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By Danny Parkes

I normally consider myself as strong as an ox, spiritually speaking. I know the Bible, I know the Lord, I know his peace, I know his assurance, I know his forgiveness, I know his love, I know his goodness, I am overjoyed with his presence, I am great at praying for people, I want to bless everyone and share with everyone about everything concerning the Lord, and the list goes on, and on, and on. In short, I’m a “super Christian,” right?

Wrong.
Just flat out wrong!
If it was not for the grace of God, I would be a zippo.
Or, as Jesus said,

“... apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5)

How much of “nothing” is “me”? The answer? Zero.
Or to put it another way, how much of anything I do is to be credited to me? The answer again, zero.

Our lives are “all Jesus.” Well, they are supposed to be “all Jesus,” at any rate. It is supposed to be Christ living in us. While it is true that we live, our strength is supposed to come from Christ. But some of us don’t realize that. And that someone may be me, sometimes. I confess, it may really be me!

In my attempts to do the right thing, I may do the wrong thing. And when I do the wrong thing? Well, it is certainly not Jesus doing it, that is for sure! In that case, it is me doing it, not Jesus. For Jesus will not take credit for sin. But if I do what is right, it is Jesus living in me, doing his
work through me. But because I do it, just because Jesus lives in me, does not prove that it is Jesus doing it through me. For sin is not of Jesus. He will live in us, through the sin, but he will not approve of the sin.

How can this be?

Jesus lives inside each genuine believer, through his Holy Spirit, who indwells them. It is a miracle, really, but that is what happens.

“But if any man doesn’t have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his.” (See Romans 8:9)

Thus, Jesus certainly dwells inside of each believer, through the Holy Spirit, who is “the Spirit of Christ” in the above verse. However, this does not prove that everything I do is approved of in God’s sight. It might not be. And I have a confession to make, it sometimes is not! This confession means that I sometimes do not do the right thing, for if I did, it would be Jesus doing it through me. And thus, my authority, and my confidence, would be unshakable. In other words, as strong as an ox!

But therein may lie another deception, in that anyone who simply feels as strong as an ox, may in fact not be. They may be weak, with their feelings betraying them. We are not the best judges of who we are, or our spiritual condition. Are you? Sometimes, when I think I am doing the best, I am actually doing the worst. Sometimes, when I’m doing the worst, well, it might be that God is even more pleased with me, for I am more humble, even, than when I think I am doing well.

Do not be deceived. You might not be doing as well as you think you are. Or, if you are feeling terrible, you might be doing a whole lot better than you think you are doing! Do not rely upon your feelings, but press in to God!
Recently, I had an amazing experience. I say it is “amazing” because of what I learned. And I would have thought I had “known it already.” But I didn’t. I did not, and this just goes to prove that I may not know as much as I think I know!

I went through a time of stress, and trouble, and travail, and trial. No, I did not like it. I really hated it. In the midst of it, I was truly weakened. I did not know what to do. That day was a Friday. I went to church that evening, because there is a church service happening at 7:00 or 7:30 on Friday evenings. Thus, I went.

The church service went fine, and was uplifting. I also knew there was a “house of prayer” (time of prayer and intercession) going on at the same church, following the service. Before the “house of prayer” started, I drove my daughter home from the main Friday evening service. On the way to our home, I sensed a real heaviness in my spirit, and a lack of spiritual covering (or protection). I felt truly vulnerable, as though the Lord was saying to me, “You are not spiritually protected here.” This feeling was real, and I surmised that I needed to go back to the church, and attend the “house of prayer.” Thus, I dropped my daughter off at home, and turned around and went back.

I’m telling you the sense of oppression was very real. I had not felt like that for months and really probably years, even. So there was definite heaviness in the air — or possibly even in my own heart! Wherever that oppression existed, it was certainly affecting me in a very profound way. Thus, I turned around, went back to the church building, and attended to the “house of prayer” (which was a prayer, praise, and worship service — focusing really on praise and prayer).

I went in there sensing heaviness, and I wanted simply to pray, kind of with my head down, in a rather downcast position. However, when I arrived at the house of prayer, and began to hold my head down, and attempted to simply
pray without entering into worship and praise along with everyone else, something happened! I felt the Lord speak to me, and say, “Lift your head up and praise me!” So I did! When I did, the heaviness that was on me started to “break.” I could feel the oppression starting to peel off. This proved to be a very significant evening, particular because of this one thing. Thus, I’m glad “in a way” that I experienced the heaviness, so I could learn the secret value of praise and thanksgiving.

Surely, I had learned that before, had I not? I had been a Christian for more than 30 years. I had practiced a lot of praise and thanksgiving. But this situation was a little bit different. The sense of oppression was quite heavy. I felt “despair” even. But God was not despairing! God was urging me forward.

The Bible says,

“The Lord Yahweh’s Spirit is on me; because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of Yahweh’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion, to give to them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that he may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1-3)

Did you notice the last part, “to give to them ... the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness”? Well, that’s what happened that evening; the Lord wanted me to hold my head up and praise him, rather than simply “pray about it.”
For there is a time to pray, but there is also a time to praise. And we ought to be sure to do both, and not just one or the other.

That evening, I learned a powerful lesson in the value of praise. I knew this lesson, but I learned it in a fresh, powerful, way. What I did not realize, was that this powerful lesson was not over yet.

