

Unguarded Strength is Double Weakness

Have you ever thought about the fact that you have a great many strengths and they could be your weakness? No, you think about well my strengths are my strengths and my weakness are my weakness Betty. No unguarded strength can even be a double weakness. That is what we are going to talk about today. Most of the time when we think about ourselves people will say, "What are you good at?" Maybe you have a hard time even thinking of it, but boy you can tell them your weaknesses. However, God has great areas that he wants to use you in. He is going to make you strong in them. It says in Daniel that people that know their God will be strong and do exploits. Do you not want to be a person like that?

We are living in the very last days right before Jesus comes back and there are so many of us that we are going to hear that trumpet sound and He is going to split the sky. There He is, coming in all of His glory, and we are going to go, "Wow! I got to see it." Think about it. For all of eternity and eternity is so long, people will come up to us and say, "Were you really there when Jesus came back?" "Yes, I sure was." "What was it like?" "Wonderful." "What was it like serving Jesus right before all of that happened?" "It took a lot of strength. It took a lot of strength because there was a lot of opposition from the devil. He was putting up his last big fight." "As you did that with the Lord, did you run into any kind of trouble?" "Yes, but the Lord preserved me out of all of it." That is our good news about Jesus.

Most of you know that, if you watch this show, I caught on fire in December of 2007 and got burned badly. I have had to learn out of that some things I did not know. I am not the same person. I have become a lot stronger and I have become a lot madder at the devil, I can tell you that. I have had to learn that the Bible does not say I am going to protect you from bad things or I am going to protect you from making serious mistakes. It says, "I am going to be there with you and when you go through it I will not leave you and I will not forsake you." I am living proof of that. It has happened in my life. How about your life? Has it happened? Can you say, yes I know what you are talking about.

Unguarded strength, oh my. We are discussing all of the leadership skills for the 21st century. This is one more lesson in this series. It is a two-part series and I am doing it because so many people have never been trained in how to be a leader. Some of you are watching from all over the world. I got an e-mail today from a man in India. I know you are there and I know that maybe you are in a good situation where you have been taught really well and maybe you are not. I am hoping that these lessons, there are eight of them, part I and part II. If you want to order them, you can order them from GLC, but I am hoping that they will help you grow and be taught things that maybe no one has ever taught you. For instance, has anyone tried to prepare you that your unguarded strength could be your double weakness. Maybe today you will learn something.

On one of the lessons I did just a few times ago, I was talking about Philip and God doing interruptions in your life and it turned out to be a big thing God was doing. Right in the middle of that I got my men mixed up. I was talking about Philip and I was just clicking along and then, I do not know what happened in my brain, I connected him to Thomas and I started quoting something Thomas had said as if Philip had said it. When I got home that night and I was thinking about I thought, "Oh no! Oh no!" What is my strength? My strength is teaching. It is one of my major gifts from God is to be a teacher and study the Bible. I have read the Bible for 37 years and anybody knows the story of Thomas if you have read the Bible a lot. There I made that mistake. How did I make it? Because when you are on television like this and you are filming a show, you are having to think, read your notes, listen to God, say what God is telling you to say. He always throws something in for me, always, something I never planned on saying. That happens a lot. In the middle of all of that I got my people mixed up. Sometimes I get my verses mixed up and yet how do I guard against that. If it is a strength that is unguarded is going to be a weakness. About the only way I know is to double check myself as I prepare my lessons. I really work on these lessons a lot. Oh my goodness, a lot before I ever get here to film them. You just kind of need to double check, do you not? If it is

a lot, before I ever get here to him them. You just kind of need to double check, do you not? If it is an area that you know you are strong in, you need to think "No wait a minute Betty, go back through here, check your references, think about what you are saying." There is another part to it about a strength becoming a weakness. Part of humility is just accepting that I am not perfect. I am not the only gun God has got in his holster, I am just one. If you make a mistake, correct it the best way you can but keep going.

