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CHAPTER 10

Understanding Strength

Strength involves a combination of intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual components. It is a multifaceted concept.

Characteristics of Strength

Strength specifically refers to the capacity for exertion or endurance.¹ Technically, it represents the ability to produce a force. POWER refers to the ability to produce an effect or influence. Dictionaries generally classify strength and power as synonyms. The two words are often used interchangeably. ENERGY denotes a related concept. It refers to the strength that can be transformed into action.

Strength includes both an offensive and defensive component.

❖ Offensive Strength

Steadfast perseverance characterizes this aspect of strength. Offensive strength offers fortitude to sustain an effort. It enables us to live abundantly, love passionately, and influence effectively. It accommodates a proactive resolve to fulfill the will of God. It enables us to produce, persuade, or act persistently in order to accomplish goals.

Connecting with Jesus for offensive strength activates a spiritual accord, which empowers us to follow the Holy Spirit to where our own strength cannot take us. It bolsters our ability to exert an effort despite contrary circumstances or resistance.

¹ Definitions in this paragraph compiled and paraphrased from the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield, MA, 2001 and Mike Stone, What is Strength? Published by the Faculty of Education, The University of Edinburgh, Old Moray House, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, 2002.

*Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but **the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.*** (Daniel 11:32 NKJ)

Fully communicating the gospel to every ethnic group on earth requires offensive strength. This strength will fuel the activity of worshipers who generate expressions of thanksgiving and praise in the face of demonic adversity.

❖ **Defensive Strength**

Patient endurance characterizes this aspect of strength. Defensive strength enables us to withstand the pressures that try to squeeze us into a distorted image. It enables us to react with power when adversaries challenge us. By connecting with God, we can maintain a courageous resolve to resist temptations. Defensive strength enables us to defy the mind-molding influences that aim to distort our identity and pervert our behavior. It empowers us to counter emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual forces, which aim to warp our character and twist our destiny.

Defensive strength involves the stamina to prevail while suffering physical pain and emotional grief. Such strength offers an ability to endure stressful times of testing through trials and tribulations in the refining fire of God. It also enables us to delay gratification until God's appropriate provision and timing converge. This trait provides ongoing restraint to overcome our bent toward selfishness, greed, and pride.

Sinners sinning (against us or against others) often produce painful consequences. Patient endurance constitutes the power to bear these consequences without becoming deformed, perverted, or bitter. Defensive strength offers patience and resilience when facing rejection or false accusations. It provides shielding against vindictive revenge, malicious assaults, and the demonic rage of persecution. It offers an ability to overcome spiritual oppression. Spiritual armor is defensive strength when standing against adversarial attacks.

2 Pet 1:3-4 NIV His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness [offensive strength] 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 [defensive strength] the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Luk 21:36 But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape [defensive strength] all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Eph 6:13 NKJ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand [defensive strength].

Rev 13:10 NIV This calls for patient endurance [defensive strength] and faithfulness [offensive strength] on the part of the saints.

INTERACTION BETWEEN SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY

Strength generally implies sound overall health.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 NAS Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- ❖ **SPIRIT:** Reflects the state of communion with Jesus and involves exposure to spiritual reality

As humans, we are made in God's image; we participate in His divine nature. This spiritual component influences the soul and body.

Supernatural experiences influence intellectual, emotional, and physical strengths. God, angels, and evil spirits affect our strength and weaknesses. Faith, hope, and an honest connection with God's love, influence the body, mind, will, and emotions.

The consequences of spiritual sin continue to exert a detrimental effect on the soul and body. Alienation from God limits the entire human potential. Separation from Him diminishes the effective use of all strengths entrusted to us.

God has a powerful influence on our strength in a variety of ways. A spiritual vision or a direct encounter with God typically alters our strength. While He always aims for our ultimate good, God may tear us down so He can rebuild us with His strength to champion His cause.

Angels contribute to the spiritual climate and circumstances that can influence our strength. A visit from an angel can strengthen or weaken us. Exposure to demonic spirits affects our strength. They can also supply supernatural strength for evil purposes. Demons are ultimately a detrimental influence to our overall strength.

- ❖ **Soul:** Reflects the state (or attitude) of the mind, will, and emotions.

A cheerful attitude exerts a medicinal influence on the body. It affects bodily processes in measurable ways. Emotional or mental stress affects the physiology (i.e., blood pressure, pulse, respiration, immune system, etc.). Mental diseases, psychological trauma, and emotional injuries contribute to weakness. The determination of the will may influence various aspects of strength. Intellectual and physical strengths interact with emotions.

