

Rev. Dr. Charle...: Hello. Thank you so much for joining us for worship. You're a Johns Creek United Methodist Church. I'm Pastor Charley, one of the pastors of this wonderful church, and just so glad that you've joined us for this time, whether you're with loved ones or by yourself, anytime during the day worshipping with us. We're so glad to have this time together to connect with one another as the church, and most of all, to connect with God, who, well, especially during these times, we need God's strength and mercy and guidance. So thank you. Let's be in an attitude of prayer together.

Lord, we are grateful for Your presence with us. We thank You for this time of worship that grounds us, that reminds us what's most important, which is why we seek to do it each and every week because we constantly need to be reminded of what's critical, and that is our relationship with You. That we can't go about living in these times without relying on You and Your wisdom and power. So Lord, thank You for this reminder and this time. And Lord, I thank You for the opportunity of preaching your word to these, my friends and your servants, a task that I definitely need Your strength to do. So Lord, speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us receive a word from You that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

You know what? Yard sales are very interesting to me. I don't really frequent them very much, but it's always been fascinating to me that one person's trash is another person's treasure. Satan once had a yard sale. He did. He wanted to get rid of a bunch of tools and things that were cluttering up his house. And so he took all these tools and things, he spread them out in his front yard on tables, and there they were. There was lying and power and lust and jealousy all around. And all these different people were looking around taking a look at these tools, wondering how much they were.

But then there was one customer, oh, that customer went way back deep into Satan's garage and was looking over a well oiled, cared-for tool. And he approached Satan with it and said, "This is nice. How much is this?" And Satan said, "Oh, that's not for sale. You see, that's my secret weapon. I can use that to wreck the world." And the customer said, "Well, what is it?" And the devil replied, "It's the tool of discouragement." Discouragement. Oh, it's an awful thing. When you experience it, it feels like your breath has been taken from your soul. You seem to be stripped bear of confidence, of life, of joy. Discouragement, it's an awful thing. I don't know, especially during this time, during this pandemic. We all know what it feels to be discouraged.

She lost her job during the pandemic. She loved her job. She had a corner office. Everything was great, but the pandemic came and, well, took everything away. She has two kids to support. It's hard to find a job. The only thing she can do right now is to wait tables to make ends meet. And one night, recently, she cried herself to sleep, thinking about that corner office she used to have, and now she just has a sore back. Discouragement.

They were happily married for 20 years or so he thought. He came home from work one day to find that she had gone, his wife had left, and there was a note on the kitchen table that simply said, "I don't want to be married to you anymore." It took his breath away. He went into a tailspin. He had no idea how it happened, or when it happened, or what happened. Discouragement.

Well, she loved where she used to live, all of her friends, a great school, a great neighborhood. But then Daddy, well got a new job somewhere else and they had to move to an entirely new town, different people, a different culture, a different context. She misses her friends so much. She can't find anyone to sit with at lunch, so she sits by herself. Discouragement.

Discouragement, it's an awful thing. Life just pulls the rug right out from under you and you have nothing to hang on. Motivation has evaporated. Confidence is gone. There is no joy and there is no life. It's terrible. Ever felt that way? Do you feel that way now? How did you get over it, if you did get over it? Some people, they never get over discouragement. A traumatic event happens in their life and they're defined by it. And the way they live their life over and over again, they think about that event. They're defined by that event, and they're always the victim. No matter what happens in life, because of that one event, they're always the victim.

Do you know someone like that? We've all been discouraged. We've all dealt with it. It's been very tough. But I've always been curious as to how some people seem to get over it, and yet some people don't. Ever wonder what the difference is? Some people, they can experience a terrible event that you and I just can't imagine and yet they just keep on trucking. They just keep on moving. And another person will experience one setback in their life, and that's it. They're in the pit of discouragement forever. What do you think the difference is? That wouldn't be a bad project to research that. What is the difference? Is it genetics? Is it upbringing? Is it religion? What is it?

What's interesting is maybe it's change. Change. Maybe it's not genetics or upbringing, maybe it's not any of that. Maybe it's a change. A change in lifestyle. Maybe that's it, because when you're discouraged and you're in the pit of life, sometimes you just feel anything different is better. And some people live like that. You don't like your marriage, well call the divorce attorney. You don't like your job, you experienced a bad event, well quit it and find another job. You don't like your friends, well then cuss them out and leave them and try to find new ones. A change, yeah, maybe that's it, to change.

I heard about a middle-aged woman who had a heart attack and went to the hospital, and while she was there, she had a near death experience and she saw God and she said to God, "God, is this it? Is this my time?" And God said, "No, you got 30 more years to live." So when she recovered, she actually stayed in the hospital to get plastic surgery. She was going to take advantage of her next 30 years. So she got a tummy tuck, a nose job, the works. And she left that

hospital just, she felt she was a changed person, and she walked across the street from the hospital to her car, and she was immediately hit by an ambulance and died. And she went to God in heaven and said, "God, what happened? I thought you said I had 30 more years to live, and God said, "Sorry, I just didn't recognize you." No, maybe a change, maybe a change is not the answer.

Sometimes when we try to change things, it's just another way of saying we want to run away. Change oftentimes is just another version of just running away. But the truth is, and I've learned this, and maybe some of you have learned this, you can't run away from who you are, you can't run away from your problems, you can't run away from reality. Eventually it'll catch up with you. So what is the answer? What is the answer to discouragement. And maybe you're desperate for it today. Maybe you're tired of being discouraged during this pandemic. Maybe you've gone through a broken relationship or going through it now and you're discouraged. Maybe it's a bad situation at work or with your health or just things you don't like to talk about, but you're discouraged and on the outside you try to appear to people that you're happy, but inside you are being torn apart by discouragement. So what is the answer? Well, I believe it would be a good idea to check the Bible for the answer.

I knew that some of you were thinking I was going to get there eventually. The Bible has a lot of wisdom. I don't know if you knew that. And I think the perfect person for us to look to, to receive that wisdom is the prophet Isaiah. If you read through the prophet Isaiah and his writing, oh my gosh, you can see all kinds of wisdom. Isaiah, well, he knew about discouragement too. He was weeping over the suffering of Israel. He saw the Babylonian army coming to destroy Jerusalem, and he, along with the people of God, were just devastated as they watched Jerusalem being destroyed. And Isaiah's heart broke as he watched the people of God just suffer and feel discouragement and bitterness. And God called Isaiah to bring encouragement to the people of God. And there's one particular thing that the prophet Isaiah prophesied with encouragement that maybe you've heard before, but you're not going to hear it quite like you will right now, I don't believe.

It comes from the 40th chapter of Isaiah, when Isaiah says this, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

Now, that's more like it, isn't it? That's what we need, that kind of energy to renew our strength, to walk and not faint, to soar like an eagle. Oh my gosh. Have you ever seen an eagle soar in the air? Oh my gosh. It's one of the most magnificent things in the world. It just seems effortless to them. This big eagle

spreads its wings and allows the wind to carry it higher, and higher, and higher, and higher, higher. I would love to live like that. I would love to have that kind of strength, wouldn't you?

Well, the prophet Isaiah says we can have that strength. That's what the text says. I also like how the prophet Isaiah says that we will walk and not faint, because so much of life is just walking. Isn't it? Taking one step at a time. Someone once said that the problem with life is that it's so daily. It's true. Can you relate to that? Life day after day, choices after choices, decisions after decisions, waking up, having a routine every day and doing these things over and over and over again. And yet Isaiah would say you'll be able to walk every step of life every day with strength. Isaiah says we can have it.

That sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Maybe you're thinking, "Well Charley, where do I sign up?" I'm going to share with you the key to that strength in this text, how you can get that strength, how you can get that power from God in the midst of your discouragement, to pull you out of the pit, and it could change your life today. But before I share it with you, there's one particular thing. If we're going to hear and apply this key to strength for living, there's one key thing we have to embrace that this text tells us. It's kind of a prerequisite before we get this key.

And it's one of the biggest obstacles that many of us have in terms of getting strength, in receiving hope in the midst of discouragement. Here it is. Anyone who seeks to live by their own power will eventually break down. This is how Isaiah puts it, "Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted." Count on it. No matter how self-sufficient you think you are, no matter how in control you think you are, no matter how much power you think you have, eventually you're going to break down. Eventually you are going to give out. And unless you admit that right now, you can't receive the power that Isaiah promises.

And I get it, it's easy to resist this. We don't want to hear this. We in America and our self-sufficiency, we love our self-sufficiency. We love our individualism. We love the idea that we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and it's only up to us, and I make my reality and I do this, and I do that. So it's hard for us to embrace this truth that even youths will faint and be weary and the young will fall exhausted.

Several years ago, I can't remember how many years ago, but the Super Bowl, the halftime show at Super Bowl, the halftime show this particular year I'm remembering was Madonna. And I don't think Madonna had performed publicly in a very long time, so it was highly anticipated. Well, I watched the show. I remember not being very impressed with it. Sorry if you're a Madonna fan. It was okay, I guess. I think the Rolling Stones were a lot better in earlier years, but that's another sermon. But it was just okay. But after that performance, the next day, everybody was talking about Madonna's performance, how wonderful

it was, how great it was. And I was talking to other people like, "Well, we didn't think it was that great. Why do people just love this performance so much?" They thought it was the best one the Super Bowl ever had.

And then I read an article, I can't remember what magazine, but it was very profound. And that article put its finger on it. And the writer said something to the effect of, "Madonna's performance wasn't that great, but you know why people loved it so much? Because for a few brief moments, it felt like Madonna was in her 20s again. All that makeup and all those smoke and mirrors, it felt for a moment all these years later that Madonna had somehow turned back time. But it was just an illusion. Even youths will faint and be weary and the young will fall exhausted. And only when we stop resisting this truth can we receive this power that Isaiah promises. This power that can pick us up out of the pit of discouragement, this power that can help us live day to day with strength and wisdom beyond ourself.

Because if there's one thing this text promises us, it is this: God has power and God gives power. But make no mistake about it, this text is clear, God does not give power to those who think they have it all figured out. God does not give power to those who believe they're self-sufficient. God does not give power to those who feel like they are in control. No, God gives power to the weak, to the faint, to the vulnerable, to the willing, to those who are willing to yield to it. The apostle Paul said it, "It is when I am weak that then I am strong." Well, the prophet Isaiah puts it like this, "We ought to wait for the Lord." That's what it means to yield and surrender to that power, to wait for the Lord. Those who wait for the Lord.

Now, it's not a passive waiting. It's an active waiting. It's kind of like an expectant mother who is waiting for the birth of her child. It's the waiting of a farmer who has planted his seeds in the ground and is waiting for the harvest. It is a active, active waiting, knowing that God knows best. And in God's good time, God's going to provide God's good answer. That's the waiting. Some might call it faith, and maybe some of you're thinking, "Well, Charley, here I am. I'm in my living room here. I'm watching and listening to you or I'm in my dining room watching you, and I've got my Bible opened up and I'm here and I know I have faith in God. I want that kind of strength. So I'm going to say I have faith in God. I want that power. I need to get it. But Charley, I don't really feel it yet."

Well, that's not a bad start, but there's one thing we have to do as we wait to receive this power. And Isaiah is very clear about it. It is the key that unlocks God's strength and power in the midst of our discouragement. It's right under our nose. And maybe you've heard this text for a long, long time and you've missed it. It's in verse 31, renewed, "They shall renew their strength." But you see, that translation in English is not very accurate. In Hebrew, the word renewed basically means exchange. To exchange one thing for another, to give God something and receive from God something in return. To let go of something, in order to get something else. Basically, Isaiah's saying we have to

give something up to receive this power. We have to make room for God's power.

And maybe you're thinking, "Well, Charley, why do I have to make room for God's power? Can't I just get God's strength for a living?" No, because would you believe there are often obstacles to receiving that power? There are obstacles in our life, things we have to let go of before we can receive God's strength. I liken it to my son, Paul, haven't talked about him in a while in my sermons, so I think he's due. We often have this ritual when we get up in the morning and he has his stuffed animals. My gosh, this kid has more stuffed animals than you can imagine. And he has this one particular stuffed animal that's fairly big. And for a while, as he got up in the morning, he was always hold onto this stuffed animal, but he also wanted me to pick him up and carry him downstairs. He would always say, "Daddy, Daddy, will you carry you me?" That's how he puts it. "Will you carry you me?" As he holds onto this big stuffed animal.

And I say, "Sure, Paul, but before I can pick you up and carry you, you have to let go of that stuffed animal." And at first he struggles. He's like, "Well, I don't want to do that." But then it dawns on him, if he wants Daddy to pick him up and carry him, he has to let it go. And so now what he does, he doesn't just let it go. He loves to throw things. And so before I pick him up, he takes the stuffed animal and he throws it over the stairs downstairs and he smiles and I pick him up and I can carry him.

What is that one thing you're holding onto that you need to exchange to receive God's strength to renew your strength? Is it an addiction? Is it a habit? Is it some kind of sin? Is it an attitude? Is it something that you have put before God in your life? It's really a God in your life. What is it? I think you know what it might be, and it might be this particular thing that is sapping your energy, that's taking life away from you, and you can't seem to let go of it.

C.S. Lewis once said that all genuine religious conversions are blessed defeats. AA, the organization, puts it another way: the first step is to realize that you are powerless. "My life has become unmanageable and I am powerless and I need a higher power." A good pastor friend of mine once went to Sweden for a family vacation, and he told me that they went to a zoo, a kind of a family zoo. And it was a lot of fun. But then he said he noticed something that was the strangest thing he had ever seen.

They got to one particular area of the zoo and he watched as all these kids with pacifiers in their mouth would walk to this big pit area and just throw their binkies over the rail. Some of them would cry as they do it. They would just walk over, take their binky and throw it over. And so my friend, he looked down into the pit and there were tons and tons and tons of pacifiers down deep in the pit. Well, my friend was so curious, it was killing him. And so he found an attendant

at the zoo who spoke English and said, "Listen, you got to tell me what's going on here. This is weird."

And the attendant shared with him, that in that particular town in Sweden there has been a long held tradition that when children reach the age where they really need to give up their pacifiers, they come to that zoo and they throw their pacifier into pacifier heaven and let it go. Paul said, "When I became an adult, I put away childish things." Which is another way of saying then he let go of what he needed to let go of to receive God's strength.

Do you want God's power in your life? Do you want God's strength in your life? It's time to give up the pacifier of control. It's time to give up your agenda that you've put before God's agenda and your family's agenda. It's time to exchange your weakness for God's strength. "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint."

Let's pray. Lord, we come to You now and we bring that thing that has been an obstacle to receiving Your strength and power. A thing maybe that is our kryptonite, that thing that has taken our energy and our focus on our priority and we throw it away. We give it to You in exchange for Your strength. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Receive this benediction. And now may that mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you also. May the love of God, our Heavenly Father, abide with you this day and through this week. May the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit fall fresh upon you in the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ go with you and sustain you, both now and forevermore. Amen.