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*“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)*

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## A STRONG POSITION

### Part I

In many hobbies, games, and sports, you’ll hear a great deal about practice and strategy all revolved around positioning yourself for success. Even when we’re studying school work or reading our Bible, we have an environment in which we concentrate better and it is specific to our needs. Some may need music playing while others need complete silence, for instance. In the sport/hobby of powerlifting, the recurring phrase for that is “a strong position.” As Christians, we should have a very similar goal in our service to God: don’t fall to temptation and sin. Now, examining our daily lives, do we put

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ourselves in a strong position to accomplish this goal, or are we routinely in a weak position and find ourselves not succeeding?

First, we must admit that success or failure in this goal is our own responsibility. God will not force us to failure (1 Cor. 10:13), and when we find ourselves in a weak position, we put ourselves there (2 Cor. 5:10). It's foolish to blame God for the trouble we place ourselves in (Pro. 19:3), and that also means it is our responsibility to put ourselves in a strong position on a daily basis. With a goal of avoiding sin, let's examine what it means to be in a weak position vs. a strong position.

To determine what exactly is a weak position for us, we need to think about the "who, what, when, and where" of our temptations. Who are we around when we're most likely to be tempted or give in to that temptation? Where are we, what are we watching, and what are we listening to when are we most likely to give in to that temptation? These are our weak positions, and although the Bible provides us numerous examples of others who put themselves in weak positions, let's examine a couple of specific weak positions we see in the Old Testament.

In 2 Samuel 6:6-7, we read of David bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. Along the way while transporting the Ark on a cart pulled by oxen "*...they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.*"

We know Uzzah should not have touched the Ark. However, can you blame him; would we have reacted differently? Uzzah acted on reflex and his intentions were not bad, but his error teaches us at least two things: 1) good intentions do not justify wrong actions; and 2) we should avoid situations where acting on reflex may result in error and sin - a weak position. Many times we see an object falling off of a table, a countertop, and

we instinctively, reflexively, reach out to catch it or stop it from falling. We can hardly help but react that way, and it's easy to see ourselves in Uzzah's position reacting the same way he did. Here's the Ark of the Covenant, magnificent both in its appearance and its symbolism to the children of Israel. It had been taken by Philistines (1 Sam. 5) who returned it because of how it plagued them, but it hasn't truly been home in about 150 years. It begins to fall. You're right beside it. Of course, you reach out to steady it. Let's examine Uzzah's weak position and see how we find ourselves in similar situations.

First, so much surrounding this situation was wrong. It was by a counsel of men rather than God who decreed the Ark be moved (2 Sam. 6:1-2; 1 Chr. 13:1-4), and the actual transportation of the Ark was incorrectly handled. They moved it on a cart pulled by oxen similarly to how the Philistines had been moving it rather than properly bearing it upon shoulders of Levites (Num. 7:9), who themselves were not allowed to directly touch any holy thing (Num. 4:15). None of these laws were secret. The ideal, strongest position for Uzzah would have been the one which put him the farthest away from this error-filled situation. That "gut" instinct, reflexive reaction to reach out and catch the tumbling Ark would not have been a problem for Uzzah if he had simply not been near it. Now, to be fair to Uzzah, he was likely under orders from King David and he was a Levite, so it's hard to say "No." Regardless, we find many sins we commit are of this "reflex reaction" nature - we don't mean to, but it just happens. Instead of reaching out to catch a falling Ark of the Covenant, it may be us saying, seeing, or thinking something sinful which could have been avoided if we had simply stayed away from this situation. For us, there might be people whom when we're around we reflexively say or think things we should not. We know there are people, places, sights (e.g., movies and television shows), and sounds (i.e., music) where we seem to almost reflexively, quickly experience anger, lust, pride, bad thoughts etc., and then are more likely to act upon it and sin. No matter how good our intentions are, or how

much we “can’t help it,” if our reflexive reaction is sinful, it is a weak position for us and one we should avoid.

A second, common weak position for us is one we see in David’s infamous sin with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 11, it’s “war season” for Israel and it’s also quite hot. It was very common to walk upon the roof where it was much cooler, and we see the following in verses 2-4:

*And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.*

We know how quickly this goes downhill from here. Let’s examine this situation, and see how David put himself in such a weak position to avoid sin.

First, David was doing nothing wrong going for a walk upon his roof. Second, *seeing* Bathsheba wasn’t wrong. David’s error was *investigating*. David could not really help what sights passed by his eyes, but he most certainly could have looked away when he realized what he was seeing. As king, David wasn’t lacking for real estate and could have walked to any other corner of his rooftop. Instead, David slowly brought himself closer and closer to the temptation and eventual sin. Again, this is often us.

