

How to Find Strength in the Midst of the Battle

Rich Nathan

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**The Holy Spirit: Learning to Ride the Wave of God's Spirit
Ephesians 6:10-12**

First of all, I want to wish all the fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers a Happy Father's Day. [Mention the gift – money clips]. You know, one of the things, Dad, that you can reward yourself with today is watching a TV show that your wife or daughter just shakes her head at and says: "This is so stupid, I can't believe you are watching this!" I give you permission, Dad, to say: "I don't care. It's Father's Day and I love this!"

What am I talking about? Today, Dad, take the remote control away from your wife. You do not have to sit and watch "Sleepless in Seattle," or "When Harry Met Sally," or those horrible English dramas where two women are sitting around drinking tea, talking for an hour about Darcy. They have names like Elizabeth, Kitty, and Lydia in one of those interminably boring Jane Austin movies.

Today, men, is the time for you to watch real manly shows like Man vs. Beast. Now there's a great show! When you hear a title of a TV show titled Man vs. Beast, what do you expect to watch? Maybe a pro wrestler wrestling a gorilla, or an Olympic sprinter racing a thoroughbred or a cheetah. What wouldn't be manly about that?

Here is an example of one of the shows they had on Man vs. Beast: a hotdog eating

contest between the world champion hotdog eater and a bear. They had this little guy, who weighed about 140 pounds, who was able to eat something like 17 hotdogs in 5 minutes. Then the bear was up. I don't know if the bear knew that this was a competition. But they gave the bear a bunch of hotdogs in a big bucket. Well, he stuck his nose in the bucket and he inhaled the hotdogs. After that, he began chewing on the bucket. Then he began looking around for the world champion so that he could eat him, too. This was not much of a competition. But for men, this is great television programming.

Or how about the World's Strongest Man Competition? How many of you guys have watched that? My wife and daughter can't appreciate this kind of sporting event. They want to watch ice dancing, and rhythmic gymnastics. But with the World's Strongest Man Competition we are talking about guys whose minimum weight is 300 pounds and who are named "Magnus," and "Igor." They're involved in real athletic events like lifting suitcases that have 250 lbs. in each suitcase.

SLIDE #1 – Strong Man Lifting Suitcase

I do that all the time when I go on vacation with my wife, Marlene. No...I'm just kidding!

Or they see how far they can pull a train

SLIDE #2 & 3 – Strong Man Pulling Train

Or flip 700 lb. tires, the kind of tires you would put on a truck, if you had to haul something really heavy like Shaquille O'Neal.

SLIDE #4– Strong Man with Big Tires

But this is Father's Day and I want to give you permission, men, to watch really manly shows—shows involving eating, lifting, and blowing things up!

I want to talk about a different kind of strength today, a strength that doesn't come from weight lifting or athletic training. It is a strength that is found in the Lord. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6:10,

SLIDE

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Then in v. 13, he says:

SLIDE

Therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand.

Every follower of Christ needs to learn how to find strength in God. But there are particular times, the times the apostle Paul calls "the day of evil," when you become

desperately aware of your need for strength. There are seasons that you will encounter in your life where if you don't know how to find strength in the Lord, you will collapse. Not every day, not every season is the same. There are some times in life where the pressure just builds and builds and builds in your family, in your marriage, with one of your kids, in your workplace, in your health or in your finances, so that if you do not know how to find strength in the Lord, you will implode. You will be crushed like an empty can of Diet Coke.

I've called today's talk, "How to Find Strength in the Midst of the Battle." Let's pray.

Ephesians 6:10-12

SLIDE

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Let me set the context for these verses. The apostle Paul has told us in the book of Ephesians that God has an ultimate goal of bringing all of creation under one head, Jesus Christ. And part of God's goal of reconciling all of creation is the creation of a new society, the church – a new people in which racial and ethnic divisions are broken down. Jew and Gentile equally enjoy access to God and are equal sharers in

the promises of God. God has a purpose of reconciling creation and the center of his purpose is seen in the Christian church. It is seen in the reconciling of relationships with each other.

Then the apostle Paul calls upon the church to demonstrate unity with each other, to build each other up. He calls us to purity and holiness and harmony in family life, and in the work life.

