



Rely on God's Strength

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Standing Firm in God's Grace, Part 6

Introduction:

The armies were lining up on opposing mountainsides. The vicious sounds of their war cries echoed through the intervening valley. The rattle of shields and the ringing of swords proclaimed the frenzy of energy pent up in the warriors. The stomp of marching feet beat the rhythm of impending battle. One young man had travelled at his father's request to get word from his three older brothers fighting in the war. As he spoke to them in the ranks, a shocking thing occurred. A giant stepped from the ranks of the Philistines into the valley. He was at least nine feet tall. His coat of mail weighed 125 lbs. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam and the spearhead weighed nearly 8 lbs. No doubt, the restlessness of the waiting armies ceased. Silence fell and Goliath's voice shattered it. "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together" (**I Samuel 17:10**, ESV). The army of Israel fled from this one giant of a man. Army was ready to face army, but no individual was ready to face the giant. But the young man, David, was not afraid. He went to the king and offered to fight. Despite the king's protests, David insisted. Turning down the aid of the king's armor, David stepped into the valley. Goliath mocked him, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" (**I Samuel 17:43**, ESV). David responded with confidence, reached into a pouch, grabbed a smooth stone he had retrieved from a nearby brook, placed it in a sling, and slung it directly into Goliath's head. The giant collapsed. David took the giant's sword and cut off his head. If this little boy could do that to the giant, what could the rest of Israel's army do to the Philistines? The Philistine army fled and was routed.

We know this story well. But I have one question. Who killed Goliath? Oh, no doubt it was David who swung the sling. It was David who let loose the stone. It was David who wielded the sword. But who killed Goliath? David knew who it was. In **I Samuel 17:46**, David promised the Philistine, "The Lord will deliver you into my hand." And then cried out, "For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand" (**I Samuel 17:47**, ESV). David may have been the weapon, but God killed Goliath.

From this battle we learn the next key to Standing Firm in God's Grace. We must recognize our need for grace, we must listen to God's word, we must hope fully in God's grace, we must live by faith and not by law, we must keep God's grace pure, and, as David did in the face of Goliath, we must rely on God's strength, not our own.

Discussion:

I. Rely on God's Strength

- A. **II Corinthians 12:9-10** explains that as long as we think we are strong, we will be weak. It is only when we recognize how weak we are that we can be empowered by God's strength. When we are weak, then we are strong. David did not win the battle because of his strength. Everyone who was relying on their own strength fled the battlefield in the face of Goliath. David won because he knew how weak he was. He won because he knew that the answer was not to do something that would make him strong enough, like wearing Saul's armor. Instead, he needed to come face to face with his weakness and realize his fight was hopeless. Only then would he take refuge in the Lord and rely on His strength. It was because David knew how weak he was that he was strong enough to defeat Goliath. Only when we realize our strength is nothing in the face of our fight will we ever be strong enough to overcome. Because only then will we rely on the strength of God.
- B. We have said over and over again that grace is God's power to overcome sin. If we want to overcome sinning, we have to quit relying on our strength. Only when we see our poverty of spirit and our weakness can we be strong and overcome. **Hebrews 2:14-18** tells us to rely on Jesus in the time of our temptation. Like us, He has faced the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (cf. **I John 2:16**). He can help. **Hebrews 4:14-16** makes the statement even more boldly. Because our High Priest has been through this life, we can draw near to His throne of grace with confidence and find help in our time of need.
- C. Recall **Philippians 4:13**. We can do all things through God who strengthens us. We can even overcome sin. Further, recall **Ephesians 3:20-21**. We can give glory to God because He can and will do far more abundantly than we ask or think according to His power at work within us. By His power, we will accomplish more than we ask or think, even in the face of our sins.

D. The long and short of our lesson is this: If we are to overcome sin by God's grace, we must rely on God's strength, not our own. We can think of a hundred mantras. "Let go and let God." "Give it to God." "The Lord will provide." "Leave it in God's hands." "Cast your cares upon God." "Jesus, take the wheel." Each of these reminds us of the exact same point. We must rely on God and not ourselves.

II. 10 Practical Ways to Rely on God's Strength in the Face of Sin and Temptation

A. We must rely on God and not ourselves. But how? I don't want to leave you with a generic point and some clever clichés to take with you. Let's get down to brass tacks. In a few minutes, we are going to walk out of this building and face life again. Satan doesn't care where you spent this morning; he's going to attack. I want to briefly give you 10 practical tools that have helped me rely on God in the daily battles. David relied on God's strength by picking up sling, five stones, and then Goliath's sword. What practical weapons does God give us to use?