We have our weaknesses, some rather harmless like “guilty pleasures,” but they are “vices” to which we struggle to say “no, thanks.” For example, many physicians tell us to cut back on sweets because of our weight, cholesterol, etc. Imagine we know someone who loves cake. It’s their favorite, but they re-

ally need to stay away from it for their health. It's so tempting to them that they can't be in the same room as birthday cake without giving in and having a piece. We hear them say "don't tell me we have cake in there," "don't bring it in here," or "don't show me that," because just knowing it's near or even its sight provides temptation so hard to overcome. Now, imagine we start hearing them ask, "Where did you say that cake was? Who made it? Do we have plates? No, no...I don't want a piece. Really...chocolate, you said?...Do we have forks around here?" Before you know it, they're eating cake. This is David. David knows Bathsheba is beautiful and would not deny him (who would say "no" to the king?!). David also knows how tempted and weak he is to his version of birthday cake - the lust of the eyes and flesh. His sin wasn't seeing Bathsheba, but he put himself in a very weak position the moment he asked "who is that?" To make matters worse, David knew the risks and the consequences. David knew who she was and that she was married. That doesn't stop David. David sending and enquiring of her is the equivalent of David saying "What kind of cake? ...No, no...I'm just curious. I'm looking; not touching." What a weak position, but one we find ourselves in too often when we fall to sin.

David did not wake up that day or go up on that roof with the intention or hope of being tempted, but an opportunity came along. The sight of Bathsheba wasn't David's decision, but not walking away and putting actual, physical distance between himself and this particular temptation was David's choice. When David should have turned around, David instead started looking for an introduction. Like David, we find ourselves near temptation and sin when that was not our plan. Living in this world, we are going to see, hear, and be near things and people which tempt us - some of which happen to be our particular vice. We can't avoid these any more than David could avoid the sights that passed his eyes that evening on his rooftop. However, we simply cannot allow ourselves to come any closer to those temptations. When Paul told the Corinthians, "*Be not*

*deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners*" (1 Cor. 15:33), Paul didn't mean only words pollute us. He meant that being near people, places, and situations that are sinful will tempt us, and the last thing we need to do is draw nearer to them. We're only deceiving ourselves by believing we're "only looking." The closer we put ourselves to these vices and the more we look at these lusts of the eyes and flesh, the weaker we make our position to avoid giving in to sin. We don't go looking for trouble, but sometimes trouble finds us, and it is up to us to turn away from it.

Next month, we'll see an example of a strong position.

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## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Remember last month's questions?

1. How many times did Noah send out the dove?  
THREE (Gen. 8:8-12)
2. What was the name of Joseph's (son of Jacob) first born son? MANASSEH (Gen. 41:51)
3. What did Samson carry to the top of the hill overlooking Hebron? CITY GATES (Jdg. 16:3)
4. What was the name of the city where Lydia was converted? PHILIPPI (Acts 16:11-14)
5. What was the name of the prophet who prophesied that Paul would be bound at Jerusalem?  
AGABUS (Acts 21:10-11)

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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## PHILIPPIANS 2

### Part II

As we begin the second part of Philippians 2, we see Paul showing that he has been worried about the Philippian people's wellbeing (most likely both physically and spiritually). Since he knows that he does not have the ability to be with them at this time, he sends his trusted companion, Timothy to check on them and to help with any needs that they may have.

*Philippians 2:19-24 - But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.*

So basically, Paul wants to send Timothy and reassures the Philippians that Timothy is a faithful servant who can be trusted.

The next verse brings up another person who has been serving with Paul that was sent to be with the Philippians earlier.

*Philippians 2:25 - Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.*

Epaphroditus went to the Philippians to deliver a message and to make sure that Paul's desire for the Philippian people is communicated. The fact that Epaphroditus had a strong desire to be with the Philippian people and that he was "full of heaviness" because they know of a sickness that he had also shows that he had a previous relationship with them.

## GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
March 22 - 24	Gilstrap Morgantown, KY	Joe Hill (Hagerhill, KY)
March 29 - 31	Verona Verona, KY	Joe Hill (Hagerhill, KY)

*Philippians 2:26 - For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.*

Evidently the sickness was a major one as Epaphroditus was close to death.

*Philippians 2:27 - For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.*

Paul expresses his concern for Epaphroditus but also shows how much he cares for this man saying that “*God had mercy on him...but on me also*”. He then goes on to explain that he is sending Epaphroditus to them so that they can rejoice in his recovery as well.

*Philippians 2:28 - I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.*

The chapter closes asking the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus and to be happy to see him.

*Philippians 2:29-30 - Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.*

This verse ends with saying that because of his work for Christ, Epaphroditus was close to death. He was not worried about his well-being as much as he was driven to working for Christ. Can we say the same about ourselves?

A. D.