

Promises
For
Now And Evermore

A Promise for Strength

Steve Flatt

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How strong are you? That's a pretty ambiguous question, isn't it? In fact you need more criteria and other questions answered before you can ever answer.

Do you mean in how many pounds can one bench press? Or, how many miles one can run without giving out. Maybe it doesn't deal with physical exertion. How much pain can one tolerate and retain consciousness? Are you talking about how many pressures in your life you can bear at any one time?

In one sense the question, how strong are you, is too broad a question to answer. But in another sense, it's a very easy question to answer. The answer is: not very strong.

I don't really care what criteria you're talking about. If you're talking about pounds to be lifted, about miles to be run, pain to be endured, hardships or burdens to be born, the best of us are not very strong.

Now when we act like we are or when we say we are strong, it's either our pride coming out, or else we're making those statements in light of or in comparison to some other people. I may say I'm stronger than he is, I'm stronger than she is or I may say I'm stronger than most of the people I know in a particular criteria. But let's get real.

In light of all the pounds that could be lifted, miles to be run, pain to endure in a lifetime, or burdens that need to be born, none of us are very strong. In fact we are not strong enough to get out of this world alive. Let "Father Time" work on you a few days and he'll show you just how "un-strong" you are. I need the strength of God to make it through life.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31)

It's so beautiful in its entirety, I hate to try and break it down and dissect it but there are four key facets.

1. **Who God is.** There was a little girl one time who was scared of going into a room because it was dark, and that was where her bed was, she needed to sleep there. Her parents finally told her, they said, "Now look honey, don't you be afraid to go in that room because God's there, and he won't leave you alone." Well, finally that gave her enough courage to slip into that dark room and to crawl up into bed. But she thought about that promise a little bit, and she said, "God if you are here, don't say anything because it will scare me to death." It would be me too, wouldn't it?

What about God? Who is God? Isaiah, the prophet, tells us, the three omni (meaning all or completely) characteristics of God:

a. "The Lord is the everlasting God." (verse 28) That tells us that he's omnipresent with respect to time. There's never been a time when he wasn't. There will never be a time when he isn't. In fact, time is absolutely nothing to God. He's not bound by it, he doesn't even measure things by it, and you and I can't even begin to comprehend that because everything we do is measured by time. God doesn't deal with time. God said, "I am that I am. I always have been, and I always will be."

Next the verse says, "He is the Creator of the ends of the earth..." There's never been a place that he wasn't. He put it there. There's never been a place that he isn't. Our God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. You don't leave his presence.

- b. He is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. Not only did he create the ends of the earth, but "He will not grow tired or weary..." His strength, his power, his energy, all of those things are absolutely limitless.
- c. He is omniscient. He knows absolutely everything "...and his understanding no one can fathom." Put simply, he knows it all. He knows everything. Nothing gets by him. He is absolutely all-wise.

You and I are most ill-equipped to embrace the concept of God. Like Moses, I so desperately want to look on his face. But also just like Moses, I have nowhere near a fraction of the capacity to do that.

The greatest thing about heaven in my humble estimation is that Christians are going to look on the face of God. I'm not all that excited about the street of gold. Oh, I might want to see it especially when Revelation said it would be as "transparent as glass" or the gates made out of pearl, but they are only figurative expressions to show the grandeur of Heaven. I am excited about the reunion I'll have with loved ones and saints who've gone on before, that grand reunion of all the redeemed.

The thing I want most of all from heaven is to be able to look on the face of God Almighty. You and I here cannot mentally embrace him, he is completely sovereign. He is transcendent. He is beyond comprehension. In fact, have you ever noticed in Scripture, the reaction of people who somehow were given that gift just to take a glimpse of God one way or the other?

God told Moses "You can't look on my face and live. I'm just going to put you there on the rock and let you view the backside." When Moses went up on the mountain and received the law, the Ten Commandments, he came down without seeing God face to face. But God spoke to him and when he came down from the mountain, his face was so radiant, everybody was afraid of him. He put a veil on because his presence literally glowed.

When Job was in the presence of God, and God was asking him questions face to face, Job bowed down on his face and said, "I am unworthy, how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth." (Job 40:4)

"I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound. Decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled." (Habakkuk 3:16) When Isaiah glanced into the throne room, instead of saying, "Hallelujah, isn't it great to see God." He said, "Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips." (Isaiah 6:5) John, the apostle, said "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17) There's nothing I want more than to see the face of God, but if I were to look upon it, it would kill me.

