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**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

When You Realize You're Weak, You Can Depend on God.

Monday, July 17, 2017

"My dad is stronger than your dad!"

Did you ever find yourself in a discussion like this when you were a kid?

I did ... all the time.

I can remember a particular instance in which the back-and-forth continued for quite some time. My friend and I were debating who could throw a football farther. It started with statements like "my dad can throw farther than your dad" and progressed to statements like "my dad can throw from here to *all the way over there!*" I'm not sure how the argument ended, though I do know that at some point my claim was that my dad could throw a football over **six apartment buildings and a mile high.**

Needless to say, we did not go ask our dads to compete in the *whose dad can throw a football the farthest* contest.

I know now that *obviously*, my dad could not have thrown a football a mile into the air. I also know that though I still have a healthy fear of my father (dad, you're reading this, right?), I understand his limitations.

As a kid, though, I *honestly* believed that my dad could throw a football a mile high. I believed he was stronger than any other dad. My child-like dependence on him is what - I think - every father wants from their child. I know that I want my kids to view me the same way.

I also know, however, that one day reality will settle in and my children will realize that I'm not the strongest guy in the world (if they don't already). They will *learn* this truth.

This past weekend, Dr. Calvin Sweeney, Pastor of the Tabernacle church, spoke about God's power. He taught us that **when you realize that God is your strength, you discover you are able to face all things.**

Genesis 32:24-30

"This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob." "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won." "Please tell me your

name," Jacob said. "Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."

As Calvin pointed out, Jacob had been a trickster his whole life (it's what his name means). He tricked Esau out of his birthright (Genesis 25:29-35) and tricked his dad out of blessing Esau (Genesis 27). At this point, we find Jacob – the trickster - alone.

Why was he alone?

He found out that his brother was approaching his location with 400 other men, so he sent his wives and children away and also sent ahead some gifts for Esau. He found himself alone, as Calvin told us, because he was relying on his strength to get himself out of this predicament.

He then begins to wrestle God. They wrestle all night and Jacob wouldn't stop, so God takes away an essential strength in wrestling: a strong hip. Jacob then finds himself holding on to God and relying on God's strength instead of his own.

We see here that, *in Jacob's weakness, God was his strength.*

Something very profound happens here. Jacob becomes a new person. Through the rest of the story, we learn three principles:

When we discover that God is my strength, I realize ...

I can face the guilt and shame of my past.

Jacob was no longer a trickster. He was the namesake for God's nation. He now could rely on God's strength instead of his own! We can know that no matter what we've done, no matter what our answer to the question "Who are you?" is, we are loved by God, and we have his strength that we can hold on to. Nothing from our past changes that.

We can face the uncertainty and challenges of our future.

Jacob, though facing an uncertain future with his brother, knew that he could face them because he was no longer relying on his own strength, but God's. When he saw Esau approaching, instead of hiding or trying to scheme, he went ahead to meet him - seemingly ready to meet whatever fate awaited him.

Finally, when we discover that God is our strength, we realize that

We can face the fear and loss of our present circumstances.

What did Jacob have to fear? Everything. His brother was stronger and had 400 men possibly ready to kill him. But, as previously noted, he went to Esau instead of hiding. Esau, instead of killing Jacob, met him with a kiss.

In our weakness, God is our strength.

Why do you think we struggle with living like God is our strength?

In what areas of your life do you need to admit weakness and then turn it over to God?

Prayer:

God, you are my strength. I know this. Sometimes, however, it can be difficult to live that out. I tend to depend on my own strength, which I know leads to bad places. Help me to rely on you. I need you. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

By Relying on God, We Can Fulfill Our Purpose.

Tuesday, July 18, 2017

They are not much to look at. Small, pearly, ridged, oval eggs, sitting on a soft, fragrant milkweed leaf. When they hatch, they are even less to look at: small, rice-sized, gray worms with a black head. They eat and eat and eat some more, and as they eat, they change. They go from looking like little gray worms to small yellow and black striped worms with tiny black antennae sticking out of their head and rear end. They eat again, but then stop moving and look like they are dead for 12-24 hours. They then slide out of their old skin and start eating again. They repeat this process three more times until they die to their old selves completely to become what they were created to be: a monarch butterfly.

