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CHAPTER 1

God Offers Strength

With one message, God communicates two truths—love and strength. These attributes complement one another since God imparts strength as an extension of His love.



***“One thing God has spoken,
two things have I heard:
that you, O God, are **strong**,
and that you, O Lord, are **loving**.”***
(Psa 62:11-12a NIV)

After escaping from Pharaoh’s annihilation threat, Moses and his older sister Miriam expressed confidence in God’s leadership. They sang:

*In your unfailing **love** you will **lead** the people you have redeemed. In your **strength** you will **guide** them to your holy dwelling.* (Exo 15:13 NIV)

We overcome fear and insecurity because God’s love leads us while His strength guides us. Together, they inform our decisions and reassure our direction. God calls us to be dauntless servants because He *“gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”*.¹ We follow the Holy Spirit where our own strength cannot take us because *“There is no fear in love”*; His *“perfect love casts out fear”*.²

While commemorating Israel’s emancipation, Moses reinforced the connection between God’s unfailing love and His supernatural strength.

¹ 2 Tim 1:7 ESV

² 1 John 4:18 NAS

Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength (Deu 4:37 NIV)

David echoed Moses' insight by exalting God for both His love and strength.

But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. (Psa 59:16 NIV)

I love you, O Lord, my strength. (Psa 18:1 NIV)

Strength comes Directly from our Heavenly Father

God said this once and for all; how many times have I heard it repeated?

"Strength comes straight from God." (Psa 62:11 MSG)

- God Strengthens Leaders

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has **strengthened me**, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service;* (1 Tim 1:12 NAS)

And David became more and more powerful, because the Lord Almighty was with him. (1 Chr 11:9 NIV)

- God provides strength to proclaim His message

But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. (2 Tim 4:17 NAS)

- God gives strength to His people corporately

... The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God! (Psa 68:35 NAS)

The Lord will give strength to His people; The Lord will bless His people with peace. (Psa 29:11 NAS)

"And I shall strengthen them in the Lord, And in His name they will walk," declares the Lord. (Zec 10:12 NAS)

Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. (1 Chr 29:12 NIV)

- God provides both Offensive and Defensive Strength

- Offensively God's strength provides ***"everything we need for life and godliness"***

- Defensively He enables us to “*escape the corruption in the world*”

*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 Pet 1:3-4 NIV)*

Bringing God’s message to some parts of this world may require a connection with God for extraordinary physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual strength.

Bruchko

Nineteen-year-old Bruce Olson (Bruchko) possessed God’s strength in the jungles of Columbia, South America. He successfully endured severe physical pain and emotional grief. He suffered torture, disease, hunger, prison, and terror in order to bring God’s message to the murderous Motilone and Yukos Indian tribes. His first encounter with the Motilones was not friendly and required strength beyond his natural capacity. Initially, they shot him with an arrow sending searing pain into his thigh. Bruchko recounts his ordeal.

Everything seemed to move slowly—even my huge, gulping breaths. I looked down at my thigh. A long shaft was sticking out of it, with a neat little punch-hole where the arrow had gone in. The hole was a bright red from the blood, my blood, oozing out and down my leg....

One of the men walked over to me. I cowered. He reached down to my leg and grasped the arrow by the shaft. Putting his foot on my thigh, he yanked out the arrow. I saw little red dancing stars. I couldn’t breathe. I looked down at my leg and saw a bit of my muscle trailing in the blood from where the arrow had been pulled. Every second the pain seemed to be more than I could stand, and then, unbelievably, it got worse....

The march lasted three hours. My leg pained beyond description, but every time I began to slow down I felt the arrow point in my back.

I think I awoke the next day. There was no way of knowing how long I had been unconscious. ...I felt hot and feverish. My thigh was swollen, and ugly yellow pus surrounded the place where the arrow had gone in....”³

³ Bruce E. Olson, Bruchko, (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1978) p. 84-86.

Through extreme hardship, Bruchko persevered to communicate God's message to the Motilone people. He describes how he endured a near death experience so that he might preach the Gospel.

"It was a long trip [to meet with a hostile Motilone chief]. We set a fierce pace, not stopping to eat. We lived on raw manioc roots, lizards, and beetles. After eight days I had shooting pains in my chest, and began to vomit every time I tried to eat....

Yellow eyes. Hepatitis! I need more than rest. I needed medical attention.