1. *Give Up*: That's right, quit fighting. Surrender. I know this sounds odd, but the first practical key to relying on God's strength is an issue of attitude and motive. For me, carrying on the fight in my mind about some temptation or sin is a sign that I am trying to be strong enough to overcome. I need to simply give up and surrender, but not to the sin. I need to surrender to God. I'm about to share nine more weapons God has given us to fight temptation. But none of them will work if you don't get this one down. Remember **II Corinthians 12:10**. We are strong when we are weak. In the past, I've thought, "Maybe if I read my Bible more, pray more, go to church more, etc. I'll be strong enough to overcome." That never worked because I was looking to make me strong enough. Don't do the things I'm about to suggest in hopes to make yourself strong enough. Do them because you are too weak to win the fight. Do them because only God can slay the giants. But He will do it through you if you rely on Him.
2. *Walk in God's Presence*: **I Thessalonians 5:17** instructs us to pray without ceasing. But I don't want to simply call this tool praying. Maybe we can call it "Praying 2.0." When I say "walk in God's presence," I don't mean praying because it is the assigned task. I mean praying because you recognize God is right beside you. Walking in God's presence means having scheduled times of prayer. Start your day by recognizing God's presence in prayer. End your day by recognizing God's presence in prayer. Conduct your relationships by recognizing God's presence in prayer. But more than that, make prayer a conversation with God. Don't wait until your scheduled prayer to speak to God. Talk with Him in your commute to work. Talk to Him about the decisions you are making. Tell Him what you are thinking at any given moment in the day. Tell Him about a temptation as soon as it is happening. If you fall, talk to Him about that and why you think it happened. The reason this works is because it is hard to gossip if you're talking to God about what you are doing while you are doing it.
3. *Give Thanks*: **I Thessalonians 5:18** goes on to say we should give thanks in every circumstance. Obviously, this would be part of walking in God's presence. But, this is a significant tool all by itself. I know that for me temptation becomes stronger when I'm living in entitlement and resentment. When I think I'm not getting what I deserve from the people around me, from life, from God, I start to get slightly embittered which somehow makes me think I'm entitled to my favorite sin. My greatest help against this has come from being actively thankful. Someone once suggested that I start writing gratitude lists. Just sit down and write the things I am thankful for. Suddenly, I begin to realize God isn't picking on me. Life really isn't dealing me a bad hand. I have lots to be thankful for. Why would I want to destroy it by deciding to sin?
4. *Conscious Contact through God's Word*: In **Acts 20:32**, Paul commended the Ephesian elders to God and to the word of His grace. We need that same commendation. We talked about this in depth in our earlier lesson, "Listen to God's Word." Don't read the Bible as a homework assignment. Recognize that it contains God's words of life. Listen for what can help you each time you read it. As you find passages that help when you are facing certain problems or are in certain moods, make a note of it. Return to them when you need their power in your life. Listen to the Word as your greatest counselor and strongest advisor. Then just do what it says.
5. *Pack the Right Bags*: **Romans 13:14** says, "...make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (ESV). Providing for the flesh is not the same as pursuing the lusts of the flesh. The idea of making provision is a word picture of getting ready for a trip. Before you go on a trip you have to make provision. You have to prepare your food, your travel arrangements, your itinerary. You have to pack your bags. Making provision for the lust of the flesh means packing your bags to take a trip in the flesh. Is going to a buffet a sin? Of course not. Can you go to a buffet and eat properly? Of course you can. But if your big struggle is gluttony, going to a buffet is making provision for the lusts of the flesh. Don't spend all your time arguing about how sinful an act is. If the action is packing your bags for sin, you are likely to end up sinning. **Galatians 6:7-8** explains that if we sow to the flesh, we'll reap destruction. If we sow to the Spirit, we'll reap eternal life. Pack your bags to travel with the Spirit, not the flesh.

