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Sources of Strength

## CHAPTER 1

# Strength, Courage, and Comfort

When God speaks, strength, courage, and comfort follow. As an ambassador of God's word, Paul wrote, *"Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort."*<sup>1</sup>



Archangel Michael over the Devil

The word of the Lord imparts strength because it is *"living and powerful"*.<sup>2</sup> Each phrase instills courage, inspires confidence, and conveys comfort.

Comfort contributes to strength by dispensing hope, healing, and consolation. According to Thorndike and Barnhart, comfort means *"to ease the grief or sorrow of another by making that person more cheerful, more hopeful, or stronger."*<sup>3</sup> This word comes from the Old French *conforter*, which means to comfort, help, or strengthen. It has roots in the late Latin word, *confortare*, which means, to strengthen much, and from the Latin *comfortis*, which means *"with strength"*.<sup>4</sup>

Judas and Silas spoke much to strengthen and encourage their fellow believers in ancient Antioch. They spoke much because God has much to say about strength and courage. He offers supernatural wisdom and revelation on this topic.

*Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. (Acts 15:32 NIV)*

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:3 NIV

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 4:12 NKJ

<sup>3</sup> *The Advanced Dictionary*, EL Thorndike and CL Barnhart, (Glenview, IL Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1988).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com> (accessed 1-6-06)

Strength varies from hour to hour, day to day, and season to season. Whether we are weak, strong, or especially strong, everyone needs to connect with God for a strong finish.

## **TARGET AUDIENCE**

### **When you are Weak**

- You may be tired, weary, and fragile
- Desperate for strength, you struggle with fatigue and contend with infirmities
- You know your connection with God is superficial and your connecting points too intermittent

This material offers focal points of hope during times of weakness. It facilitates waiting for the Lord to renew your mind, restore your emotions, refresh your body, and replenish your spiritual vitality.

### **When you are Strengthening Others**

This material facilitates waiting on the Lord for wisdom and revelation, courage and comfort, perseverance and patience as you help others connect with Jesus:

- As a lifeline wrapping God's love around those in need
- As a prophetic voice communicating God's word (1 Cor 14:3)

### **When you are Strong or Extraordinarily Strong**

This message challenges everyone to rely on God for strength. It highlights the inadequacy of our own power, especially in light of the spiritual opposition that we face and the extraordinary mission that God calls us to accomplish.

- You may not see the need for additional strength at first
- Perhaps you want more time in the day to use all the strength that you already have
- You wish others were strong enough to keep up with you

This message will challenge you to put your strength to the test, particularly when extreme circumstances demand an extraordinary response. God may be calling you to

- Accept a more challenging assignment
- Undertake a cause with greater significance
- Exercise your strength more aggressively with greater courage

- Stand more resolutely against forces of evil
- Actively tear down spiritual strongholds
- Advance the cause of Christ with intrepid valor
- Love God with all of your strength

### **The Truth about Us—We are Weak**

- As human beings, we are marred by sin, wounded by transgression, and impaired by iniquity inherited from generations past
- Our mortality is like grass that withers in the wind or a flower that fades in the desert
- We are an evaporating mist, a fleeting shadow, a wave tossed in the wind
- Regardless of socioeconomic status, everyone possesses a finite breath in a frame of dust

*Lowborn men are but **a breath**, the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are **only a breath**.* (Psalm 62:9 NIV)

*for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that **we are dust**. As for man, his days are **like grass**, he flourishes **like a flower** of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.* (Psalm 103:14-16 NIV)

*My days are **like an evening shadow**; I wither away **like grass**.* (Psalm 102:11 ESV)

*For my days pass away **like smoke**, and my bones burn like a furnace.* (Psalm 102:3 ESV)

Also see Isaiah 40:6-7, 1 Peter 1:24, and Job 14:1-2

Despite flaws, failures, and limitations, we hold immense value in God's sight. Jesus loves us with an impassioned affection equivalent to the love that He shares with His Father. The price paid on the cross for our redemption extends beyond human comprehension.

