

The Supernatural Secret to Living Strong

I've been thinking about strength lately, mostly because I really need some. I've been praying about it a lot too. And I realized that I've been living under the assumption that at some point God will just zap me with strength so I can get busy doing all the things I think I need to do.

Yeah. I know—that's not how it works.

God doesn't say He will give us His strength so we can do our things without Him. He doesn't give us strength so we can march away from Him with our to-do list in hand, ready to do our stuff on our own.

He gives us strength so we can lean on Him as we live the life He has given us. So we can do all the things He has called us to in whatever place, circumstance or situation we find ourselves.

I do not speak because I have need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know both how to face humble circumstances and how to have abundance. Everywhere and in all things I have learned the secret, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11-13).

That passage gets applied to many situations as if God is going to give all the strength we need to accomplish our life to-do list, be who we want to be right now, make life happen the way we want it to.

It is more than that and maybe less than that in some ways.

I think it means no matter what circumstance I find myself in,

no matter how difficult or wonderful life is, God will give me the strength to live gracefully. To make the difficult but godly choices. To face temptations and not fall. To overcome the past so that I can live in the present with purpose and joy. To be content—not always longing for the perfect fix, the “thing” that is going to make everything better—the thing that is going to make *me* better.

I wonder if the phrase I utter the most is, “Lord, please give me strength.” Sometimes it’s said in a quiet whisper, sometimes through clenched teeth and even at times in a wail of desperation.

There are moments I feel I have not one ounce of strength left, and there are still so very many things to do: Children to love on, papers to grade, lessons to plan, homework to help with, dinners to make, lunches to pack, activities to drive to, laundry to fold, dishes to scrub and innumerable other things that cause weariness to crash over me like a tsunami.

I feel weary of parenting challenges such as my little girl whose will could bend steel or a tweenager who can’t resist just one more snarky comment. I find myself fearful that I will be completely unprepared to address any parenting challenges with any discernment.

There are days when I believe I have nothing left—not enough energy to make wise decisions and stick by them. No strength to keep moving forward when things just refuse to be resolved easily. No strength to live the life for Christ I so desperately want to live.

And I wonder, *Why do I still not feel strong?* It is one of those mysteries to me. How do I live strong in Christ when I feel so weak in myself?

I keep thinking that God is going to give me strength to live the life I want to live. I have to ask myself what is this life I want to live, and why do I feel that I’m not living it?

It is a vision I have. And I realized today that I want God to give me the strength to make it happen. And because I don't seem to be able to do that, I sometimes feel weak, ineffective and defeated. Maybe I have this strength thing all wrong. (I think that is a fair assumption at this point.)

So I decided to look up all the verses on strength and figure it out. The first one brought me to one of my favorite stories in the Old Testament. When things were so difficult during my husband's departure from our marriage, our family and our daily lives, this passage brought me so much comfort.

"The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (Ex. 15:2).

Moses makes it pretty clear that his strength is found in the Lord. This is in reference to the Lord saving the people of Israel at the Red Sea. I love that story. I know I have written about it before, but it always thrills me to remember the hopelessness of the situation and the amazing rescue of the Lord. The reality was that the Israelites were surrounded on every side—mountains to the right and left, a sea in front and the Egyptian army barreling down from behind. Not an ideal situation. Had the Lord saved them from slavery to place them in an impossible situation now? Heavens, no! He had already planned the glorious escape.

The mind-blowing thing for me was the east wind was blowing from across the sea, parting the water to them. Moses didn't raise his hands and see the water parting before him; the water parted from the opposite shore and came to them. God was already making a way out of the impossible before they knew they needed it.

I love our God. Impossible situations are never impossible for Him. So the strength Israel needed in that situation was the strength to trust that their God who had brought them out of

Egypt with hands full of provisions. Their God who had led by day and night with pillars of smoke and fire. Their God who had saved them would indeed save them again. The strength came from trusting the Lord.

The second time the Israelites crossed water—the Jordan River—into the Promised Land, the priests had to stick their toes in the overflowing water and stay there until the people all crossed safely to the other side. No easy task—it required bravery, trust and strength to stick toes in frothy, foaming, rushing while holding the Ark of the then to stand in the middle while the people crossed. Once everyone was on the other side, Joshua instructed a man from each of the 12 tribes to take a stone from the place where the priests' feet had stood. These stones, which must have been quite large because they had to carry them out on their shoulders, were to be a remembrance of what God had done.