But it was eight days back to the river, then another week to make a raft and float downriver to civilization. I wouldn't make it alive....

After I had been in the hospital four days I began to hemorrhage internally. The doctors said that if I had stayed another six hours in the jungle without medicine I would have died."⁴

God will Strengthen You

*But the Lord is faithful, and **he will strengthen and protect you** from the evil one.* (2 Thes 3:3 NIV)

- **God Commands or Summons Strength for us**

*Your **God has commanded your strength**; Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us.* (Psa 68:28 NKJ)

***Summon your power**, O God; show us your strength, O God, as you have done before* (Psa 68:28 NIV)

- **God Dresses people with His strength**

His strength covers our weakness as clothes cover our nakedness. With spiritual armor, He provides defensive strength and offensive weapons.

*Finally, **be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God** so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes... Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.* (Eph 6:10, 13 NIV)

*I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been **clothed with power from on high**.* (Luke 24:49)

⁴ Ibid, p. 122-125.

*The **God** who **girds me with strength**, And makes my way blameless? (Psa 18:32)*

Awake, awake, clothe yourself with strength... (Isa 52:1)

- **Our connection with God becomes our strength during famine**

*Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the Lord, **I will rejoice** in the God of my salvation. **The Lord God is my strength**, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places. (Hab 3:17-19)*

- **God brings strength to us in times of fear and anxiety**

*'Do not **fear**, for **I am with you**; Do not **anxiously** look about you, for I am your God. **I will strengthen you**, surely **I will help you**, surely **I will uphold you** with My righteous right hand.'* (Isa 41:10)

- **God strengthens the weak, weary, and tired when they connect directly with Him**

***He gives strength to the weary**, and to him who lacks might **He increases power**. ³⁰Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, ³¹Yet those who wait for the Lord will **gain new strength**; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary. (Isa 40:29-31)*

Sergei Kourdakov was an officer for the secret police in the former Soviet Union during the *cold war*. He defected to British Columbia through the icy storm-driven waves of the North Pacific Ocean. His story illustrates how God strengthened a weary, weak, and desperately tired man.

"But now, in my last moments, my mind turned to the God whom I did not know. Almost instinctively, I prayed. God I have never been happy on this earth. Now that I'm dying, please take my soul to paradise. Maybe You can find me a little bit of happiness there, God. I don't ask You to save my Body. But as it now goes to the bottom, take my soul with You to heaven, please, God! I closed my eyes, fully believing this was the end. Now I'm ready. Now I can sleep. I relaxed and stopped struggling. My battle was over.

Slowly, ever so gradually, I could sense something strange happening. Though I had been drained of every ounce of energy, I sensed a new strength

flowing into my tired arms. I felt the strong and loving arms of the living God in the water like a heavenly buoy! I wasn't a believer. I had never prayed to God before. But in that moment, I became aware of new reserves of power pouring into my worn, water soaked body. I could swim again! My arms, which were as heavy as logs only minutes ago, now felt strong enough to get me to the shore! I had now been in the water almost four and a half hours...

I didn't understand what was happening to me. All I knew was that my life was going to be spared. For two more hours I swam steadily forward.”⁵

Sergei Kourdakov eventually became a Christian and an effective herald of God’s message. After faithfully serving Jesus, he was discovered shot to death.

- **God strengthens the sick**

*"I **will** seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and **strengthen the sick**; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment. (Eze. 34:16)*

- **God strengthens those who suffer**

*And **after you have suffered** for a little while, **the God of all grace**, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, **will Himself** perfect, confirm, **strengthen** and establish **you**. (1 Peter 5:10)*

Samuel Morris (AKA, Kaboo from Liberia, Africa) is an example of God's ability to strengthen someone miraculously after severe suffering.

“...the infuriated chief ordered Kaboo to be whipped every day. Each beating was more prolonged and severe than the one before. A thorny poison vine was used as a whip. At each stroke it tore the flesh and implanted a fiery virus. The agonized victim felt as if his whole body were afire....

Kaboo's wounds did not have time to heal. The flesh of his back hung in shreds. Soon he became so exhausted from loss of blood and the fever induced by the poison vine that he could no longer stand or even sit up. A cross-tree was then erected and he was carried out and thrown over it while he was again beaten over his raw back....

