Isaiah 40:29: “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Clarence Jordan, who was instrumental in the founding of Habitat for Humanity, was a gifted man who had two PhD’s in Greek and Hebrew and Agriculture. He could have become a rich and powerfully successful man. Instead he chose to start the Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia in the 1940’s. This was a farm community which served the poverty stricken of all races. Such an idea did not go down well in the deep racist South of the 1940’s and Dr. Jordan faced a lot of hostility. For fourteen years he labored at the wearisome task of establishing a community for the poor regardless of race. In 1954 the Ku Klux Klan came in one evening armed with rifles and forced all the families to leave the farming community and then they burned down every building that Dr. Jordan worked so hard to build. The next day a reporter, who was also a member of the Ku Klux Klan that destroyed Dr. Jordan’s life’s work came to survey the damage. He found the entire community deserted except for one black family that refused to leave and Dr. Clarence Jordan who was out in the field working the ground with a hoe.

The reporter approached Dr. Jordan and asked in a mocking voice: “Well, Dr. Jordan, you’ve got two of them PhD’s and fourteen years building this farm. You’ve got nothing left; just how successful do you think you are?” Dr. Jordan faced the reporter whom he knew was a deacon in the local church and a member of the Klan and said: “About as successful as the cross. You see, sir, we are not about success, but about
faithfulness to God. Now if you will excuse me, I have some rebuilding to do.” When word spread what had happened, many came from across the country to help Dr. Jordan, rebuild. They continued to build and build, not only was the farm rebuilt and stands today, but thousands of homes throughout the world for the poor have been built through Habitat for Humanity.

When Dr. Jordan saw his life’s work go down in flames, he must have felt very weary indeed. Yet, God was faithful to His word and gave him strength in his weariness and increased the power of his weakness. The word used for weary in Isaiah 40:29 in Hebrew is ya’ap which is a weariness from excess. This is a weariness that comes when you have tried your best and you still failed. It is a weariness that comes from having pushed yourself as far as you can go and yet the finish line is still beyond reach. When you have reached that point, the point when you it seems you can do no more, God promises to give you strength. This word for strength here is kocha which is a strength of ability. Dr. Jordan built the first community with his own ability. When that burned to the ground he rebuilt the community, but this time with God’s ability and this building just continued and continued to the present day through Habitat for Humanity.

I suppose this verse could be rendered: “He gives ability to those who have reached the limits of their own ability.”

He then increases the power of the weak. The word power in the Hebrew here is ‘asam which is a strength that comes from binding together. The word for weak here is interesting. It is really two words, loen ‘oiniman which actually means no and idol or falsehood. When coupled with the word ‘asam (strength) it would most likely mean one who has no other strength. In
other words God increases his power in us by binding with us when we have no other strength to turn to. We bind with Him and His power and strength alone.

The whole idea of Isaiah 40:29 is that when we have gone as far as we can go in our own abilities and power God promises to take us to the finish line by re-energizing us with his power and ability.