We have the great purposes of God explained in chapters 1-3. And the great call upon Christians to live a life worthy of what God has done for us in chapters 4-6. Then having done all of this wonderful teaching, the apostle Paul says:

SLIDE

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Why does he add this little note about finding strength in the Lord and warfare with the devil? Listen, Paul's quote "Finally" is not just a postscript. Paul is not saying: P.S. There is just one more minor thing that I neglected to mention. Ephesians 6:10-20 on spiritual warfare is absolutely essential teaching if you want to learn how to live effectively as a follower of Christ. It is absolutely unthinkable that the apostle Paul would end the letter in ch. 6:9 having told us wonderful things about what God has done and wonderful things about ourselves, and having told us all the things we must do. It is unthinkable that the apostle Paul would say, as most evangelical churches and preachers say today, "Now go and do it. Go and put it into practice,"

without giving us the context in which the truths of scripture are played out in this world. Paul reminds us that there is a war going on. And like it or not, we are involved in the war.

See, I believe one of the main problems facing Christians is an overly sentimental view of life, an overly optimistic view of the world, and people, and what we should expect, if we are followers of Christ and are trying to be decent people. This is true especially here in America because of our prosperity. We American Christians have a view that the Christian life essentially ought to be like a cruise in the Western Caribbean. You swim in a pool and then you take a nap. Then you eat. You take a walk around the deck of the cruise ship and then you eat some more. And then you nap and read a little bit. Then you eat some more. Life ought to be no more taxing than deciding what to eat.

We try to create these illusory worlds, these islands of calm. So people, if they can afford it, live in gated communities. They send their children to exclusive private schools. We do everything in our power to increase our security and safety and sense of tranquility in this world.

One of the great problems facing Christians is the view that if I'm a follower of Christ, life should be easy. It should be tranquil. It ought to be like lying in a hammock in my backyard. No storms, no struggles.

The apostle's statements in Ephesians 6:10-20 are bracing truth for us. It is a wake-up call. Paul calls us back to the real world, a world in which there is a war going on between God and those forces aligned with God, and on the other side, the devil and those forces, attitudes, philosophies, mindsets and people aligned with the devil.

The notion that life is hard, that the Christian life is very hard, it is warfare, catches most Christians off-guard. You can tell it in the way we share our problems. The very tone of our voices communicates that something is desperately wrong and out of whack when we find ourselves experiencing great pressures in life. Friend, isn't this a regular experience for you and for those you know who are followers of Christ – this self-pitying tone?

I don't understand why this is happening to me. I can't figure out why life is so hard and why I'm under so much pressure. Something must be really wrong. God must not exist, or he has forgotten about me. Things should be easier than this.

The apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 4:12 says this,

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Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange was happening to you.

Nothing is more important than that you recognize how normal it is for trial and difficulty to come into your life. It is normal for things to break down. It is normal for

cars to break down and appliances to break down, and sinks to get stopped up. It is normal to not have all the money you want. Conflict is normal. Family pressure is normal. Work pressure is normal. Struggles in relationships are normal.

Why do we need strength? Because life is not a Caribbean Cruise as we try to pretend that it is. Life is a battle and all that God purposes and desires is constantly opposed by the enemy. If you went through the book of Ephesians and you made a list of all of the purposes of God, you can very quickly understand the work of the devil by simply saying that every one of God's purposes in this world is fought over and opposed by the devil.

Does God want people reconciled together living in harmony and peaceful relations with one another? Then the devil will sow conflict, fighting, suspicion, mistrust, gossip and slander.

Does God want to create a new society in which racial and ethnic barriers are broken down among people? Then Satan wants to rebuild those racial and ethnic walls. He wants to sow into the church racial divisions so that we have a white church and a black church, an Asian church, and a Hispanic church.

Does God want people to live in purity and holiness? Then Satan is going to oppose that and draw people into perversion and pornography and uncleanness.

Have you found life to be a struggle for you, friend? Are you in a season right now in which the pressure is really building? Not every day is the same. As I said before we are always in a battle, but there are particular times in which the battle gets really ferocious. Paul calls these times: “the day of evil.” V. 13,

SLIDE

Therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground.