As Kaboo was flung upon the cross-tree for his final beating, all hope as well as physical strength left him. He longed only for the boon of death.

⁵ Sergei Kourdakov, *The Persecutor*, (Old Tappan, N J: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1973), p. 20.

Then suddenly, something very strange happened. A great light like a flash of lightning broke over him. The light blinded all about him. An audible voice that seemed to come from above commanded him to rise and flee. All heard the voice and saw the light but saw no man.

At the same time there occurred one of those instantaneous healings which science can neither deny nor explain. In the twinkling of an eye Kaboo found his strength restored. He had had nothing to eat or drink all that day. Yet he felt neither hunger nor thirst nor weakness. Leaping up, he obeyed the mysterious voice and fled from the astonished natives with the speed of a deer....”⁶

Samuel Morris ignited a missionary movement in the United States that in turn affected the continent of Africa with the Gospel message.

- **God gives Strength to our Bones**

Over 200 bones provide structural support for our body. Their strength protects our brain, liver, heart, and lungs while offering dexterity and movement. Adult bone marrow generates over one million red blood cells per second; it also makes white blood cells and platelets.⁷ Vital minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, and sodium are stored in the bone matrix, which serves as a reserve supply for the entire body.

*"And the Lord will **continually guide** you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and **give strength to your bones**; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. (Isa 58:11)*

- **God provides Strength to Serve**

*Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; **whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies**; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:11)*

- **Jesus Strengthens All Things by the Word of His Power**

*[Jesus] **upholds** [Gk., *chazaq* means to be or grow firm or strong or to strengthen] **all things** by the word of His power. (Heb 1:3)*

⁶ Lindley Baldwin, Samuel Morris, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1942), pp. 10-12.

⁷ Kent M. Van De Graaff, Human Anatomy, (2nd ed., Dubuque, IA, Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1988), p. 150.

- **God's strength provides unlimited possibilities**

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:13)

*And my God shall supply **all your need** according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:19)*

- **Maintaining our connection with CHRIST is essential for sustained strength**

The parable of the Vine and branches illustrates our dependence upon Christ for strength. Our connection with Jesus is similar to the connection of a branch growing from a vine. Bonding with Christ is an essential ingredient for receiving His strength. Apart from this union, we are powerless. We are as ineffective and unproductive as a decomposing twig disconnect from the vine—Jesus.

Jesus offers strength for a purpose. This parable links a responsibility to our connection—that we produce lasting spiritual fruit with the strength God supplies. By failing to produce fruit with His provision, we face separation, dryness, and destruction. Relational separation from Christ ultimately ends in eternal separation from God. Without His source of supply, we are as vulnerable as a grape branch severed from its vine. Our connection to Christ is voluntary but essential if we are to remain strong enough to follow Him.

*I am [Christ] the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. ...⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for **apart from Me you can do nothing**. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15:1-2, 4-6)*

- **The Strength of our Prayers Depends on our Connection**

***If you abide** in Me, and My words abide in you, **ask whatever** you wish, and it shall be done for you. ⁸"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (John 15:7-8)*

- **God offers Strength to those who Know Him**

Strength that stems from our divine connection involves more than intellectual knowledge. It involves a personal relationship that transforms our heart through

ongoing intimacy. During a crisis or dangerous peril, taking appropriate action with strength requires more than head knowledge about Jesus.

*... the **people who know their God will display strength and take action.***
(Dan 11:32)

... No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Mat 11:27 NIV)

Paul links knowing Jesus with resurrection power.

that I [Paul] may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:10)

- **Connecting with God for Strength beyond our Humanity**

The Holy Spirit strengthens us to connect with all that God offers so “*that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*” (Eph 3:19 NIV). The power to fully live, love, and influence is a by-product of our connection with the Holy Spirit. He offers inner strength, one of the “*glorious riches*” that as we possess as we progressively connect with more of Him. This inner strength facilitates our spiritual quest to connect with the fullness of God.

*I pray that **out of his glorious riches** he [God] may **strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being **rooted and established in love, may have power**, together with all the saints, **to grasp** how wide and long and high and deep is **the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*** (Eph 3:16-19 NIV)

The Spirit of the Lord offers strength in at least six categories:

- Wisdom
- Understanding
- Counsel
- Power
- Knowledge
- The fear of the Lord

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. (Isa 11:2 NIV)

The Holy Spirit connects us with God's divine nature. He is:

- Almighty
- All-knowing
- Ever-present
- Eternal (Transcendent, Self-existent)
- Unchanging
- Perfect

God's gift of strength connects us with a powerful person. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit is not merely a force, resource, or commodity. When we connect with the Holy Spirit, we receive the comprehensive influence of God's moral attributes. He empowers us to love others while maintaining self-discipline to apply His strength without fear (i.e., with courage).

