because we know our enemies cannot prevail over us. As Jesus said, *<sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* Matthew 10:28 The worst man can do is send us to glory. When we lose our fear of

death, which is one of the freedoms we have in Christ, we are incredibly strengthened to stand for our faith. Through death Jesus destroyed the power of Satan who causes us to live in fear of death. <sup>14</sup> *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,* <sup>15</sup> *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.* Hebrews 2:14,15 Freedom from the enslavement of the fear of death is real strength.

Jesus also gives us the strength to break free from Satan's other enslavement tools such as addiction to whatever our weakness is. Jesus said that everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin (John 8:34<sup>iii</sup>). But He also said that knowing the truth sets us free (John 8:32<sup>iv</sup>). That is supernatural strength to overcome our weaknesses comes from the One who is truth incarnate (John 14:6<sup>v</sup>)!

In the Old Testament we had feats of physical strength, such as Samson and David's mighty men. But we also had supernatural strength demonstrated by those who trusted in the Lord to be their strength such as David with Goliath. The little shepherd boy was mocked by the gigantic warrior. Goliath said he would feed David's flesh to the birds and beasts. <sup>45</sup> *Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup> This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup> and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."* 1 Samuel 17:45-47 David mentioned the weapons Goliath trusted in but did not say a word about his slingshot. Instead, he said he was coming in the name of the Lord of the armies of heaven. He declared it was the LORD who would give him the victory. He said the LORD does not save with weapons. It is His battle. That is the voice of faith in God, and that is strength!

But of course, the ultimate display of strength was when Jesus went to the cross. It is ironic that they mocked Jesus by saying, <sup>43</sup> *He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'*" Matthew 27:43 And God did deliver Him - from death. Yes, Jesus trusted His Father and knew that despite what looked like weakness and utter defeat, He would rise as the victor over death and hell. Now that is strength! The Apostle Paul declared that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us (Ephesians 1:19,20<sup>vi</sup>). That is amazing strength that we must have faith to believe and apply to our lives.

When I heard the words "you need to be strong," I understood that to mean reliant upon the Lord with faith in what He can do no matter what the situation appears to be or how disappointed I am in the outcome. It is faith that trusts God and does not fear for what can man do to us!

**Courageous:** Courage comes from knowing you have that supernatural strength of the LORD with you. Three times in Deuteronomy 31 and four times in Joshua 1, we are told to be strong and courageous. Here are three of those verses: <sup>6</sup> *Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes*

*with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.*” Deuteronomy 31:6 <sup>7</sup> *Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.* Joshua 1:7 <sup>9</sup> *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*” Joshua 1:9 Courage is the opposite of being frightened. We cannot talk about courage without mentioning the 365 times in Scripture that we are told not to fear. **Fear is evidence of a lack of trust in God.** If we know Almighty God is with us, what do we have to fear?

Where does courage come from? <sup>14</sup> *Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!* Psalm 27:14 When we wait upon God and find His will, we can let our hearts take courage and press on because we know He goes before us. Courage is in most cases preceded by the command to be strong. When we find our strength in the Lord and wait for His direction, we will find the courage we need to do what He has commanded us to do.

Moses had to hear that God would be with him before he set out to do God’s will. The same was true with Joshua. And the same is true for us under the New Covenant. Jesus last words before His ascension were, *“I will be with you always, to the end of the age!”* Matthew 28:20b He promised never to leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5<sup>vii</sup>).

Those two conditions, knowing Jesus is with us and waiting to know His will, should be all we need to courageously go forward into whatever He asks us to do. Think of Joshua and the battle of Jericho. He had to meet the Commander of the Hosts, Jesus, before he could go forward (Joshua 5:13-15<sup>viii</sup>). Gideon had to hear, “I will be with you” and hear God’s plan before he attacked the Midianite hoard with just 300 men (Judges 6:15,16<sup>ix</sup>). Young Jeremiah had to hear it before he could stand and prophecy to rebellious Judah (Jeremiah 1:8,9<sup>x</sup>). The Apostle Paul needed to hear it when he first came to the wicked city of Corinth (Acts 18:9,10<sup>xi</sup>). When we lack courage, we need to hear it from God’s Word. God with us is a promise to everyone who is in Christ.

To be courageous we must wait on the Lord to know what His will is. His will is revealed in His Word. Sometimes that Word can be spoken to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we discern it as we read the Bible. The combination of knowing the Almighty is with us along with His direction to us should result in faith that is courageous. The outcome then belongs to the Lord. Whether we prevail in a situation or do not, we did what God desired and know He was with us. Sometimes the ultimate effects are not seen in the natural realm. We will only know the outcome in heaven.

**Endurance:** We can start off strong and courageous, but the battles can get our eyes off the fact that the battle is the LORD’s. Our old nature can demand that we have done enough. If we stop waiting on the Lord and renewing our strength, we take some hits and back off from the battle. That is why God spoke through Isaiah saying, <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. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.* <sup>29</sup> *He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.* <sup>30</sup> *Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;* <sup>31</sup> *but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with*

*wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40:28-31 That is how we endure. We wait on the Lord who renews our strength.

The Apostle Paul told his disciple Timothy, <sup>3</sup> *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.* 2 Timothy 2:3 (KJV) In this verse the word translated endure means to suffer with others, and the others would be our fellow soldiers in this spiritual battle we call life in this world. ESV translates it as “sharing in the suffering.” Everyone in this fallen world suffers in one way or another. Our suffering for the cause of Christ has eternal rewards (2 Timothy 2:12a<sup>xii</sup>).