That evening, I drove a friend home. It was a rare opportunity to drive him home, due to the fact that I alone was driving, and there was no one else with us, as normally it might be my wife and daughter, or wife and two daughters, with us. But on this evening, I was alone, so I was able to drive my friend home, which was 10 miles away (or thereabouts). On the way to his place, my friend asked me how I was doing. And I confessed to him my sense of heaviness, which was not entirely cured. For the Lord had done a work, but there was more to go.

But if I had not even been there, to attend the “house of prayer” praise and prayer time, I would not have gotten to drive my friend home. Thus it was that we spoke and some more burdens were lifted. The lifting of these burdens came as a result of “confessing” my burdens to my friend. It was a wonderful time to simply receive. I went home feeling more refreshed than ever. But was it over? Were all of my burdens now completely lifted? Well, actually, not!

Let me tell you something else “remarkable” that happened that evening, before I even attended the “house of prayer.” During the regular church service, we took communion. We did this by finding a group of people (about 5) to pray with as we took communion. In our group was a man named Juan. I did not know his last name. For some reason, I felt like saying to the entire group, “Juan’s last name is Amigo” (which is Spanish for “Friend”). I don’t think I’ve ever guessed someone’s last name before, and I did not think
that in reality, his last name was “Amigo,” but that is what I felt like saying, so I said it to our group of about 5 people.

Juan responded, “Actually, my mother’s last name is Amigo.”

Well, I was amazed! For he really was an “Amigo” if you considered his mother’s side of the family. Due to tradition, Juan uses his father’s last name, as most people do. But in reality, he is equally “Amigo” as well, due to his mother’s last name! Thus, in a very real way, I got it right. But was that really me who got that right? No, certainly not. The entire credit has to go to Jesus, because apart from Jesus, we can do nothing (see John 15:5, previously quoted).

Thus, when I heard that Juan’s mother’s last name was, in fact, “Amigo,” I said to the group (and to myself), “God knows us by name, and he cares for each of us, as well.” Thus, this became an encouragement for me and the entire group. I also shared this with others, in order to encourage them.

Thus, that evening, God provided encouragement through this means, through praise, and through confessing my burdens to the man I drove home that evening.

But it was not over. Four days later, I knew that I still needed to be lifted up, so I quickly went back to the house of prayer, in order to join in praying for persecuted believers. For on Tuesday evenings, they devoted their time to praying for the persecuted church. While there, I sensed great anguish of soul. I felt burdened. I wanted God to somehow touch me. Within a minute or so, a man to my left suddenly showed me an encouraging quote on his phone, speaking of God’s love, tenderness, and compassion. I was touched. Then, another man began praying for the persecuted church. He mentioned persecutions and trials going on in Africa. I was touched.
In fact, I was so touched, that I began weeping.

I felt God touch me in a significant way. After that service, I went out for coffee with the man who had shown me the encouraging word. We also went out with another man. Therefore, we discussed, prayed, and encouraged one another. It was great!

Thus, God had done a lot, and has done a lot, through this difficult time. He has shown me anew the value of attending prayer and praise sessions, known as the “house of prayer” in my part of the world. It may go by a different name in your part of the world, but the most important thing is that there are opportunities to pray and praise. The music abounds in the “house of prayer” and it works out well. There are other paradigms, too, such as praying, but not playing music at the same time. But in the house of prayer, music is always playing, when a session is “on” (it happens to be a live band; perhaps if you do not have a live band, you can play prerecorded worship music).

Thus, in summary, I have often felt like I was as strong as an ox. But the Lord has shown me that it is quite possible for me to become as weak as a newborn baby.

But why? Why must we go through these times of weeping, and trial? The Lord so very much wants us as his own, that he will allow us to experience trials, that will push us into his loving arms of protection. You see, before all of this, I hardly attended the house of prayer, but now, I see the value and the need — not only for other people’s sake, but for my sake, as well. While this may not seem to be the ideal reason to attend the house of prayer, I can assure you it is more than sufficient! Once we discover that our spiritual protection, and spiritual vitality, comes from being where the Father is leading us, we will be “more about the business of the Father” (the house of prayer) than ever before. And some of this will come by recognizing our own weaknesses,
as God made clear to me. Thus, I’m glad, in fact, for it — for the need is real.

While meeting my own needs is “more than sufficient” to get me to the house of prayer, the motivation does not stop there — thankfully! In hearing prayers offered for the persecuted church, I was so touched, that I felt I had heard the most loving prayer in my entire life. I went over to the man who had prayed that prayer, and I said, “I think that is the most loving prayer I have ever heard.”

He responded, “I’m so glad you said that. I wasn’t sure if I said it right.”

So what are we doing in the house of prayer? We are encouraging one another, and being encouraged. And prayer is indeed ascending to the Father’s throne, where action is being taken. Friend, if it takes a little hardship to get you there, then do not despise the hardship. You will be more than blessed, as you attend the house of prayer, and as you keep attending the house of prayer.

Finally, my own daughter has been playing violin at the house of prayer repeatedly for, is it almost two years now? No wonder she is so blessed! For we noticed her getting multiple (good) job offers for summer jobs, and being able to engage in numerous activities that had the word “blessed” all over them. Thus, if you are looking to receive, you might try giving some of your time to the house of prayer, where God shines his favor down upon those who attend.

I’m in. And I hope you are, too!
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