

## Discovering What Is Too Strong for You



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### Seeking the Turnaround Only Jesus Can Provide

Have you ever been overwhelmed? Are there days when you face things that seem too difficult to deal with? The Bible isn't silent on the subject. God's Word provides great encouragement to us as we seek to overcome the seemingly insurmountable odds positioned against us.

David's life is a great example. Most of us picture David as a heroic figure. His faith helped him defeat a powerful giant, conquer enemy armies and kill wild animals with his bare hands. David won the confidence and loyalty of the soldiers he led into battle, and he won the love of the people he ruled in the kingdom of Judah. Nothing seemed beyond his anointed command.

Yet a relatively minor situation ended up seemingly out of David's control. He confessed, "Even though I am the anointed king, these two sons of Zeruiah—Joab and Abishai—are too strong for me to control" (*2 Samuel 3:39, NLT*). You may not even recognize these two men's names. But a triumphant king admitted they were too strong for him.

The focus of this episode in David's life is the first man he mentions, Joab. He was a general in David's army and a trusted confidant. Joab was especially important to David because the other tribes of Israel stayed loyal to Saul's family even after Saul's death. Then a day came when one of Saul's generals, Abner, felt betrayed and defected to help David. "Abner said to David, 'Let me go and call an assembly of all Israel to support my lord the king. They will make a covenant with you to make you their king, and you will rule over everything your heart desires.' So David sent Abner safely on his way" (*3:21*).

As this was happening, David's top general, Joab, was away on a raid. When he returned and heard what happened, he was furious. "Joab rushed to the king and demanded, 'What have you done? What do you mean by letting Abner get away? You know perfectly well that he came to spy on you and find out everything you're doing!'" (*3:24-25*).

Stop for a moment and consider Joab's approach to David here. His words were insulting and demanding: "What were you thinking? How could you make this kind of mistake? This is outrageous!" The truth is, Joab had an ulterior motive. He wanted revenge because Abner had killed his brother. Joab concealed his motive by blaming David, and afterward he acted on his own to get vengeance.

"Joab then left David and sent messengers to catch up with Abner, asking him to return. They found him at the well of Sirah and brought him back, though David knew nothing about it. When Abner arrived back at Hebron, Joab took him aside at the gateway as if to speak with him privately. But then he stabbed Abner in the stomach and killed him in revenge for killing his brother Asahel" (*3:26-27*).

When David heard this, he mourned. "Then King David said to his officials, 'Don't you realize that a great commander has fallen today in Israel?'" (*3:38*). But David was overcome by more than grief. He seemed overwhelmed by what Joab had done. It's why he said, "These two sons of Zeruiah—Joab and Abishai—are too

strong for me to control. So may the Lord repay these evil men for their evil deeds" (3:39).

### What about Joab made David doubt himself?

Despite David's victorious life, one renegade man under his command appeared too powerful for him. What was going on? What seed of doubt got planted in David's mind to make him think, "I can't conquer this"? David could have arrested Joab, convicted him and punished him for his horrible act, but he didn't. Why?

Maybe it's because he appreciated Joab. How do you oppose someone who's been deeply loyal to you? That kind of blind spot can exist in all our lives. Even when we're overwhelmingly victorious like David, sometimes we have a weakness that we conveniently ignore until God puts his finger on it.

For example, you may be a great dad, successful at business, kind and loving to your wife, but at times your anger flares up unexpectedly. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to it; it just sneaks up on you in a surprising moment. Suddenly you're reeling, wondering, "Why did I just shout at my wife? Where did that come from?"

It doesn't align with the rest of your life. You have a long history with God; your walk with him has given you confidence. However, like David, something unexplainably pops up that proves too strong for you.

Maybe it's an unwanted tendency to isolate yourself. You're an introvert by nature, yet you know God's design for you is to join in regular fellowship. Some days, though, you just want to stay at home from church, your small group, your Bible study—not because you need a break, but because of a fear that surfaces occasionally. Maybe you feel worthless and fear that others will see your deficiencies. You withdraw even though you know the best thing is to be among those who love and support you.

Or maybe it's a temptation to alcohol or pornography or some other past habit that could become an addiction again. Even though you've been sober or pure for years, suddenly the attraction comes roaring back.

In those times, even the strongest Christians can go into a tailspin. Sometimes that's *because* they've lived a victorious life. They think, "I've tried 1,000 times to be free of this, and yet here it comes again. Jesus, you've given me victory in every other area. Why does this one thing remain to plague me?"

### Do you ever try to picture what your life would look like free of that one last thing?

As I ask this question, I'm not referring to absolute victory or spiritual perfection. The church is filled with messy people, and no one in Christ's body is an exception. The truth is we can be imperfect and still love each other, accept one another and lay down our lives for each other.

One reason God wants to show us these weaknesses is because they're where Satan exploits us. If he can keep hitting the same weak spot in us, he knows we may eventually give in to defeat mentally, relationally or spiritually. One way he does this is by making us doubt God's power: "If the Holy Spirit really empowers you to overcome sin, why do you still struggle?"

How did David respond? He avoided his problem with Joab. Instead of taking righteous action, he put it on God to resolve: "May the Lord repay these evil men for their evil deeds" (3:39). But God won't let us ignore a problem, because his sanctification requires us to participate with him in his holy work of correcting it.

David wasn't exercising the power that God gave him. Part of God's kingdom work is for us to walk, move and act in the authority he gives us, and we ignore that authority at our risk. You see, Satan wants *everything*. The Bible says he seeks to kill, steal and devour, meaning he's always looking for an opening. When he finds it, you can be assured he'll pounce. So, if we don't confront our weak spots, they'll end up confronting us as David's did.

### Identifying these problem areas is only the first step; the next is to discover how to turn them around.

Ask yourself what's at risk if you don't seek God in faith to turn your problem around. Could your marriage

crumble? Could you fall into a depression if you remain isolated? Could you slip back into addiction if you don't reach out for loving help from others?

At one point in Israel's history, God instructed Jeremiah, "Say to the people, 'This is what the Lord says: "When people fall down, don't they get up again? When they discover they're on the wrong road, don't they turn back?"'" (*Jeremiah 8:4*). God was saying, "People, wake up! I'm alerting you to this. If you don't take action, things will fall apart!"

The first step is to *know God has a plan for you*. His plan for your life includes getting you through this present issue he's pointing out. That's the responsibility of any earthly parent; how much more so of our heavenly Father? I'm a dad of four children, and from their earliest days I've had a vision for them. I've had a prayer list for each of them, from their future marriage partner to the unique ways I see them following Jesus. God has that kind of vision for you and no one else.

The second step, after knowing God has a plan for you, is to *align yourself with his plan*. He didn't point out your problem to judge you, but so he can fix it. You may be stressed out that it's beyond your control, but he's telling you, "Don't worry, I'm in control of this."

Yes, you're going to fail; you'll make mistakes and fall short. But God can turn everything around by changing the whole trajectory of your life. Paul describes this process when he writes, "Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (*1 Corinthians 6:11*).

Third, *implement God's plan*. It's easy to say, "Lord, I know you have a plan for me, and I want to align myself with it." But we also have to actively walk in that plan and execute it in our life. I urge you, be the one who says, "Lord, I rejoice that you're changing my life. You're turning around what I couldn't. I want to live that out in the fullness of your Spirit. Show me how." That pleases him because nothing is too strong for his loving grace and mercy. Amen!

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