

## God's Promise of Strength for the Journey

Isaiah 41:10

Good morning! Tomorrow we celebrate Memorial Day. But today, we remember our fallen heroes. These brave men and women in uniform didn't die in vain for they have given their own lives so that others may live in freedom. We recognize their sacrifice and willingness and readiness to fight their battles. We will not enjoy the freedoms we enjoy today if not for their selfless devotion to others and our country. We truly are grateful for what they have done for us.

Some of us have a loved one or loved ones who died fighting for freedom, maybe a brother, a sister, a parent, an uncle, any relative or a close friend, I would like to thank you, too, for being a part of their lives. Normally, if we were inside a church building, I'll ask you to stand. But I'll ask you to show yourself on camera if you'd like to. And then we're going to pray a prayer of thanksgiving and we'll pray for you, too. Would you do that?

Before I ask everyone to bow your heads, let me share this beautiful poem by Lewis Millett entitled "An Old Soldier's Prayer".

"I have fought when others feared to serve.  
I have gone where others failed to go.  
I've lost friends in war and strife,  
Who valued Duty more than love of life....  
I've seen challenged men become even bolder,  
I've seen the Duty, Honor, Sacrifice of the Soldier.  
Now I understand the meaning of our lives,  
The loss of comrades not so very long ago.  
So to you who have answered duties siren call,  
May God bless you my son, may God bless you all."

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, we are so deeply thankful for soldiers who courageously gave it all, without regard for their own safety, so that they can uphold the everlasting principles of freedom, love, and peace. If not for their sacrifice, we won't be enjoying freedom. We thank you that they responded to your call in their lives to defend this country. We also remember their families who unselfishly gave up their own rights to their loved ones who pursued their calling. We ask for your unique blessings to fill their homes and we pray that your peace, provision, and strength will fill their lives. May your presence accompany them always even as they feel the absence of their loved ones. In the name of your Son Jesus, we pray, Amen.

So, we reached the end of our journey as far as our series is concerned. I hope you were inspired in this journey we're calling "God's Awesome Promises to You" that we went through together for the past six weeks. And I hope you'll be able to apply the principles you learned to your own personal journey in life.

All of us are in a journey. Some reach the end of their journey quicker than others. Just like the soldiers we are remembering today, and many of them died at a young age. For them, I'm sure it was a difficult journey, a journey that was filled with anxiety and dread and fear. Many of them as they were out there in the battlefield didn't know whether that would be their last day on earth.

All of us are in a battlefield as well. Scottish Minister John Watson, writing under his pseudonym Ian MacLaren said, "Every man is fighting a hard battle." I think that's true. If you think otherwise, you haven't lived long enough.

Even Christians are fighting a hard battle. Jesus didn't promise an easy and smooth life for his followers. Some people have this mistaken notion that when you become a Christian, you'll always be blessed, you will not get sick, you will always be happy, you will always have money, you will have no enemies, etc.

That's why we're getting some false conversions, people following Jesus because of what Jesus can give them, not because of a genuine relationship with Jesus. For example, John tells us in his gospel that some Jews were looking for Jesus because he performed a miracle and gave them food to eat. Then, we're also getting carnal Christians, those who after conversion, wouldn't mature and have not completely given everything to Jesus. In Acts 8, we read about Simon the Sorcerer, who Luke said believed and was baptized, just like the Samaritans. Yet, because he had a wrong understanding of ministry, he thought he could buy a spiritual gift with money. Peter rebuked him and told him to ask forgiveness from God because his heart was not right. Now, some commentaries say that he wasn't really converted and some say that he was. I would say he was but that's not my point here. My point is that all Christians still struggle with some sin in their lives and we need to be reminded and rebuked of our sin. We all have blind spots. If we don't struggle, then we're perfect. Is there a perfect Christian on this side of eternity? Sometimes, the Holy Spirit himself rebukes us or sometimes he uses another person. Our response to that rebuke will depend on our spiritual maturity.

So, we are all fighting a hard battle. There are enemies within and without. We fight our own selfish desires and tendencies to sin and we fight external forces or pressures like the everyday problems we face in life. Sometimes, we fight the devil himself. But let's not say that the devil is causing all the problems we're having. Let's not give him too much credit. We face problems in this world because this world is imperfect and people are imperfect. Jesus himself said that **"In this world you will have trouble". (John 16:33)** That's a given, right? We all face troubles in this world. Even Bill Gates the richest man in the world, his marriage is in trouble. You've heard of his impending divorce, right? So, would you rather be rich or would you rather have a wife? Some of you go, "That's a tough question". Ok, just kidding. For a Christian, marriage is paramount.

So, we will have trouble in this world, whether you like it or not. It will come. And when it comes, you need to be prepared. You need something to hold on to. You need hope to reassure you. You need a promise that will not be broken.

