

MY BIGGEST STRENGTH

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A FEW YEARS AGO DURING ONE OF MY FIRST ^{PRISON} MEETINGS AT A CRIMINALS & GANG MEMBERS ANONYMOUS (C.G.A) SELF-HELP GROUP, THE FACILITATOR AT THE TIME ASKED US TO DO AN EXERCISE WHICH CONSISTED OF WRITING AS MANY STRENGTHS (POSITIVE) ABOUT OURSELVES THAT WE BELIEVED WE HAD. HE GAVE US 2 MINUTES. I COULD NOT BELIEVE HOW CHALLENGING THIS APPARENTLY SIMPLE TASK WAS, AND THE ONLY THING THAT GAVE ME SOME SORT OF RELIEF WAS THE FACT THAT AS I LOOKED AROUND THE ROOM MANY OF MY PEERS APPEARED TO BE HAVING THE SAME PROBLEM AS I DID.

LOOKING BACK IF THE FACILITATOR WOULD HAVE ASKED THE GROUP INSTEAD TO WRITE... SAY OUR WEAKNESSES OR THE BAD THINGS WE HAD DONE, WITHOUT A DOUBT MOST IF NOT ALL OF US WOULD HAVE FILLED OUR PAGE WITHOUT A PROBLEM. WHY? BECAUSE MOST OF US HAVE HAD A NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF OURSELVES OUR ENTIRE LIFE. EITHER BECAUSE OF THINGS WE WERE TOLD GROWING UP AND WE BELIEVED, EVENTUALLY BECOMING PART OF OUR WARPED BELIEF SYSTEM, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF OUR LIFESTYLE, CRIMES AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR, WHICH REGARDLESS OF OUR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS. WE CHOSE. FOR THESE REASONS AT LEAST FOR MYSELF (ALTHOUGH IM SURE IM NOT ALONE) I HAD NEVER REALLY GIVEN MY STRENGTHS OR GOOD QUALITIES MUCH THOUGHT, FOCUSING ALMOST ALWAYS ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE AND EMBRACING IT NOT ONLY AS SOMETHING GOOD, BUT SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF AS WELL.

UPON REFLECTING ON THAT DAY YEARS AGO, I CAME TO REALIZE THAT ALTHOUGH I WOULD HAVE NEVER ADMITTED IT BACK THEN, AND ACTUALLY PUT ON MANY MASKS THROUGH OUT MY LIFE IN AN ATTEMPT TO HIDE IT, THE TRUTH WAS THAT I SAW MYSELF AS A FLAWED AND INSECURE INDIVIDUAL AND IN REALITY, I HAD TROUBLE WRITING DOWN MY PERSONAL STRENGTHS BECAUSE I LACKED THEM, AND THE ONES I CONSIDERED I HAD I USED IN A NEGATIVE WAY TO ACCOMPLISH NEGATIVE THINGS. SPECIALLY HERE IN PRISON.

When I was first asked this question, I was taking my first steps in my journey of recovery, which today, I have whole heartedly embraced. Not long ago to my surprise the same question was once again asked; "WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS, DO YOU KNOW THEM?" THIS TIME I HAD A SMILE ON MY FACE KNOWING THAT EVEN THOUGH IT HAD TAKEN ME YEARS I WAS PREPARED TO ANSWER THE QUESTION WITH HONESTY AND CONFIDENCE. HOWEVER, THIS INSIGHT AND PREPARATION DID NOT COME SIMPLY THROUGH READING IT OUT OF A TEXTBOOK OR LEARNING IT FROM A CURRICULUM, IT HAS COME THROUGH LIVING IT AND WORKING THE C.G.A STEPS ON A DAILY BASIS.

FURTHERMORE, WORKING THE C.G.A STEPS HAS MEANT PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE OF HUMBLeness, ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO DO, SPECIALLY WHEN ALL OF (MY) YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN DEDICATED TO THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE; EGO, PRIDE, VIOLENCE, SELF-CENTEREDNESS. HUMILITY DEMANDS VULNERABILITY AND EVEN THE WILLINGNESS TO BE HURT, THIS LAST ONE MAY EVEN SEEM UNATURAL, BUT THAT IS HUMILITY AT ITS FINEST.

SO WHAT IS MY BIGGEST STRENGTH? I ASKED MYSELF AS I WROTE THIS PAPER THE ANSWER DID NOT COME INSTANTLY, WAS IT BEING A LEADER? WAS IT BEING LOYAL OR TRUSTWORTHY? A FEW DAYS WENT BY, BUT THE ANSWER EVENTUALLY CAME, WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT ANALYZING ONESELF COULD BE SO CHALLENGING? ANYWAY, I CAN SINCERELY & HUMBLy SAY THAT RECOGNIZING AND BEING AWARE OF MY LIMITATIONS AND WEAKNESSES & ACCEPTING THIS TRUTH WITH GRACE IS MY BIGGEST STRENGTH TODAY, BY EMBRACING THEM & ALLOWING THEM TO WORK IN HARMONY WITHIN ME, UNDERSTANDING I CANNOT HAVE STRENGTH WITHOUT LIMITATIONS.

RECOGNIZING MY LIMITATIONS AND BEING AWARE OF MY WEAKNESSES HAS GIVEN ME THE STRENGTH THROUGH MY HIGHER POWER (JESUS) TO OVERCOME THE POWERFUL FORCE, WHICH REIGNED IN MY LIFE FOR SO LONG, TO ALWAYS LOOK STRONG & ACT TOUGH WHICH IN REALITY ONLY MASKED

WHAT I REALLY FELT AND WHO I TRULY WAS. WHO WAS I? AN INSECURE, FEARFUL INDIVIDUAL WITH LOW SELF WORTH AND A VERY UNHEALTHY NEED FOR ACCEPTANCE WHICH LED ME TO SUPPRESS MY FEELINGS, ACT TOUGH, PRETEND TO BE STRONG, AS A WAY TO COPE WITH WHAT I LACKED OR HAD NO CONTROL OVER.

KNOWING THAT MY BIGGEST STRENGTH TODAY IS RECOGNIZING MY LIMITATIONS AND WEAKNESSES I CAN BE MORE AT PEACE WITH MYSELF AND OTHERS. THIS, BY NOT TAKING EVERYTHING PERSONAL OR AS A CHALLENGE. THERE IS THINGS I CANT DO OR AM SIMPLY NOT GOOD AT, THERE'S DREAMS I HAVE THAT WONT MATERIALIZE AND COME TRUE, GOALS THAT UNFORTUNATELY, I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE, AND IT'S OKAY, I'M AT PEACE WITH THAT. TODAY, I KNOW WITH ALL CERTAINTY THAT NO MATTER WHAT, WITH MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND THROUGH MY FAILURES, WITH MY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES I AM UNCONDITIONALLY LOVED AND CARED FOR.

II CORINTHIANS 12:10

"... BECAUSE WHEN I AM WEAK, I AM STRONG"

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