Are some of you living right now in the day of evil? The mark of a cult, the mark of distorted Christianity is a promise made to people that we have the secret key to an easy life. Other Christians in history have missed it. But you don't have to have the day of evil come to your house. You have the key to tranquility and prosperity, ease and health. Just buy this tape series. Just give this amount of money. Just purchase this book. And you will experience a breakthrough. No more problems.

Friends, the problems of an easy life, a problem-free life, and a battle-free life are the mark of a cult or of distorted Christianity. Between the first coming of Jesus Christ as Messiah and his second coming, this world is at war. We will experience the evil day. Why do you need to learn how to find strength in the Lord? Because of the greatness of the power arrayed against you, friend.

One of the worst things a team can do in sports is underestimate the ability of their opponent. The LA Lakers just did that in the NBA series. Everyone predicted that this

was going to be a Lakers' sweep, a cakewalk. One of the worst things you can do in sports is underestimate your opponent and overestimate your own capacities.

The same is true in war. Read military history. You often see nations embark on self-destructive courses simply because they over estimate their own strength and under estimate the power arrayed against them. The South fired on Ft. Sumter. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Hitler invaded Russia. The U.S. entered Viet Nam.

It is true in sports. It is true in war. It is true in business. Don't underestimate the competition. Don't take your customers for granted.

Why do we need to find strength in the Lord? Because of the greatness of the power arrayed against us and the weakness of our own wills, and our own flesh. Look at how Paul describes the opposition that every follower of Christ faces in v. 12,

SLIDE

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

In other words, the battle that you are engaged in is not simply with your ex-spouse, your boss, your child, your parents, or someone in your small group. Rather than simply saying you are battling demons, Paul uses a series of four terms to characterize the opposition against us. He speaks of rulers, authorities, powers, and

spiritual forces. Why does he use four terms rather than simply saying: Remember that you're battling evil spirits?

I believe Paul piles up the terms in order to wake us up. He is hitting us with an electric current. He is shocking us to the reality of the magnitude of the power that is arrayed against us. In Job 1 we read that Satan is able to stir people up to attack you. It says in Job 1:13,

SLIDE

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing near by, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword and I am the only who has escaped to tell you!"

You ask: Why is this happening to me? Why are people coming against me? There doesn't seem to be any reason for this.

I don't understand my mother's reaction or my father's reaction. It is so out of proportion to what I did.

I don't understand why I'm experiencing so much pressure.

Why did this person stab me in the back? I thought everything was worked out. I thought that we were finally getting along better.

Do you understand, friend, that Satan can stir up attack against you though people? Have you ever had someone say something to you, which was mean or hateful and it had particular power to wound you? You've had a lot of negative things said to you, but this one thing seemed energized. It was like a dart that wounded you and you can't shake it.

Or perhaps the words spoken to you were energized to seduce. They drew you in to an addiction, into a relationship, into a behavior that was wrong, or that you were overwhelmed by. Do you understand that Satan can attack you through other people, energize their words and their actions so as to wound you, demoralize you, and seduce you?

We go on in v. 16 and read:

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While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said the fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the servants and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you.

The fire of God is lightening. Do you know that Satan has a certain amount of power over nature? Certainly not every lightening storm comes from the hand of Satan, but

some of it does. This one did. And I believe that when Jesus and his disciples were in a boat traveling across the Sea of Galilee, going up to the other side, and a storm came up on the lake that threatened to sink them, I believe that storm was stirred up by Satan. It was energized. Certain natural disasters come from the enemy.

Satan can even send sickness into people's lives. Not every sickness comes from the enemy, but some of it does. Job 2:7,

SLIDE

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

Satan can attack you through other people. Satan can attack you by using the natural forces of this world against you. Satan can attack your health.

Friend, we have to come to grips with the power of the opposition arrayed against us. Satan can assault your mind with self-destructive thoughts, with thoughts of despair and discouragement, suicide. And some of you have had these self-destructive thoughts, powerful thoughts. Some of them come from the enemy. He can exaggerate your problems, sow fearful thoughts about the future into your minds, and tempt you to anxiety, to unbelief, to depression.