*As the Father has loved me, **so have I loved you**. Abide in my love.* (John 15:9 ESV)

## Progressive Weakness

Our strength falls short of the glorious potential that our Heavenly Father designed us to possess. As we age past our prime, strength diminishes and thereby reduces

- How well we live—our quality of life deteriorates with advanced age
- How effectively we live—our accomplishments fade as we grow older
- How long we live—our weakness ultimately ends in death

## A Strong Beginning

We are weak, *“but it was not this way from the beginning”*.<sup>5</sup> In the beginning, Adam and Eve were strong. They were as strong as they needed to be; they were as strong as God wanted them to be. Physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and relational strength united in one harmonious life.

Weakness infects the human race today because Adam and Eve shattered our relationship with God and estranged our bond with each other. Jesus said, *“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning”*.<sup>6</sup> This rebuke illustrates how human weakness (hard-heartedness) accommodates relational separation (divorce).

In *“Naked without Shame”*, Christopher West illustrates this point with a modern analogy.<sup>7</sup> He equates human weakness to automobiles driven on flat tires. As rubber shreds and wheels dent, we drive through life with great difficulty. Since everyone has flat tires, we accept this condition as normal. Citing Jesus’ statement in Matthew’s gospel, West asserts, *“it was not this way in the beginning”*. In the beginning, Adam and Eve drove through life with air in their tires.

Connecting with Jesus restores our shredded life and fills us with the Holy Spirit; He inspires us with life everlasting. In Christ, we assume a new normal because Jesus fills our tires with air.

Our Heavenly Father endowed Adam and Eve with attributes consistent with their divine design. The first couple was strong because God made them in His image. They complemented each other with masculine and feminine distinctions.

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<sup>5</sup> Mat 19:8 NAS

<sup>6</sup> Mat 19:8 NAS

<sup>7</sup> Christopher West, *Naked Without Shame, A Crash Course in the Theology of the Body* by Pope John Paul II, The Gift Foundation, Carpentersville, IL, [http://www.giftfoundation.org/naked\\_without\\_shame.htm](http://www.giftfoundation.org/naked_without_shame.htm) (9-30-07)

Their union produced an intimate relationship bursting with conjugal synergy. Originally, God designed men and women to live from a place of passionate love, cohesive courage, and resilient confidence.

Alas, humanity's strong beginning ended long ago. Original strength gave way to original sin. Weakness came suddenly, decisively, and with severe consequences. The contrast between Adam and Eve's strong start and our progressive demise remains to this day. The human race lacks the vitality and fortitude that they once possessed. Somewhere between a stellar start and a pathetic fig leaf cover-up, weakness infected the human gene pool. It shattered our connection with God and alienated our union with each other. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they weakened the human race to death.

Without realizing how strong Adam and Eve were in the beginning, we hardly notice how frail we are now. We accept weakness because everyone struggles with it. Sickness and disease afflict both mind and body. Pain and suffering consume energy and deplete courage. Sorrow and grief, rejection and shame, fear and disappointment drain our natural vigor. Broken relationships diminish our drive and distract our focus. People wound us, demons wound us, and we wound us. Each wound assaults our strength and affirms our weakness. Sometimes even God wounds us. He said,

*There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, **I have wounded and I will heal**, and no one can deliver out of my hand.*  
(Deuteronomy 32:39 NIV)

When painful memories paralyze us in a coffin of hopeless despair, we need more than a religion to rescue us. We need Jesus, the God of Hope who fills us with all joy and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked our Heavenly Father to meet this need.

*May the God of hope **fill you** with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.* (Romans 5:13 ESV)

## **The Truth about God—He is Almighty**

Omnipotence confirms God as God. This essential attribute validates His divine nature. Adam and Eve were strong but they were not almighty. Omnipotence distinguishes God from everyone else. His job description demands nothing less than perfect power. Omnipotence is so important that four heavenly creatures do not rest day or night from proclaiming the fact that God is almighty.

*Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy, **Lord God Almighty** who was, and is, and is to come”. (Revelation 4:8 NIV)*

Invincible strength and absolute power define God. He is bigger, stronger, and more competent than anyone can dream or imagine. He alone holds this distinction of being Almighty.

*O Lord **God Almighty, who is like you?** ... (Psa 89:8 NIV)*

*Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your **great power** and outstretched arm. There is **nothing too hard for You**. (Jeremiah 32:17 NKJ)*

### **In our weakness, God offers strength**

Jesus did not come in human flesh simply to help us cope with our weakness. He came that we might live more abundantly—thriving with emotional fortitude, intellectual confidence, and spiritual vitality.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJ)*

At the Temple gate called Beautiful, a lame man begged for money.<sup>8</sup> Instead of tossing him a few shekels, Peter and John introduced him to the power of God. Rather than helping him cope with weakness, Jesus transformed his life. Instead of implementing a social policy to accommodate his disability, Jesus provided a supernatural solution. Seeking routine charity, this ailing man underestimated the love of Christ. Strengthened by His healing power, this beggar entered the temple leaping and praising God with unrestrained joy.

Jesus came to remove every obstacle that separates us from our Heavenly Father. He revealed the truth about us and the truth about God.

- Jesus Reveals the Truth about us
  - He exposes our sin—the root cause of weakness
  - He conveys our need for repentance, forgiveness, deliverance, redemption, salvation, and restoration
  - He affirms our value as human beings made in God’s image

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<sup>8</sup> Acts 3:1-10

- Jesus Reveals the Truth about God
  - He clarifies vague approximations that diminish His divine attributes
  - He corrects false assumptions that abbreviate His supernatural accomplishments
  - He restores faith and hope in His eternal promises

Jesus offers strength by connecting men, women, and children with the power of the Holy Spirit. This power propels human weaklings beyond mortal limitations. Our Father in heaven has ordained strength for His family on earth. Jesus conquered our fundamental weakness at the cross, i.e., sin. Through the power of His resurrection, He insures adequate strength for the future. Paul wrote:

*that I may **know him and the power of his resurrection**, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (Phil 3:10 ESV)*

Connecting with the knowledge of the truth provides everything we need to prevail in this life through Jesus Christ.

***His divine power** has given us everything we need for life and godliness through **our knowledge of him** who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may **participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption** in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4 NIV)*

### **God is Strong and He wants us to be Strong**

The remedy for our weakness is to connect with Jesus more fully—as Adam and Eve once did. Rather than accommodating our frailties and finitude, Jesus wants us to be strong in His mighty power, progressing from strength to strength with confidence and courage. To this end, Paul proclaimed:

*May you be **strengthened with all power**, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy (Colossians 1:11 ESV)*

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Ephesians 6:10 NIV)*

Our Heavenly Father redeemed us so we might become the men and women that He intended for us to be. As fellow-heirs with a royal inheritance, we are destined to perform noble exploits. Jesus will return for a glorious bride fit for an eternal union with Him. Designed in God's image, we are suited to express extraordinary strength with courage.

## **We Acquire Strength through our own Efforts**

The psalm used to dedicate David's Tabernacle of Praise exhorts us to be proactive—to seek both the Lord and His strength.

*Seek the Lord and His strength...* (1 Chronicles 16:11 also Psalm 105:4)

Part 2 describes how to connect with God for strength. It offers bullets of inspiration that will wedge in your brain until the Holy Spirit ignites them in your heart. As we develop our connection with Jesus, He offers strength through the following attitudes and activities:

- **Waiting for the Lord**
- **Resting**
- **Rejoicing in the Lord**
- **Food**
- **Exercise**
- **Prayer**

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