What I'm trying to get across is that we've got a God who is far beyond our comprehension. J. B. Phillips wrote a book many years ago entitled Your God is Too Small, and the title says it all. I want to tell you something about your view of God. It's too small. You say you don't even know how I view God. I don't care how you view God, it's too small. Take your view of God and multiply it a million times, it's still too small. What Isaiah wants to make sure that we understand is, if we are going to embrace this promise for strength, we need to understand that we have a God who is able to back it up.

2. Who we are. The second facet of the promise is trying to understand who we are. That's easier to do. "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." (Isaiah 40:29). Do you see those two "w" words that describe us: weary and weak. That's who we are.

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall.” The prophet wants to make sure that the young men who hear these words or read these words understand that principle. Do you know why he wanted to make sure of that? Because young men think they are invincible, and so do young women.

When I was between 18 and 25 years old my whole life was in front of me. Every now and then, one of my friends would have an accident, somebody would die, but that wasn't going to happen to me. I was invincible, and I was strong. Oh but God has a way of teaching us, doesn't he? I'm grateful that I've learned a lesson.

I was reminded of it the other day because I'm a runner. Let me rephrase that. I'm a very part-time runner. I hadn't run in about three weeks, and I began to feel a little guilty because my waistband began to get a little tight and my caloric intake was getting a little large. I decided I would catch up all in one day. I took out one afternoon and decided to run 5.2 miles. I walked 2.6 of it. I languished on that sofa grasping for breath for the next five hours. I thought back, there was a day when I could run five miles and come home and be ready to play basketball. That day is gone. We are weak and weary people. Don't let your pride tell you otherwise.

All right, we've got a God who's bigger, broader, stronger, more powerful, and wiser than we can imagine. We are just weak and weary people.

3. Lord will renew your strength. "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." Now the word, "wait," doesn't mean idleness. It doesn't mean just sitting around saying, "Okay God, zap me, hit me!" Don't misunderstand, there is a time to just “be still and know that I am God”. There's a time in all our frenzy and rat race when we do need to just be quiet and let God speak to us, meditate upon him, read his word, and pray to him. That's not really the context here.

The idea here is to wait upon the Lord which would be something like a cabinet member waiting upon the President of the

United States. What does it mean to wait upon him? It means to serve him, to tend to him, to help him. A better illustration would be a "waiter," in a fine restaurant. What does a waiter at a really nice restaurant do? Well if you're at his table, he is so focused on you, he is tending to you.

About a year ago, I took my wife out on our anniversary to this really, really nice restaurant. It set me back a bundle to be honest. It was a nicer place than we're accustomed to taking the family. In fact the kids didn't go with us. I was amazed because I couldn't get my water a half inch down, fingers were being snapped, and that water was refilled. I bet he refilled my water 20 times that night. When I spilled some bread crumbs in front of me, all of a sudden here he was with a little knife scraping it all off into a little plate. He picked my napkin up and put it right there over my lap. If I ever just so much as looked up he was waiting on me, total attention. Now listen, when I sense my weariness, my weakness, and my strength zapping, what do I do? I wait upon the Lord. My total attention is given to him. He is my focus. If I will wait upon him like that fellow waited upon me, he will "renew my strength."

I find that people who grow weary, discouraged and tired do one or two things generally, and I'm talking about Christian people. One thing is they forget God. Some Christians just forget him. They worry so much about their own zapped strength, their own apathy, and their own trials that they put God on a shelf and try to fix all this themselves. The other people in the midst of weariness, trial, and zapping of strength begin to focus upon the Lord. They really focus upon the Lord asking Him to "renew me," and He does.

4. What God does. "The Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (verse 31)

I love the illustration of the eagle, the most majestic of all birds, the one that soars higher than any others. It's not the first time God used that analogy. In Exodus 19:4, he was talking to the children of Israel who were now about to wander. He said, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you out on eagles' wings..." Part of the reason is for protection against prey. But part of the reason is because to assist in teaching an eaglet, a baby eagle, to fly. When the time comes for the little eagle chick to fly, it is nestled out of the nest and begins to free fall to see if those wings are ready to work. The mother eagle is peering with intent and an accurate eye. If her little eaglet can't begin to fly, the mother eagle swoops down and flies underneath and catches it on her back. If she can't get it on her back, she gets it with her beak and soars up again.

Folks, that's what our God does for us. When I wait upon him in my weariness and my weakness, he will watch me with that keen eye and as he sees me fall, he will swoop under me. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles" not because I'm strong, but because I've got a God who put the stars in their place, and who loved me enough to die for me.

I know you know the old song. "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief's to bear! What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer!" Listen to the third verse. "Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer? In his arms he'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there." That's true. That's the promise. That is indeed one of those precious promises that get us through this life. Adapted from Amazing Grace #1167 - Steve Flatt, July 10, 1994