

RENEWING OUR STRENGTH



In the Place of God's Presence

***They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.
They shall mount up on wings as the eagles.
They shall run and not be weary.
They shall walk and not faint.***

Isaiah 40

The world we live in is as full of idolatry today as it was in the days when people bowed down to images of gold, silver, wood and stone. Today it's money. It's your favorite celebrity. It's that wonderful spiritual organization you belong to. Your career. Your political passion. Your ego. Whatever it is that drives you, other than love for God, is an idol.

It's the thing you serve, whether you realize it or not.

How often we start out walking by faith in God, and end up enslaved to an idol. Just like the Israelites, who were brought out of Egypt by God, with signs and wonders and the parting of the Red Sea. But as soon as Moses goes up on Mt. Sinai to get the commandments, they forget all about God. It's so much easier to live with an idol.

"Come on, Aaron. You're the high priest. Make us a god we can see!"

"Okay," says Aaron, "Give me your gold."

And now the Israelites who had been set free from slavery by the unseen God are bowing down to a golden calf.

The same thing is going on among believers today. We claim to be worshiping God, but it's so much easier to put your trust in something you can touch or see. Something you can control.

But here's the catch:

When you open your heart to an idol, that idol drains your strength. Whether your idol is money or your own ego, that idol will drain you until it destroys you.

On the other hand, when you wait upon the Lord, instead of draining your strength he keeps renewing your strength, until one day you are standing before his throne, shining with his glory.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

Jack Short came face-to-face with God when he was 25. The word of the Lord knocked him off his feet one summer afternoon down at the beach, when a friend offered to cut him in on some shady business. Something inside his soul shouted, "Don't do it, Jack! Get away from this guy!"

Where did that voice come from? Who was it that spoke like a fire alarm in his heart?

"I don't know who you are," said Jack to that inner voice, when he was alone again, "but whoever you are, show me the way."

In the days that followed, Jack Short became convinced that it was the voice of the Lord. He opened his Bible, went to the gospels and started to pay attention. He couldn't get enough of those words of Jesus. Soon his soul was on fire.

Jack Short found a church and went there faithfully every week. The people in that church recognized that Jack had a gift for teaching. So he began to share with others everything he knew about the Lord. People were drawn to Jack's teaching and gave their hearts to God. Soon Jack was preaching with such power that crowds came wherever he spoke.

During those early days Jack Short took great care to keep his focus on one thing: God's kingdom, God's World. He took time to be alone with God every day. He made sure he paid attention to the broken souls who came to him with their troubles.

They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

Jack Short knew how to wait on the Lord. Prayer was the foundation of everything he did.

One day a wealthy stranger took Jack to lunch. "You have a message that needs to be heard by the world," said the man. "I'm going to put you on TV." It seemed like an opportunity sent from heaven. Pretty soon Jack Short was a household name in the Christian world, and he was busier than he'd ever been in his life.

By this time Jack had so much on his plate that he just didn't have time for people as he once did. And time spent alone with God every day began to diminish as his phone kept ringing and meetings piled up.

Jack Short had now become like the captain of a big ship. It took all his strength to keep the ship running like it should. What Jack didn't realize was that his ship, his "ministry," had become his idol. And his idol was draining his strength. Jack was so busy managing his ministry, he never got around to asking himself where the ministry was going. Where *he* was going.

Without realizing it, Jack Short had switched from waiting on God to waiting on his idol. He was so busy expanding his own kingdom, he lost touch with God's Kingdom. One day Jack Short woke up and discovered that he was a Christian celebrity with an empty soul. Ah, but then his i-phone rang, and he rushed off to another meeting.

They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

As long as Jack Short was waiting on the Lord, his strength was renewed and he bore fruit for God's Kingdom. But when Jack allowed himself to be side-tracked by his idol, his kingdom, instead of God's Kingdom, his bank account grew fat and his soul grew lean. Until one day, like Samson of old, Jack Short discovered that his strength was gone.

This tragedy doesn't just happen to Christian celebrities. It happens to ordinary people like you and me. When we get caught up in serving our idol, we lose our strength. Our faith withers because we are no

longer waiting on the Lord. Maybe we keep going through the motions but we hardly have the strength to pray a decent prayer.

So what does it mean to wait on the Lord? Waiting on the Lord is simply prayer, and the life of service that flows from prayer.

Jesus never taught the disciples how to preach. He never taught them how to heal. He never gave seminars on casting out demons. He just said, "Go out there and do it."

But Jesus was continuously teaching those disciples how to pray.

To keep praying and never lose heart.

To pray the way he did.

At the start of the day, Jesus *prayed*.

When he broke the bread, he *prayed*.

After he fed the multitude, he went into the hills and *prayed*.

When he hung on the cross, he *prayed*.

So what do we pray for, when we wait upon the Lord? We pray for four things:

We pray for focus.

We pray for light.

We pray for strength.

We pray to set the captives free.

We pray for focus.



