

“Is your spiritual motor sputtering?”

(Ephesians 3:14-21 NIV)

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, (15) from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

(16) I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, (17) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, (18) may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, (19) and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

(20) Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, (21) to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

(16) I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, (17) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Life should run smoothly, we think.

It never does for anyone.

Every person faces difficult tests.

When those times come, does your spiritual motor perform well?

Or does it sputter and cough?

In what condition is your inner person?

Some of you might recall the story I once related of the elderly man, who started attending the Hollywood church in the mid-1960s.

Charles¹ was born in Oklahoma when it was Indian Territory.

He learned life the hard way, painted houses for a living, fought with alcohol in his mid-years, married and buried a couple of wives, and had no children.

He'd been away from the Lord for some time, but rededicated his life to God.

Though he was savvy, generous, and good-natured, Charles could not read or write.

One his relatives came to visit from Oklahoma.

Charles wanted to take her, Norma, our daughter Janice, and me to

Knott's Berry Farm.

¹ This is not the gentleman's real name.

Janice was barely school age at the time; Norma and I in our mid-thirties.

In an older part of Knott’s, we entered a quaint walkway with lattice work over it.

Pomegranate trees grew beside and over the lattice work.

Janice saw a large pomegranate hanging from a tree about 12-14 feet off the ground, and she wanted that pomegranate.

What she saw was definitely not “low hanging fruit.”

I thought I could climb up and get it, but I first wanted to get permission.

I honestly hoped someone would say “No,” but the security guard said, “If you can get it, you can have it.”

I looked more seriously at the challenge.

Climbing the lattice and tree was dicey and I’d probably get my clothes dirty.

I contemplated too long.

80 year-old Charles pushed me out of the way, saying: **“Stand back!”** He took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves and pants legs, and was up that tree faster than a native after a coconut.

Holding on with one arm, he grasped that pomegranate, tossed it to me, jumped down, and brushed off his clothes as I stood there dumbfounded, feeling a little like a guy, who had just had his girlfriend stolen.

Of course Norma was saying of Charles, “What a guy!”²



When Charles’s second wife died, she left him a comfortable bungalow and a few hundred thousand in the bank. She set up a bank-administered estate from which he received amounts to live comfortably. After a time, Charles thought he deserved an increase in his monthly allotment. In order to change it, Charles had to make an appeal before a hearing officer in a Los Angeles court.

² Those of you have visited our home might note the following bit of info, which I just thought about today. For years, the centerpiece on our dining room table has been a big bowl of dried pomegranates.

He requested me to go with him and assist him; remember, he could not read or write.

He firmly deemed he was entitled to the raise; after I reviewed his monthly income and expenses, his request seemed justified.

We sat about four rows back that morning in the downtown Los Angeles hearing room as the hearing officer heard and ruled on other cases.

Bank representatives who administered the estate also attended.

The clerk eventually called Charles’s name, and I went forward to present his case.

Charles suddenly motioned for me to come back.

Sweating and trembling, he asked me to drop the matter.

Charles had lost his nerve; it was his turn to have the kid inside take over.

The octogenarian Charles could scale trees, swing from lattice work like Tarzan, but appearing before a court terrified him.

How do we overcome the fearful child in us?

A) Lots of guys pump iron because they are trying to bolster the boy inside.



B) Some women undergo drastic routines trying to shore up that inner little girl.



Many of us have walked the earth for years, attended church, and reared a family, but we still feel like tiny tots inside, and sometimes act that way.

It is not only hard on us; our hesitancy and lack of confidence probably displease God.

1 Samuel 15 tells of an assignment the Lord gave King Saul.

Saul did not completely fulfill it.

- **God was displeased.**
- **He sent Samuel the prophet to rebuke King Saul.**
- **When Samuel got there, Saul bragged about what a good job he’d done:**

“I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”



“‘Stop!’ Samuel said to Saul. ‘Let me tell you what the LORD said to me this night.’ ‘Say on,’ Saul replied.”

“And Samuel said, ‘Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission . . .’”³



The Lord puts us in the positions where we are and has sent us all on a mission.

Our number one duty is: boldly honor God and praise His Son, Jesus.

God gave this task to every believer.

He expects us to carry out what He assigns us and to stop looking at obstacles through weak infant eyes.

