

THE LORD OUR STRENGTH

Theodore L. Cuyler

The first lesson of childhood is human weakness. The earliest cry of the infant betrays it. At the other end of life we often see a pitiable dotage, such as I encountered lately in the case of a man who was once a luminary of the American pulpit, but now cannot remember the names of his own children. But the weakest side of humanity is its moral side. Colossal intellect is often found lodged in the same person with a conscience of mere pulp. For the sake of morality, I rejoice that Madame de Rémusat and Metternich have lately been stripping away the glamour that has hung around that stupendous embodiment of selfishness, Napoleon I. They show us the intellectual giant continually pushed over with a straw. The chief lesson of such a career as Napoleon's is to demonstrate what a contemptible creature man is the moment he cuts loose from God.

One of the chief purposes of our divine religion is to teach man where to find this indispensable element of strength. The Divine Word, coming from the very Maker of man, who knows us completely, declares that "he who trusteth in his own heart is a fool." We have no spiritual strength in ourselves. Just as our bodies derive all their strength from the food we eat, and every oak draws its strength from the surrounding earth and air, so our souls obtain all spiritual power from a source outside of us. Psalmist David, whose native weaknesses were deplorably conspicuous, was only strong when in alliance with God. His declaration is, "The Lord is my strength." This is the only strength which the Bible recognizes. Who are the Bible heroes? Men of genius, wits, orators, philosophers? No. They are the Enoch who walked with God, the Joseph who conquered sensual temptation because God was with him, the Elijah who stood like a granite pillar against the tides of idolatry, and the Daniel who never quailed at the lion's roar. Daniel gives us the secret of his strength in his three-times-a-day interviews with God. The Lord fed his inner soul as the subterranean springs feed a well and keep it full during summer droughts.

God's strength is "made perfect in our weakness." This means that the divine power is most conspicuous when our weakness is the most thoroughly felt. We have got first to be emptied of all self-conceit and self-confidence. A bucket cannot hold air and water at the same time. As the water comes in the air must go out. The meaning of some hard trials is to get the accursed spirit of self out of our hearts. When we have been emptied of self-trust, we are in the condition to be filled with might in the inner man by the power of the Holy Spirit. When Isaiah felt that he was but a child, and an unclean one at that, he received the touch of celestial fire. Peter had immense confidence in Peter when he boasted of his own strength; but after pride had got its fall, Peter is endued with power from on high, and then the apostle who was frightened by a servant-girl could face a Sanhedrim. A Christian must not only realize his own utter feebleness, but he must give up what worldlings rely on, and admit that "vain is the help of man."

That poor woman who had tried all the doctors in her neighborhood, and had only grown worse in body and poorer in purse, is a touching illustration of our invalid souls.

She despaired of human help, and came crouching to the feet of the Son of God. One touch of His garments sent a new tide of health through her veins. Contact with Christ brings currents of the divine power into our souls, so that we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. At the very outset of the spiritual life this divine strength becomes recognized. A Gough or a Sawyer testifies that he gained his victory over the bottle by the influx of a new principle and a new power into his heart. The essence of conversion with them was that the seven devils of lust for the cup were cast out, and Christ came in. This was a supernatural work, the very thing that modern scepticism hoots at; but a Bible which did not bring a supernatural element into weak and wicked humanity would not be worth the paper on which it is printed. If the Christ of Christianity cannot and does not endow a frail sinner with supernatural power to resist terrible temptations, then is Christianity a confessed imposture and delusion. But it does stand this very crucial test. Multitudes have given the triumphant testimony that, under sore pressure, the Lord stood with them and strengthened them. Their testimony has always been, "When I am weak, then am I strong" — that is, when I get emptied of self-trust Jesus comes in and strengthens me. Charles G. Finney has left us some wonderful experiences of the prodigious tides of power which poured into his soul and into his work when he humbled himself before God and put his own soul, like an empty vessel, under the divine power, until he became filled "unto all the fulness of God."