❖ **Body:** Reflects the physical state

A tired, injured, or sick body can affect our mood, emotions, enthusiasm, mental concentration, resolve, and ambitions. A sound anatomy and healthy physiology directly affect overall strength. The condition of the body also affects the strength of the mind, will, and emotions.

Pro 17:22 NIV A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up [or withers] the **bones** [Heb., *Gerem*, means *bones* or *strength*].

Psa 32:4-5 NIV For day and night **your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped** as in the heat of summer. Selah, Then I **acknowledged my sin to you** and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

Psa 38:3-13 NIV Because of your wrath there is **no health in my body**; my **bones** have **no soundness** because of my sin. ⁴My **guilt** has **overwhelmed** me like a **burden too heavy** to bear. ⁵My **wounds fester** and **are loathsome** because of my sinful folly. ⁶I am **bowed down** and **brought very low**; all day long I go about **mourning**. ⁷My **back** is filled with searing **pain**; there is **no health** in my body. ⁸I am **feeble** and utterly **crushed**; I groan in **anguish of heart**. ⁹All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my **sighing** is not hidden from you. ¹⁰**My heart pounds**, my **strength fails me**; even the **light has gone from my eyes**. ...¹³I am like a deaf man, who **cannot hear**, like a **mute**, who cannot open his mouth;

Dan 8:17-18, 27 NIV As he [**The angel Gabriel**] **came near** the place where I was standing, I was **terrified** and **fell prostrate**. “Son of man,” he said to me, “understand that the vision concerns the time of the end.” ¹⁸While he was speaking to me, I was in a **deep sleep**, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet. ...²⁷I, Daniel, was **exhausted** and **lay ill for several days**. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.

Dan 9:8,15-17 NKJ Therefore I was left alone when I **saw this great vision**, and **no strength remained in me**; for **my vigor was turned to frailty** in me,

and **I retained no strength.** ...¹⁵When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became **speechless.** ¹⁶And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, **because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength.** ¹⁷For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, **no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me.**"

- ❖ Strength is subject to the (natural and supernatural) influence of **External forces.**

The physical environment exerts its influence through various forces (e.g., exposure to heat, cold, humidity, sun, wind, etc.). High altitudes affect our strength mainly by reducing oxygen in our blood. Nutrients and other chemicals can contribute to our strength. Exposure to hazardous chemicals can diminish our energy level. Radiation exposure can result in sickness and death. It can also affect the strength and welfare of our descendants through genetic mutations. Light-dark cycles can contribute to seasonal disorders. The quantity of daylight affects hormone production, which can influence strength. Organisms such as bacteria, mycoplasma, virus, mold, fungus, etc. can affect our strength in a positive or negative way.

Likewise, the spiritual atmosphere exerts an influence on our strength.

CATEGORIES OF STRENGTH²

*This general framework offers assistance
in contemplation, meditation, and prayer
As we believe God for increased strength in specific areas*

- ❖ **Physical strength**

Physical strength involves a strong and healthy body. A strong body is well suited for productive activity. It can endure physical stress due to inclement conditions, injury, disease, and exertion. A strong body can work until the task is accomplished. It can exert short bursts of effort to lift a heavy object or sprint. It can sustain long steady efforts to carry a load a long time or to complete a marathon endeavor. Physical strength enables us to participate in strenuous preparation through training. It enables us to perform exploits to glorify God and influence

² Characteristics from each category may overlap.

others. Mothers, musicians, firefighters, dancers, construction workers, speakers, soldiers, athletes, etc. rely on various degrees of physical strength.

❖ Emotional strength

God intends for us to be emotionally strong and stable. Emotional strength involves the fortitude of soul to bear calamities patiently. It provides strength to withstand a desperate crisis without panic or shock. It includes the ability to maintain a sufficient composure while functioning under an intense threat, fear, pain, stress, or pressure.

God designed us to experience strong emotions—to express fervent and heartfelt feelings. Strong emotions can help us relate to God, people, and situations with appropriate passion and drive. Joy, sorrow, grief, anger, love, etc. are powerful energizers that can propel us into productive action as agents of change.

While emotions contribute to our inertia, they do not have permission to govern our decisions or dictate our actions. Jesus Christ is the Lord who rules our life—The Holy Spirit is stronger than our emotions.

*Beloved, I pray that you may **prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*** (3 John 1:2 NKJ)

❖ Intellectual strength

God wants our mind to be filled with His knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. A strong mind can remember important facts and details. It can understand concepts and situations from a comprehensive perspective. It can perform complex calculations. It can evaluate and determine outcomes. It can judge right from wrong based on facts. It enables focused concentration amid distractions. It enables careful planning and organizing. It can compile knowledge and apply wisdom to make decisions. Intellectual strength helps us pioneer creative ideas and innovative solutions. Mental strength helps speakers inspire, educate, influence, and persuade. A strong mind enables accurate and sensitive communication with prudence and discretion.

