



Jim Teeters

This is me with a work of art I completed in 1989, a couple of years after resigning as the pastor of the former Evangelical Friends Church of Kent in Washington (now East Hill Friends Church), where my wife, Rebecca, and I are members. I'll explain its meaning in Sunday's devotional.

Rebecca and I have lived in Kent, Washington, for over thirty years where she worked as a children's librarian for the King County Library System. After my four years as pastor, I went on to practice my profession as a social worker for the state of Washington. Currently, I am retired and volunteering in the local school district, mentoring in a high school and helping in a kindergarten class as "Mr. T" to those kids. I continue writing and teaching poetry to kids. Rebecca has a great proclivity for travel planning and we have visited five continents and over twenty countries including China where we taught English at a university in 2000-2001. Both Rebecca and I are part of our church music team, me on the drums and Rebecca as singer and guitarist.

BIBLE READING: 2 Peter 1:3-4

I constructed this triangular-shaped art piece with sturdy 2x4s and plywood. I painted it white and in the bottom left I attached a real autumn maple leaf (light yellow). I created a three-dimensional cross and chain onto which I splashed red paint symbolizing blood.

Here is the meaning: The sturdy frame and shape is the *strength* of God; the maple leaf is the *gentleness* of God; and the cross is the *sacrifice* of God. I suppose the triangle shape could stand for the trinity (though it might have been subconscious on my part).

This piece was conceived in my meditative morning walks in a nearby wooded area. I thought of the strength of God as I touched the solid trunk of a large maple tree. I meditated on the gentleness of God as I ran my fingers across some tall grasses, and the sacrifice of God I sensed as I pressed my palm onto the end of a broken branch—the minor pain reminded me of the greater pain Jesus experienced on the cross on my behalf.

I want to more fully explore these ideas and see what can be discovered about God and about my humanness in relationship to them. I invite you delve deeper with me into these three concepts this week.

SONG: Victory in Jesus

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord of strength, gentleness, and sacrifice, teach and transform me!

—Jim Teeters

BIBLE READING: Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:15-17

When I place my hand against a tree trunk it reminds me of the strength of God, but when I turn my eyes skyward I am reminded of the vastness of creation. How God spoke all things into existence; *God said let there be light!* Goosebumps! We live on this little blue-green ball amid millions of galaxies. We rarely get a glimpse of the starry sky here in the Seattle area but in Eastern Washington near Rebecca's family farm, we could lie on our backs and see the Milky Way and watch for shooting stars! We see a small part of the vast, marvelous creation emanating from God's voice.

Then I am reminded of a joke I heard—get ready: Some scientists were telling God how he wasn't needed anymore because they could make life out of dirt. "We just add a few chemicals; charge it with electricity to get life." God is amused and says, "Well, show me how you do it." One of the scientists reaches down for a scoop of dirt. As he does this, God says, "Oh no, you get your *own* dirt." God's strength is experienced in the wind, the mountains, the mighty sea but we can barely grasp God's power. Awe and praise is the only reasonable response. *Just get your own dirt*, indeed!

Listen to Isaiah, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom" (Isaiah 40:28). Let me invite you *right now* to simply lift up your head and hands toward the heavens in praise of our glorious Creator; see how that feels!

SONG: Mighty to Save

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, you are so mighty, so strong, so understanding. I praise your Holy Name!

—Jim Teeters

BIBLE READING: Psalm 27:1; Proverbs 18:10

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Isaiah 40:29). God shares his strength with us! Hannah Whitall Smith, in *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, (Chapter 12: Is God in Everything?), lists many Scriptures trying to convince Christians who find this hard to believe.

Just how does God share his strength? As I pondered this and read Smith’s Scriptures I compiled a list of ways this has happened in my life and in the lives of many in Scripture. Check the ones that seem to fit in your life:

Healing: the Lord performs a miraculous healing in answer to prayer.

Assurance: the Lord provides affirmation for decisions you need to make.

Peace of mind: you find a scripture or someone comes alongside; find an answer at just the right time.

Courage: you discover to your surprise that you can move into dangerous territory in some way.

Creativity: you find an answer to a problem or act in ways you couldn’t have imagined.

Comfort: in times of strife, death of a loved one, or some loss you find ways to handle it.

Forgiveness: God frees you of guilt and sets you on a new path.

You become open to God’s strength in two ways: the first way is *leap of faith*—it follows a principle that you must believe to see (instead of the reverse). The second is simply *letting go*—“be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, ‘I will never fail you. I will never forsake you.’...The Lord is my helper, so I will not be afraid” (Hebrews 13:5-6, NLT).

SONG: The Name of the Lord Is a Strong Tower

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, right now I trust you to share your strength with me in any way you wish!