What about Peter? This is our very first Scripture we are going to look at today. It is in Matthew 26:33, "Peter declared (It does not say Peter said, it says Peter declared. You know what that word means, it is not just speak it.) Lord, even if everyone else deserts You, I will never desert You." You know what happens when you say never. Never say never, right? He did it. Peter was a fisherman, a big burly tough fisherman. If you have ever lived in the part of the world where there are fishermen there and you see them. They are strong, they are tough, they are sinewy, they know how to fight the elements and they know how to fight things none of us even know how to fight. Peter had a confidence that was earned. It was not like he was just saying something off the top of head. He had been in situations where he could have deserted a lot through bad weather, bad financial times, but he had hung in there. He was a strong person. It was one of his greatest strengths. He was just speaking out of that great strength but he never stopped to think that I need to watch out and I need to be careful that in this strength that I do not get full of myself.

(Look at this picture that is coming up on the screen. You see that strong man? That man has worked out a lot has he not? He has got a strength in him. He is not a weakling. He is not a lazy person. He is not an undisciplined person. There is a price to pay to look like that. You guys that work out all of the time. You know there are lots of times you do not want to do it and you make yourself do it anyway. Look at him. He paid the price and he has a strength in him. Now look at this second man. Oh, this man, you can tell from looking at him that something really bad has happened. He has lost everything. He is like, "Oh no, what am I going to do?" He has failed some way.)

There were many people in the bible that withstood great tests for the Lord and then there were those that did not. Some of them are people we know their name, we know all about them but maybe you never realized they had their weak times. I want to talk first of all and give you some examples. I could call them the nobodies of the Bible. They do not even have names. Some of them have names and you might recognize them but some of them you think, "I have never heard of that person." These are not even named and look what they went through. In Hebrews 11:32-39, this Scripture is not going to come up on the screen but I am going to go through it with you. Open your Bible and let us look at it. These are the hall of faith people. These people had great strength in very difficult times and maybe you are like that. You know there is someone watching right now and I believe you live in another country, I believe that it is a very dangerous time for you right now.

You are not sure which way to turn. You are not sure who you can trust. You are not sure that you have time to get things done and the Lord says to you, "I am your kinsman Redeemer. I am your Savior. Listen and I will lead you." Just listen and know the Lord is right there with you. You are not by yourself. Here we go in Hebrews 11. Now that is an example of the Lord just flipping something in there and telling me to say it, but I love it. "And what more shall I say (this writer of Hebrews is saying) I do not have time to talk about Gideon, Barack, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith did these things. Conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what was promised, who shut the mouth of lions." Now we know about David slaying Goliath. Did you know that he also defeated a lion and a bear? Nobody in their right mind would try to do that. He slayed them I think he said with his own bare hands. This also says, "People quenched the fury of the flames." I can identify with that one because I have been on fire and saw it could be quenched. "They escaped the edge of the sword."

There are people watching this show right now that live in other countries that cannot even profess to be a Christian. The only way you are able to grow in the Lord is through the internet and shows like this. You have to escape danger all of the time.

Before I go on, I want to tell you a little story. Back in the days of communism when Christians were put in jail, killed, stoned, lost their jobs and lost everything. I met a lot of those people because I went there for eleven years to the former Soviet Union. I met those people that had that happen. I heard a story one time and in this story they said the Christians need to meet but if they tell each other there are spies so how are we going to know where to meet to comfort one another. I know how we are going to know. The Holy Spirit will speak to us and tell us where to go. It says in the Bible the Holy Spirit will show you things to come. Did you ever think that He could tell you an address to go to? All of those people knew. One of them got kind of interrogated by the police on the way and they said, "Where are you going?" "My brother has died and we are going for the reading of the will." His brother was Jesus and they were going to read the Bible. Here is another one. The Bible was written thousands of years ago but everything in it applies to today. That is why

one. The Bible was written thousands of years ago but everything in it applies to today. That is why it never grows old, never, never, never. It is for today. It will be for tomorrow.

