

BE STRONG IN THE LORD!

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An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10, by Dr Andrew Corbett

When you're feeling particularly weak and vulnerable, it doesn't ordinarily help to have someone tell you to *just get over it* or *snap out of it!* But on the surface of it, this most unhelpful counsel is precisely what the Bible seems to offer when it instructs us to *be strong in the Lord*.

¶ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Ephesians 6:10

I think Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is perhaps one of the most profound pieces of New Testament literature. No other church in New Testament times draws as much attention as the Ephesian church. While it is often a dangerous thing for a reader to confuse "to" and "for" regarding the intended audiences for a Biblical book (modern readers often naively claim that a particular Biblical book was written *to* them), there can no doubt that the great apostle intended for this Epistle to be read by an audience much broader than the addressed recipients. We know this because we have found ancient manuscript evidence for this Epistle actually being a type of 'circular' epistle (it's contents would have also been addressed to the other churches in the region as well). Thus, we can be confident that while this epistle was not written *to* us it was most certainly written *for* us.

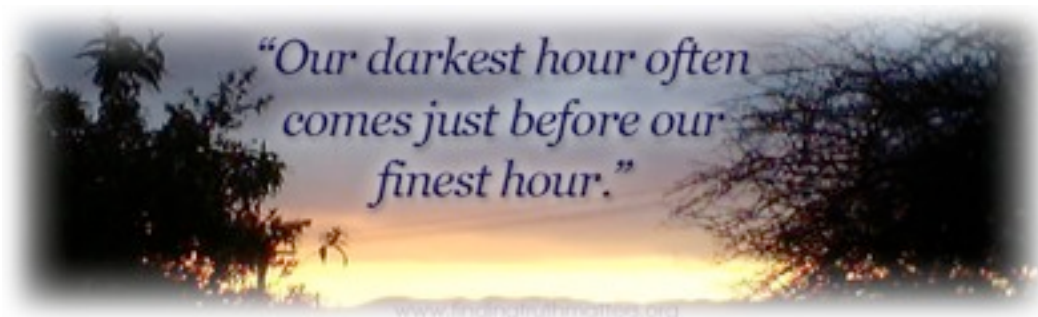
"Be strong in the Lord" sounds like something we are called to do. It sounds like a choice. It sounds like the apostle thought that we could do something within us to draw strength from God. As I study the art of leadership I find that all of the great leaders and teachers on leadership were united about the one common ingredient absolutely necessary for someone to be a leader worth following: *character strength*. That ability to always bounce back when the cause is right and just. The disposition which causes correction from

others to be seen as a gift not as an attack. The sense of responsibility borne that needs no overseer to work. Character, inner strength. *Be strong in the Lord* speaks directly into the recesses of our soul's identity - *our character*.

I wonder when the apostle penned these words that he was also speaking to himself. After all, the human spirit can sink quite low when chained and manacled in a prison cell! I wonder too if he pondered the life of King David who is described as having *strengthened himself in God*?

And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

1Sam. 30:6



What we know, and what David didn't know at the time of this verse, was that although all the people were bitter toward him, and he was almost overcome with distress, he was on the verge of being crowned king! Often our darkest hour comes just before our finest hour. Speaking to this text, Matthew Henry wrote-

Great faith must expect such severe trials. But observe that David was brought thus low, only just before he was raised to the throne."

Matthew Henry

HOW TO STRENGTHEN YOURSELF IN GOD

God has made available *grace-strength* to His children. We sometimes think that grace is only about salvation. But it is actually God's *underserved provision for our needs*.

This not only includes in our salvation, it includes our sustenance. And there are times when we particularly need God's sustaining strength. But the way that He has ordained for His sustaining strength to be mediated to His children is very often *counter-intuitive*. That is, it seems that we have to do the opposite of the very thing we are wanting to do. To

move forward sometimes God calls us to *wait*. To grow rich sometimes God call us to give everything away. To be refreshed sometimes God calls us to keep working.

When we are particularly weak and vulnerable, we tend to withdraw from others. But one of the most counter-intuitive things that God calls us to do in such times is to immerse ourselves in others. In fact, Peter when writing to a buffeted and persecuted church, reminds them that the grace of God actually comes in many and varied forms, through our brothers and sisters in Christ who are called to steward God's grace to one another.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

1Peter 4:10

Similarly, the apostle Paul told the Romans that God's strengthening grace came through the Gospel, but particularly through the Gospel being preached. This is why attending a good Bible-based, God and Gospel honouring church is good and strengthening for your soul.

¶ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages

Romans 16:25

This can be very counter-intuitive when on a Sunday morning you are tired and weighed down. It's easier to stay in bed than to get out of bed and get to church for worship and instruction in the Word. But it is the latter that God has ordained for our continual strengthening. Conversely, bad, irrational, exegetically irresponsible preaching can actually drain our souls of strength.

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

Hebrews 13:9

Based on the above verse, we can see God instructing His children not to seek strength or comfort from food or drink (and therefore by principle, *or drugs*), but to look for strength from the sound teaching of God's Word. God mediates His grace *to* His children *through* His children but especially through the sacred gathering of God's children.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:16

This is why God imparts strength to His people through the sacred assembly where the Word of God is taught “richly” in “wisdom” accompanied by thoughtful “hymns” and “spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16). If you want your spiritual strength continually topped up, be committed to your local church and “do not neglect to gather together” (Hebrews 10:25).

HOW TO DEplete YOUR STRENGTH

If you want to deplete your strength, do the following (or if you want to be spiritually strong, don't do the following) -

1. Stop asking God for help.
2. Turn to food or drink for comfort or strength.
3. Use human wisdom to solve your problems, rather than what may appear to be “counter-intuitive” Biblical wisdom. Human wisdom may reason that sleeping-in on Sunday mornings would be more beneficial than ‘sacrificing’ your sleep to go to church.
4. Cease living in a lifestyle of surrender to God (if you want to be spiritually weak do not pray *Lord I surrender to You. Have Your way in my life even when I resist. Break those things out of my life that do not please You. Help me to only live for You.*)
5. Live independently by refusing to fellowship with or receive help from others.
6. Refuse to take direction from those that God has placed in authority over you.
7. Neglect your spouse and don't make time for your children.

This is not merely a list of opinions. Each of these sources of strength are addressed by the apostle in his epistle to the Ephesians. Before he concludes with his, “*Finally*”, where he then tells his readers to “*be strong in the Lord*” (Eph. 6:10), he has already discussed the importance of their relationship with God (Ephesians 1); their relationship with people different to themselves (Ephesians 2); their relationship with those within the church (Ephesians 3); their relationship with those in authority over them (Ephesians 4); their relationship with their spouse (Ephesians 5); and their relationship with their children/parents (Ephesians 6). God has designed for His children to receive the grace of His strength mediated through these key relationships. If you consider that the armour and weapons which Paul lists following his injunction to be strong in the Lord, they are really a summary of how these relationships strengthen us. So, *be strong in the Lord* results when we develop our character to know where we can always find God's grace which we will discover comes gift wrapped in the form of people.

Andrew Corbett
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