Every summer I look forward to raising my butterflies. The first time I watched the life cycle unfold, I was blown away by how much these insects mirror the Christian life. They go through five instars in which they slide out of their old skin so they can continue to grow. The final shedding, changing from caterpillar to chrysalis, is gruesomely awesome. The caterpillar roams around to find a suitable place, hangs upside down in the "J" position for about 24 hours, and finally splits out of its skin and "dies" as a caterpillar once and for all. In about two weeks, they emerge vibrant and airborne.

The life of a Christian can be seen in this transformation. We live our lives and go about our business until something stops us in our tracks. Some painful event that we must overcome so we can grow in character - to become who we were created to be. This happens throughout our lives, and each time we don't think we can make it through the obstacle, but we do. And in making it through, we become more mature and more like Jesus. That is our purpose on this earth - to grow and mature and become like Jesus.

Contrary to the beliefs of our culture - and even many Christians, life is not just about us and our wishes and desires. We were created for a purpose and only in fulfilling that purpose can we become what we were meant to be. Just as the monarch caterpillar was not created to remain a small worm, we were not created to remain stagnant in our lives. The formation of our character is the whole purpose of all of our joys and sorrows, the purpose behind the creation of the world, the reason Christ had to suffer and die. According to MaClaren's Exposition of the Holy Scripture, "*God* means to make us like Himself, and so pleasing to Himself, and has no other end in all the varieties of His gifts and bestowments but only this, the production of character." We must go through many transformations and die to ourselves over and over again. Each time we die to ourselves, we can grow. And with each growth opportunity, we have the option to become more Christ-like in our character or fall deeper into our own sinful nature.

In our passage today, Paul is reflecting on his life as a Christian. He reminds us that becoming more like Christ should be our entire aim and purpose in this life. Everything we do, whether in work or play, should be refining our character, so we reflect Christ more clearly. Just as a master musician

or artist continually works toward his goal of becoming the best he can be, we must keep our eyes continually looking forward toward our prize: Christ-like character. We may be called fanatical or ridiculed for our dogged devotion to Christ, but it is worth it. As MacLaren so aptly put it, "Let sorrow and joy, and trade and profession, and study and business, and house and wife and children, and all home joys, be the means by which you may become like the Master who has died for this end, that we may become partakers of His holiness."

In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul writes:

¹³No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

This is the goal. However, we cannot do it on our own. We have to rely on God's strength. Without his strength, we are just doing good things. If our purpose is to become more like Jesus, only he – in his infinite power – can help us to do this.

What race are you running? Is your focus the prize of becoming more like Christ or is your prize more earthly?

What areas in your life do not line up with God's aim for your life? Is God's aim your aim? How can you begin to focus more on the prize for which you were designed?

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for creating me with the ability to grow and change through any situation. I pray that you use every situation in my life to help me become more like Christ until godly character is my sole aim. I pray for the grace to accept the good and the difficult as gifts from you to help me transform from what I am to what I was created to be. Amen.*

This post was written by Julie Mabus, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

God's Power is With You.

Wednesday, July 19, 2017

Have you ever broken the rules? Have you ever faced the consequences of those broken rules? Did anyone ever show mercy to you? Biblical times were no different. God punished the Jewish nation and showed them his displeasure, yet he had mercy on them and delivered them. This gives you background to what the prophets wrote in today's passage:

Isaiah 43:1-3

¹But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. ²When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. ³For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt as a ransom for your freedom; I gave Ethiopia and Seba in your place.

The one who formed you – God created all of us; he is all-powerful. He created everything in the universe, but there is something special about people - we were created in his image. He does not look at who we are now; he looks at who we are *meant* to be.

Do not be afraid – We are not to be afraid in any circumstance because God has redeemed us. Redeem means to buy something back and to restore it to its original intent. God allowed Jesus to be put to death so that his chosen people might be saved. As Christ followers, we are his chosen people. He loves us, and he can and will do anything for us.

Called you by name – Calling someone by name means that you have a personal relationship with them. God did not call all the nation; he called his followers because they were his.

