

TRUTHS THAT TRANSFORM

I can do all things through Christ!

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Philippians 4:13

I'm going to share a little secret about me with you. It's something I'm embarrassed about and would prefer people don't know. It's not something I've done wrong. It's just somethings I haven't done.

Back in 1987 I graduated from the seminary in St. Louis. As a student, Sue and I had been living in small apartments. But the congregation I was called to in Minnesota offered us a large house live in. Moving from an apartment to a house was a big deal to us. We didn't have much furniture, and with our first child on the way, we looked for some used stuff in resale shops. We found a dining room table. Great. I refinished it. We still have it and its worked just fine for us. Later that same year we found 5 of the original chairs. I got 2 of them refinished to match the table. But 3 chairs still haven't been redone. They look bad. That's 3 chairs waiting to be refinished for (get this) 36 years! Yes, 36 years and they're still not done. Do you see why I'm not real proud to bring that up? 36 years of an unfinished project.

Any unfinished projects under your roof?

I admit I also have boxes photos waiting to go into photo albums. I have a stack of books at home I intend to read. It's about a foot high. And then there are rooms at home waiting to be painted. I have the paint, but just haven't done them.

Don't get me wrong. Not everything in my life is incomplete. But I confess, I don't always finish what I start. Chances are I'm not alone.

Is there something unfinished in your life? Is there an exercise machine that collects dust? Got any closets you intend to clean out some day? Recipes you said you'd try? Any flower beds overgrown with weeds?

Let's face it, we don't always finish what we start. And we don't always start what we ought to start.

Now there are a several reasons for this. Sometimes, I just don't have the time. I am often unrealistic in my thinking when I say "Yes, I can do this!" When the reality is there is no way I have the time to do it.

Another reason is that, some things just shouldn't be finished. Maybe it was a bad idea to start in the first place. Sometimes quitting, giving up is the RIGHT thing to do.

But often, I don't finish what I've begun, or I don't start what I should start ... because ... I don't have the strength.

It's not just the little things like unfinished dining room chairs. Often it's the big things of life. I know that what God would want me to do, but I just don't have it in me. It would require more power than I possess.

PARALYZED: WITHOUT POWER AND WITHOUT HOPE.

I hear this all the time. You do too. I knew a woman who was in an abusive relationship. She needed to get out for her physical safety and her emotional and spiritual good. But she can't. "I'm just not able to do it," she said.

I know a guy who smokes, drinks, and eats too much. The doctor tells him his heart and lungs are like a time bomb waiting to go off. He says, "I just don't have the power to change my life."

There are people who fall into temptations that destroy them, and they say the same thing: "If I had the power to overcome the temptation, I'd overcome it. It just requires more power than I possess."

In the Bible, God guided Paul to write in Philippians 4:13, "***I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.***"

I can do all things — do whatever is required, face whatever challenge, look any hardship in the eye — through Christ who gives me strength — strength I don't have."

If I asked, "How many of you think that God is a powerful God?" Everyone here would raise their hand. "Yes, of course, God has power!"

If I asked, "Does God love you and want to give His power to you? Would God want to empower you to live for Christ and stay in faith?" Again, every hand would go up.

But here's the rub: How does God's power become yours? How does God actually strengthen you to face what you need to face, to get through times of adversity, to live your faith in Jesus?

Well, that's what we're trying to understand today. And today's Old Testament reading teaches us a lot about God's power working in our own lives.

This story took place way back in the time of the Judges. The Israelites had been led out of slavery in Egypt. They got into the Promised Land. They were challenged to always be faithful to the true God, Yahweh. But the people didn't keep their promise; they kept turning away from God.

Then God would punish the nation of Israel by some enemy. Soon the people came to their senses, admitted their sin to God, begged for forgiveness, and returned to worshiping Him alone. Then God would raise up a judge. A judge was *somebody* who would be a deliverer. A judge was like our president, a judge, and the pastor all rolled into one person.

At this time Deborah was the judge. She's an example of a powerful, accomplished woman of God back then. The enemy punishing the Israelites was a Canaanite king named Jabin. He had a big and powerful army, under the command of his general, Sisera. The Bible tells us Jabin and Sisera, "**oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years**" Judges 4:3. The Canaanites had 900 chariots. A chariot back then was the most powerful weapon on the battle field. They were fast and armored. So, most battles were fought on flat level ground where chariots could maneuver.

There was a large plain in northern Israel called Meggido. Next to the plain is Mount Tabor. So, God raised up Deborah to lead the nation to be free from this Canaanite oppression. She's not a

soldier so she calls on a guy named Barak. Deborah tells Barak to take 10,000 men and go up on Mount Tabor.

Barak knows he is out-numbered and outgunned. But Deborah delivers a promise from God that is so bold! ***“Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you ... with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand’?”*** *Judges 4:6-7* God promised power to do what appears to be impossible! Barak, however, is not chickening out, but he's not real confident either. He says to Deborah, ***“If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.”*** *Judges 4:8* He's not exactly full of courage.

So together they go, Barak and Deborah. Barak gets 10,000 men. They are up on the mountain. They aren't trained soldiers, but farmers and sheep herders. They have no chariots. None! And sure enough, just as God promised, Sisera salivates at this set up. He brings his whole army and all 900 chariots to the foot of the mountain, down on the plain. Sisera is planning that as soon as Barak and the Israelites come down the mountain he will have them sliced to pieces.

