



A Father's Strength

From the *In His Hands* healing meditation series

Dedicated to my friend Ron Birchall, a loving father, on the birthday of his daughter with
God, Kelly, January 1, 2005

Internet and downloadable version
<http://www.chipcaldwellassoc.com>, click on "Meditations".

Preparedness - Orientation in the Use of this Meditation

This is a one meditation event (whereas others contain many meditations in a series, like the twenty-one meditations contained in the *He Is Risen Indeed* Easter series.) Many have not experienced this form of allowing God to speak directly to us and sometimes things with which we are unfamiliar are viewed critically. If this sentiment is occurring in your heart or your mind, let it go. Do not miss this opportunity to experience God, at least until you have tried it once. After experiencing something once, each one of us has the right to judge. But, not until then. Wisdom comes from the connection between God and experience. Prejudice comes from the absence of one or both.

First, for our purposes in this meditation, we hold a specific meaning for meditation. Some think of meditation as a synonym for prayer. Others refer to meditation as “thinking.” Quite frankly, these are very naïve notions of God’s intended relationship with us. They suggest a one-way relationship, one in which only we talk to God, but rarely remain silent to allow His grace and wisdom to guide us through directed listenings. For our purposes, we hold a highly specific definition of meditation as a structured, disciplined, and dedicated process to allow God *to speak* directly to our hearts, minds, and our spirits. That is, it is “a listening.” Therefore, by this definition, meditation is not a time for us to speak to God, either for intercessions or for thanksgiving or praise. Reflect on the number of times in the Gospels that the writer observed that Jesus had gone away to pray – up into the hills, most often. The purpose of these times alone with God has been made perfectly clear to us. Jesus did not enter these times as petitioner, nay, not to request intervention from God upon His own life, to provide Him earthly comfort or to avoid a difficult path, nor to request anything on His own behalf. But, rather, His time with God was to ask for guidance, perhaps for specific actions and steps to take in the coming hours or days. In other words, His time with God was to listen, to meditate, not to petition. Even in His dying meditation He said, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” [Mk 14:36] Can we learn anything more important from His time on earth as a human above that He listened and meditated with God, seeking God’s will, not His own? As advised in Ecclesiastes, “... there is a time to speak,” But, now is not that time. Now is “...a time to be silent....”

The meditation appearing herein follows a category of meditation known as Lectio Divina (Kaisch, 162-182). The main attraction to Lectio Divina form of meditations is that they prepare us in such a way that we, first, with faith and grace from God, close our connectedness to all things of this world, connect our hearts, minds, and spirits to God, followed by a living out of the words and life of Christ in a state beyond time, space, and physics. We are transcended by God into His world where He speaks directly to us, sometimes with undeniable clarity, sometimes in undetectable ways, and sometimes by His silence to our minds (but who knows but God of what may be recording beyond our temporal sensory capabilities in our hearts and spirits.)

Other categories of meditation, however, for those who would like to expand their experiential horizons beyond Lectio, abound. These other types are:

- Contemplative Meditation, a higher order meditative form in which we silence all our being into a Jungian-type connectedness to God;
- Monologistic Prayer, like mantras, the use of a rosary, or recitation of the Jesus Prayer (CF: Anonymous. R.M. French, trans. *The Way of the Pilgrim*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1965);
- Sensory Meditation, in which we draw upon a visual image, or music, or smell, to experience God's call to us; and,
- Recollection.

For our purposes here expect to be guided by God using the meditation method of Lectio Divina into an experience with Christ.

Second, journaling is an important component in your spiritual growth and development. For your convenience, a Reflections Journal appears in downloadable form on the website and/or as an appendix to this meditation if you are using a printed version. Feel drawn by God to record His revelations to you. Do not feel obligated, however, to use this form of journal. Whether you journal in the Reflections Journal or another form of diary or planning template, is immaterial. It is the journaling process that is important.