Satan can stir up your pride or your lust. He can bring to your mind thoughts that you didn't have a minute or two minutes ago. You say: Where did this come from? Why

am I suddenly feeling this powerful urge that I did not feel two minutes ago? You need to find strength in the Lord because of the power of the enemy.

We need to find strength in the Lord because we've come to a frank and honest recognition of our weakness. Friend, are you in touch with your own weakness? There can be a danger of introspection and sinking into yourself, constantly picking at yourself and turning over every thought and every motive. Some of you fall prey to that. But I would say that the average American is engaged in too little self-reflection. We fill ourselves with entertainment and activity, diversions. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor. 13:5,

SLIDE

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourself. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, you fail the test.

When we examine ourselves we frequently find that there are particular weaknesses that we have. We have tendencies and access points that we need to particularly guard. Friend, when you examine yourself, you will see that in your life there are some open doors to the work of the enemy. There are some dark veins in your life, just as there are dark veins in my life. Because of your past, because of things that have happened, because of your family background, because of your temperament, because of your sins there are hooks in your life that the enemy is able to pull upon.

Are you aware of that? Do you see that in your life? Are you in touch enough with yourself enough to say: I do know my weaknesses. I've done enough reflection that I know places in my life that the enemy has access to me. You need to have enough self-awareness to recognize that there are situations where your will is not sufficient in doing battle with the enemy.

Might some of you say: I'm a sitting duck in forming an emotional attachment with the opposite sex. Maybe your marriage is really dry. Maybe you don't get the support that you wish you got from your spouse. You see yourself craving connection with the opposite sex. Friend, do you recognize that your frustration in your marriage opens you up to at least having an emotional affair? Are you able, in the day of evil, to guard your heart and find strength in the Lord?

How many of you here would say: I believe I've entered now or at some time in the past, at least an emotional affair with someone who is not my spouse.

Are you in touch with your weak points—your need to succeed, even if you have to compromise what you believe to be true, or your tendency to avoid responsibility for your life and your mistakes?

When you see a follower of Christ really stumble and fall on their face, almost always you will find someone who is not in touch with the enemy's power or their own weakness. I can't tell you how many people have said to me over the years: I thought I was strong enough to handle this. I thought I was strong enough to handle

this relationship. I thought I had finally come to the place where that particular issue was no longer a problem for me. I had a clear set of commitments. I thought I could handle it.

Have you ever said that, and then been tragically wrong? Overconfidence. We see it all the time in people who live life as if the rules don't apply to them. Oh, maybe everyone else has to guard himself or herself and live circumspectly, walking right down the middle of the road, but I can play on the edge. I can dangle my toes over the edge and not fall. Any of you ever fall prey to that lie?

I can dance over the edge.

I can hang out with people who are not followers of Christ. I can engage in a lot of their behaviors, but I won't become like them. I know too much to be drawn totally in. I can date outside the faith, but I won't fall in love.

When we consider the battle, the power of the enemy and the weakness of our wills, we also need to recognize the call that is upon us by God. In Ephesians 6 Paul tells us four times the purpose of discovering God's strength is to enable us to stand in the evil day.

SLIDES

Eph. 6:11 – Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devils schemes.

v. 13 – Therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

v. 14 – Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...

I love this call simply to stand. When the day of evil comes, when you are under enormous pressure and the battle is really ferocious and the wind is really blowing hard in your face, one of the greatest victories you can ever achieve, as a Christian is to simply stand.

The storm is really blowing very hard in my face right now. We are facing enormous pressure financially, with my parent's health, with my kids, at work, with a friend. But I'm still standing.

We're called to stand, to resist, to withstand the storm that is blowing in your face. It means that you reject, Christian, any possibility of retreat. You are in a battle and there are some battles that you don't even allow yourself the thought of how you're going to escape or retreat. You know the enemy will always, in the midst of battle, say: I can offer you an attractive alternative, an easy way out. This is too hard. There is no hope of ever turning this situation around. Give up. Throw in the towel. You've tried and tried. Close the door. Here is the escape hatch.

There are battles in which you simply have to say to yourself: There is no escape hatch. The door is barred. Your only option is to stand in the midst of this. I tell

engaged couples for their wedding day: When you exchange your wedding vows, you lock the door and throw away the key and do not allow yourself to even imagine the possibility that you can escape from your marriage, if it becomes extremely difficult.