Now folks, can you image being Barak at that moment? What would you be feeling? What would you be thinking? Up there, looking down on all those soldiers and all those chariots.

Then ***“Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?”*** *Judges 4:14* It didn't look like that! It didn't look like God had already granted the victory. If you were Barak, would you take the first step down that mountain? Would you walk into that battle? Would you start moving in the direction God has told you simply because God said so?

**GETTING TO YOUR FEET: GOD'S STRENGTH IS GIVEN
THROUGH A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUSTING JESUS CHRIST.**

You know what God is promising? He's promising power along the way. Power – given through faith – given through a relationship of trusting in God's goodness. God's power is given through trusting in Him so much that you shift your feet into gear and start walking in the general direction God has called you to go. Power between here and there. Power through faith in God's promise, that is stronger than fear over what you see.

Now I don't like that program. I like power now. I like power before the crisis, before the showdown. I want to be guaranteed ahead of time that it will all play out in my favor. I want to not *have* to rely on God to intervene. I like to not *have* to trust completely in faith on Him. I like power way before I have to take the first step. But that's not the way God's program works in our lives.

The way this story ended is a bit complex. But the end result was that God gave power so that it turned out just as He has promised. **And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.** Judges 4:15

There are lots of other passages in the Bible that reinforce this pattern. Ten men are full of leprosy. They see Jesus walking by and call out to Him for help. Jesus, didn't walk over to them. He kept on the direction He was going. Jesus simply said, "Go, show yourselves to the priest." The priest was the guy would certify that they were healed and could move back into the village with their families. These ten, look down at their skin. They are still covered with this dreaded disease. Why should they go? But they put one foot in front of the other. They go. And on the way they are healed.

Scripture is clear: God is more than willing to intervene in the difficulties and hardships of our everyday lives, and He does so by calling us to trust Him. See, God is so much more interested in your heart – in your relationship of trust and love in Him, than God is interested in solving your momentary problem.

It's FAITH – trust in God SO MUCH that I – believe Him with my mind, and act on this faith and trust.

Can you trust God for strength?

Yes, absolutely! Why? First because you know **God LOVES you!** God has made you to be who you are. He's given you your eyes and ears, your whole body, your reason and senses, and takes care of you everyday with food, clothing, house, family, your job and income.

If that weren't enough, **He gave you Jesus.** Your Father in heaven has given you His very best, His Son, Jesus. In love, Jesus came down from heaven to earth. He became one of us in every way except sin. He knows what your life is like. He knows what it is like to feel exhaustion, to feel you can't go on, to face challenges and threats and temptations that are huge.

Jesus knows what it's like when in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed for strength to go on, power to keep walking in the way of God's plan for Him, even when it meant beating, crucifixion, and death. He took all your sins into Himself and carried them with Him to the cross. He paid for all the times you have doubted God's Words, disobeyed God's plan, and turned away in fear to seek your own selfish ways.

Then God's love was demonstrated in Christ bursting from the tomb on the 3rd day, alive forever more. He is with you now and always. He is preparing a place for you in heaven.

Even all that is not the limit of God's love and commitment for you. **He has given you His Holy Spirit!** He lives inside of you, He is so committed to you! He claimed you as His own son or daughter and guaranteed it in your Baptism. Baptism means you *know* you are His. You *know* God is residing in your heart and mind to strengthen you to live in His ways. You *know* God is working to keep you in faith and bring you to heaven, which also means, you *know* all His plans for you are for your good. God promises: ***"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose in Christ Jesus."*** Romans 8:28

TRUST GOD AND TAKE A STEP!

Would you like God's power in your life? I bet you would! He doesn't give power to do whatever YOU want to do. God gives

power for you to do what GOD wants you to do. That's why trust in God is so important. That's why loving Him, wanting to do HIS Will (not our will) is so critical!

What is the challenge, the problem in your life today that looks so huge to you that you don't have enough strength to get through?

Some people are drinking more than they ought to drink, or they're involved with addictions that they can't get out of. Can you trust God for the strength to ask a friend to drive you to a treatment center? Or walk into a support group that will hold you accountable? Pray for strength, and along the way say, **"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."**

Some of you have been crushed by grief. Someone you love deeply has died or walked out of your life. Friends, please trust in God's goodness so much – He loves you, is committed to you, He wants to continue working for good in your life – trust God's goodness so much that you get out of bed every morning, and start to walk in the direction that God has called you to go. And if you have to go to work, trust that God will provide the wherewithal by the time you get to the office to do your job. And when you get home to a house that is now empty, trust in God's loving goodness, that He will come alongside and offer his comfort and divine companionship to ease the loneliness.

Some of you face a financial challenge of one kind or another. Some of you have a spiritual struggle, or a medical battle of one kind or another. Life is hard, and the fact of the matter is many of us are facing challenges that require more power than we possess. So why not this moment of this day say, "God, I need You. "And I'm going to trust, and between the bed and the shower, and the shower and the driveway, and the driveway and the job site, and the job site and the worship site, and the worship site and the home site, I'm just going to put one foot in front of the next and trust that between here and there, You will give strength to do what You've called me to do. I'm going to praise you and thank You." AMEN