1 Cor 2:16 NIV ...we have the mind of Christ.

Ecc 7:19 NKJ Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.

Job 12:13 NIV With Him [God] are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding.

❖ Inner strength

Strong CHARACTER involves moral strength that will not compromise on God's standards. Strong INTEGRITY involves strict personal honesty, soundness of reason, and justice. Strong RESOLVE involves firmness of purpose despite overwhelming odds. It involves determination in the face of naysayers, setbacks, obstacles, difficulties, and pessimism.

❖ Spiritual strength

God wants us to be strong in faith, hope, and love. Spiritual strength implies unshakable faith in Jesus Christ as LORD. Faith provides strength in the form of confidence and stability to persevere, endure, and prevail in life. It is the ability to believe in a God that we normally cannot see or hear. It is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1). It is the ability to trust God completely with our life now and for eternity. It is the ability to maintain a confident hope in God's faithfulness despite overwhelming needs. It is the ability to remain loyal and committed to God and His ways despite adversity.

- Paul and Silas were strong spiritually. Though physically weak, tired, and emotionally stressed they employed their spiritual strength to pray and worship God. This response under pressure in prison changed their own situation and significantly influenced others.

Act 16:23-25 NIV After they had been **severely flogged**, they were **thrown into prison**, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴Upon receiving such orders, he put them **in the inner cell** and fastened their **feet in the stocks**. ²⁵About midnight **Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God**, and **the other prisoners were listening** to them.

Spiritual strength emanates from a PASSIONATE LOVE relationship with God. It involves an absolute conviction that places our love and obedience to God above our comfort and our life. Spiritual strength includes the ability to love those who are hard to love. It includes an ability to forgive those who are hard to forgive.

- Paul rescued the prison guard who shackled and thrust him into an inner prison cell. He did not retaliate for the injustice rendered to him. He was not complacent or passive toward the jailer's well-being. Paul used a reserve of spiritual strength to wrap God's love around his persecutor in the midst of this desperate situation. It took strength at that late hour to speak God's message and baptize the jailor and his household.

Act 16:27-28 NIV **The jailer** woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open [from the earthquake], he drew his sword and **was about to kill him-**

self because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But **Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"** ³²Then they **spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.** ³³At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately **he and all his family were baptized.**

- Paul and Silas demonstrated a strong sense of civic and spiritual authority. They would not tolerate injustice or tyrannical intimidation by city magistrates. Upon their release, they remained strong enough to meet in Lydia's house to bring a message of encouragement to others.

Act 16:36-40 Niv The jailer told Paul, "The **magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released.** Now you can leave. Go in peace." ³⁷But **Paul said** to the officers: "**They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.**" ³⁸The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹**They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.** ⁴⁰After **Paul and Silas** came out of the prison, they **went to Lydia's house,** where they met with the brothers and **encouraged them.** Then they left.

Spiritual strength includes the ability to resist temptation, to say no to sin, and to avoid further exposure to the lust of the flesh. Spiritual strength involves humility to quickly admit and repent of sin. Spiritual strength is fundamentally rooted in God's grace rather than anything we do or avoid doing in an attempt to win God's approval or earn His favor.

2 Tim 2:1 NKJ You therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

Our ability to connect with God's heart in prayer and worship can affect our capacity to influence others and to influence our world. Certain attributes like the fruit of the Spirit contribute to the stature of our spiritual strength. Spiritual gifts can influence our spiritual strength. A strong spiritual wherewithal will benefit us now and in the life that is to come. This core strength is a valuable asset because it facilitates our access to God's presence. Our priority should be to fortify this inner spiritual strength because of its eternal quality.

1 Tim 4:8 NIV For bodily exercise profits a little, but **godliness is profitable for all things**, having promise of **the life that now is and of that which is to come**.

DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS³

Strength means physical power, muscularity, vigor, brawn, and vitality. It involves character and integrity, which include moral courage and fortitude. It is the ability along with the energy to influence and produce change. It is the quality of enduring the application of a force without breaking. It means durability, impregnability, and the capacity to withstand assault, stress, or deformation. Strength involves toughness and cohesion. It refers to the possession of resources that provide a means of support and ability. Categories that quantify strength are breaking strength, compressive strength, fatigue strength, and tensile strength.