Stand therefore. No retreat. No escape. No alternatives. In contrast to our age, which is an easy going, tolerant, live and let live, hey, it's nobody else's business, who am I to judge, kind of age, talk about a wake up call. But you, follower of Christ, are going to have to do something that is totally counter-cultural in this easy going, tolerate every kind of behavior, there are no absolutes age – you at times in your classroom, in your job, in your family, in your dating relationships, are going to have to draw the line in the sand and stand.

Everyone else wants to fudge the line. The line is so confusing and it is dotted. Does God really hate divorce? What does “hate” mean? What, after all, is sex anyway?

What's wrong with having a little pornography in the house? It just spices up our romance. Lots of people do it.

What's wrong with indulging my greed and going whole hog into buying the biggest, fastest car I can?

Why keep things simple and tithe and give to the poor and to missions?

Why can't I go to that party, Mom?

Why can't I sleep over at this friend's house?

Why can't I go along with my professor's anti-Christian diatribe? After all, he has all the power.

Follower of Christ, sometimes you have to draw the line in the sand and take your stand.

Where do we find strength to stand in the midst of the storm? It certainly is not in us. Certainly most of us, most of the time, are notorious compromisers. We, ourselves, are people-pleasers, most of us most of the time. We ourselves, we throw in the towel and turn tail and run most of us most of the time.

The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6:10,

SLIDE

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Throughout this letter to the Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the power of the Lord that is available to believers in the midst of the battles and struggles we face with demonic powers. Eph. 1:18-20,

SLIDE

We pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the

working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Or Ephesians 3:16,

SLIDES

I pray that out of his glorious riches he will strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

Eph. 3:20-21

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.

Eph. 6:10

Be strong in the Lord and in his might power.

We need to be in touch with something and someone stronger than the enemy. We need strength for weak-willed people like us. We need strength when we are in the day of evil. When we find the strength, we find it in the Lord.

You know, when you recognize what is at work in our culture, the power that is arrayed against us, you sometimes just want to shake your head, don't you, Christian, at the weak answers our culture gives to the enormous problems facing us?

We're going to teach values in school

We'll teach conflict resolution skills.

We're going to introduce another self-esteem program in prison.

We'll make a New Year's Day resolution.

We'll show this movie on the evils of drugs.

The governor is going to have a summit on responsible business practices.

Just say 'No' to drugs or sex.

Talk about watered-down milk. We need something a lot stronger than good intentions and slogans and commercials to live the kind of lives God intends for us.

Let me bring this home for you so that you can begin to understand the practical way that God's power can be of assistance to you when you are in the battle. When we are talking about accessing God's power, we first of all need to access the power that is in the blood of Christ when dealing with the enemy.

You know, one major way that Satan gains power in our lives is through sin. This is what gives the devil an upper hand in our lives – it is sin. If we had never sinned, if our spiritual ancestors had never sinned, Satan would have no leverage point in our life, no opportunity. That's why Jesus says in John 14:30,

SLIDE

The prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me.

Jesus gave him no access point, no entry point to his spirit. But the truth is, we frequently open the door of our lives to Satan through sin. So, what's our remedy when we've given access and entry into our lives to the devil? What's our remedy?

The power of the blood of Christ. You know the old hymn: *There is power, power, wonder working power in the blood of the Lamb. There is power, power, wonder working power in the precious blood of the Lamb.* Revelation 12:11 says:

SLIDE

They overcame him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb.

Here's how it works. You've sinned. You've failed to be the mother or father you wish you had been. You failed to be the husband or wife you should have been. You said what you shouldn't have said. You've entered a relationship you shouldn't have. You've given vent to your anger. You laid it all out in your rage. You succumbed again to your addiction. You are up in the middle of the night and you hear the stream of accusations:

Look at what you've done.

Look at what you've failed to do.

You've blown it.

You are a failure.

You are worthless.

You simply cannot live as a Christian.

You are a hypocrite.

You know you shouldn't have done that, but you did.

You missed another opportunity to serve God.

Here's another area where you aren't fulfilling your obligations.

You are a loser.

