

# Devotions

Antithesis  Opposites

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*In the Stage 6 English syllabus there is a buzz word – a word that we hope our students know, and use in their essays! It's not a new word, but it is one rarely used in common conversation – Antithesis...*

*Antithesis – basically means 'opposite'. In class, we discuss its use in Hamlet's soliloquies - particularly his ideas of life and death, in different novels, poems and so on.*

*Funnily enough, the bible is full of antithesis and lately I have been reading a series of devotions that pulls together this very idea – the opposition of sadness and rejoicing, being wise and foolish, weeping and laughing, sin and redemption, life and death, mourning and dancing.*

*As Christians we are caught in the 'now', and also the 'not yet' and we live our lives knowing that the God of love and life, sent his son to die for us. And as we are made in the image of our Creator, we can both mourn and feel distressed by the wrongs of this world, yet delight in this life and the life to come.*

*Antithesis.*

*Today I'm going to focus on a couple of these opposites or tensions that we as Christians face, believe in, and see as fundamentally working together in our faith.*

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## Antithesis Number One – Weak vs Strong

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I am sure everyone here at some point has felt inadequate, like you just had no idea what you were doing and questioned whether or not you could actually do what you needed to. When I first started teaching I remember that feeling constantly...some days now (15 years later) I still do!

However, I remember feeling this same sense of weakness and vulnerability the day I left hospital with my first born son Lachie. I only stayed in for 48 hours and then I was allowed to come home. That day Caleb, my husband, and I and a brand new, tiny, totally dependant

human, that we were now completely responsible for, walked out. I remember thinking that someone would stop us, or tell us what to do, or make us go back till we passed some kind of parenting test. But no! Talk about feeling inadequate! I really had no idea what to do and knew that a steep learning curve awaited.

The one thing I did know when I left hospital that day, was that we were not alone. That in our weakness as brand new parents, we could rely completely and utterly on God. I am pretty sure that is only through the grace of God that we have managed to keep Lachie alive for 10 years, and even go back for a second!

In Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church, he address this idea of being weak, yet at the same time strong.

***2 Corinthians 12:9 says;***

***“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”***

Here we are reminded of God's strength in our weakness. Before this verse Pauls speaks of his “thorn in the flesh” and his own weakness. Whatever difficulty Paul ‘had’ obviously troubled him and, after praying and petitioning God to remove it from him, God's response was this...

***“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”***

It would have been easy here for Paul to lash out in anger, to be annoyed at God for not answering his prayer the way he wanted. Far too often when we feel weak or powerless we respond with fear, anger, despair or desperation.

Yet, this verse reminds us that it is only through God that we can have the strength to face whatever problems come our way. No problem is too great for Him to solve. He just might not solve it the way we expect.

Paul went on to say in **verse 10**, ***“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”***

Paul's perspective here points us straight to Jesus. He knew the power that God had in his life and he demonstrated first-hand the ability to praise God in all circumstances, even in times of weakness.

We all have strengths and if you are anything like me, it is our strengths that we so desperately try to let everyone see. And it is our weakness that we wish to cover or shy away from.

It is through our frailties and our 'humanity' that God is able to show our world; a world obsessed with winning, competition and success, that power and strength does not actually depend on how great we are, but points to the only true power and strength of Christ.

James McDonald wrote<sup>1</sup> "God does not dispense strength and encouragement like a pharmacist fills a prescription. God never says, *Here, take two of these and call Me in the morning.* He *is* the grace. He *is* the strength. His presence *is* the power. All we need comes through intimacy with Him. No matter what we face, Jesus is the complete answer. He doesn't give what we need and then go somewhere else. He comes to stay promising **"I am with you always"**.

#### Antithesis Number Two – Mourning and Dancing

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*There is an occasion for everything,  
and a time for every activity under heaven:  
a time to weep and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn and a time to dance  
-Ecclesiastes 3:1,4*

For those of you who don't know, my husband Caleb is a nurse at Westmead Children's hospital and as I was reflecting on this devotion I remembered one night in particular when he arrived home. He was downcast and sullen and I knew his shift had not been a good one. There have been other times when he has arrived home like this, but I now know the signs. But this day he was in charge of the Anaesthetic/Recovery Unit and I knew that something had happened. An 18-month-old baby had arrested while in his care and as the first nurse on he was in charge of CPR and Resuscitation. It took an hour of CPR, machines, and all kinds of things I have no idea about, but they were eventually able to stabilise the baby enough to get her into emergency cardiac surgery.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jamesmacdonald.com/teaching/devotionals/2016-08-31/>

When he came home he still had no idea if the baby had survived, or what permanent damage had been done.

