

## **Real Strength in Joy**

### **Ready:**

"Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'" - Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)

**Set** The joy of the Lord is our strength. How many times have we heard that? I feel like I say it but don't always put my full effort into believing it. In this passage, Nehemiah is talking to the people about the law of God. The people are weeping because they know they have disappointed God, but I believe this response from Nehemiah shows God's heart: "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." As athletes, we spend a lot of time lifting weights. We tear down our muscles in order to build them up bigger and stronger. The more weight we can bear, the more reps we can do, and the stronger we get. And this is what the world tells us about strength. How far we can go; how long we can push ourselves; how far we can go beyond the pain. To athletes, the daily battle to get stronger makes sense! Now let's look at this biblically. We're told several times that "the joy of the Lord is our strength." Joy...To me, it is a feeling of freedom, rescue, and lightheartedness. Anyone else see a contradiction here? The world constantly tells us that, in order to be strong, we must carry weight and push through pain. But when we look at the heart of Jesus, we find that He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Rather than carrying our heavy burdens on our own in order to get stronger, Jesus says, "Hey! Give it to Me, and, in return, I will give you rest!" He gives us peace in return for our burdens. What a deal! Sounds like a deal too great to pass up, doesn't it? I know it's something I wouldn't want to turn down. But, still, I find myself trying to become strong on my own without His help. I find myself saying, "You know, I've been working out. I'm strong. I can handle this one, God." Ha! I wonder if He sits back and chuckles slightly, knowing that, in time, I'll come back to Him. I see myself as a child and God as a Father. I run off and think I can handle something only to come running back. If the joy of the Lord is our strength, then why, when we are given something so light and so free, do we insist on proving our own strength by carrying our own heavy burdens? We assume that the heavier the weight we can bear, the stronger we are. But in reality, Jesus gives us a joy so light and free that our efforts seem useless compared to His grace. Today, remember that His joy is not circumstantial. Give Him your burdens; He is waiting with open arms! You don't have to prove your own strength by bearing it alone.

**Go** 1. What burdens are you trying to carry on your own? 2. Why are you trying to carry them? 3. What is keeping you from being joyful in every circumstance? 4. Will you accept Jesus' offer to bear your burdens?

**Workout** Psalm 28:7 Matthew 11:28-30

**Bible Reference:**

Matthew 11



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