

## ***The Power of Weakness: Embracing the True Source of Strength***

by Dan Schaeffer, Discovery House: Grand Rapids, 2014. (24 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

### **1. God's Strength Is What Is Necessary.**

Dwight Moody said, "When God wants to move a mountain, He does not take a bar of iron, but He takes a little worm. The fact is, we have too much strength. We are not weak enough. It is not our strength that we want. One drop of God's strength is more than all the world." [page 9]

### **2. Greatest Weakness Becoming One's Greatest Strength.**

Author and businessman Harvey MacKay told the story of a ten-year-old boy named Mark who decided to study judo despite the fact that he had lost his left arm in an automobile accident.

Mark began his lessons with an aged Japanese Judo master and was doing well, but after three months had passed and he had only been taught one move, he questioned the master. "This is the only move you'll ever need to know," was the master's reply.

Perplexed, but trusting, Mark kept training, and several months later entered his first tournament. Surprising himself, Mark won the first two matches. The third match was more difficult, but soon his opponent became impatient and charges. Mark deftly used his one lone move to win the match.

He was now in the finals, but this time his opponent was much larger, stronger, and more experienced. Mark was nervous, and it was showing in the match. The referee, concerned for the boy's welfare, called a time-out. He was about to stop the seemingly imbalanced match when the master intervened and said, "Let him continue."

The match resumed and Mark's opponent made a critical mistake: he dropped his guard. Instantly, Mark used his move to pin his opponent, winning the match and the tournament.

On the way home, Mark reviewed all his matches and moves with his master, finally summoning the courage to ask the question that was foremost on his mind.

“How did I win the tournament with only one move?”

“You won for two reasons,” the judo master answered. “First, you’ve almost mastered one of the most difficult throws in all judo. And second, the only defense for that move is for your opponent to grab your left hand.” [pages 9-10]

### **3. Opportunity to Experience God’s Power.**

Personal weakness = opportunity to experience God’s power! [page 13]

### **4. God Rules.**

Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone (1 Chronicles 29:12). [page 18]

### **5. No One beside the Lord Our God.**

Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, “Lord, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You” (2 Chronicles 14:11). [page 18]

### **6. God’s Spirit.**

Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6). [page 19]

### **7. Survival by Doing the Opposite of the World.**

Years ago there was a movie called *The Poseidon Adventure*. In the movie, the ocean liner *SS Poseidon* encounters a terrible storm at sea and flips over, but because of the air trapped in the ship, it floats upside down. Most of the passengers who survive the initial onslaught get disoriented and try to escape by climbing the steps to the top deck. Unfortunately, the top deck is

now deep under water, and in trying to get to the top, they actually go down in the water and drown. Only those who do what is counterintuitive survive. A small group of people descend into the dark belly of the ship until they reach the hull. By “going down,” they reach the ocean’s surface. Rescuers finally hear them and they are saved.

Our world, which has chosen to disobey God and live life apart from Him, has been thrown upside down. To survive, we must go in the opposite direction. [page 21]

## **8. God Helps Weaklings Like You and Me.**

C.S. Lewis said, “You needn’t worry about not feeling brave. Our Lord didn’t—see the scene in Gethsemane. How thankful I am that when God became man He did not choose to become a man of iron nerves; that would not have helped weaklings like you and me nearly so much. [page 23]

## **9. The Faithful Few.**

David Ray said, “Throughout Scripture God affirms the few, the small, and the insignificant who live by faithfulness rather than forcefulness ... God is willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous people can be found. Christ is present where two or three gathers in His name. The widow’s mite is the largest gift. The boy with a few loaves and fish provides food for thousands. Jesus fed five thousand but only shared the lord’s Supper with the Twelve and was revealed to the two in Emmaus as they broke bread. The mustard seed, the pearl of great price, the leaven in the loaf, the lost sheep and coin, the sparrows, and the numbered hairs on a person’s head are all powerful signs that small can be theologically mighty. [page 23]

## **10. In My Weakness.**

Paul shares this thought: “If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness” (2 Corinthians 11:30). It suddenly makes this short sent far more powerful, doesn’t it?