Maybe I need some memorial stones to remind me of the strength the Lord has given me in the past, of the many miraculous and beautiful ways God has walked me through difficult things, of the times He has given me wisdom, discernment and grace to live well for Him. What would my memorial look like? Probably my book, *When Happily Ever After Shatters*, could be considered one because it is a true retelling of how God was with me throughout my husband's abandonment and our divorce. Maybe the answer is another book of the past several years as a single parent. (Would you pray with me about that one?)

I know, and I'm reminded by His Word, that the only way to tap into His strength is to be with Him.

"Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face continually" (1 Chron. 16:11).

I do not believe it is possible to live in the Lord's strength without living in His presence. Acknowledging Him. True strength is found in the presence of God. And of course, the

beauty of the Lord is that He chooses to stay with us, to live with us. It is part of the covenant. He truly does never leave us nor forsake us. I am reminded of all the times I found solace in His Word. I could not hold God's hands as I poured out my heart to Him, but I could open up that precious dog-eared book and find comfort in His words written for me.

"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17).

I almost took that verse and wrote only the first part because that was all I technically needed for what I want to convey. But I believe God's Word is richer for the context. Paul is sharing with Timothy that God was with him giving him strength in the life he was called to live. God had called Paul to many difficult things and He stood beside him and strengthened him in every the arduous ones. To say that Paul walked a challenging path is quite an , imprisonments, shipwrecks—and yet, he is the writer who says,

"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

God's will is for me to rejoice each step of this path. To continually be with Him. To be grateful, because He knows without a doubt that living a joy-filled life is living strong.

"For the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10c).

This seems to go back to what Paul said about finding the secret to living in any circumstances. Can I find joy even when things are decidedly different from what I'd have chosen?

Can I find joy in my weariness? Can I find joy in my life? The answer to those questions is yes. But I must ask myself, "Will I find joy?"

It's like that old teacher joke when a student asks, "Can I go to the bathroom?" and the teacher asks back, "I don't know, can you?" There is no question that I can do something about living joyfully. The tougher question is, "Will I?"

Will I seek strength in the Lord or continue to search for it in myself? Without the Lord, I do not have the strength I want to live well. There is no joy to be found in and of myself. All that I need is found in Him. Will I seek Him?

You shall seek Me and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will turn away your captivity and gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back into the place from where I caused you to be carried away captive. (Jer. 29:13-14).

I will find Him when I seek Him with *all* my heart. In looking up verses on seeking God, I was brought to Hebrews 11, the "By Faith" chapter. And I was reminded that most if not all of those precious people mentioned were called out of comfort. They were challenged to trust God. To believe that He could do immeasurably more than all they asked or imagined, in whatever circumstances they found themselves. To believe that their strength was in the Lord, not their abilities or their circumstances. Oh, to have that kind of faith-daily.

To believe that God is able to not just do the God-sized tasks, but the everyday pain in the rear overwhelming tasks of life as a single parent—as any parent, as any person for that matter. That is the blessing. That is the trusting. That is the strength.

"Strengthen the weak hands, and support the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, fear not'" (Isa. 35:3-4a).

There is an element to this strength thing of just doing it. Just believing God to be faithful to provide. I think sometimes I assume that strength is just going to pour over me like cool water on a hot day—reviving, energizing and giving me what I need to keep keeping on. But I believe strength is a decision to live for the Lord, to look beyond the struggle to the Savior.

I know, I know. “Sue, what do you mean? How do you look beyond the piles of laundry, the stacks of bills, the teetering towers of dishes? How do you hear His voice past the noise of children, the constant cell phone notifications, the emails that pile up in inboxes?”

I don’t mean this in a condescending or rude way at all, but I believe it is quite simple really. You take a moment and pray. You make time to read His Word. You do it. You seek Him. Believe me, no—believe Him. He says when you seek Him, you *will* find Him.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Live strong by living with Him. Make time for Him in the busyness. Listen to His love poured out for you in His Word, share your life with Him in prayer, and trust that He loves you relentlessly. Find strength in the joy of knowing Jesus.

Choose Him. Live strong. {eo}

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