Third, some "rules of the road" have benefited others in their meditation journey, as follows:

- Truly listen to God and avoid speaking more than is prudent to gain an understanding of what He is placing in your heart. A good rule of thumb might be to listen at least 75 percent of the time, speaking no more than 25 percent or not at all.
- Be patient, both during your meditations and in your reflections in the hours, days, and weeks after. Allow God to speak directly to your heart, not your head.
- At times, expect incompleteness, silence, and/or a feeling that God is not interacting in ways that are immediately detectable. You may feel that God is not speaking to you (and indeed He may not be at that exact moment.) You are on God's time now and not your own. Who other than God can know His calendar unless He reveals it to us? Do not attempt to direct His path, but rather patiently listen and grow from your time with Him.
- Expect varying emotional responses. You might find tears in your eyes or you may feel totally emotionless. You may feel elation or you may feel despair. In other words, expect the unexpected. Nothing inside your communion with God is beyond limits. But, of course, in times of "at this moment" discomfort or despair, always know that His love proceeds beyond this moment and transcends all human suffering. Allow yourself to feel His love for you even at times you feel completely unloved, unlovable,

and utterly alone. And know that, like Ruth, in His time, He will provide, perhaps not euphoria or perpetual elation, but rather for your contentment.

- Expect to attempt to shape God's call to you to your own desires, later feeling a discomfort in your heart. After all, you are human and have human fears and self-centeredness in your core. God made you this way (for whatever reason) and obviously loves you just as you are. If you feel so conflicted, either during a meditation or sometime after, simply return to that meditation, as often as it shall take, until your heart tells you to move on.
- Expect that what seemed a clear revelation, perhaps even a direct "promise" from God in a meditation, does not materialize. These seem the most disappointing when they occur to me, but a return to mediation, placing our anxieties and confusion directly in God's hands prepares our hearts for God's ultimate call to us.
- It would be a good idea to share your revelations with a trusted friend or spiritual mentor, someone who can aid you in understanding the deeper nature of your heart. But, be careful not to replace these discoveries of a friend or mentor with those revealed to you in your meditations. Rather, if you become conflicted about the meaning of a mediation response as a result of an interpretation or expressed feeling of a friend or spiritual mentor, repeat that meditation as often as you feel necessary until God's intentions for your life, either short-term or long-term, become crystallized.
- Finally, you may feel a particularly strong connection to God after a meditation. As you reflect on these revelations, prayerfully consider sharing your conversation, and any resultant change in your life or the lives of others, beyond your immediate sphere of influence. Should you desire editorial assistance in organizing your thoughts, we will be more than willing to help, as I am sure, will others close to you. As you share your meditations with us, depending on the topic and available space, it may be shared on our website and/or in a future meditation publication upon your blessing and permission.

A Father's Strength: Feeling the Strengthening Hands of God

**Dedicated to my friend, Ron Birchall,
a loving father, on the birthday
of his daughter with God, Kelly**

Opening Prayer

Praise be to You, our Lord and Master, who has risen from death in the grave into everlasting dominion over all that is good. Be with us in this time with You, giving us comfort, wisdom, faith, hope, and love, but most importantly Your ever-present guidance and direction to do all that we are meant to do. Through Him who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Observations

As I walked up to him in the Ready Room outside the Sanctuary that would experience the burial of his only daughter, he reached out to embrace me and said simply, "There are no words. There are no words." His strength was overwhelming and yet his vulnerability evident. It seemed not the put-on face of a father who feels he must show strength for his family and to the outside world that suddenly appeared translucent, but rather the peace that comes only from God's hands, not from afar, but in the ever-present, here-and-now, physical placement of His hands upon the shoulders of His flock when only His strength can sustain. His pain and his grieving were there all right, but some other-worldly strength and peace overshadowed it.

Later, my seating in the sanctuary allowed me to view him from the side as he sat in the end of the first pew with his loving wife and other children. No words can paint the image of that place. The grief weighted the place down like a fog. Yet, his strength remained like the brightness of the sun throughout all the ceremony, all the testimonials from those who loved her as they spoke one after another from the podium, throughout the homilies of the priests, and the Communion.

After the dedication of the body, Father David retrieved her ashes from the altar and faced the hundreds of us who had gathered there. The family rose in unison to face him. As the family moved into the aisle, the priest handed the box containing Kelly's ashes to Ron. I could not help but wonder how he could possibly hold these ashes without faltering. They must have weighed more than the Universe itself. Atlas would have buckled under the strain. And yet Ron stood there, bearing up as if God Himself supported that small box. Time ceased; only stillness remained. It occurred to me at that moment that this event represented not just the ashes of Kelly, but the pain of the whole world. The moment was overwhelming, truly overwhelming. This father's strength was not just there for his daughter's ashes, but for all of us, for all our pain, for all our tribulations, for all that crushed us under the strain.