Doug Nichols shares the following story of finding power through weakness. It is instructive because, like us, Doug was not expecting what God was going to do.

While serving with Operation Mobilization in India in 1967, tuberculosis forced me into a sanitarium for several months. I did not yet speak the language, but tried to give Christian literature written in their language to patients, doctors, and nurses. Everyone politely refused. I sensed many weren't happy about a rich American (to them all Americans are rich) being in a free, government-run sanitarium. (they didn't know I was just as broke as they were!)

The first few nights I woke around 2:00 a.m. coughing. One morning during my coughing spell, I noticed one of the older and sicker patients across the aisle trying to get out of bed. He would sit up on the edge of the bed trying to stand, but in weakness would fall back into bed. I didn't understand what he was trying to do. He finally fell back into bed exhausted. I heard him crying softly.

The next morning I realized what the man had been trying to do. He had been trying to get up and walk to the bathroom! The stench in our ward was awful. Other patients yelled insults at the man. Angry nurses moved him roughly from side to side as they cleaned up the mess. One nurse even slapped him. The old man curled into a ball and wept. The next night I again woke up coughing. I noticed the man across the aisle sit up and again try to stand. Like the night before, he fell back whimpering.

I don't like bad smells, and I didn't want to become involved, but I got out of bed and went over to him. When I touched his shoulder, his eyes opened wide with fear. I smiled, put my arms under him, and picked him up. He was very light due to old age and advanced TB. I carried him to the washroom with my arms under his armpits as he took care of himself. After he finished, I picked him up, and carried him back to bed. As I laid him down, he kissed me on the cheek, smiled, and said something I couldn't understand.

The next morning another patient woke me and handed me a steaming cup of tea. He motioned with his hands that he wanted a tract. As the sun rose, other patients approached and indicated they also wanted the booklets I had tried to distribute before. Throughout my day nurses, interns, and doctors asked for literature. Weeks later an evangelist who spoke the language visited me, and as he talked to others he discovered that several had put their trust in Christ as Savior as a result of reading the literature. What did it take to reach these people with the gospel? It wasn't health, the ability to speak the language, or a persuasive talk. I simply took a trip to the bathroom. [pages 57-59]

### **11. Expecting Strength.**

Philip Yancey, in his book *Reaching for the Invisible God*, writes, "People expect power from their God, not powerlessness, strength not weakness, largeness not smallness." [page 62]

### **12. Taking the Weak and Making Them Strong.**

Erwin Lutzer said, "God ... is not in the business of helping the humanly strong become stronger; rather he takes the weak and makes them strong in himself." [page 75]

### **13. When I Am Weak, Then Am I Strong.**

John Claypool was an Episcopalian priest whose young daughter suffered from leukemia. When she went into remission, everybody thought that God had possibly healed her. On an Easter Sunday morning, however, she went into a terrible recurrence. In his book *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, Claypool relates how for two weeks his daughter was wracked with pain, her eyes swollen shut. She asked him, "Daddy, did you talk to God about my leukemia?"

He said, "Yes, dear, we've been praying for you."

"Did you ask him how long the leukemia would last? What did God say?"

What do you say to your daughter when you can't help her and the heavens are silent? Emotionally and spiritually he was exhausted. A few hours later, she died.

The following Sunday morning, John Claypool stepped into the pulpit to preach. His text was Isaiah 40:31: "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" (NIV).

Dr. Claypool reminded his congregation that there are three stages of life. Sometimes we soar and fly like an eagle. We're on top of the world. Sometimes we run and don't grow weary. We just go through the routine. And sometimes it's all we can do to walk and not faint. Then he asked the congregation for their prayers and encouragement. In his lowest, his weakest moment, he preached perhaps his most influential sermon. It came at his darkest hour, and he could say, like Paul, "for when I am weak, then I am strong." [page 89]

#### **14. Failing in the Strong Point.**

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The thing we have to watch most of all is our strength, our strong point. We all tend to fail ultimately at our strong point." [page 95]

#### **15. Character Development.**

I have seen people who were very well off financially, or socially, or physically lose those resources. Yet, to a person, these people gained a maturity and Christlikeness that was missing from their lives before. They learned to trust their heavenly Father more because they had to, and trusting Him more led them to love Him more deeply as He met them in their time of deepest need. They hadn't been bad. This wasn't punishment. It was character development, and that's not always fun. [page 123]