Will not drown or burn up – There is such an incredible promise in this verse. The all-powerful God will be with us always. If you have fallen and are suffering in your current circumstances, he will be with you. He will never leave you alone or forsake you because you are his. If your current circumstances are going right, he is with you as well. In good times, we need to be grateful and thank him because of his power and grace.

For I am the Lord – God had entered into a formal covenant, or contract, with his people of Israel, which meant he would protect and defend them. He was the one true God. Other nations worshiped other gods that were not all-powerful and could not protect them. God called his people of Israel to reflect on what he had done. He was their deliverer; he had destroyed mighty nations to deliver them.

Your current circumstance or brokenness does not define who you are. God will love you through this because he is all-powerful. Are you going through anything where you can use the power of the Lord?

You have not out-sinned the grace of God. He is with you always in good times and bad. Do you have an intimate relationship with God, so he knows you by name?

It is important to reflect on your life to see how powerful God has been in every situation. Even if you think God has been silent, he is there.

Psalm 46:10 *“Be still, and know that I am God;”* He is always present, and he is our strength.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, please help me to focus on you. Grant me the wisdom to know that you will never leave my side. Give me courage through tough times and patience to know that I will rise up again. Thank you for your guiding light that strengthens me. Through Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.*

This post was written by Jennifer Macke, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

God is In Control of Everything. Even the NFL.

Thursday, July 20, 2017

In life, we all have made mistakes. We have said things that hurt others. We have done things we shouldn't have. We all fall short of God's perfect standard. Wouldn't it be nice to have our slate wiped clean and our guilt lifted from our shoulders - to have our past screw-ups put "out of sight?" That's the beauty of the message of the Bible. We can have that!

Today's scripture shows us that if we bring our past to Christ and admit our former failings honestly and wholeheartedly, he will expunge our record, so it is as if those things never occurred. And along with our sins goes our guilt. Jesus Christ is the only person with the power to give you that clear conscience and to remove that heavy weight of guilt you have been carrying around. Why? Because he already paid the penalty for our wrong doings, yours and mine alike. So why live life as if we are waiting for impending punishment? He already took our punishment. For crying out loud, he took on death ... and WON! Surely he has the power to free us from our guilt and our past.

The Bible talks about Jesus' power by reminding us that he set the stars and planets in place. It says he holds the wind in his fists. He can turn it loose or restrain it at his whim!

Do you need a modern-day example of God's power and control over any and everything? Tim Tebow was a quarterback for a short time in the NFL. He was known in college for writing scripture verses on his eye black as a witness. One verse he liked to wear was John 3:16. Once he got to the NFL, he was not allowed to continue this practice because of a rule that banned sending messages via eye-black. But our God is much bigger than the powers-that-be in the NFL. After one highly watched playoff game, upper management of the team for which Tebow played told him that he threw for 316 yards, averaging 31.6 yards per reception. The time of possession of his team was 31:06, and the ratings were 31.6 million people. Oh, and 90 million people Googled John 3:16 during the game. It's as if Jesus said, "Fine, I got this. Let's show the world who's really in control."

This Jesus, who created the universe with his fingers and controls the winds, and, yes, lords it over the NFL (pun intended), is the only being with the power to free you from your past and your guilt. So why are you holding on to it? Bring it to his feet, and drop it. He's got this!

Questions

Contrast the results of confessing your sins in verses 1, 2, and 5 (of what scripture reference?) with the consequences of holding on to your past and your guilt in verses 3 and 4.

What does life look like for those who trust God to lead them? (verses 8 and 10.)

Compare this to how the "senseless" person is described in verse 9.

Prayer

Before praying, contemplate verse 6 of today's scripture passage. If you want God to remove your guilt and forgive you for your prior wrongs, tell him all about your past. He already knows everything. You won't surprise or shock him. Ask him to forgive you and take the reins of your life from here on out. Ask for his help daily to live life as he would have you live it. Thank him for allowing you to access his immeasurable power.

This post was written by David Vernier, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

A Cancer Diagnosis and a Powerful God.