<sup>13</sup> *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* Matthew 24:13 In this case, endure (*hypomeno*) means to bear up under a burden until your destination is reached. Recently the movie Jesus Revolution brought up the fact that the young man, Lonnie Frisby, who started the whole movement later backslid. However, before he died, he returned to the Lord. Chuck Smith was there as he was passing and witnessed his conviction to return to preaching the gospel. He suggested that this verse implies that those who are born-again may fall away, but that the Lord will bring them back before they pass from this life. Of course, it is better to never set down the burden of dying daily and serving our Lord and laying up treasure in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:31<sup>xiii</sup>; Matthew 6:19,20<sup>xiv</sup>).

<sup>19</sup> *By your endurance you will gain your lives.* Luke 21:19 This passage refers to the persecution in the last days as did the previous verse from Matthew. Jesus said that in that day the world will be persecuting believers and even putting them to death (John 16:2<sup>xv</sup>). But then Jesus said that not a hair of our head will perish. Followers of Jesus will be executed so how is it that not a hair will perish? Perish is to be lost. When we are in service to Christ, our earthly losses are not losses. They gain heavenly rewards. The doctrine of endurance is what I stated earlier that the born-again person will persevere to the end. They may stumble and be reconciled, but they will not fall away and die in that rebellious state.

<sup>3</sup> *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* <sup>4</sup> *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,* <sup>5</sup> *and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Romans 5:3-5 Endurance is not only evidence of our salvation, but also the process by which our character is conformed to the image of Christ. Enduring suffering and hardship cause us to lean upon the Lord and find His strength to be our sufficiency. Our faith grows, so that instead of feeling hopeless, we find hope in the promises of God (Romans 8:28<sup>xvi</sup>). We are confident that the Lord will see us through and that He will be glorified in the process. We trust that He is conforming us to His likeness (Romans 8:29<sup>xvii</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* <sup>5</sup> *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup> *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Romans 15:4-6 This passage also links endurance to the instruction from the Scriptures and to hope. Why would we have hope if we do not endure and cast aside our faith? It also states that hope comes through the

encouragement of Scriptures. These Scriptures are all telling us we need the Word and to dwell on the promises and encouragement in it.

Verse 5 calls God the God of endurance and encouragement. The theme of Scripture is that we are to be increasingly conformed to His likeness. That means we should be people of endurance and encouragement. Just think how God has endured with the sinfulness of mankind, not wishing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9<sup>xviii</sup>). That is how we should endure the suffering caused by sinful man in hopes of their salvation. Think of how He has encouraged you through Scriptures, and through fellow believers, through songs, and through the comfort of the Holy Spirit. That is how we are to be toward one another. And the result is that with united hearts we glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“We need to be strong, courageous, and endure!” These qualities are ours when we live the Great Command: <sup>37</sup> *And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* Matthew 22:37 If our hearts are set on Him, if we find our deepest inner need met in His love for us, we will live out this Great Commandment. He will give us the strength we need to face the opposition of the world. He will give us the courage to face the trials of life, and He will be to us the God of endurance and encouragement.

We are in different fields of work and different cultures, countries, and situations, but I know God is with us to strengthen and encourage every believer to do His will. And while we are living the Great Command, we are to remember that the Great Commission is to make disciples. That definitely includes our children, but also those whom God brings into our lives. I pray often for those my ministry touches, and a part of my prayers is that they fulfill 2 Timothy 2:2. <sup>2</sup> *and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* The daily battle we face is not just for our own spiritual maturity, but also to liberate the captives, to set them on the same glorious journey. God will bring people into your lives to share the wonder of what it means to belong to Jesus. Watch for those opportunities. Do not let them pass you by. Speak the words that God puts on your heart with His love and genuine concern.

Keep on keeping on. **We need to be strong, courageous, and endure.** Amen? The best is yet to come.

Questions:

- 1 What is Biblical strength?
- 2 How can the joy of the Lord be our strength?
- 3 What did David trust in for strength?
- 4 What was the ultimate display of strength?
- 5 How is strength and the Lord with us related to courage?
- 6 What are we missing when we fear?
- 7 What else is needed to have a courageous heart?
- 8 How can we endure? What produces endurance?
- 9 Why is it essential to endure?
- 10 How does this all start and to what end?



*<sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5,6*

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<sup>i</sup> **John 15:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

<sup>ii</sup> **Nehemiah 8:5-8 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

<sup>iii</sup> **John 8:34 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

<sup>iv</sup> **John 8:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

<sup>v</sup> **John 14:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

<sup>vi</sup> **Ephesians 1:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

<sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

<sup>vii</sup> **Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

<sup>viii</sup> **Joshua 5:13-15 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" <sup>14</sup> And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" <sup>15</sup> And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

<sup>ix</sup> **Judges 6:15-16 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." <sup>16</sup> And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

<sup>x</sup> **Jeremiah 1:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

<sup>xi</sup> **Acts 18:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

<sup>xii</sup> **2 Timothy 2:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12a</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him;

<sup>xiii</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!

<sup>xiv</sup> **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and

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steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>xv</sup> **John 16:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

<sup>xviii</sup> **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.