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity [fear, NKJ], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline [a sound mind, NKJ]. (2 Tim 1:7 NIV)

Our connection with God cultivates a harvest of spiritual fruit (i.e., moral attributes), which empowers us to live, love, and influence.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control... (Gal 5:22-23 NIV)

- Love may be the strongest influence in the universe
- The Joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh 8:10)
- Peace facilitates rest, which helps restore our strength. Our strength drains when we are not at peace with God, with ourselves, with others, or with our circumstances. Peace occurs when we connect with God despite the situation. It is not the absence of strife, discord, contention, grief, anxiety, chaos, mayhem, or pandemonium.
- Patience and longsuffering facilitate defensive strength
- Kindness empowers us to show sympathy, concern, or understanding for others. It exerts a strong influence since “God's kindness leads you toward repentance” (Rom 2:4)
- Goodness provides strength to overcome evil (we “overcome evil with good” Rom 12:21)

- Faithfulness strengthens us to remain trustworthy, loyal, and honest
- Gentleness maintains our strength under control as we demonstrate sensitivity and consideration to others
- Self-control provides strength to express our strongest emotions, desires, thoughts, words, and actions in an appropriate manner. It does not deny, hide, quench, or shut down emotions but focuses their intensity toward a productive goal.

- **The Holy Spirit Strengthens us to Influence**

As we fully-preach God's message on a global scale

*but you shall **receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses** both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. (Act 1:8 NKJ)*

*Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷and that **repentance and remission of sins should be preached** in His name **to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸And **you are witnesses** of these things. ⁴⁹Behold, I **send the Promise of My Father upon you**; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are **endued with power** from on high (Luke 24:46-49 NKJ)*

The Holy Spirit strengthens and encourages the **Church**. It attracts new people and increases a sense of the fear of the Lord.

*Then [after Saul's (Paul's) conversion] **the church** throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It **was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers**, living in the fear of the Lord. (Acts 9:31 NIV)*

The Holy Spirit connected with Jesus, to empower Him with a spirit of strength to

- Do good deeds
- Heal those oppressed by the devil
- Spread His reputation

*And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, **the spirit of** wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and **strength**, (power NIV; might NKJ) the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (Isa 11:2)*

*"You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with **the Holy Spirit and with power**, and how He went about **doing good**, and **healing all** who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. (Acts 10:38)*

*And Jesus returned to Galilee in **the power of the Spirit**; and **news about Him spread** through all the surrounding district. (Luke 4:14)*

The Holy Spirit empowered **SAMSON** with supernatural physical strength. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him with strength to deliver himself and his nation.

- He tore a lion apart with his bare hands (Jud 14:6)
- He killed 30 men from Ashkelon (Jud 14:19)
- He tore off the ropes that bound him and armed with a jawbone killed 1000 Philistines (Jud 15:14-15)

The Holy Spirit strengthened apostles to proclaim the resurrection of Christ

- With boldness
- With great power
- With great grace

*... and they were **all filled** with the Holy Spirit and **spoke the word of God with boldness**. (Acts 4:31 NKJ)*

*And with **great power** the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and **great grace** was upon them all. (Acts 4:33 NKJ)*

The Holy Spirit empowered Stephen with inner strength to live an abundant life. He connected with God fully.

- He was full of the Holy Spirit
- He was full of faith
- He was full of God's grace
- He was full of power

Stephen performed supernatural signs and wonders. Under life threatening circumstances, he remained strong enough to declare a compelling message. Enraged opponents were unable to cope with the wisdom and Spirit with which he was speaking. Stephen exhibited prevailing strength to suffer a victorious martyr's death. He proclaimed a comprehensive life-message (through words, deeds, stoning, and death). Poised in death, he exerted a compelling influence on Saul, the brutal persecutor, before he connected with Jesus to become Paul.

...Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit... ⁸Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs

among the people....¹⁰but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke (Act 6:5,8,10 NIV)

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