

Dear Friend,

I bring Christmas greetings to you, mighty warrior!

Right now you're thinking, "Wow. Did this ever get mailed to the wrong address! If they only knew who and what I am."

Well, perhaps I know more than you think. When God is about to do something mighty, He characteristically searches for vessels who know their own weaknesses. Those who are strong in themselves always find that battles which can be won only in the Spirit are beyond the scope of their highest abilities. That's what this newsletter is all about.

Why don't you give yourself a great Christmas present this year by simply believing what it will speak to your heart. Remember today that even Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). That was on the day of the greatest victory humankind has ever known! It was in His weakness that hell bent its knee and we were released from its grasp. And it is through your weakness that others will find their Savior and freedom in the days ahead.

A very, very Merry Christmas to you, indeed!

With you in weakness,

Pastor Carter Conlon

THE NECESSITY OF WEAKNESS

by Carter Conlon

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

By his own testimony, the Apostle Paul stood among the people in weakness. Yet it is arguable that prior to meeting Christ, in his own natural ability he had stood as the strongest among his peers. He described his former life as very strict—taught by the best minds of his day, bypassing others who were striving to advance themselves religiously in the same way that he was (see Acts 22:3, Galatians 1:14). Paul even said of himself, "Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:6). What a phenomenal boast on his part! It would be the same as somebody without Christ today claiming, "To the best of my knowledge, I have thought no evil, spoken no evil, and seen no evil. I have done everything the way I believe God would have me do it."

Before his conversion, Paul obviously was very determined,

strong-willed, and successful. And so we ask ourselves the question: Why, then, when adding Christ to all of this, would he now consider himself weak? And why would he prefer weakness to his former state?

■ BOASTING IN WEAKNESS

In the book of Second Corinthians, Paul speaks of a time when he was caught up to the third heaven—a place where he heard utterances that he could not even put into words (see 2 Corinthians 12:2-4). "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians 12:7). In other words, lest it become all about me; lest I become proud in my own strength. After all, that is the human condition. The fallen nature of man wants to boast in itself.

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The Bible tells us that this thorn in his flesh was so grievous to Paul that he pleaded with God to

take it away. Yet the Lord replied, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I [Paul] will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Paul learned to boast in everything that was allowed to come into his life that kept him entirely dependent upon God. At one point, he even testified that *“when we were in Asia we were pressed above strength to the point that we despaired of life”* (2 Corinthians 1:8). In other words, we thought we were not going to make it. It was so difficult!

Perhaps life feels just like that for you these days. It is hard going to the same job and listening to the same gossiping voices all around you. It is hard coming home to the same empty apartment or fighting for the semblance of family that you have left. Everything is just so difficult. But that is why we must learn, as Paul did, that there is a strength available in Christ that human intellect or effort cannot even begin to touch. It is not available to the proud, for *“God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble”* (see James 4:6). If you are ever going to be used of God, you must first discover this truth.

■ NO MATCH FOR THE ENEMY

Unfortunately, humankind typically despises weakness. Throughout history, we see the tendency to shun the simplicity of faith and gravitate toward something more tangible and self-satisfying.

For example, we see that in the Old Testament, God Himself was leading the Israelites. Nevertheless, the people got tired of walking in

the simplicity of faith and wanted to follow something more visible. They wanted something human that they could take pride in, so they went to Samuel and essentially said, *“We want a king like the other nations around us. We have had the divine, but we want human leadership now. We want to worship something that is visible”* (see 1 Samuel 8:4–5).

Whenever it looks as if the people of God are up against an enemy they cannot defeat, the strength of God is revealed through weakness.

And so God gave them a king named Saul. He was handsome, standing head and shoulders above everyone, and everybody rejoiced. However, what they got was a strategist, not a seeker. Although Saul started out with a marginal acceptance of spiritual things, ultimately he was a thinker—a self-made man who led predominantly by his own reasoning.

Of course, Saul did manage to win many great victories. He defeated the Amalekites; he had an army that was well-trained. Everything seemed to be going fine until suddenly the Israelites were confronted with Goliath—a power that everyone, including Saul, knew they could not defeat in their own strength.

I can just picture the Israelites with all their armor, looking to their king standing a foot or so taller than the rest—representing their confidence in human strength and ingenuity to lead them. However, Saul could do nothing but tremble with the rest of them. Eventually, the people

began searching for holes in the rocks to hide in. They were a type of Christians in our generation who find themselves unable to go forward. Many are thinking about finding a safe place to hide where they can ride out the coming storm. *“How can I get by without being persecuted in the marketplace? How can I avoid being vilified or fired because I believe in traditional marriage and the sanctity of life?”*

All the while, this mammoth, big-mouthed giant was coming out every morning and challenging the armies of Israel, saying, *“You are going to serve us. There is no chance that you are going to win this fight!”* (see 1 Samuel 17:8–9). And that was true...in the physical realm. Nobody in his own strength could match the power that was standing on the other side of that valley. Likewise, if you and I try to fight the darkness of this hour with human reasoning and human zeal, we will discover that we are no match for it.

It is not about what we can do for God, it is about what God can do for Himself through us to glorify His own name!

