

Experience, STRENGTH, and Hope

When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me (Acts 1:8 NLT).

We come to support group meetings to share our experience, strength, and hope with others in order to carry a message to them and to help us continue in our journey with God in recovery. What strength do we have to offer? What's working for us? What have we seen work in others? What secrets do old-timers have that can help us get strong and stay strong?

Many of us come into recovery physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually weak. We're running on empty and it feels more like limping along than running at all. We need to get strong. We have diseases and wounds that need healing. We are suffering from poor eating habits and need proper nutrition. Our minds are confused and worn out. Our emotions are ultra-sensitive. The first task of detoxing and recovery is to deal with enough of these conditions so we can hear clearly and begin to do something with a message of strength and hope. In the beginning we're too weak to fight and too tired to try to get life together on our own so for a while we are willing to learn from the experience, strength and hope of others. If they tell us to do it, we're willing. We sleep, we eat, we talk, we read, we pray, we write, we exercise, we go to meetings, we serve. We begin to look better and feel stronger.

Many people begin moving towards relapse right at this point because we now have the energy to do whatever we decide we want to do. The temptation to fix life as we've always fixed it will begin to call out to us right here. The desire to run rather than to face the horrors of our past will grow now that we have the strength to move. The voice in our heart will grow louder that reminds us that we know what to do to get well.

If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. (1 Corinthians 10:12, Romans 7:18 NLT)

It's at this point in our recovery of renewed physical energy that we have to be very careful to correctly identify the source of our strength thus far and what is needed for the rebuilding journey ahead. We are powerless on our own and we need a power greater than ourselves. Based on this information we need to maintain the habit of turning our will in all circumstances to the care of God. Every day, throughout the day, for the rest of our lives, it is this affirmation of powerlessness and action of surrender to God that will be the source of our strength.

[God] gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. Even youths will become

exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31 NLT)

No matter how strong we feel, it's not enough to bring us through to sustained recovery. We will tire out and we will give up the struggle if we think any physical and mental strength we feel today is enough for the long haul. Strength is a gift. Strength is the product of an ongoing relationship with God. Strength is the result of trusting God, waiting for God to act, and following God's voice and plans. This is what gives us joy, keeps us safe, what helps us understand and respond well to events in our day

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my victory ... God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble ... Christ is the mighty power of God and the wonderful wisdom of God. This "foolish" plan of God is far wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is far stronger than the greatest of human strength (Exodus 15:2, Psalm 4:1, 1 Corinthians 1:24b-25 NLT)

Jesus clearly taught us that our only real strength comes when we stick with him. He used a gardening picture to help us understand. ***"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.*** (John 15:5-6 NLT)

Outside of God, we can't even maintain the desire to do what is right let alone find the strength to act on what we know we should do. ***For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.***

(Philippians 2:13 NLT) It is the experience of those who have walked with God that God pours out power at the very times we feel weak and that's what actually makes us strong. God says: ***"My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness."*** (2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT) As we ask for and receive God's grace and power, then we are able to say, ***"For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."*** (Philippians 4:13 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I welcoming God's strength into my experience today?
2. Where is my own strength making me vulnerable today?
3. What action do I need to take to live better in God's power today?