How do we strengthen our inner person so the toddler inside us does not prevail?

Our text speaks to empowering our inner person.

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

How do we make that happen?

Somewhere long ago I read this info about animals.

Buzzards

If you put a Buzzard in a pen that is 6 feet by 8 feet and is entirely open at the top, the bird, in spite of its ability to fly, will be an absolute prisoner.

Buzzards always begin their flights from the ground with a run of 10 to 12 feet.

Without space to run, as is its habit, the buzzard will not even attempt to fly; it will remain a

³ 1 Samuel 15:16 RSV; 1 Samuel 15:17, 18 NIV

prisoner in a small jail with no top.

People

In many ways, we resemble Buzzards. Some have so little faith we make no effort. We flail about in our problems and frustrations, never realizing that all we have to do is look up.

Paul informs us how to look up and receive help.

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being . . .”

How do you get God’s Spirit into your inner being?

Many of us don’t even know the Spirit will help us.

I heard about a poor man who wanted to come to this country. This was before the days of air travel. He saved his money and finally booked passage on the cheapest room available on a ship. He bought a huge supply of cheese and crackers so he would have something to eat.

Each day for breakfast, at noon and evening meal, he ate crackers and cheese, cheese and crackers. After about ten days of that diet, the ship

was scheduled to reach port early the next morning. He is out on the deck eating his crackers and cheese for the last time and a ship steward walks by. He commented to the steward, “I sure hope we get to port early in the morning, because I am so tired of eating crackers and cheese. I’ll never eat them again.”

“Why are you eating just crackers and cheese?” said the steward. “Why haven’t you been eating in the dining room? Don’t you know that meals came with your ticket?”



Many Christians are hardly aware of God’s Holy Spirit and the power He supplies.

When we are baptized into Christ, we receive God’s Holy Spirit.

A crowd gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (circa 30AD) and Peter told them this:

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.’

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said

to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’

³⁸ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’⁴

How does the Spirit work in us?

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. . .”

1. We begin each day open to the Spirit’s leading as we read God’s Word.

Instead of starting with Facebook, Twitter, the news, crossword puzzles, the astrological forecasts, weather and sports, we read several Bible chapters every morning.

We ask God to give us wisdom to deal with difficult situations.

Many of us think we know what the president, the secretary of State, the

Secretary of Defense, and the Governor should do, but we have no idea how resolve the conflicts in our own lives.

Unless we read the Scriptures, we shall never be open to the Spirit’s leading

In most cases we don’t heed the Lord’s advice; we get ourselves in a big pickle. Then we beg the Lord to get us out of it.

Do you want to stop sputtering and become confident?

Let God’s Spirit and His Word guide you.

2. 1 John 3 lists two things that cause people to lose confidence.

A) Too many of us do not have our hope placed in the new life Christ gives:

“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure.”



John strongly emphasized this point: We quit sinning.

⁴ Acts 2:36-39 NIV

- **“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact sin is lawlessness (verse 4).**
- **“Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous” (verse 7).**
- **“Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God” (verse 10).**

If you have questions about what is right, read: 1 Corinthians 5 & 6 and Galatians 5.



**B) John advised another path to confidence.
1 John 3, verse 10 tells the second**

part:

**“Anyone who does not do right is not a child of God,
nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”**

Unless we love everyone, we cannot be confident and act as mature Christians.

Angry people cannot do God’s will and they cannot stay focused on anything because they are always blowing off steam.

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (verse 11).



- **We follow the Spirit every day.**
- **We do right and love everyone.**
- 3. We also ask God for boldness to witness for him.**

To the wealthy man Philemon, Paul wrote:

“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.”⁵

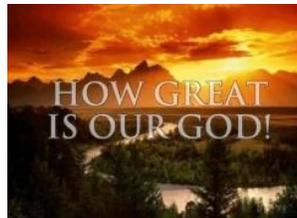
⁵ Philemon 6 NIV



When we tell other people about God’s love and their need to respond to him, He builds our confidence and knowledge.

God’s word gives us this great assurance:

“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”⁶



There’s no need to cower anywhere in any circumstance.

God’s power in us can overcome any obstacle and any force.

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⁶ 1 John 4:4 NIV “Them” refers to false Christs and pseudo-prophets.