

From POWERLESS to POWERFUL: Living a Stronger Christian Life

I heard an interesting statistic recently; did you know that 95% of all electric vehicles are still on the road? The other 5% have actually made it home!

Have you, like an out of power vehicle, ever felt depleted, worn out, powerless? How does that happen? How did all those good ideas and plans fall by the wayside? What happened to the vision for your life you once had? In spite of your love for Jesus, you may have asked, "Where did I go wrong?" This might relate to your career, your finances, your marriage, your former marriage, your friendships, your family, your health, your spiritual life.

Many of us resonate with this scripture: **"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Romans 7:18**

My paternal grandfather was a physically powerful man. He was a preacher, a farmer, a stonemason and a bricklayer. I remember he would grab both of my hands in one of his, hold me by the wrists, and then act like I wasn't trying to extricate myself from his grasp. He would gesture with his other hand as if nothing was happening and make a big show of having a conversation with some adult who was also in the room. I found this amusing at times but also extremely frustrating when it continued. It reminds me of times in my life where I was powerless and handcuffed in other ways. I wanted to be empowered in my relationships, my work, in other areas of life and resented feeling helpless and powerless.

Of course, that physical power my grandfather had diminished when he was diagnosed with cancer and eventually was so weak he could hardly lift his arm. The lasting power that stayed with him until his death was his love for God and his recognition that the Lord would walk with him through his death experience into his eternity with Jesus. My aunt told me that on his deathbed, moments before he died, he sat up and in a strong voice declared the beauty of what he was seeing and was thanking God.

Moments earlier he had, under his own physical power, been unable to even lift his head on his own to have a sip of water. He knew where his strength and power came from.

Psalm 121 reminds us in verses 1 and 2: **“I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? MY help comes from the LORD who made heaven and earth.”**

This is also another reminder that, like Paul said, “strength in made great in weakness.” When I admit I am powerless on my own, I am beginning to find the source of my true strength.

Until you and I admit that we are powerless and cannot help ourselves, we are stuck. We are like the guy with one foot nailed to the floor, walking in circles, pretending to be in control but going nowhere fast.

Let’s look at 5 things that contribute to and keep you stuck in powerlessness and some antidotes.

1. PRIDE

Have you ever noticed that pride and ignorance seem to be very much part of the same equation?

Proverbs 29:23 reminds us that **“One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly [humble] in spirit will obtain honour.”**

Have you ever refrained from asking for help, advice, or assistance because your pride said “I don’t want people to think I’m weak/stupid/helpless/etc.” I have.

When in your life have you needed physical help, or emotional support, or spiritual guidance but you’ve been too stubborn and prideful to reach out to others? Or do you think you’re not really worth helping? That’s kind of prideful too; God wants to help you; do you think you know better than the creator of the universe - the One who designed and sustains you?

By the way, if you think others should be mind readers and help you without you deigning to ask for help, give your head a shake; that’s your

pride and sense of self importance (**they should know!**) rearing its ugly head! And even Christians do that!

2. OLD REGRETS AND RESENTMENTS

The truth is each one of us has made mistakes; we have personal history. Each of us has sinned and done things that have hurt ourselves and others in some way. And all of us have been hurt by others either intentionally or inadvertently. Living in the past, being stuck in self recrimination and unforgiveness for ourselves or others is toxic to you and the people you love; it's detrimental to your spiritual walk and your relationship with Jesus.

Have you or someone you know done something that was sinful, vile, deceitful, harmful or all of the above and years later you're still harbouring guilt and shame about it? What does the Bible say? **"If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify/cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** 1 John 1:9

In Jeremiah 31 the prophet is sharing God's words about the forgiveness of sins. The Lord declares, **"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."** That same statement is echoed in the book of Hebrews, chapter 10.

There are many other passages in the Bible that remind us that when we confess and repent, God forgives us; it's as if our sins haven't happened because of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. The slate is wiped clean! The question then becomes, "If God has forgiven and removed this sin of the past or the resentment I've held, what right do I have to hold on to it?"

Sometimes our resentment and anger is towards another person. In Ephesians 4 we are reminded, **"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."**
-Ephesians 4:26-27

Have you ever done that - held resentment or anger towards another? Has that helped or hindered your spiritual health and your faith? Remember, it may also be pride that keeps you from letting this stuff go!

3. WORRY

Sometimes worry is a sign that we are focussing on the wrong things. Charles Spurgeon summed this up nicely more than a century ago. He said, ***“We are prone to engrave our trials in marble and write our blessings in sand.”***

“Well,” you might say, “I have lots of things to worry about, Jonathan. My family, my finances, health, the future, the government, work, legal issues, other people’s opinions, my living situation” the list goes on! Think of one thing you worry about frequently Now let’s all worry silently for 10 seconds. (Pause). Has anything changed - other than your blood pressure?