Here is another on Hebrews, about verse 34, "Whose weakness was turned to strength." Now there you go. We are talking today about strength that can become a weakness. Did you know your weakness could become your greatest strength? You can ask God, "Lord, in my weakness, You be made strong."

I will tell you another story. These unnamed Christians that when we get to heaven, we will meet thousands of them that did amazing things for Jesus. There was a lady and her children and I believe they were Chinese. They were going to be shot in front of a firing squad because they would not deny Jesus. She gathered her children about her as they were getting ready to shoot all of them. She said, "Take courage children. Tonight we dine with the King." Is that not a beautiful story? I will tell you another one. There was a man in Russia that was going to be shot in the dead of winter because he was a Christian. They took all of his clothes off him. They made him walk out on this frozen pond and Russia can be bitterly cold and it was bitterly cold. This man walked out and they were all going to shoot him. They said to this man, "If you will deny Jesus, we will not kill you." He said, "I will deny Jesus." At that minute, one of the soldiers stepped forward and said, "I will take his place because as he was standing there I saw a golden crown being placed on his head. I will do it."

What else does it talk about in Hebrews? People who became powerful in battle, even against foreign armies. Listen to this. You hear about people being raised from the dead more and more right now. I know people that have done it. I know people that have been raised from the dead that you can read about. People say that cannot happen. Jesus said, "Heal the sick, raise the dead." Here it says in verse 35, "Women received back their dead raised to life again." You think about all of the people who have had those life after life experiences and they come back and tell us what heaven was like. Well, there you go. Others were tortured and refused to be released in order that they might gain a better resurrection. I have heard about men being in prison and they had a chance to get out but while they were in prison they had developed such a mighty walk with God that they were a leader, teaching Bible studies and many men were coming to the Lord. I heard about a man that said "I do not want to get out. God is using me here and my life has great meaning because of all of these men's lives I am touching. I do not want out." "Some faced jeers and flogging while others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned. They were sawed in two. They were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, mistreated." Look at this incredible verse in verse 38, "The world was not worthy of them."

You may say I love Jesus and I have stood by Jesus for a long time and nobody even knows it. Nobody knows it or anything about me. I will tell you, all of heaven knows about you. You have been through hard things. Some of you are paralyzed and will never move again and you think, "Do I even count?" I want you to know. All of heaven knows your name and the world is not worthy of you. "It says they wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. They were all commended for their faith yet none of them received what had been promised." They had to wait until they got to heaven to see it and it took a lot of faith. And yet, here today we are talking about some of the people in the Bible who were the strongest fell the hardest and at their great point of strength. I will tell you three I am talking about; Elijah, Noah and Peter. Does that mean that they are really not all that the Bible told us they were? No, not at all, not at all. They were mighty men of God. They were mighty. You cannot be a mighty person for God and not have weaknesses, and not have setbacks and failures. You just cannot live in this world and be perfect because only Jesus was perfect. What do you do when you fall? You say, "Lord, teach me everything I can learn from this." Milk it until there is not one drop of anything left. I want every lesson I can possibly learn out of it Lord and then I do not ever want to go here again.

In modern times, and this is really still about 150 years ago and maybe a little longer, have you heard of a man named Sir Francis Bacon? He was an Englishman and he was known for all of these essays on morality that he wrote. He had this great strength in that and he did not guard it. Never think that your strength ever has to go unguarded because it is so strong. No, Satan comes looking to sift you. Here this man had spoken and written all of these essays on morality and at the end of his life he got involved in a financial dealing that was very shaky. It was a financial misconduct and the king banished him from England. He spent the rest of his life having to live in another country.

You see, until the day we die we have an enemy. He does not ever get tired. He does not ever give up. In fact, the more effective we are, that just makes him more determined. What does that mean? Do we need to run and be scared? No. We need to just get stronger and stronger in our dependence on the Lord and less and less in our self-confidence that we do not need anybody. I am strong. I can do this. It just sets you up for a fall. All you have to do, in America especially right

now, whether it is in the religion area, the political area, the financial area, it does not matter, we are seeing lots and lots of people fall. It is not just Christian preachers, it is not just political figures, it is everywhere. What is that all about? Why would that be happening? These are strong people that have succeeded. It says in the last days there will be a great falling away. Inside those people, instead of preparing, leaning more and more on the Lord when He spoke to them about their weaknesses they corrected them.

