

September 21 | PSALM 46:10

There is only one situation where weakness is a virtue. The Bible, of course, urges us to be strong again and again. Our culture celebrates powerful people and shows contempt for weakness. But in the presence of the Almighty, All-Knowing, Everywhere-Present Lord of all, admitting weakness is both wise and appropriate. In Psalm 46:10, the Lord Himself speaks, saying, “Be still and know that I am God.” In Hebrew, the term translated “be still” can also be rendered “to be weak, or to let go; to release.” A paraphrase might read, “Let yourself become weak, and you will know God’s power in your life.” The apostle Paul agrees, saying, “When I am weak, then I am strong.”¹ Whatever adversity you may be facing right now, don’t be ashamed if you feel weak or lacking strength or resources. That’s the best time to present to God what you lack so *He* can supply His strength.

Lord, I remember the story of David at Ziklag. He was defeated, heartbroken, and had cried so hard he had no strength left in his body. His men were so angry with him they were about to stone him to death. But your Word says, “David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.”² That is what I want to do, Lord, right now.

1. 2 Corinthians 12:10. 2. 1 Samuel 30:6, NKJV.

In a vineyard, weeks before harvest, a final pruning of the vines allows maximum sunlight to boost sugar content in developing grapes. Jesus and His disciples may have been walking through such a vineyard when He used the vines as an object lesson. He said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” We too need pruning. And no one is more qualified to perform that surgery than the One who knows us best and loves us most. We have unfruitful branches—activities, habits, preoccupations, and unhealthy friendships that sap life energy and keep us from bearing the sweetest and most abundant fruit. God’s pruning knife is sharp, and it hurts when He cuts away unproductive branches. But He is a *Master Gardener*. He knows what produces good fruit.

It’s true, Father, that I have felt Your pruning knife. Some things that once seemed so important to me have been cut away, and I’ve grieved for the missing branches. But in the morning, with Your healing sunlight flooding over me, I remember that time is short, and I want to bear the most fruit that I can.

An extended passage in Exodus describes the garments of Israelite priests—in great detail! God wanted His representatives clothed in a very particular way, reflecting the dignity of their role and the beauty and purity of the God they served. There were regulations about tassels, turbans, breastplates, belts—and even undergarments. If all of these details start to overwhelm you, turn quickly to the New Testament book of 1 Peter, and read about *our* priesthood as Christians. Peter declares that “you are... a royal priesthood... God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”¹ And how are we to dress as God’s royal priests? The Bible says, “...as God’s chosen people... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”² But rather than being compelled by Old Testament law, *we* are compelled by the wonderful, liberating mercies of God. Dress yourself today in clothing that will draw attention... to Him.

Lord, I want to wear these clothes! I want to slip on compassion and kindness every morning. I want people around me to recognize the humility and gentleness that comes from You—and the patience that I could never achieve on my own. Please let the things I put on today remind people of You.

1. 1 Peter 2:9. 2. Colossians 3:12.

Once my “get up girls” have me dressed and sitting up, once I’ve finished breakfast and am ready to head out the door, my friends and I take an important pause. We head for our favorite warm spot. It’s the bedroom bay window seat, which looks out over my backyard—and the San Gabriel Mountains beyond. With pillows on the window seat, it’s one warm spot that invites you to sit and linger. In that cozy corner, the three of us open a hymnbook to harmonize together over some beautiful old hymns. Safeguarding a quiet moment, admiring God’s creation, and giving God pleasure each morning with our song—it’s something that warms the soul as well as the body. Don’t be in such a hurry with life that you rush past those warm, quiet places where you meet with the Lord. The peace and perspective that come from those few sweet moments will color the rest of your day.

Father, the Bible tells how You met with Adam and Eve in the Garden in the cool of the day. I imagine there were warm, quiet places in Eden where You loved to talk to our first parents. Help me to find those moments in my day! Please don’t let me hurry past places and times where You seek fellowship with me.

Today's Scripture says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."¹ Jesus had a clear and concise ministry. To carry out His mission, He connected with virtually every person the Father put in His path—every kind of individual in every strata of society. He didn't allow Himself to bypass *anyone*. This included arrogant, self-righteous religious leaders, as well as prostitutes, traitors, people with infectious diseases, and even dangerous people inhabited by demonic spirits. What about us? Every day we bypass people who are considered outsiders, oddballs, loners, foreigners, and second-class citizens. Yet God has placed these individuals around us in our neighborhoods, on our street corners, on our campuses, and in the mall parking lot. We may find ourselves tempted to relate only to those with whom we identify, with whom we are comfortable. But if we want to follow Christ's lifestyle, it will mean making inroads with people outside our normal circles.

Jesus, I've prayed this before, but I'm asking You again. Open my eyes to see the people around me as You do. Help me to see beyond the externals. Help me to venture outside my comfort zone to greet, speak to, help, or at least smile at the people I would normally avoid or ignore—for Your sake!

1. Luke 19:10, NIV 1984.

December 31 REVELATION 22:12–13

Today's Scripture gives the best possible word on which to end our year together. "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."¹ In the course of this past year, we've heard countless voices and read stacks of material by dozens of authors. But after all is said, read, and done, Jesus is the first word in our lives and He is the last word. What more can we say? Who else can we turn to? Where else could we go? There is no one like Jesus. It's my prayer that the plans you make, the way you spend your time, the thoughts you entertain, the words you speak, the company you keep, and the manner in which you live before others, all of it, will point to Him.

As David prayed, dear Lord, "You are my God. My times are in your hands."² Oh, that I would remember this, from the time I open my eyes in the morning and through all my days. My life is not my own, my time is not my own, my opportunities are not my own. I belong to Another... to Him who gave His life for me.

1. Revelation 22:12–13. 2. Psalm 31:14–15.