You are a loser as a parent.

You are a loser as a student.

You are a loser as a provider.

You will never stop this eating disorder.

You will never be able to overcome your emotional problems.

You've hurt your spouse too badly this time; there will be no forgiveness.

You made your bed, now you will have to lie in it.

Have you heard that voice? Look at you – worthless, failure, loser, how could you be so stupid? Satan wants you to agree with him and to try to pay off your sin by beating up on yourself. When we self-flagellate, that's a way of us doing our own penance, paying for our own sin. Beating up on ourselves is our form of self-atonement. And we think we've done atonement enough when we really feel bad, when we really feel sorry. I'm really sorry this time, God. And we resolve to do better in the future. These are paper-thin defenses.

There is only one way to deal with the accusations of the enemy. When you have failed and you admit failure:

I have failed as a parent.

I should have done this and I didn't.

I have failed to obey God.

I have failed in my responsibilities at my work.

There is only one way to deal with past sin and past failure. That is to admit that all you are hearing is true.

Yes, I am a sinner.

Yes, I am filthy.

I will not minimize my sin.

I will not rationalize it away.

I will not make excuses based on my past for what I just said, or what I just did.

Just because I had an unhappy childhood, it doesn't give me the right to do this.

Just because I've been hurt by the church, or I'm lonely, or ADD or had a terrible relationship with my father, I will not use that as an excuse for my sins.

I have nothing, no hope, and no strength except that Jesus Christ, the Son of God loves me and gave himself up for me. And in the bloody death of Jesus Christ, God, my great judge is satisfied. The justice of God, the righteousness of God, the judgment of God is completely satisfied by the sinless life, the perfect death, and the glorious resurrection of the Son of God. God, my judge, is so utterly satisfied by the blood of Christ that he looks at me now and says: Innocent. You are innocent in my

sight. You are completely clean. You are washed. You are free. You are not vile. You are not worthless. You are not a failure. You are acquitted. You are free, free, free, indeed!

That's why so many hymns center on the blood of Christ.

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

Or how about this:

*There is fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.*

Don't deal with the accusation of the enemy and the accusation of your own conscience by resolving to do better, by saying: I'm trying to change; by feeling sorry for yourself, by making excuses. These are paper-thin excuses. Answer every accusation of conscience and every accusation of the enemy with the blood of Christ.

SLIDE

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb!

Friend, have you ever applied the blood of Christ to your sins? We're going to get a chance to do that at the end of the message.

You say: Well, that's great for past failures. But what about the present and the future? I'm in such a horrible battle right now in my marriage. My kids are in this horrible battle. I'm in this battle with my emotions. I'm battling with an addiction, or with an eating disorder. I just don't know how I can win in the midst of the pressure that is facing me. I understand the blood of Christ can take care of my past sins, but what about my present and future sins? How can I find strength right now to deal with this current battle I'm in?

Paul says:

SLIDE

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

I would remind you of the mighty priesthood of Christ. Look with me at Hebrews 7:24,

SLIDE

Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to

intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our needs, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sin is exalted above the heavens.

You say: How can I deal with what's facing me right now in my home? How can I deal with what's facing me right now in my body, with my job, in court next week?

It says in Hebrews 7:25,

SLIDE

He is able.

That's the key. Our prayer is not that we are able. It's not that we are great men and women of faith or that we won't fail when we are tried in the fire. Our confidence is in the simple fact that he is able; Jesus is able. That's what I'm relying on. He is able to do what? It says in Hebrews 7:25,

SLIDE

He is able to save completely.

That word "completely" means he is able to save to the uttermost. There is no circumstance the enemy can bring your way, no problem, no storm, no lightening, no wind gusts, no attacks from other people, no health problems, no future horrible event, that Jesus cannot save you through. If all of your wildest fears came true, if whatever you dread right now came through – if you lost your job, if the diagnosis

turns out to be malignant cancer, if your spouse leaves, if your child's life falls apart, if it is arthritis or Alzheimer's – all the prophecies regarding gloom and doom in the world turn out to be so – terrorism hits this country again, there is global warming, another epidemic more dreadful than AIDS hits us, if it all came through – still Jesus is able to save to the uttermost!