So, that promise is contained in Isaiah 41:10 which says, and listen to it carefully, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Now, those words were actually spoken by God to his people the Israelites through his prophet Isaiah. But just like many verses in the Bible, we can personalize them and apply them to our personal situation because they have great value for us. Romans 15:4 says, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.” I believe God has intended it that way. Yes, there are passages that we cannot apply to our situation, but in general I believe God’s words are there to help us in our journey.

So, with that in mind, I’m using this passage as basis for this message which I’ve entitled, “God’s Promise of Strength for the Journey”.

In this message, I’d like to share with you four things about God that will give you strength in your journey in life. If you’re feeling weary, tired, and just about to give up, this message is for you. If you’re not, this message is for you, too, because you’ll need it someday.

First thing you need to remember as you face life’s problems is that

#### 1. God’s Presence is Real.

God says, “So do not fear, for I am with you;”. I’d like to emphasize “I am with you”. Nothing can be more reassuring than that. No matter how alone you might feel right now, if you are a Christian, you are never really alone.

I understand that loneliness is a horrible thing. For many it can lead to depression, a feeling of worthlessness, and downright despair.

The good news is that whether you recognize it or not, or feel His presence or not, God is always with you. Even when He seems far away and unavailable, He is still there. When Jesus gave His Great Commission, He ended it with these words: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” – Matthew 28:20b

Jesus promised that there would never be a time when He would not be with us. He promised that even when He left the earth, He would send a companion – the Holy Spirit who would take His place. “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.” – John 14:16

There will never be a time when you do not have God as your companion in life. Even in the worst of times, when things seem to be falling apart all around you, God is still there.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians, “We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.” – 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (NLT)

I understand that the difficulty in all this is accepting something you can't see, hear, touch or feel. But has God come through for you in other areas? Has He kept His promises? Has he done what He said he would do?

If you can trust God for those other things, certainly you can trust Him when He says that

He will never, ever leave you. God gave this promise to Joshua, but I think it also applies to us:

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Joshua 1:5b (ESV)

I remember the story I read of a woman who lost her husband during the Vietnam War. She was in church one day with their only child and then suddenly she just felt this gnawing pain in her heart because of the absence of her husband. She felt alone and extremely sad. Tears started streaming down her cheeks as she wondered whether God could ease the pain she was feeling. Suddenly, she felt like the pain was going away and was being replaced by a sense of peace and joy. It was as if she was being embraced by God himself. She felt the incredible love of God at that very moment. She wiped her tears away and happened to look to her right. She saw a lady sitting at a pew at the next aisle who was smiling at her and she smiled back. After the service, the lady approached her and told her she noticed she looked so sad. So, she prayed for her. She prayed that God would touch her. God answered her prayer.

Folks, just because we don't always experience God's presence doesn't mean he isn't there. He will make his presence known at the moment you need him the most.

So, because God's presence is real, you don't have to be afraid.

The second thing you need to remember to give you strength for the journey is that

## **2. God is a Personal God.**

What do I mean by that? It means that he is a God who you can relate to. He says, **“Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.”**

You see, when God said those words to the Israelites, he was most likely calling their attention to the fact that the pagan gods around them couldn't care for them like he could. Those pagan gods were not real, they were just created by human hands and, therefore, couldn't respond to their needs. But with Jehovah God, they need not be dismayed. They can bring all their anxieties and fears to him and he will respond for sure because he is real and he is personal.

When Jesus came to earth, he expanded this to mean that God is our God who we can relate to because he is our father. The word "Father" says much about our relationship to God. Prior to Jesus' coming, most people wouldn't presume to address God as their "Father"; Jesus changed all that. Jesus startled people by repeatedly calling God His Father. Jesus wants us to know that we can come to the Father anytime. We need not be afraid of him. Sometimes, this fear springs out of our experience with our earthly father. We're afraid that he might judge us or punish us so quickly. But, our Heavenly Father is not a heartless dictator, a stern boss or a harsh judge.

You see, "Father" is a family word. God as our "Father" implies a close, intimate relationship of reliance. We can trust him. Paul describes our position as members of God's family in his letter to the Galatians:

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ... Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." (Gal. 3:26; Gal. 4:6) Abba is Aramaic for Father. In English that would be equivalent to daddy. And as you know, you cannot call somebody else's father as daddy. He must be your own daddy. That speaks of a close, personal relationship.

As Paul says, our relationship with God as Father starts at the time when we receive Jesus into our hearts as Lord and Savior of our lives. That is what John says too, "But to all who did receive him (that is, Jesus), who believed in his name,

he gave the right to become children of God”. (John 1:12 ESV) So, only those who put their trust in Jesus are God’s children.

It’s not true that he is the father of all mankind. God may be the creator, the sovereign ruler of everything in this world and, in fact, in the whole universe but he is not the Father of everyone. We become God’s children by faith. And because God is your father, he loves you so much. John says also in his letter, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (I John 3:1).