OLD TESTAMENT DEFINITIONS⁴

In the Old Testament, strength generally means physical force, might, power, and vigor. It can refer to that inner strength, which involves courage, bravery, valor, boldness, and confidence. Depending on the context, it includes aspects of ability, efficiency, and help. Strength at times constitutes endurance. Sometimes it conveys the idea of being continual, perpetual, or everlasting. It may imply prominence or eminence. Strength suggests being stout, resolute, rigid, firm, or determined. It reflects prevailing in victory or pressing ahead.

Strength may indicate security—a means or place of safety, protection, and refuge such as a harbor, stronghold, rock, or a summit of towering peaks. Sometimes it involves the idea of a bright countenance, to gleam, smile, be bright, shine forth as the dawn, and to be cheerful. It may signify the power of wealth, finances, and material resources. At times, it refers to personal, social, or political force. God refers to the arm as a symbol of strength. In an abstract sense, strength may represent a state of being hard, severe, grievous, fierce, or violent.

NEW TESTAMENT DEFINITIONS⁵

❖ *Dunamis*

³ Compiled and paraphrased from The American Heritage Dictionary and Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

⁴ Compiled and paraphrased from at least 40 Hebrew words describing strength.

⁵ Compiled and paraphrased definitions for most relevant Greek words relative to strength. See Appendix A for more detail.

Dunamis means strength, power, and ability. It refers to the inherent power residing in a person or thing by virtue of its nature. It constitutes the capacity to achieve something physically, intellectually, spiritually, militarily, or politically. It connotes power to perform miracles. Depending on the context, it signifies moral power and excellence of soul. It conveys power and influence, which derive from privileged access, riches, and wealth. It means the power of resources arising from numbers. It can refer to power consisting in or resting upon armies or forces. We gain access to this *power* [Gk., *Dunamis*] when the Holy Spirit comes upon us (Act 1:8). Paul fully preached the gospel of Christ by the *power* [Gk., *Dunamis*] of the Spirit of God (Rom 15:19). God has given us a spirit of *power* [Gk., *Dunamis*] and love and a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7).

❖ ***Dunato:***

Dunatos specifically means mighty in wealth and influence. It involves strength of soul to bear calamities and trials with fortitude and patience. It implies strength in character virtues. The *strong* [Gk., *Dunatos*] ought to bear the failings of the weak (Rom 15:1).

❖ ***Exousia***

Exousia refers to the strength or power of authority. It involves the privilege of liberty, choice, permission, or the right to do as one pleases. It signifies the power of influence, jurisdiction, judicial decision, rule, or government. It refers to the authority to manage family affairs. It includes physical and mental power, ability, or strength. It may apply to the dominion, power, and authority of regal or spiritual potentates. God rescued us from the *power or dominion* [Gk., *Exousia*] of darkness (Col 1:13). We have *power or authority* [Gk., *Exousia*] over all the power [*Dunamis*] of the enemy (Luk 10:19).

❖ ***Ischuo***

Ischuo means to be strong physically. It involves robust strength and sound physical health. It refers to the power of a body to perform extraordinary deeds. It represents ability to exert or wield power to overcome or provide benefit. It means to be able or capable of doing something or to be useful. It denotes a force or exercise of power, particularly physical power. In the legal arena, it means to be valid, applicable, or have value. It means strength in a physical sense relative to people and things (such as strong bonds).

Jesus asked His disciples, “are you not *able* [Gk., *Ischuo*] to watch one hour?” (Mar. 14:37 and Mat. 26:40). Salt which has lost its taste is *fit* [Gk., *Ischuo*] for

nothing (Mat. 5:13). The effective [Gk, *energeia*] prayer of a righteous man can accomplish [Gk., *ischuo*] much (Jam. 5:16).

❖ **Kratos**

Kratos means force, strength, power, or might. It suggests might with great power. It refers to a mighty deed or a work of power. It conveys the concept of dominion or superiority.

“Be strong [Gk, *endunamoo*] in the Lord and in the *strength* [NAS or *power*, NKJ; Gk, *Kratos*] of His might” [Gk, *ischus*] (Eph 6:10). “Strengthened [Gk, *dunamoo*] with all might [Gk, *dunamis*], according to His glorious *power* [Gk, *kratos*], for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (Col 1:11 NKJ).

❖ **Oikodome**

Oikodome means the act of building up. In 1 Corinthians 14:3, the NIV translates it as *strengthening* (as a direct result of a verbally articulated prophecy). Metaphorically, it means edification as an act of promoting growth in virtues such as wisdom, piety, happiness, or holiness. “Everyone who prophesies speaks for *strengthening* [Gk., *Oikodome*], encouragement and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3 NIV).

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