When I consider all of my weaknesses, and all of the weaknesses in this church, and all of the open doors and entry points in our culture, how is it that I can have hope and confidence? Because Jesus, my perfect holy and indestructible High Priest at this very moment is standing in heaven, while I speak to you, while you sit here, when we go to bed at night, when we are driving in the car, when we are watching TV, when we're fighting with each other, when things are unraveling – Jesus Christ is standing in heaven praying for me and Jesus is praying for you. He is praying for this church. He is praying for the church in this city. He is praying for the church in this nation. He is praying for his people around the world. It's awesome. While we sit here, Jesus, our indestructible holy, pure High Priest, is praying for us.

What is it that distinguished Peter from Judas? Both of them betrayed Jesus. Why did Peter fall and get back up, whereas Judas fell and never got back up? What was the difference between Peter and Judas? Here's one major difference. Jesus prayed for Peter. That's what it says in Luke 22.

SLIDE

Simon, Simon, Satan desires to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you,

Simon that your faith won't fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

I have prayed for you. That is my hope when I see a teenager or an adult who has known Christ and is drifting from God. My hope is not in my prayers alone. My hope is in Jesus' prayers.

I want you to note, finally, that this strength in God is not just God's strength on our behalf. This strength is actually at work in us. We read in Ephesians 1:18,

SLIDE

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heavenly realms far above all rule and authority power and dominion and every title that can be given not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

All these powers, all these rulers, all these principalities, and all these authorities – the apostle Paul is saying that Christ is above all of them. He is greater and stronger. He surpasses all of them in power.

Here is the secret. This Christ, who is above all rule and authority and power and dominion, this Christ dwells within every believer by faith. We read in Colossians 1:27

SLIDE

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The great powerful Jesus Christ lives in you, if you've received him into your life as Savior and Lord. That's why we regularly need to pray: Lord, fill me with your presence. Fill me up, Lord Jesus Christ, with your powerful presence.

Friends, we can assist one another in finding strength in God, strength in his blood, in his prayers, by his filling. I believe there is no one more vulnerable than the unattached Christian. The person who says: Well, I've given my life to Christ. Now I'm going to do battle with the enemy on my own. I believe there is no one more vulnerable than the unattached Christian, the person who is not deeply rooted in accountable, honest, authentic relationships with the church. One of the great gifts we have, friends, is that we do not have to fight alone. When you are under siege, when you are in the battle, that's when you can really appreciate the gift of brothers and sisters who can encourage you and strengthen you.

The reason we have small groups and women's groups and recovery groups and men's groups and support groups are to assist each other to find strength in the

Lord. But you have a choice of whether to connect with a lifeline God is throwing you through a brother or sister, or push that lifeline away and live a totally independent, isolated, secret, unaccountable life.

When King David in the Old Testament was fleeing from Saul, when David faced his evil day, it says in 1 Samuel 23:16,

SLIDE

Saul's son, Jonathan, went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

Over and over in the book of Hebrews 3:13 it says:

SLIDE

Encourage each other [literally, put strength in each other] daily as long as it is called today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

In Hebrews 10:25, it says:

SLIDE

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Brothers and sisters, we live in an evil day. There are many of you who are under siege in your homes, in your work, in your bodies, in your relationships. Be strong in

the Lord and in the strength of his might. And allow other followers of Christ to help you to find strength in God in your time of need. Let's pray.

How to Find Strength in the Midst of the Battle

Rich Nathan

June 19-20, 2004

The Holy Spirit: Learning to Ride the Wave of God's Spirit

Ephesians 6:10-12

- I. Why Do We Need Strength?
 - A. The Reality Of The Battle (1 Peter 4:12)
 - B. The Power Of The Enemy (Job 1)
 - C. The Weakness Of Our Wills
 - D. The Call Of Our God (Ephesians 6:11-14)
- II. Where Do We Find Strength?
 - A. Weak Answers
 - B. Powerful Responses
 - 1. Power In The Blood Of Christ (Revelations 12:11)
 - 2. Power In The Priesthood Of Christ (Hebrews 7:24,25)
 - 3. Power In The Filling Of Christ (Ephesians 1:20-22)
- III. How Do We Gain Strength?