Here is what our pastor said recently and I thought it was so neat. He said, "God will do three things when He is trying to warn you. At first, He will say "Do not do that. Do not do that. I do not want you doing that." Either you quit or the next thing happens. He gets loud and he says, "I said, do not do that." He is very pointed about it. He can be speaking through another person but you know it is God. And then if you still do not listen God will fix a fix that will fix you. So temptation can come in the least likely place, in the aftermath, after you are tired and weary. You are just too tired to be prepared and too tired to watch out. Jesus did try to warn Peter. I want you to look at this third Scripture. I am going to give you a second Scripture; I have kind of got them mixed up here. In this third Scripture, Luke 22:31-32, it says, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to sift each of you like wheat but I pleaded in prayer for you Simon." Think about that. He pleaded for Simon before it ever happened. He knew it was going to happen. "That your faith would not fail so when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers." I want you to look at this next Scripture. For the guys that helping me I had it marked as Scripture two, I guess it will be three now. Look at this in Daniel 11:32, talking about the end times. "And such as violate the covenant (that is the covenant between you and God, His laws and what He wants done) he (the devil) will pervert and seduce with flatteries (there is something that trips you up, you have to be careful), but the people who know their God (and that is what I am talking about, spending that time with God and letting Him work on you) shall prove themselves strong and they shall stand firm and do exploits for God." You know Peter ended out his life doing that. He ended out his life standing firm and doing exploits for God, even after that big failure. He was crucified upside down in Rome. He said, "I am not worthy to be crucified like Jesus was. Do it upside down."

I want to give you as a leader, here you are training people so I want you to learn this for yourself, but then you need to teach this to the people that you are working with. What? Here is one. You say to them, "You have gone through a big crisis, now you need to be alert to the small things that could trip you up right now." Another thing is to say, remember these people in the Bible. Peter in his strength as a fisherman thought No I will stand by you. Elijah stood up against 450 prophets of Baal and then had a woman scare him, Jezebel. Noah, he worked for 120 years building that ark. It had never rained. People did not know what rain was. He kept saying it is going to rain. They mocked him and he had to keep on, keep on and keep on. He did great. But then, after it was all over he got drunk. His great strength had an unguarded weakness in it. Do you see what I am talking about?

These Bible characters that I have just talked to you about, they fell on their strong points not their weak points. What are your strong points? Have you figured it out? Satan tempts us. Remember that verse I read to you. He flatters you. You have got to learn when compliments are true compliments from God to encourage you, which we all need, and when is it Satan coming to puff you up, get you where you can fall. The Lord wants us to be strong and He wants you to do exploits in His name. It is exciting. At the same time He wants us to realize that there will never be a time when you can be unguarded, when you will not need Him and His protection. The good news is God will be there to pick us up, dust us off, give us great new wisdom, encourage us and get us going again. You never fail forever.

There is a business man watching right now. You feel like you have embarrassed yourself, your family and even your church. You want to give up and God says, "No, you are not to give up. You are to make amends, not give up." God has big plans for you. Hang in there.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. Is there ever at time when having an unguarded strength is a good thing?
2. How does humility influence us when we think about our strengths?
3. How does the story of Peter in Matthew 26: 33 show an example of an unguarded strength that becomes a weakness?
4. Who are some of the other Bible characters who fell on their strengths not their weaknesses?
5. How do you prevent yourself from having an unguarded strength?

To watch the video on UNGUARDED STRENGTH, Pillar Six, Leadership Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any articles written by Betty Swann, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Betty Swann, Betty Swann Ministries, P.O. Box 8882, Amarillo, TX 79114-8882, Amarillo, TX 79109, phone 806-433-4649, www.bettyswann.com, betty@bettyswann.com