

Ministry Message



Expanding the Impact of Your Gifts of Encouragement

Strong in the Lord®

Introduction

Biographies of famous men can enlighten and encourage us. They offer insights into the forces that have motivated and inspired heroes and celebrities like John D. Rockefeller or Winston Churchill or Jerry Weintraub or David Beckham or Bono. Some of the famous and powerful use their fame and wealth for good. But often, the stories of the rich and famous contain great ironies:

- The handsome and popular athlete whose biography contrasts his amazing physical strength and athleticism with his weaknesses in fending off sexual temptation.
- The politician, who for the sake of his wife and children, pays any price to win election after election, and then, just as he takes his place among the influential and powerful, sees his family begin to fall apart. His ambition and greed have alienated them from him and from each other.
- The industrialist who wakes up one morning to the realization he has built his empire on the backs of thousands of underpaid workers, people who struggled for years in unhealthy and unsafe working conditions to advance only his own career.

You may know stories of men like that. Some few see the devastating consequences of their poor choices before it's too late. Others never do. In either case, we as onlookers often see at least a part of our own life story in the regrets of the rich and famous.

Getting to the Heart

Rich or poor. Famous or infamous or anonymous. None of us gets far in life without a few regrets. Even the so-called "heroes of the faith" had them. We are all flawed by sin. It brings down even the strongest among us. For example:

- Noah, who obeyed God and saved the human race by building the ark, planted a vineyard and drank himself into a stupor soon after.
- Abraham, the "father of the faithful," struggled with fear and twice tried to avoid danger by passing his wife off as his sister, putting her in harm's way and wrecking his witness with two powerful leaders of his day.
- Moses, whom God had made a prince of Egypt, committed murder.
- Samson, chosen by the Lord to deliver his people, let his anger and lust get the best of him time after time and arguably accomplished far less than God had gifted him to accomplish.
- David, a man after God's own heart, wrote beautiful poetry praising God for his grace and goodness, but he was also, at one point in his life, an adulterer and murderer.

Regrets? Surely these men had them. But their life stories are not stories of regret. Their life stories end, not on a note of human weakness, but on one of God's strength. They were strong—in the Lord.

They, like we ourselves, have a mighty and loving God, one who knows human weakness. He knows it well because he sent his only Son to take our sin and weakness on himself. Jesus was tempted, just as we are, but he never gave in to sin. Jesus lived a sinless life in our place. Then he died a very painful human death to earn forgiveness for our every wrong thought, word, and action. Nothing remains beyond the scope of his forgiveness. He is "mighty to save," as the prophet Isaiah once put it (63:1). In our weakness and our regrets, Jesus offers us his gifts of forgiveness, restoration, and the sense of direction we need to begin again—renewed and strong in him. With David, we can declare, "God is my strength and power" (2 Samuel 22:33).

Ironically, God's strength reveals itself most clearly in contrast to our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. When we see our weaknesses, our need for the Lord, his strength is there to uplift and empower us. As the apostle Paul once wrote, God's "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

And God's strength is making a difference in the lives of men who belong to him through faith in Christ Jesus!

- Strong in the Lord, a young man chooses not to yield to the influence of the culture. He refuses to move in with his girlfriend, choosing to honor her as together they plan their marriage.
- Strong in the Lord, a businessman facing Lou Gehrig's disease reaches out to share the Good News of Jesus with others as he receives treatment.
- Strong in the Lord, a grandfather fights off the temptations of alcoholism day by day, seeking to rebuild his relationship with his wife and children—and to create a family legacy of faith.

As men of God, we can begin each day reminding ourselves of our identity in Christ, "God is my strength and power" (2 Samuel 22:33). We can encourage one another with the words of Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." We can leave regrets behind as we build our own legacy of faith.

What difference is your Savior's forgiveness and strength making in your life? What difference will it make today?

Taking It Home (Father's Day)

You may be a father, grandfather, uncle, brother, or son. But by God's grace, you are also strong in the Lord. You are called by him to serve those around you with courage and commitment. To remind you of that, each of you will receive today (*name the Strong in the Lord® gift you will distribute*). You are in our prayers. We are so thankful to God for the gifts you are!

Taking It Home (Men's Ministry)

Each of you serves the Lord Jesus in many different ways. No matter what your specific callings, in the cross of your Savior you are strong in the Lord. Today, each of you will receive a (*name the Strong in the Lord® gift you will distribute*). Let this gift remind you always of God's strength at work in you and through you.