—Jim Teeters

BIBLE READING: 1 Kings 19:11-13; Mark 10:13-16

Jesus tells us to come to him: “for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29) and Zechariah predicts this: “See, your king comes...gentle and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). So we have the powerful Lord, the mighty Creator of the universe coming to us gently, telling us to come, relax in his presence! It’s the *other* side of God.

I need God’s strength, but I also need to know the gentle touch of my Creator—the touch that calls me to his side where I can find rest for my weary soul. George Fox saw this side of Christ and became a peacemaker; Tolstoy saw this and wrote “War is so unjust and ugly that all who wage it must try to stifle the voice of conscience within themselves.” (*War and Peace*, books.google.com, p. 145). Gandhi read Tolstoy and freed India from the control of the British through peaceful means. Dr. Martin Luther King witnessed Gandhi and won freedom, through nonviolence, for African Americans.

The gentleness of God is an astounding contrast to mankind’s proclivity toward warring, even using the name of the Lord to support it! Jesus commands Peter: “Put your sword back in its place,” when he uses it to defend Jesus (Matthew 26:52). We have a gentle Lord!

I can come to Jesus and lay my burdens down; cry out to the King of Kings and know he is willing to listen, forgive, and bless me. He leads me by still waters and restores my soul!

SONG: Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, I need your gentle touch today; let me be still enough to hear you whisper. Thank you!

—Jim Teeters

BIBLE READING: Matthew 5:38-39, 43-44; Philippians 4:5

I think one of the most challenging moments for being gentle is when we are driving. Here's a poem I wrote about a driving incident where I was at fault:

**Cut You Off in Heavy Traffic
Didn't Mean To**

Dear Sir:
I don't know your name
Only the sound of screaming
Eyes glowing with hatred
for me
Want to say
I am chagrined
ashamed
ashen-faced
Wanted to yell back
I AM SO SORRY!
But had to turn left
Now I'm
free of you

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). We are called to be gentle and kind. We are not to fight, but turn the other cheek; we are to love our enemies! Jesus modeled this behavior on Calvary. Trusting God, he allowed himself to be nailed painfully to the cross. Yet, we scrap and fight to maintain our position, our dignity. There are divisions on issues in our yearly meeting as in other denominations, as in our country. A woman in our church and I are diametrically opposed politically, but each Sunday we hug and say we love each other, not letting our passionate beliefs stand in the way of gentleness toward each other. Gentleness! Jesus demands it!

SONG: Gentleness (Music Machine)

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, help me to be a model of gentleness, childlike in nature, turning the other cheek even when I want to get even!

—Jim Teeters

BIBLE READING: John 3:16

Jesus, God's only Son, died for us. We don't need to die for Jesus. We are to *live* for him! I think of current events in our world where radical religious devotees (or the naïve ones) are blowing themselves up for their deity! No! Not necessary. Jesus told us: "go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13; see also Hosea 6:6).

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1). Jesus suffered and died. His Father gave him up to face this terrible death on the cross in the hands of his enemies; to set us free! Set free to live, love, and not have to face death that sinfulness brings. In my walk in the woods, I press my hand on the pointed stick to remind me of the sacrifice of God—it is just the merest example of the pain Jesus endured. And oh, the pain the Father felt watching his child die at the hands of some maddened murderers. That moment split time in two, creating the greatest moment in the history of mankind—our loving Father offering up one he loved so that we might live freely to love and to enter his eternal kingdom.

I want to share one more Scripture: "let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles....Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12: 1b-2). Let's sing, let's dance, and let's live for him!

SONG: O, How He Loves You and Me

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, thank you for your sacrifice! Let me soak up your mercy and share it with everyone I meet!

—Jim Teeters

BIBLE READING: Luke 14:26-27

What is my sacrifice if not to die for God (see Friday). It is to sacrifice everything that is central and uppermost in my mind! Whew! To be Christ's disciple is costly—some might say it may be easier to die for God. But no; it has to do with getting my priorities straight. We have to give up our stuff! Give up our ideas about what matters. Just let go of it all! For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6). The Jews (and many Christians) look to the law: keeping rules in order to please God; we may even try to figure out what rules are best. God is telling us to let go of our ideas and simply live by faith in Jesus and let him lead us into loving! That's "the only thing that counts."

Here is a poem
I wrote about
letting go and
how important
it is:

GENTLENESS
As I let go
of the war inside me
I notice the simple
things, the gifts of
 breeze across my skin
 swirl of leaves
 promise of new growth
willing now to bend
in the windstorms
of daily living
 hold the hand of a child
 smile at my grouchy
 neighbor
because I see
her war still raging

SONG: I Surrender All

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, I surrender all I think is important and ask you to lead me into your path of love.

—Jim Teeters