#### **16. Being Transformed from Death to Life.**

A Christianity that recognizes no need of pruning in our lives is an ornamental Christianity. It's like a beautiful Christmas tree we cut down at

the Christmas tree farm. We bring it home, stick it in water, decorate it. It's charming and beautiful. It's also lifeless. All the decorations and lights in the world won't be able to stop the tree from eventually turning brown, brittle, ugly, and dangerous. It's bound to happen—because we are decoration a dead tree.

So much modern Christianity seems to be about decorating a dead tree as we seek to hang onto the very things that need to die—like greed, anger, jealousy, bitterness, gossip, pride, and lust. God wants to provide us the power to be transformed from death to life, from chasing the very things that bring heartache and ruin to pursuing the only things that bring true joy and fulfillment. [pages 128-129]

### **17. Making Us into the Image of God.**

When James actually writes is, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4).

James says that the end result of the trials that come our way will, if we allow them, make us perfect and complete. Now, who do you know who is perfect and complete? Wait ... that would be Jesus! God's purpose in our lives is not to make us miserable; it is to make us into the image of Jesus, who alone is perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. There is wisdom to be gained through the difficulties God brings our way—wisdom that comes no ... other ... way. [page 132]

### **18. No One Besides You.**

“Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, “Lord, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You (2 Chronicles 14:11).” [page 139]

## **19. Taking Our Eyes off Us.**

Embracing our weakness involves taking our eyes off our own skills, talents, and resources as well as our own liabilities, weaknesses, and past failures. None of those things has anything to do with the power of God in us, whether we feel strong and gifted or weak and helpless. Neither extreme is the proper position before God.

In our weakest moments God can deliver us in a mighty way, and in our strongest moments He can do far beyond what our human strength and giftedness can accomplish. However, we might feel, or whatever pose we might strike, we are weak and powerless before almighty God.

In Psalm 8:3-4 we read, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” In Psalm 103:14 we read, “For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.” [page 142]

## **20. Transformation to Eternal Glorious Life.**

One day I will suffer again from something, and ultimately die of it. And then my suffering will be over forever. God’s power will transform me from death and suffering into eternal glorious life with Him forever. [page 144]

## **21. Trusting God to Work.**

If God has called us to forgive someone and we feel we can’t, we can ask for His power in this and He will give it—but we still have to intend to forgive. If we are asking God to help us physically, that doesn’t mean we don’t keep our doctor’s appointment, but that we are trusting God to work through, and even beyond, our doctor. [page 145]

## **22. God’s Power in My Life.**

*Where should I seek God’s power in my life?* Here is just a short list to consider:



*In offering forgiveness –*

Ephesians 1:18-23, “<sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might <sup>20</sup> which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 4: 31-32, “<sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

*In overcoming criticalness, greed, and anger –*

Luke 6:35-37, “<sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

<sup>37</sup>“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

*In overcoming lust –*

2 Peter 1:4-6, “<sup>4</sup> For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. <sup>5</sup> Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness.”

*In lack of talent or giftedness for a task set before you -- (Moses, Paul)*

*For courage in place of fear –*

Hebrews 11:33-34, <sup>33</sup> who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”

*For provision and protection –*

2 Samuel 2:9, “He made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, even over all Israel.”

Psalms 33:16-19, “<sup>16</sup>The king is not saved by a mighty army; a warrior is not delivered by great strength. <sup>17</sup> A horse is a false hope for victory; nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength. <sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness, <sup>19</sup> To deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine.”

*In overcoming a terrible past – (Joseph).*

*In handicaps and disabilities –*

Romans 4:19-21, “<sup>19</sup> Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; <sup>20</sup> yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup> and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”

*In despair and depression –*

2 Corinthians 1:8-10, “<sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; <sup>9</sup> indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; <sup>10</sup> who delivered us from so great a peril of

death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us.”

*In trying to serve God and others –*

1 Peter 4:11, “<sup>11</sup>Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

*In moments of personal weakness –*

2 Chronicles 14:11, “<sup>11</sup>Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, “Lord, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You.”

