

Our word for strength comes from a word signifying 'twisted together', as in the strands of rope. When God says that He is the strength of our soul, He means that our lives are twisted together with Him. Like a vine wrapped around a giant oak tree, we can be strong when our pitiful strength is entwined with the infinite. The word comfort, with the same root as the word fortify, means to support with strength.

It is there for the asking. The story is told that one time a small boy tried to lift a heavy stone, but could not budge it. His father, who was looking on, finally said, 'Are you sure you are using all of your strength?' 'Yes, I am!' the boy cried. 'No you're not,' said the father, 'You haven't asked me to help you!'. We must not overlook this in our prayers to God. God can strengthen each of our weak areas, giving us all-round balance and capability. It makes me think of the seemingly inherent weakness that we have on one side of our body. One hand works very well, but the other seems useless at times. The left side has from ancient times past been associated with weakness or evil, because it was typically weak and hard to control. God can complete us wherever we are lacking.

God also gives us strength in terms of nourishment. We become weak from not continually providing our body and soul with the right kind of energy source. Christ said that He was the bread and water of life; he means that our most fundamental needs (not necessarily our desires) can only be truly satisfied through our faith in him. David wrote, '*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*', in Psalms 23:1. God supplied the Israelites physically many times with water, manna, and quail; he then led them into a 'land of milk and honey'. Elijah was a prophet who was nourished many times through the providence of God; by the ravens at Cherith (1 Kings. 17:6), the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9), and of the greatest interest, when Elijah ran for his life (1 Kings 19:4ff). '*Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you. And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.*' God gives us the answers to our needs. But if we are against him, it will be '*as when a hungry man dreams that he is eating, but he awakens, and his hunger remains; as when a thirsty man dreams that he is drinking, but he awakens faint, with his thirst unquenched.*' (Isaiah 29:8a).

One more way that God supports weakness is that he restores our health. He can do this physically and spiritually; '*This is what the Lord says: 'Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing or you....But I will restore you to health, and heal your wounds''* (Jeremiah 30:12,17). And of course, '*By his wounds we are healed*' (Isaiah 53:3b). Disease destroys our strength, but God can revive us again, no matter how low we go (see Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones). We must seek this strength.

The world tells us that God is a crutch, something only for those who are too weak to stand on their own two feet. While it is true that God supports us in many ways, He is not a crutch. If there is anything that I learned from spending two months on crutches, it is the fact that crutches are extremely painful and extremely clumsy. And the life of a Christian with God is just the opposite. God is not a crutch, but a smooth foundation, upon which we can walk without stumbling. I think of the support even over water that Christ gave the apostle Peter as he was able to walk on it (Matthew 14:28ff).

The idea of God being a Rock or a foundation is a beautiful one that is expressed many times in the scriptures. For instance, in Ps. 62:6,7, we read, '*He only is my Rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: The Rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.*' God is a rock that is not just some little pebble; it is gigantic, immovable, and God can plant us firmly upon it. In Psalms 18:1-3 we read, '*I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*' Our God gives us strength and support. He helps us run the race of life most gracefully, not stumbling around as though we were crippled and blind. He indeed is our Rock. Let us use His support to hold up as many others as we can.