This is the real office of faith. It is simply the linking of our utter weakness to the omnipotence of Christ. We furnish weakness and He furnishes strength, and that makes the partnership. The baby furnishes a hungry little mouth, and the mother furnishes the nourishing milk. The mother is happy that she can give the full supply, and the rosy darling is happy as it draws in the sweet contentment. Beautiful picture of my poor weak, hungry soul resting on the bosom of the Infinite Love! There is no danger that the supply will ever give out, for my Lord, my Feeder, my Supporter, is constantly saying unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee." In this way we are strengthened with all might according to His glorious power. A happier translation of the sentence in I. Colossians would be, "inforced with all force." We have retained the word "reinforce" in the English language, and it is a pity that we have dropped the older word "inforce," for it describes exactly the impartation of the divine strength to a believer's soul.

Alas, how easily we run dry, and how constantly we need replenishment! Yesterday's breakfast will not feed me tomorrow. The Christian who tries to live on the experiences of last year were as insane as if he attempted to work on the food eaten a month ago. Lord, evermore give us this bread! They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, the waste shall constantly be repaired, and the new emergency shall be met with a fresh supply.

One great purpose in all afflictions is to bring us down to the everlasting arms. We had become presumptuous, and had made flesh our arm. We were trying to go alone, and then came a fall. Trouble, and even bereavement, may be a great blessing, if it sends us home to Jesus. A boy often forgets that he has a

home until a cut or a bruise sends him crying to his mother's side for the bandage or the medicine. God often strikes away our props to bring us down upon His mighty arms. What strength and peace it gives us to feel them underneath us! Far as we may sink, we cannot go farther down than those outstretched arms. There we stop, there we rest; and the everlasting arms not only sustain us, but carry us along, as on eagles' wings. Faith is just the clinging of my weak soul to the Omnipotent Jesus; its constant cry is:—

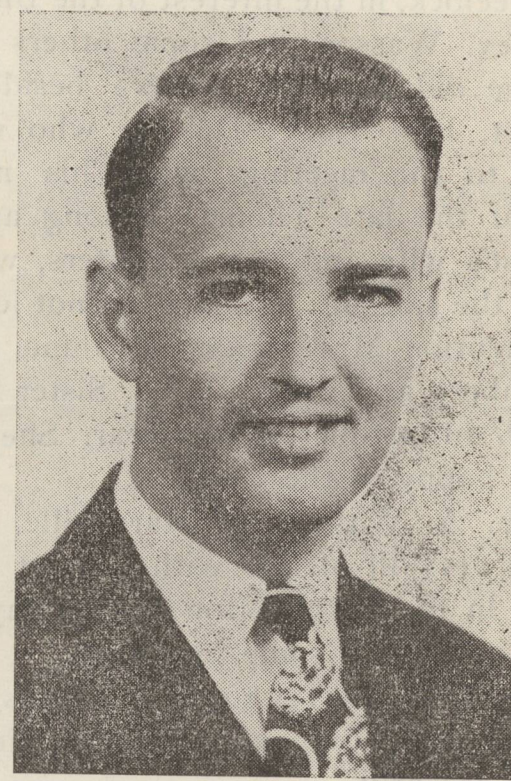
"I am weak, but Thou art mighty:
Hold me with Thy powerful hand."

To that hand let me cling with all the five fingers of my faith. It will never let me drop until it lands me in glory.

GOD'S LOVE!
(Ephesians 3:18-19)

By A. M. Quick

In breadth God's love is as a belt of gold
Encompassing the globe; its mighty length
Starts deep in His eternal purposes
And reaches to a bless'd eternity;
Its depth is measured by the deepest woe
Of hopeless human hearts defiled by sin;
And of its height—oh, who may tell, and how
Describe the indescribable? Above
The tow'ring peak of man's imaginings,
Beyond the farthest star his eye may scan
Or mighty instruments bring to his view,
To that most highest place of highest heav'n
Where glories infinite adorn Christ's throne:
Such is the height of God's great love to man!



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Mr. Stairs came to Bethany Bible College from Eastern Nazarene College, Wollaston, Massachusetts. While there he received his bachelor of arts degree and his bachelor of theology degree. Throughout college days Mr. Stairs was an honor student. In his fourth year of college he was selected as a member of "Who's Who in American Universities and Colleges," and upon graduating he was elected to the "Phi Delta Lambda," the national honor society of the Church of the Nazarene.

Mr. Stairs teaches out of the area of his own study — language, psychology, ethics, advanced theology and homiletics.