Look to Christ

Nicodemus was a teacher in Israel, but he knew there was something missing in his life. When he saw Jesus teaching in the temple and healing the sick, Nicodemus decided that Jesus had what he was looking for.

So one night he goes to see Jesus.

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God. For no one can do the signs that you do, unless God is with him."

"Nicodemus, what you're looking for is the Kingdom of God---God's World. But you'll never even see God's world until you're born of the Spirit."

And when Jesus talks about being born of the Spirit, he's not talking about goose bumps and pious feelings and announcing to the world that now we're "born again." He's talking about allowing the Spirit of God to enter us and focus our lives on the one thing needful; God's Kingdom, God's World.

When Jack Short lost his focus, he lost his strength.

When we get distracted by our idol, that idol drains our strength away.

Lord, help us to focus on you...on your Kingdom, so that we may mount up on wings as the eagles.

We pray for light

When we were focused on our idol, on that ambition, that dream, or even that jealous grudge, everything seemed so clear. We knew which way we wanted to go. We seemed to know just what to do. But now that we're focused on God the road ahead is often cluttered with distractions, shrouded in fog. We need light.

So we pray for light. And lo and behold, light comes.

***"I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."***

John 8

That light renews our strength until we mount up on wings as the eagles. Until we run and never get weary. We walk and never faint.

We pray for strength



Breakthrough

The Apostle Paul had this thorn in the flesh. We don't know what it was. Was it an eye problem? Stomach trouble? Somebody giving him a hard time? Whatever it was, this thorn kept him weak.

So Paul prayed, "Lord take it away!" Three times he cried out for relief from this thorn. But Paul got an answer he didn't expect.

***"My grace is sufficient for you,
my strength is made perfect in weakness."***

Paul got strength. God's strength. Power to ignite the fire of God's Kingdom all over the Roman world.

To be able to keep going when times get tough, to be able to plow through the smoke and the confusion of this dark world and not lose heart, we need that strength.

All we have to do is ask. And keep asking. His strength always comes, never fails.

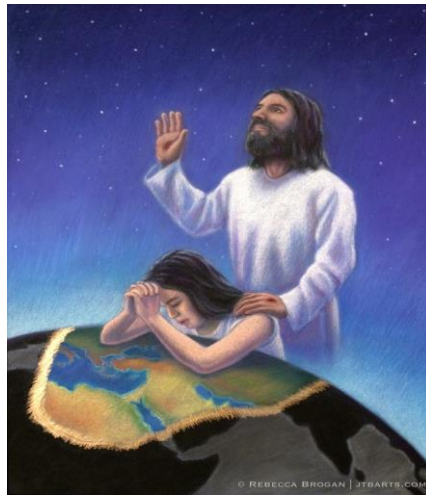


Sons of the Light

We pray to set the captives free.

***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives.***

Luke 4



Intercession- Praying the Perfect Will of God

In a world where millions are being drained of strength and destroyed by their idols, Jesus comes to set us free. He died on the cross, he rose from the dead, and now he sets us free through prayer.

Scripture tells us that the risen Lord ever lives to make intercession---prayer--- for those who draw near to God through him. (Hebrews 7:25)

So we enter into the prayers of our Master. In his name we set the captives free through prayer. The Lord puts names into our hearts. The names of people he wants us to pray for. God will do things for these people through our prayers that will only happen through prayer.

Why God sets it up this way is a mystery. But that's how it is.

So we pray for our loved ones, neighbors, friends in the church, friends from the past. We pray for our enemies, people who give us a hard time. We lift them by name before the throne every day, and let heaven flood them with grace. The Spirit may even guide us to pray for the downfall of a tyrant.

It's the most important ministry God will ever give us.

This kind of prayer has unspeakable power.

Jack Short started off with grace and power, until his "ministry" became his idol and drained his strength. But there's still hope for Jack. All he has to do is go back to Square One, and all heaven will come to his aid.

The same is true for us. All heaven is waiting to lift us into a place brighter than we've ever known, if we will but answer the Master's call to come alongside with him and pray.

Pray for focus.

Pray for light.

Pray for strength.

Set those captives free through prayer.

If we wait upon our idol, our idol will drain us until it destroys us.

If we wait upon the Lord, the Lord will renew our strength day by day until the day we stand, shining and radiant, before his throne.



Into the Most Holy Place

Prayer- What a gift, a blessing that you call us to come and join with you in prayer. That we can wait upon you, enter into your most holy place and be renewed and strengthened. Thank you, thank you. Lord forgive us for turning away from this most precious gift, and waiting on our idols instead. Help us to let go of our idols before we are drained of strength and completely destroyed. Help us to focus on you once again, until our hearts are bathed in your presence and goodness. We pray for light so that we can have vision to see past the darkness. We pray for strength so we can keep heart, keep going when things get tough. We pray for those you bring into our lives. We pray for their turmoil and struggles. Fill them, free them, draw them to you so they may renew their strength as well. May we all wait upon you so we can stand shining and radiant before your throne in this life and into eternity.

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN

