

Strength to Soar

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Sunday, September 6, 2026

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Malachi 3:6–12 NLT

I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them.”

“Now return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “But you ask, ‘How can we return when we have never gone away?’ “Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! “But you ask, ‘What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?’ “You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me.”

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.”

Isaiah 40:31 NLT

But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

Weakness: *any area of human limitation or insufficiency that shows our need for God*

Isaiah 40:6–8 NLT

A voice said, “Shout!” I asked, “What should I shout?” “Shout that people are like the grass. Their beauty fades as quickly as the flowers in a field. The grass withers and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the LORD. And so it is with people. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

Isaiah 40:12–17 NLT

Who else has held the oceans in his hand? Who has measured off the heavens with his fingers? Who else knows the weight of the earth or has weighed the mountains and hills on a scale? Who is able to advise the Spirit of the LORD? Who knows enough to give him advice or teach him? Has the LORD ever needed anyone's advice? Does he need instruction about what is good? Did someone teach him what is right or show him the path of justice? No, for all the nations of the world are but a drop in the bucket. They are nothing more than dust on the scales. He picks up the whole earth as though it were a grain of sand. All the wood in Lebanon's forests and all Lebanon's animals would not be enough to make a burnt offering worthy of our God. The nations of the world are worth nothing to him. In his eyes they count for less than nothing— mere emptiness and froth.

Isaiah 40:22–26 NLT

God sits above the circle of the earth. The people below seem like grasshoppers to him! He spreads out the heavens like a curtain and makes his tent from them. He judges the great people of the world and brings them all to nothing. They hardly get started, barely taking root, when he blows on them and they wither. The wind carries them off like chaff. "To whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One. Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out like an army, one after another, calling each by its name. Because of his great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing.

Isaiah 40:27–30 NLT

O Jacob, how can you say the LORD does not see your troubles? O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights? Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion.

2 Corinthians 12:5–7 NLT

That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God.

- 1. God sees my weakness as an opportunity for His power to fill my life and His glory to be displayed.**

Action: *Admit your weaknesses to God and invite His help.*

2 Corinthians 12:7–9 NLT

So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

2. God’s plan, oftentimes, is not to remove my weakness, but to use it.

Action: *Ask God to remove your weakness, but if He doesn’t, ask Him to use it.*

2 Corinthians 12:10 NLT

That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

3. When I am weak, then I am strong.

Action: *Receive God’s strength right now.*

Small Group Guide: Strength to Soar

Opening Question

What is your instinct when you hit a wall — when you run up against a limitation or weakness you can't push through on your own? Do you tend to double down and try harder, hide it, or something else?

Your Weakness Is No Surprise to God

Isaiah 40:31, an oft-quoted verse in Scripture, is easy to memorize and put on a coffee mug or note card, but it is more difficult to live out when we are face to face with our own weaknesses.

Isaiah 40 reminds us that the Lord never grows weak or weary. His strength is not limited in the same way ours is. Chapters 1–39 of Isaiah deal largely with judgment; chapter 40's tone shifts, opening with comfort, written to people who have not yet entered suffering but who will — and who will need something to hold onto when they do. What Isaiah offers them is not a strategy or a self-improvement plan. It is a portrait of God. People are like grass, he says — beautiful, brief, and completely subject to the breath of the Lord. Nations are a drop in the bucket. The greatest human power amounts to dust on the scales. The stars are called out by name and not a single one goes missing.

These comparisons are meant to reorient us, helping us to remember that the one who holds the oceans in His hand is also the one who gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. His power is limitless.

In Isaiah 40:27, God asks His exhausted people a question: “How can you say the Lord does not see your troubles? How can you say God ignores your rights?” God is saying He knows exactly how much His people are carrying and is asking why they haven't brought it to Him. Our weaknesses do not take God off guard. He made us. Jesus became human and lived inside our limitations. Our inadequacies were factored in. The problem is not that God doesn't know; the problem is that we relate to Him as if He doesn't. As Pastor Austin illustrated in the message, we can try to hide our weaknesses by overcompensating for them, adding more to shoulder ourselves, hoping the weight will make us stronger.

The Hebrew word translated “trust” in Isaiah 40:31 is *qavah* — which means to wait actively, but also, significantly, to bind or twist together, the way strands are twisted into a cord. This is a deliberate intertwining with God, a choice not to move until He moves, not to solve until He speaks. And it reframes what weakness actually is: not a deficit to be eliminated, but a space where God's power can enter and dwell. Our insufficiency is the container for His sufficiency.

Paul's journey in 2 Corinthians 12 illustrated this process in Paul's own life. He had a weakness, one which he does not explicitly state, and he asked God to remove it three times. God said no. Not because He was indifferent, but because He had a better plan: “My power works best in weakness.” Then Paul answers a question for us — *What do we do when we ask God to remove a weakness and he chooses not to?* Paul begins to boast about his weaknesses, because he has learned that they are the exact places

where Christ's power shows up most clearly. Where being weak once brought him pain, it now brings him a reason to rejoice— because every weakness is now an invitation. When I am weak, then I am strong.

For Discussion

1. Isaiah spends several chapters describing the vastness of God before landing on the promise of strength for the weary. Why do you think that context matters? Does the size of God change how you hold your own weakness — and if so, how?
2. Weakness is defined in your notes as “any area of human limitation or insufficiency that shows our need for God.” With that definition in mind, what are one or two weaknesses you are most aware of right now? How have you been handling them?
3. We can develop patterns of building things around our weakness — working harder, getting more organized, waiting for the right season — instead of bringing the weakness to God. Which of those substitutes, or another not mentioned, are you most prone to reaching for? What does it feel like when they don't actually work?
4. Paul asked God to remove his weakness three times. God said no and explained why. Have you ever been in that place — asking God to take something away and not getting the answer you wanted? Looking back, do you have any sense of what He may have been doing in it?

Closing Prayer

Father, You hold the oceans in Your hand, call every star by name, and You also see every place in us where we are running on empty. Thank You that our weakness doesn't surprise You. Thank You that You didn't design us to handle life on our own strength. Forgive us for the ways we have covered our weakness instead of bringing it to You, for the things we have built around it hoping no one would notice, for trusting in everything except You. Jesus, You wore humanity and know what it is to be tired. Meet us in our exhaustion. Holy Spirit, do what only You can do: turn our weakness into something that carries Your power and displays Your glory. We don't want to stay on the ground. We want to soar. And we are choosing to trust You with the places where we cannot do it ourselves. In Jesus name, Amen.