

God is My Strength



Christopher News Notes

FROM THE SMALLEST PROBLEMS TO THE LARGEST TRIALS, we turn to God for strength when we feel we cannot get through them on our own. However, that doesn't mean we should use God only in a "break glass in case of emergency" situation. Instead, God offers us the strength we need to get through challenging times. It's always available to us, through His love. Our task is to trust and accept it.

Writer Christine Ponsard describes it this way:

“The gift of strength is this engine that allows me to move forward in God’s love. It is up to me to maintain that engine or let it rust in a corner. As the saying goes, ‘If you don’t use it, you lose it.’”

Ponsard goes on to point out that God knows the burdens we are carrying and the obstacles in our path. He gently offers us the gift of strength to grow in love and holiness—and to complete difficult tasks when we feel that hope is dim, the odds are improbable, or defeat is close at hand. As St. Paul wrote, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Saving Dad

Sometimes God’s strength comes through when the weight is too heavy for us to bear on our own. Consider 10-year-old twin brothers Bridon and Christian Hassig of Mountain Brook, Alabama, who found themselves in an unexpected emergency when they were called upon to save their father Brad’s life.

Brad was doing breathing exercises underwater in his backyard pool when he suddenly lost consciousness. Christian, swimming with his goggles on, looked at his father and could tell there was something very wrong: “I could see he was shaking a bunch and then he just laid on his side...His face was turning very light blue. I told Bridon, ‘Dad’s not OK.’”

Bridon and their 11-year-old friend, Sam Ebert, jumped in the pool to help. Bridon recalled, “I got one shoulder and [Sam] got the other. We just dragged [Dad] to the steps.”

At that point, the boys remembered a scene from the classic kids’ sports movie *The Sandlot*, in which one character saves another by using CPR. That memory allowed Bridon to successfully perform chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on Brad, even though he had no training. Soon after, Brad regained consciousness and coughed up foam, blood, and water, reported the *Washington Post*. He also heard his boys exclaiming, “Daddy, Daddy. Come back, Daddy. You have

When baseball Hall of Famer Hank Aaron passed away at age 86 in January 2021, accolades for his life and career poured in from around the country. It was a different story, though, during his days playing the sport. Throughout Aaron’s years with the Milwaukee and Atlanta Braves, he endured racism and even death threats because he was African American. Still, the slugger, who broke Babe Ruth’s home run record in 1974, persevered with grace. Aaron told a reporter, “When I was in the ballpark...I felt like I was surrounded by angels, and I had God’s hand on my shoulder.”

A man of deep faith, Aaron also once wrote in *Guidedposts*, “I need to depend on Someone who is bigger, stronger, and wiser than I am. I don’t do it on my own. God is my strength. He gave me a good bound and some talent and the freedom to develop it. He helps me when things go wrong. He forgives me when I fall on my face. He lights the way.”

to be okay.” Christian then flagged down a driver who called 911.

Brad, who has since recovered, credits the strength and courage the boys showed to God’s intervention, telling the *Today Show*, “There’s no way, physically, they should have been able to pull a 185-pound man out of the water like that and to know and do what all of them did, perfectly as quickly (as they did)...It has God’s hands all over it.”

The Lord is Your Refuge

For Christians suffering because of their faith, turning to God for strength can be the only way to get through the ordeal of persecution. Asia Bibi, a woman who spent 10 years in a Pakistani prison for alleged blasphemy, spoke with the *Christian Post* and numerous media outlets about how prayer and Scripture sustained her during those dark years.

“When a human being is tested, the desire to succeed, to overcome the trial, is extremely strong,” Bibi said during an interview. “I knew that prayer would help me in this sense, and many signs encouraged me to pray.”

The Christian mother was accused of defiling the water in a well by drinking from it. Two days later, Bibi was accused of blasphemy against Islam in a separate incident. She maintains her innocence, but was convicted of violating Pakistan’s anti-blasphemy laws, which carry a punishment of death or life imprisonment. Bibi was sentenced to death

by hanging in 2010.