An ancient story is recounted in which Peter Abelard, the 12th century French theologian, and his protégé, while walking through a forest, came upon a dying rabbit suffering mortal wounds inflicted after being caught in a trapper's snare. The rabbit, cradled in Abelard's hands as it looked upon his kind face, appeared to experience some form of hope during those final moments of its life. As the protégé looked down upon the suffering rabbit, he metaphored to Abelard, "You mean all this? You mean all this?" He was questioning his mentor if Christ's passion on the Cross took on, not only the sin and pain of the world at that moment in time, but beyond "then", to "now", and for each moment in the future, "always and everywhere". For all of time, from the "Big Bang" to the coming "Big Collapse". It is Christ, who is "risen for us", who provides everything we have needed for sustenance in the past, everything we need in this moment, and everything we will need during all moments of the future.

Ron, with the support of Christ, carried us all down the aisle in his hands that day, step by heavy step, pew by pew, face by face, heart by heavy heart, tear by tear.

So, what does one do when faced with overwhelming grief, overwhelming uncertainty, overwhelming pain? How can we bear up under it all?

Readings

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." [Jn 11:25b-26a]

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked. "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed. Then He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." [Lk 8:45-48]

God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof rage and swell, and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same. There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most Highest. God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed; God shall help her, and that right early. Be still then, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, and I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. [Psalm 64]

(Jesus said) "So I say to you: 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?' " [Lk 11:9-13]

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” [Mk 11: 22-24]

Meditation

To begin this meditation, find a comfortable spot where you will be uninterrupted for several minutes. Seat yourself comfortably. Breathe deeply and slowly for two to three minutes. Visualize all the things that trouble you evaporate from your body like steam from the street after a summer storm, leaving your body restful and content.

Visualize yourself walking along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee with Jesus with just a few believers just as the sun is rising. Smell the saltiness in the air. Smell the life of the sea that is always present in the early morning surf. Feel the warmth of the sun on your face, on your arms, and on your feet as you walk along the shoreline. Visualize yourself walking along in quietness with the others during this early morning time. Shortly, you notice that Jesus has turned to you and says, “You seem to be a little troubled this morning. And you appeared distant last night. Can you tell me what is troubling you?”

As you consider the weight of His question upon your heart, hear yourself empty your concerns, your pains, your uncertainties and fears to Jesus. Continue conveying your troubles to Jesus for some time.

After you have expressed all that is troubling you to Him, you notice that His face suggests that He knows exactly how the weight of your heart is burdening you and immobilizing you. After a few moments, you hear Jesus begin to speak. Listen carefully, not interrupting or commenting, but intently to every word from the mouth of God. Feel the eternal power of God wash over you. For several minutes, allow the Holy Spirit, directly from God, of God, and of Christ, to stir your thoughts and your feelings. Continue in this state for as long as self requires.

As you feel your meditation come softly to an end, feel the refreshing sensation Jesus has placed upon you and know that this sensation will stay with you all day long.

As the days pass, observe the changes Jesus is making in your life from this reflection. Record any special coincidences or revelations in your Reflections Journal, calendar, and/or on anything handy and refer back to them in two weeks.

Sharing Your Vision with Others

If you are so called, turn to your Reflections Journal in the Appendix and, using the guidelines provided, share your mediation with us. Regardless of how insignificant you

feel your meditation might have been, your small candle may become a floodlight for others. So, with all humility, prayerfully consider sharing Christ's revelations in your life with us so that we might share them with others.

Appendix

Reflections Journal

Record your reflections below. Consider sharing your reflections with us so that we might share them with others by emailing chipc@chipcaldwellassoc.com or mail to:

Chip Caldwell
7198 A1A South
St. Augustine, FL 32080

Date	Record your reflections, any coincidences that occurred in your life after the meditation or other thoughts worth recording for yourself below.

Date	Record your reflections, any coincidences that occurred in your life after the meditation or other thoughts worth recording for yourself below.

Date	Record your reflections, any coincidences that occurred in your life after the meditation or other thoughts worth recording for yourself below.

Endnotes & References

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