



March 2014

Dear friends,

Do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Nehemiah 8:10

In the book of Nehemiah, when the people gathered to hear the reading of the word of God they wept. The truth of God's word often does that to each of our hearts, too. We go to the church building and hear the Word and we get paralyzed by our sin, mourning over our sin. We may even leave the church building still grieving and not knowing how to walk in joy, not knowing how to operate with God as our strength.

When a boy and girl become interested in one another in the United States we often say, "they are talking to each other." In Africa, when a boy becomes interested in a girl, they say, "they are walking together." Though a subtle difference, I value that wording, especially as I consider my own relationship with Jesus. As we get to know Jesus we aren't only talking to one another, we are walking together. Our walking with Jesus teaches us how to live in holiness because He is holy; how to live in joy because it is our strength.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Psalms 51:9-12

The decisions and actions we make against God can bog us down as we try to walk with Jesus in faith. We don't believe we are deserving enough or good enough or holy enough. The truth is... we aren't and we won't be.

Our God has given us the joy of the Lord as our strength and we, like the people of God in Nehemiah, don't always operate from the Lord's strength. Confessing and

weeping over our sins is a cleansing and healing process. However, staying in the spirit of mourning paralyzes us from living in Christ's power.

When Christ lives in us, our sins lose their power as Christ's power manifests itself in our hearts. We forget God's power lives in us as Christ followers and we default to operating out of our own strength. Our own strength is a trap because we have no true strength apart from Christ. Therefore, we live powerless lives, devoid of Jesus and based on our own decisions and efforts to control.

Nehemiah is reminding the people and reminding us that our power comes from God and the joy of The Lord is our strength. When we learn to worship God throughout the day, celebrate the truths of His word and meditate on the word day and night, we begin to let go of our control and hold on to His control.

Then, He allows us to experience His joy in the midst of our gloom. His joy overshadows our gloom. His joy teaches us to walk with Him. His joy gives us strength.

Life is challenging. Some of us struggle financially. Others struggle with our health. Our kids make wrong choices. We struggle with self-sufficiency, self-esteem, and selfishness. Some of us fail to manage our time well, we are lazy, we are indifferent, we battle fear. None of us are without struggle or difficulty.

We all have the opportunity to walk with Jesus today. He will show us the way to go. He will speak to us and guide us. He will give us joy and we will be strong in The Lord.

And do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:16