What a day for him. It sure put into perspective my cheeky Yr 10 class, or the angst I felt at feeling like I had not taught my Yr 11's a brilliant lesson.

What a world we live in. I turn the news on and there is so much pain, so much hurt and so much suffering. Mothers losing their babies, war torn countries, poverty, famine, terrorists and closer to home, students in our school suffering great loss, colleagues who are ill, friends reeling from the effects of adultery and divorce. Sometimes it feels all consuming.

And then I notice my sons playing in the garden, or enjoy the laughs and conversation when out with friends, or I see the sunrise of an awesome morning like today and my heart feels joy.

Mourning and dancing, weeping and laughing.

While people celebrate the goodness and wonder of life, our broken and fallen world continues to break our hearts, sometimes so personally and sometimes from afar.

The tensions of this world are ever present—and as Christians we live our lives wondering when to celebrate and when to cry. Is it right to mourn? – absolutely is it right to dance? – for sure. “Mourning and dancing are not mutually exclusive actions. We can experience deep joy and deep sadness at the very same time.”<sup>2</sup>

There is a tension here for believers in Jesus. And often the best thing we can do is acknowledge that tension; that this side of heaven both are real and both exist. We can mourn at the pain of Christ's suffering, but we can rejoice knowing that we are restored by His sacrifice. Our grief can turn to celebration because, like Paul, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). What joy there is in that statement!

As Christians we can “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” - seeking the Lord at every twist, turn and triumph. We must never stop grieving the brokenness in our world. And we must never stop celebrate the goodness and purity of life and beauty.

In Revelation we are reminded that because of Christ we can be assured of the life to come where **“God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://shereadstruth.com/2016/07/21/mortality-and-life/>

When I was working at a church a number of years ago I went on a trip to New Zealand with some of our youth leaders to work with a church in Christchurch for a couple of weeks. In that time we did some travelling and sightseeing, and some other crazy activities. On one of these adventures I was dared, as the leader of our team to go bungee jumping. Looking back, I am not really sure what convinced me to say yes, but I did!

Nothing really could have prepared me for what I was about to do, and as I walked up to the bridge which I was about to jump off I couldn't even look down! I went through the safety training, walked up to the edge and when the guide counted to 3, I didn't think, I tried not to imagine what could happen, I jumped.

And can I say it was the most terrifying thing I have ever done...and one thing I will never do again!

But...I did it. The feeling of falling through the air with absolutely nothing to hold on to was unbelievable and only when the bungee cord pulled back and I began to bounce around did I actually feel free enough to enjoy what I had just done. After that moment it was awesome.

There was no room for **doubt** that day. I put my **trust** in a bunch of cords. A bunch of elastic bands, to be specific, all pulled together at one end. Each piece of elastic had its purpose, and each was tightly wound to the top which connected them all to keep me safe.

I didn't know the outcome, and I didn't have all the answers before I jumped...but I had no room for doubt and somehow I knew that I would be ok.

But there are many, many moments when I do doubt. I doubt myself, and my abilities, I doubt friendships, my confidence and I know there are times when I doubt God – there are moments when I doubt He is there, in control or whether He is listening at all.

The bible is full of people who have doubted God and his plan for their life – Sarah, Gideon, Jonah, Jeremiah, Thomas. But in each instance, God does not respond with despair but with patience. These stories are included in God's word for us – to encourage us, to uplift us, to centre us, to assure us – that God is faithful, that He is good, trustworthy and true.

I'm going to finish today by reading some passages to you – passages that I believe we can cling to, passages that tell of God's mercy and his continual presence in our lives. Even in those moments of doubt and despair. Can I encourage you now to sit and listen as I read some of God's promises to us;

1. [Proverbs 3:5-6](#)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.

2. [Psalms 143:8](#)

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,  
for I have put my trust in you.  
Show me the way I should go,  
for to you I entrust my life.

### 3. [Psalm 91:1-2](#)

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust."

### 4. [Philippians 4:19](#)

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

### 5. [Psalm 28:7](#)

The Lord is my strength and my shield;  
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.  
My heart leaps for joy,  
and with my song I praise him.

I am continually learning that when things don't work out the way I would have wanted,  
there is a greater plan in play. The focus of my walk with Jesus, has to be taken off my  
doubts, and placed continually in these promised words from God.

For I am convinced that "He is the way, the truth and the life..."

*Let's pray.*

Father God, you know the weakness and trials of each one of us. Help us to know that even  
in these moments, in the moments that we feel our feet slipping, that you not only promise  
to catch us, but that you sustain us and give us everything we could possibly need. Thank  
you Lord God that you are our strength, our shield and our rock. Amen

*Devotions*