“I cried so much,” Bibi recalled of her imprisonment. “I kept crying for a week. I kept thinking, ‘What is happening to me?’”

Bibi came to believe that one day she would be released. She explained that one night in prison she had a dream about a priest who made her recite verses from the Bible. “When I opened my eyes, I remember being amazed that I no longer saw him,” Bibi recalled through a translator. “I thought that maybe God was sending me a sign that I should try to learn those verses, which would help sustain me. So that’s what I did. I read the Gospels very regularly.”

Bibi told Western news outlets that that the phrase “The Lord is your refuge” kept coming back to her: “Over and over again, it was the first psalm I came across. Above all, at every moment I kept God in my heart.”

After a decade of prayer, and against all odds, God delivered her freedom. After much international pressure, Pakistan’s Supreme Court acquitted Bibi in October 2018. She fled to Canada with her husband and two daughters in May 2019.

“I was deeply saddened when I had to leave Pakistan, the country where I was born,” Bibi concluded. “It was after my liberation, and I know God showed me the way. But I firmly hold on to the hope that one day I will be able to return to my land.”

Cancer Patient's Strength in Jesus

Blessed Chiara Badano was an Italian teenager who died in 1990, before her 20th birthday. Though her faith in God was unshakable, she was not delivered from the trial that took her life: a rare form of bone cancer. Nevertheless, she maintained a warm, bright, and grateful spirit to the end, always quick to point to God as her strength, earning her the nickname "Chiara Luce," a play on the Italian words meaning "clear light." She was beatified 20 years after her passing.

A typical teenager, Chiara played sports, had friends, struggled with schoolwork, and loved to sing and dance. But her faith was important to her from an early age. When asked, she said she did not try to bring Jesus to her friends with words. She tried to bring Jesus to them with her example and how she lived her life. This sometimes resulted in other kids teasing her, but she never let it deter her.

Chiara became involved with the *Focolare* movement, and the group had a profound impact on her life. *Focolare* emphasizes brotherhood and unity among all people. The group focused on the image of the forsaken Christ as a way to make it through difficult times, an image that spoke to Chiara. She wrote to her parents, "It hasn't been easy to embrace this suffering, but this morning Chiara Lubich [foundress of *Focolare*] explained to the children that they have to be the spouse of Jesus Forsaken."

At age 17, Chiara learned she had a rare form of

bone cancer. Treatments were painful and unsuccessful, and she became paralyzed. Rather than feel despondent, she turned to God for strength, telling others that when she suffered, she felt closer to Jesus. She even refused to take pain medication that would make her too sleepy to continue to live her life.

While she was undergoing a painful medical procedure, Chiara was visited by a lady. She described the experience this way: "When the doctors began to carry out this small, but quite demanding, procedure, a lady with a very beautiful and luminous smile came in. She came up to me and took me by the hand, and her touch filled me with courage. In the same way that she arrived, she disappeared, and I could no longer see her. But my heart was filled with an immense joy and all fear left me. In that moment I understood that if we're always ready for everything, God sends us many signs of His love."

Despite her illness and being confined to bed, Chiara wrote letters and sent messages to others. She gave all her savings to a friend who was becoming a missionary in Africa. When her life was nearly at an end, she said, "I have nothing left, but I still have my heart, and with that I can always love." Her final words to her mother were, "Be happy, because I am."

Over 2,000 people attended Chiara's funeral, and as the stories came out about her, more and more people realized how special she was—and yet, how ordinary, too. She lived her short life with complete and total trust in God. Within nine years, the bishop of her diocese began the work on her cause for canonization. Pope Benedict XVI declared Chiara "Blessed" in 2010.

Each of us can call on God for strength during troubling times, while also remembering to praise and thank Him during better days. Then, we need to open our eyes and hearts to see how that strength is entering our lives.


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

—Psalm 73:26