Friday, July 21, 2017

Sunday, August 10, 2014

I got ready for church that Sunday morning, thinking that we would go to CedarCreek Day and the Rib Off from there. My husband Mike wasn't feeling well, so he said, "Go on without me. I'll meet you at the Rec Center." So I left for church. As soon as the service was over, my phone rang, and it was my husband. "Come home right away. I've thrown up." So, I went home. Not only had he thrown up, but the bed was covered with what could only be blood. I called 911. We went to the hospital and in very short order got the diagnosis of cancer. What a dreadful disease! The big "C" strikes fear in everyone's heart, and all of us know someone, or many "someones," who are traveling that journey right now. We were afraid. By Tuesday morning, we had confirmation: diffuse large B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. There were six tumors in Mike's stomach, a mass behind his right kidney, and the cancer had metastasized to his spine. The doctors recommended a course of six chemotherapy treatments, one every three weeks.

August is not a good month for me. On August 8, 1997, my son died suddenly. The next year in August, a dear friend lost their near-term baby. And on August 10, 2014, my husband was diagnosed with cancer. I can only cling to the thought that God is with me.

Many people came to the hospital and prayed with us. Mike said that he felt that God wasn't done with him yet. He had just begun serving in the hospital visitation ministry, and his visits had impacted him, maybe more than those he visited. Although we were afraid, we felt that God had a plan and purpose, even for this.

We clung to the passage from Isaiah 43:1-5:

*But now this is what the Lord says-
He Who formed you, Jacob,
He Who formed you, Israel:
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; ...
Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you,*

*I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.;
Do not be afraid, for I am with you."*

So we entered into that season, and it was awful. There were days when I yelled at Mike, and I yelled at God. Mike lost his hair, lost a lot of weight, and just struggled through the days. But I don't think there was ever a time that we felt abandoned by God. He was our rock, the only thing we could count on. He was our strength when all our strength was gone. He was our confidence that he was in control of the outcome, that he had a plan and purpose, even for this. As so many of you know, in our broken world, he is our only hope.

Throughout that time, so many people asked how it was going and told us they were praying for us. I could only answer, "Thanks for your prayers! We're managing, with God's help. Everyone's got something going on in their lives. As I stand here, and Mike is in the infusion center, this place could collapse, I would be dead, and Mike would still be alive, with cancer. All we can do is trust in God and his goodness."

Psalm 139, one of my favorite psalms, says in verse 16b, "*all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.*" We knew God had it all worked out. If this was the way Mike was to end his life, then that is how it would be, but only because God had set that time. Nothing surprises him, not Mike's cancer, not the struggle we had for the next four months of chemo and sickness, not my impatience, nor his long suffering. In the strength God gave us, we made it through the treatment. December 24, 2014, the doctor told us Mike was in remission. Today, July 11, 2017, we went to see the doctor after a CT scan, and Mike is still in remission. We praise God!

We are painfully aware that not everyone's story looks like ours. We have many friends who are struggling with health issues, and they don't look forward to the same outcome. But they do if their trust and hope is in God. He is our aim. His plans *are* our future.

MercyMe, the Christian pop group, has a great song out called, "Even If." I encourage you to listen to it and the lead singer's story behind the song. The chorus goes:

"I know You're able and I know You can
Save through the fire with Your mighty hand,
But even if You don't
My hope is You alone.
I know the sorrow and I know the hurt
Would all go away if You just say the word
But even if you don't
My hope is You alone.

Every challenge we encounter in life gives us the opportunity to know more about him, about who he is and who he created us to be. There is never a reason to fear, even though we may be afraid – of a diagnosis, a situation, a broken relationship, or the loss of a job, status, or position. Our omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God is knowing, powerful and with us. He loves us so much; he gave his only son to redeem us.

In Romans 8:35, 37-39, Paul says,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword (or cancer)...? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him Who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That was, and is our hope. We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. Our trust, our hope, our confidence is in him, who is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise, now and forever!

How can you trust God today with the struggles you are currently having?

How can you praise him today for all he has brought you through?

Prayer: *Holy Father, you are my hope, my stronghold, my deliverer. Help me to trust you more, knowing that you love me and are at work in my life to make me more like your son. I submit to that work today. Have your way with me loving father! I trust you! Amen.*

This post was written by Lauri White, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.