There’s this guy, a Christian - let’s call him Rob - who is single and thinking of pursuing a relationship. But Rob is a worrier so instead of going out and meeting other single people at his church he starts worrying and catastrophizing. He thinks, “Well, maybe I’ll meet a beautiful and talented and charming young woman and we will date, fall in love and get married. We’ll both have decent jobs and we might even buy a house or condo. But I know my luck; things will go great for a while but sooner or later there will be an economic downturn and I’ll lose my job and not be able to find a new one because of the high unemployment rates. Our marriage will be increasingly stressed and eventually we’ll have to sell the house; we’ll pay off the mortgage but because of the economic downturn we’ll owe more than the house is worth so what little savings we have left will be used up so we will have to move in with her parents. Eventually I’ll get depressed and she will get fed up and tell me it’s over and she wants a divorce. I’ll end up living in my car until I get arrested for vagrancy and they confiscate the car; they release me from jail and now I’m living on the street... just me and the dog. No, I don’t think I want a relationship!” By the way, Rob doesn’t even have a dog, a girlfriend, or a wife or a house! Talk about powerless!

Worry saps whatever personal energy and power God has given you and it will sabotage the work of the Holy Spirit flowing life and power through you.

In Philippians 4, Paul prescribes a wonderful solution for fear, anxiety and worry, something that will empower you with the strength the Holy Spirit makes available to each one of us who believes: **4 Rejoice in the Lord**

always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.

And what promise does doing this bring? “**The God of peace will be with you!**” Are you standing on that promise or do you discount it? (Don't go to “I'm different”; that's pride again.)

4. ISOLATION

A woman, Beth, is feeling stressed and lonely; she's been doing well with her habitual patterns, has been going to church and attending recovery meetings and sharing with the other women in her small group. She even has a support team. She's been eating healthily and has managed to reduce a few pounds. But for a few days, she has a setback at work, her car breaks down, and she gets a nasty text from a cranky family member. With discouraging thoughts in mind, on the way home from work she stops at grocery store and buys a lot of chocolate and junk food.. She goes home, turns the lights down low , turns off her phone, puts on some sad music, and eats herself into a stupor.

Isolation is a choice; what could Beth have done differently? If she would have picked up her phone, or sent a text or asked someone to pray with her or meet her for coffee, or gone to a church service,, she could have had some victory in this situation; instead, she **chose** to be powerless! God puts others in our lives but we must be willing to engage! Notice how pride is part of this as well. “**What will people say when I admit I'm having a bad day?**”

By the way, before we get all judgy about Beth's poor choices- for food, substitute drugs, pornography, gambling, socializing, social media, compulsive sports watching, etc....

Proverbs 18:1 **“Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgement.”**

Does this sound like anyone you know? Are you seeking out Christian friends who will encourage and challenge you? And as Kelly mentioned this morning, are you grafted in to the body - the church?

5. SEPARATION FROM GOD

I've shared this with some of you before. I spoke to a lovely man from this very church. I was curious about how he approached Bible reading and prayer. I asked him if when he read his Bible he did it out of duty or if there was an attempt to think of applications in his own life or in the church community. His reply, “Oh, I'm not much of a reader. I don't read the Bible. That's why I come to church.” I didn't know what to say.

Have you ever heard someone say, “God doesn't speak to me” or “I don't get a sense of God being available to me.” Or something similar. Maybe you've said or thought something like that yourself.

So here are some \$5 million questions for all of us. Do you spend as much time in Bible reading and prayer or reading good Christian books as you do watching sports, Netflix or Youtube or scanning social media? Does your “spare time” include everything else but your devotions? How committed are you to having a relationship with Jesus that is more than a nodding acquaintance? Have you used your stunted relationship with God as an emergency hotline: **911 Help Me Jesus?** And if you treated your human relationships like that, how healthy would they be?

The thing is, God will put up with this even when your family and friends wouldn't but that doesn't mean it's a good idea!

Do you want to experience real power? Then lean on the Lord. Develop a strong and deep relationship with him. Study scripture. Pray. Participate in a Bible study. Attend church even when you would rather stay home. Make these an A1 Priority as if your life depended on it, because it does!

2 Timothy 1:6-7 is contains a wonderful promise to think about in anticipation of a deepening relationship with your Lord and Saviour: **“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and good judgement.”**

In closing, remember these 5 mind numbing power suckers and their remedies! ***Working on these is a part of mind renewal!***

1. PRIDE- Humble yourself before the Lord and he will exalt you!
James 4:10

2. OLD REGRETS AND RESENTMENTS- Let all bitterness, anger and warmth, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. Ephesian 4:31-32

3. WORRY-Don't worry about anything but in prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God..... Philipians 4:6

4. ISOLATION- Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

5. SEPARATION FROM GOD - The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us. 1 John 3:24

Through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in you, you have been set free. Will you claim the power that comes through that freedom? Let's pray.