■ THE STRENGTH OF GOD REVEALED

The good news is that whenever things finally come to the point where it looks as if the people of God are up against an enemy they cannot defeat, the strength of God is revealed through weakness. In the case of Saul and his army, the strength of God was revealed through a teenage boy. One day, young David showed up in the Israelite camp, sent by his father with some cakes and cheese to

give to his brothers. Now David came as one who had been walking with God—one with incredible passion for the honor of His name. That is what you and I need more than anything else! Remember, it is not about what we can do for God, it is about what God can do for Himself through us to glorify His own name!

Are we constantly trying to escape the very things that God has sent to make us strong?

When he came into the camp, David essentially asked, “Why are you all just standing there? Why won’t anybody go and fight this uncircumcised Philistine? How dare he defy the armies of the living God?” (see 1 Samuel 17:26). That is the kind of passion you and I must have in our hearts. “Who are these principalities that dare defy the armies of the living God? What makes them think they can triumph over Christ and His Church? Didn’t Jesus say, ‘On this rock I build My Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it’? Isn’t it written in the Scriptures, ‘I give you power over serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you?’” (see Matthew 16:18, Luke 10:19).

When David offered to fight the giant, Saul took his armor and put it on David. Imagine how ridiculous that must have looked! And so David essentially said to Saul, “I am sorry, but I cannot fight with this; I have not proven this! You see, I have lived by faith since I was young, and I have experienced the strength of God. I know what He can do!” (see 1 Samuel 17:39). Perhaps that is your testimony as well. God has given you victories that you know you could not have secured on your

own. You could not have escaped the prison that you were in; your marriage was dead until you began to pray. You could not have endured the trial that came into your life had you not trusted God!

The Bible tells us that David took his staff in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook. He put the stones in his shepherd’s bag, and with a sling in his hand, he drew near to the Philistine. If you look at this picture in the natural, it is preposterous to think that this boy would pick up five little stones to go fight a giant! Yet, suddenly the Spirit of God came upon David, and he began to prophesy, *“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give you into our hands”* (1 Samuel 17:45–47). David was able to speak in the Spirit because he was fighting in the Spirit. And in his weakness, he was empowered to defeat this great enemy.

■ PAUL’S JOURNEY TO STRENGTH

If you and I expect to experience this power of the Holy Spirit, we must learn to rejoice in those things that God allows in our lives to keep us dependent on Him. Yet I cannot help but wonder: Are we there yet? Or are we constantly trying to escape the very things that God has sent to make us strong?

It is the ultimate of ironies. God must first make us weak so that our

strength and our confidence will no longer be in ourselves. We see this hold true throughout Paul’s journey. For example, it was in weakness that Paul, in the midst of a storm, was relegated to the belly of the ship among the slaves and prisoners. It was certainly not a place of human strength or influence. Yet it was there that Paul found wisdom and power that was stronger than the storm all around him. Eventually he was called to the deck of the ship, and he became the voice of authority and encouragement to all on board (see Acts 27).

The Bible also tells us of a time when Paul and Silas were taken, beaten, and thrown into the inner prison (see Acts 16:22–23). Yet at midnight, in that place of weakness, they found the power to sing praises to God. It was the kind of worship that says, “God, I may not understand everything, but I know that heaven is Your throne, and the earth is Your footstool. I know that You are in charge of all things.” As they began to praise Him, the prison began to shake! The doors opened, and all the prisoners were set free. Even the jailer bent his knee to God and was baptized with his whole family. They had witnessed a strength in Paul and Silas that was greater than anything this world had to offer.

Do not be surprised when the devil tries to convince you that you are finished.

On another occasion, the *“Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with*

Barnabas to Derbe” (Acts 14:19–20). It was in weakness that Paul found a divine ability to endure all that hell could throw against him. Although he was stoned and thought to be dead, a place of complete weakness, Paul eventually got up and finished his journey. The Scriptures tell us that he went with Barnabas to Derbe and strengthened the souls of the disciples!

The end of ourselves is the beginning of God.

■ THE END OF OURSELVES

In every place of weakness that Paul found himself, I am sure he had to fight the constant lies of the devil. So do not be surprised when the devil tries to convince you that you are finished. He will try to tell you that you are too weak and there is no point in going on. “Why bother opening your mouth again? Why bother trying to serve God?” But I am telling you that even when you reach your lowest point, God can cause you to rise up again in the power of the Spirit.

You have a power source within you that is greater than all of the strength of this world put together.

I often say it this way: The end of ourselves is the beginning of God.

So in those moments when you feel weak or defeated, take courage, for you may actually be on the brink of the greatest victory that you have ever known. Remember, God takes the weak to confound those who are strong; He takes the foolish to confound those who are standing in their own wisdom. Therefore, do not worry about the things that come against you in this world. You have a power source within you that is greater than all of the strength of this world put together. And one day, like Paul, you are going to testify, “I rejoice in the difficulties that I have had to experience. I rejoice in all the things that have come against me. Even though I might stand in weakness and trembling, even though there is sometimes a measure of fear in my heart, I know I will not be defeated. No Goliath, nothing of evil, no weapon of hell has any authority over me. The purpose that God has for my life will be fulfilled!”

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Prayer Service	
Friday	7:00PM	The Gate*	

*Youth and Young Adult Service

Live Webcast:

All our Sunday and Tuesday services can be watched live and replayed for seven days on our website.

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