

“Stronger” by Kelly Clarkson
2 Corinthians 4:7-18

The strongest mineral is a diamond.

The strongest organic material is the silk of the Darin Bark Spider of Madagascar, twice as strong as steel.

The strongest man made material is Graphene, a 1-atom hexagonal carbon matrix 100 times stronger than steel, and more conductive of heat and electricity than copper. IBM has created a computer chip out of it that's 50 times faster than today's fastest chips. Amazing.

Human beings ... we're fragile, easily broken. But resilient also, and we can be continually renewed by Christ and taught to refocus away from distractions to life's most important matters.

Today's song by Kelly Clarkson is a break-up song ... we've already done FIVE break-up songs:

- Apologize.
- Achy-breaky Heart.
- How Do I Live Without You.
- The Way We Were.
- Freebird.

Apparently, breaking up is a pretty common occurrence. In today's song Kelly wants that low-down dirty, no good for nuthin' guy to know ... she's getting STRONGER since he's left. The adversity of their relationship has made her fighting tough and more self-reliant. The tone of the song still contains quite a bit of anger and bitterness, but she's working out of that to brighter days ... she's even got a new boyfriend ... “so THERE, take THAT!”

Relationships certainly have their fair share of adversity. Jobs and work does too. Friendships, family, health, sex, managing bills, and saving for the future ... all of these can be challenging to navigate. And through all of this we can get stronger, in the face of adversity, challenge, and heartache.

But how? Kelly really doesn't say HOW she's gotten stronger, only that she has. Let's listen to a bit of her song ... [play snippet #1].

So, she's stronger. Not defeated, like at all! She's encouraging others to stand tall too, and don't let a bad relationship haunt you ... leave it behind move forward. I agree. And, let me add the Bible speaks a similar Word to those who are going through any kind of hard time also. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 4:8-9:

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

Kelly Clarkson got the phrase, “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” from a German Philosopher ... but that idea is much older than that! Paul is writing to Christians in the Greek city of Corinth saying, “life can beat you down pretty far, but you CAN and you WILL rebound!”

Let’s dig into this passage a bit more deeply to answer the HOW question of getting stronger that Kelly Clarkson doesn’t divulge ...

How to Get Stronger in the Face of Adversity 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

A. We’re fragile, easily broken.

2 Corinthians 4:7, But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We WISH we were stronger, but the reality is we’re pretty fragile. Our feelings can get hurt pretty easily and the people who know us best also know how to push those raw buttons in our life that make us super-annoyed.

“This treasure” is the presence of Christ in our lives, His supernatural joining to us, making us “in Christ.” And, the AMAZING thing is God put Christ in us, really fragile and weak creatures. Why? If you have something really valuable, you don’t put it in highly breakable objects, like a clay jar ... and yet, that’s exactly what God did.

Why? “... to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”

Here’s a weakness of Kelly’s song ... see if you can pick it out of this snippet.
[play snippet #2]

Catch that phrase? “Just me, myself, and I.” I’d want someone going through a tough time to actually become LESS self-reliant and MORE Christ-reliant. Not, “me, myself, and I” but “me and Christ, and unstoppable team!”

B. We’re resilient.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10, We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Afflicted, not crushed.

Perplexed, not in despair.

Persecuted, not forsaken.

Knocked down, not out.

Just like the song says. But then what's this about "carrying with us the death and life of Jesus?" That's not in the song. Paul is telling the early church, and Sunny Hills Church too, that those moments when we're feeling crushed and broken remind us of the sacrifice of Jesus, who was crushed and broken for us. It's like God is saying to us, "when you're low, I understand, because my son experienced that too."

And then Paul encourages us ... "look, you've experienced the low part, just like Jesus, and you will experience the life-part too! Jesus didn't stay low, He was resurrected, and that resurrection power is for us today."

When we're down we wonder, does anyone understand or care? Jesus does.

We wonder, is there hope for me? Yes, there is! Let's get more specific.

C. We're renewing.

2 Corinthians 4:16, So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Death and life are at work within us, and life prevails.

ILLY: How "thick-skinned" are you? Technically, thin skin is about 2mm, thick, about 3mm. So, for example, the "W" at the top of the lyrics page is 3mm wide. Here's the thing about skin though, as we age it does exactly what this verse says, it wastes away, get's thinner, it wrinkles, shrivels. No amount of crème, derma-abrasion therapy, or moisturizer can prevent that. BUT, your skin is just the packaging ... the real "you" is inside, your mind, emotion, character, aspirations, and personality ... these are a constantly renewable resource that Christ is eager to change and improve. How often? "Day by day!"

In our song Kelly talks about starting over with someone new ... [play snippet #3]

I have some advice ... take it or leave it ... after a break-up be sure to leave yourself plenty of time for some of this inner renewal. God wants to teach us some things during the hard times and it's important not to rush past His instruction. One thing God often says to us is, "Alan, are you focused on the important things? Is your priority where it needs to be right now?"

D. We're refocused.

Kelly Clarkson does some refocusing after her break up. [Play snippet #4]
Kudos for her! She's finally thinking about herself instead of him all the time. There's this phrase, "boy-crazy" and it's cousin-phrase "girl-crazy" that remind us we can become attached to another person in an unhealthy way. The undercurrent of this song is about the danger of being in a controlling relationship, where one person tries to dominate the other, squelching her freedom and personhood.

Then she says, "Footsteps even lighter." Awesome! She's broken free and has recovered her sense of dignity and self-confidence. But, where will those footsteps lead her? 100% guaranteed: into more trouble! Hey, that's just confessional, I find it SO easy to get side-tracked and on the wrong path. Paul gives us a Word about refocusing on what's most important:

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We're told to pursue two things that aren't at all natural for us to pursue:

- The unseen. We are driven by our sight, preferring "good looks."
- The eternal. We are driven by urgency, we want "it" (whatever it is) right way.

Two things, when put together, are a recipe for disaster: the superficial, and the immediate.

GOOD NEWS: Over time, God can train you, through the school of "hard knocks" to prefer the unseen and the eternal. And when you're refocused on those things, the beautiful Life God wants for you will emerge wonderfully, and joyously.

A closing prayer ... "Dear God, make us stronger! Help us skip past the superficial trinkets of living and pursue the deeper things of faith. Use our brief time here on earth to prepare us for eternity in Your presence. In Jesus' name, amen."