6. *Cut It Off*: On April 26, 2003, Aron Ralston was trapped between a rock and a hard place. Hiking and rock climbing alone in Eastern Utah, his right hand was crushed between a shifting boulder and the rock wall. Over a period of five days he made various attempts to free himself. Nothing worked. When he ran out of his water supply, he was certain of death. Since no one knew where he was and they would not find him any time soon, he tried one final desperate plan. He broke both bones in his forearm. Then, using what was left of his dulled cutting tool, he amputated his own right arm. He repelled into the canyon and hiked out to meet searchers. Nobody wants to lose an arm. However, when the choice is lose an arm or lose a life, the arm is not so bad. **Matthew 5:29-30** says if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Nobody wants to lose a hand or an eye, but when the choice is lose a hand or an eye or lose your soul, the hand and eye aren't so bad. Here's the point: do you have things in your life that always seem to lead you to sin? Then you have to cut them off. If you want to quit sinning, you have to change your playgrounds, your playmates, and your playthings. In sin, we are used to being with people, going places, and handling things that are part of our sins. Relying on God means changing all of that. It means letting God determine our playgrounds, playmates, and playthings. Do you find you are trapped in lust every time you watch a certain show? Quit watching it. Do you find you end up gossiping every time you are with a certain person? Quit being around that person. Do you find you end up lying every time you participate in a certain activity? Quit that activity. Cut it off. Rely on God.
7. *Find a Fellow Traveler*: **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** says two are better than one. They have more success in their labor. They have greater comfort. They have better protection against attack. Further, they have help when they fall. Relying on God means relying on God's other children. That is why He has given us each other. Sadly, in most churches, the number one means of relying on God has been sacrificed because of a spirit of competition, pride, and judgment. We will only be able to rely on each other when we recognize that Christians of all shapes and sizes sin. Their sins do not mean they are insincere or hypocrites. It means they are growing in Christ. A local church is not a country club for people who have it all together. It is a hospital for those who need the Great Physician. Oddly enough, too many of us get in this hospital and try to act like we aren't sick. The more we pronounce our health, the more other sick people become afraid to share their sickness. The more we are afraid to share our sickness, the less we are getting help. Find someone you can walk this journey with. Someone who won't sit in judgment when you have fallen but understands the reason you are talking to them is because you want to grow. Find someone who understands where you are and can provide loving counsel to help you grow. Find someone to walk this path with. Rely on God by relying on His children.
8. *Bring the Inside Out*: In that relationship, you have to get deeper than talking about the weather and the Colts. You need to bring the inside out. **James 5:16** says if we want to overcome sin, we have to confess to one another. This isn't talking about coming forward and uttering some words of generic sin. This is finding someone with whom you can share what is really on the inside. I imagine some of you are exactly where I have been. "I can't tell someone what is going on inside me. They would kick me out of the church. They would lock me up. They would take my kids away. They would despise me." And on the list goes. What I have found is I'm only as sick as my secrets. One of the greatest blessings I have found is people I can share my insides with. Putting light on the darkness makes it go away. God has given us each other for a reason. Let's start accepting the blessing God intended us to have in each other. When the temptation hits, find someone to call and shed the light on what is happening inside you. You will be amazed at how this helps defuse the temptation and reduce its power.
9. *Acts of Service and Love*: The reason we want to avoid sin is to be more like Jesus. It stands to reason then that relying on God means following the example set by Jesus. **Matthew 20:28** demonstrates the great character of our Master. He was and is a servant. If we want to be like Him, following His example, then act like a servant. The great benefit of this is that most, if not all, sin is bound up in selfishness. The moment I start acting in service to others, I'm doing the exact opposite of sin. The more I take the actions of service and love, the more I find the strength to avoid selfishness and, therefore, sin. Make a meal for someone who is sick or shut-in. Visit someone in the hospital. Call a friend just to offer encouragement. Write a note. Send an e-mail of encouragement to a preacher we support. Help out at a homeless shelter. Volunteer for a non-profit organization. Sign up to help clean the church building. Do something that serves someone else, especially if it is someone that cannot repay the favor.
10. *Do the Next Right Thing*: **Matthew 6:33** says we should seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Relying on God means listening to His advice, seeking His way, doing what He says. Right now, my job is simply to do the next right thing. With the decision I make, what choices fit within God's will? Which choices are about pursuing God and His righteousness? But there is another side to the tool of "the Next Right Thing." I don't have to spend all day fretting about what might happen 10 years from now. I don't have to

place the pressure on myself of whether or not I'll do the right thing for the rest of my life. I only need to make the decision right now. What is the right thing to do next? Do that. When temptation hits, hit the pause button. What is the right thing to do in that moment? Do that. When it hits again a few minutes later, repeat the process.

- B. Don't misunderstand. None of these tools will take temptation away. Satan will always attack. Further, none of these tools is a magic pill that says by tomorrow you will be perfect. This is a growth process. However, when you rely on God by using the tools that He has provided, you will be amazed at the growth you experience and the victories you gain. When the tools don't seem to be working, just keep working them until they do. This is what it means to rely on God's strength and stand firm in His grace.

Conclusion:

We often think of God's grace as some ethereal, disembodied, impossible-to-define-or-see entity floating in the heavens. Not so. First and foremost, God's grace is Jesus Christ on the cross. But further, God's grace is the practical tools, perhaps we could say weapons, He has given us to do battle with Satan. Use them. Use them well. And watch God accomplish the victory in you just as He did through David and his sling. Rely on God's strength. Stand firm in God's grace.