*In protection from enemies –*

Psalms 44:6-8, “<sup>6</sup>For I will not trust in my bow, nor will my sword save me. <sup>7</sup>But You have saved us from our adversaries, and You have put to shame those who hate us. <sup>8</sup>In God we have boasted all day long, and we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah.”

Psalms 56:3-4, “<sup>3</sup>When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. <sup>4</sup>In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?”

*In our prayers –*

Romans 8:26, “<sup>26</sup>In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

*In empowering our witness –*

Acts 1:8, “<sup>8</sup> but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

1 Corinthians 1:18-19, “<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.  
<sup>19</sup> For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.”

*When exhausted –*

Isaiah 40:28-31, “<sup>28</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. <sup>30</sup> Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, <sup>31</sup> yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”

Ephesians 3:14-21, “<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup> to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

*With a difficult or seeming impossible project –*

Jeremiah 32:17, “<sup>17</sup> ‘Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You.’”

Ephesians 3:20, “<sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.”

*In preaching or teaching –*

1 Corinthians 2:4-5, “<sup>4</sup> and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

*For surviving and even conquering trials –*

1 Corinthians 4:7-10, “<sup>7</sup> For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? <sup>8</sup> You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. <sup>9</sup> For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. <sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.”

*For being fruitful and effective and holy before God –*

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, “<sup>11</sup> To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In short, you can seek God’s power in your life in any area where you need it. And, friend, you do need it. [page 147-148]

### **23. Demonstrating His Power in Our Weakness.**

We need to exchange power paradigms. Just begin to seek His power in the issues you are facing right now. Admit that you can’t fix it, can’t make it

better, and are tired of trying. Tell God you long to witness His power, not your own. Ask Him to demonstrate His power in your weakness. Ask Him to demonstrate His power in your strength. And see what you've been missing." [page 149]

## **24. God's Power in Helen Roseveare's Life.**

Dr. J.P. Moreland, in his book *Kingdom Triangle*, tells about the experience of a woman named Helen Roseveare, a physician from England who was serving as a medical missionary in Zaire, Africa. One particular night she had worked hard to help a woman in labor, but in spite of all she did, the woman died, leaving a premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. Helen knew it would be tough keeping the new baby alive, as they had no incubator, no electricity to run an incubator, and no special feeding facilities. Trying to make do, they tried a hot water bottle, but when they filled it burst. They had no other hot water bottles, so they put the baby close to the fire as they could and slept between the baby and the door to protect it from the cold night drafts.

The following noon, Helen went to have prayer with the orphanage children who liked to pray with her. She asked them to pray for the new born baby, explaining how difficult it was to keep the baby warm since the hot water bottle had broken. She also described the little two-year-old girl crying because her mother had died.

During prayer time, a ten-year old girl named Ruth prayer with the bluntness typical of children. "Please, God," she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God. The baby will be dead. So please send it this afternoon."

Helen gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, but Ruth wasn't done. "And while you are about it, would you please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know you really love her?"

Helen admitted, "I just did not believe that God could do this. The only way He could answer this prayer would be by sending a parcel from the

homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I live on the equator!”

Halfway through the afternoon, while Helen was teaching at the nurses’ training school, she received a message that a package had been delivered to her door. When she arrived home, she found a large parcel on her veranda!

“I felt tears pricking my eyes,” Helen said. “I sent for the orphanage children, and together we pulled off the string ... some thirty or forty eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. I lifted out brightly colored knitted jerseys, knitted bandages for leprosy patients, and a box of mixed raisins and sultanas. Then I put my hand in again and ... could it really be? Yes! ‘A brand-new rubber hot water bottle!’ I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He would.”

Ten-year-old Ruth rushed forward crying out, “If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!” Rummaging down to the bottom of the box she pulled out a small beautifully dressed dolly. “Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she’ll know that Jesus really loves her?” asked Ruth.

That package had been packed and mailed five months earlier by Helen’s former Sunday School class. It was God’s answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it “that afternoon.” In Isaiah 65:24 we read, “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” [pages 151-153]