Now, how is God like a “Father” to us? He provides, he loves, he gives life, he guides, and he disciplines us. For example, Jesus said to people who were anxious about life, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, nor reap, or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Mt 6:26). He’s saying, “You are God’s child. You don’t have to worry about any lack in your life. Do not be dismayed. God knows exactly what you need, and he will provide it to you at the exact time you need it.”

God’s presence is real. God is a personal God. And the third thing is

### 3. God gives me staying power.

We all need staying power to survive. We all need to be energized like the Energizer Bunny so we can go on and on and on. Have you ran in a marathon before? Swen ran in several marathons before. You ask him and he’ll tell you that you need incredible endurance and determination and persistence in order to finish a marathon. In fact, in a race there is always a tremendous crowd at the start. But as the race goes on, the crowd thins out. You see, it’s not so important how you start the race of life, but how you finish up that counts. It doesn’t matter where you’ve been, what matters is where you’re going to end up. And if you want to end well, the only one who can help you is God. He says, “I will strengthen you and help you”.

The apostle Paul was a person of great staying power. Twice in 2 Cor. 4, first in verse 1 and another in verse 16, he says "we do not lose heart." He kept on keeping on no matter what happened. And then in verses 8-9 he says, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

Now, how was he able to survive everything that life has thrown on him? Later on in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, he says, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Then, a few years later while in prison, he writes, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Phil. 4:13).

We all have moments of human frailty and weakness, distress and difficulties, struggles and tribulation, but it's in those moments when we're at our weakest and most vulnerable point, we can draw on God's strength.

It's God's power within us that enables us to stand strong in the Lord and to walk through it with Him. When he doesn't take the weaknesses or struggles away, He strengthens us with His power and might, so we can go through it in His strength and with complete peace—we will then come out the other side victorious.

German theologian Otto Dibelius, a leader of the anti-Nazi resistance movement in World War II says this, "God does not lead his children around hardship, but leads them straight through hardship. But he leads! And amidst the hardship, he is nearer to them than ever before." That's a striking way to put it. Not around hardship but straight through it.

Probably, you're someone who's going straight through hardship right now. Funds are low, marriage is crumbling, body is sick, children are stubborn, people are mean, whatever trouble you're in, know that God is always there to strengthen you and help you. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

To have strength in the journey of life, remember that God's presence is real, God is a personal God, God gives you staying power. And finally,

#### 4. God will never abandon you.

God says, "I will uphold you with my righteous right hand". To uphold is to support, to lay hold of, to hold fast. I like what this famous theologian named Rick Astley said, "Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down, never gonna run around and desert you". Folks, God will never leave nor forsake you as the Bible says. He is always there to support you. Many people turn away from their faith because they feel like God has abandoned them or God doesn't have answers to their questions.

Recently, we've heard of some famous Christians who resigned as pastors or preachers or singers or worship leaders declaring they are no longer Christians. It's sad when that happens. We really don't know what happened but for sure they have become disappointed with God. Maybe they were not Christians in the first place. Maybe they were. We don't know. Only God knows. But if they are Christians, the Bible says that God loves them because they are his children. And as a father, God will not forsake them and in fact, he will pursue them and discipline them until he returns to them.

My point is that if you're a Christian, God loves you more than you know. The Bible says that you're the apple of his eye and he rejoices over you with singing. This is the picture of a father who delights tremendously over his child.

A father would always protect his child like he would protect his very eyes and he would sing with gladness over his child.

Now, God says he upholds you with his righteous right hand. God's right hand is the symbol of his power, his protection, his love and his grace. We find that in several passages like Psalm 48:10, Psalm 118:15-16, Exodus 15:6, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 18:35, and Psalm 20:6.

And so, it's telling us that God does what is right always. He always points you in the right direction. He always does what is best for you, even if you don't always realize it at the time. God's hand reaches far. There is nowhere that you can go that God cannot reach you. He can find you at the top of the mountains, at the depths of the oceans or anywhere in between. He can reach you in outer space. God's hand brings you near. The purpose in His reach is to bring you close. He has not rejected you. He wants to connect with you spiritually, relationally, eternally. The God of the universe cares about you. He really cares about you. He is not finished with you yet. Like me and everyone else in this virtual room, we are all a work in progress.

The Bible says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Therefore, he will not forsake you because he is still doing something in your life.

If you're a Christian, God has chosen chosen you for salvation. So, stand fast amid all the trials of life, knowing that God will encourage you and make you strong on the inside.

If you're not a Christian, get Christ into your heart and you will be stable. All that I have said doesn't matter without Christ. Unless he is in your heart, the rest is just good religious advice. Do you know him? Get to know him. "Run to the cross". Because in the cross there is deliverance and safety. But that's not just a good word for the lost. That's great advice for believers.

In the time of trouble, run to Jesus. Cling to him! Believe in him! Trust in him!  
Rest your soul in the Lord and all will be well.