

## **Closing Words**

In the preceding messages, I have sought to consider with you from various angles the subject of being truly strong, and its implications for our lives. In these closing words, I would like to summarise the consideration of this subject by bringing together the main points.

### **Worldly pursuit of strength and power vs being truly strong**

The world is preoccupied with the negative pursuit of strength and power. Being strong and powerful connotes worldly status and wealth, power to do as one pleases and indulgence in personal desires. Christians are often influenced by these worldly concepts of power and strength.

The pursuit of true strength according to the biblical perspective must arise from a heart of love for God and love for others, a desire to be faithful to the Lord and a commitment to live out the truth. Instead of pursuing worldly strength and power, we must seek to be truly strong in God's kingdom. It is the way to an overcoming life, a life pleasing to God, one that bears fruit in every good work.

### **Learning from the Lord Jesus – the truly strong**

The most striking and beautiful picture of what it means to be truly strong is the Cross. However, to the onlookers, including Christ's disciples, the Cross was a pathetic sight. There on the Cross the Lord Jesus hung, weak and helpless, dying and in great pain and agony. Indeed, in the eyes of the world, the Lord Jesus died a sad and pitiful death. But in reality, the Cross was the greatest manifestation of true strength and power.

On the Cross, the Lord Jesus bore our sins and the punishment due to all mankind, and He endured all the afflictions the evil one and the forces of darkness could freely inflict on Him. It required supreme strength to endure the indescribable suffering and agony of the Cross.

The Lord Jesus Christ could endure it all because of His strength of character, His moral and spiritual stature, His deep love for mankind and His unwavering commitment to accomplish the will of God.

He is our perfect example and we need to learn from Him. We need to learn to be like Him, conforming more and more to the character and image of Christ, learning to walk as He walked.

## **Characteristics of the truly strong**

The one who is truly strong has a deep knowledge of God and an intimate personal relationship with Him. He is firmly grounded in the truth revealed in the Scriptures. He understands God's intentions for mankind in Christ and is identified with the heart of God.

The one who is truly strong has a healthy spirit and a renewed mind. He manifests the fruit of the Spirit. He exercises self-control, bringing his body and emotions, yes, even his whole being, under subjection to the truth. He lives out a life of commitment to God and perseveres in the path of true discipleship with a heart of joy and thankfulness, however difficult this path may be.

He is meek and humble. He knows the flesh is weak and he places no confidence in his own capabilities. Instead, he places his trust in the Lord and is prayerful in all situations. He learns how to be strong "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:10), how to walk by faith, walk in Christ, and be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, responding to people and situations with all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

As he walks with the Lord each day, he learns much from Him, including learning deep lessons as he goes through trials and difficulties with the Lord.

His deep longing is that God's glory be manifested, that God's kingdom be advanced, and that the hearts of men and women be submitted to God's reign. His deep desire is that God's will and purposes be accomplished – in his own life and in the lives of others.

The truly strong is a valiant soldier in God's army. He puts on the whole armour of God and fights the good fight of faith. He has spiritual strength and stamina, is alert to the wiles and attacks of the evil one and knows how to discern, counter and overcome them. He is able to carry on well even under mounting spiritual opposition and difficulties.

He understands that God's intention is to raise not just strong individual believers, but also a corporate body, the Church, a powerful army of the Lord, one that is effective in advancing God's kingdom and setting captives free. As a member of the body of Christ, he fulfils his part in the expression of body life, both receiving life from the body and contributing to it. He understands the tremendous potential of healthy church life in the local context and the significance of the universal church in the fulfilment of God's purposes, and he looks to God to guide and enable him to fulfil his part faithfully.

## **Experience of spiritual power may not be positive**

As we aspire to be truly strong, we need to be mindful that not all manifestations of spiritual power are from the Lord. Yes, in the context of our faithful and effective

service, God can manifest power, and He can do so in spectacular ways. But manifestations of spiritual power can also be of the evil one. The Lord Jesus warns us that prior to His Second Coming, "false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24).

We must also be mindful that the desire for spiritual power or to experience it is not necessarily a positive thing. Having such experiences does not mean one is spiritual or truly strong. The Lord warns us that many who prophesy, cast out demons and perform miracles in His name are actually lawless people who are not recognised but rejected by Him (Matt. 7:22-23).

Balaam is one such example. Though he prophesied according to God's revelation, he was not truly strong in the Lord and his life and character were not pleasing to God. The apostle Peter warns us not to follow "the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15).

When we are drawn towards obvious manifestations of spiritual power and experiences, we expose ourselves to unnecessary dangers and deception by the evil one. We may damage our lives and come under serious bondage, especially if there are impure motives and negative traits in our character, and we are lacking in knowledge of the wiles of the evil one. We may be led to think of ourselves as spiritual and important, even though we are not.

### **God's preferred approach in communication**

God may speak to us in clear and direct ways, whether in dreams or visions or in some other obvious forms. But from what I can understand, God's general approach in communication is not dramatic, and this is God's preferred way of communication today, especially to those who have access to the Scriptures.

Compared to the more dramatic kinds of communication, the less dramatic kinds have more reliable safeguards against deception and subjectivity. One main safeguard is the Scriptures God has given us. The Scriptures provides an objective basis for us to know God and His ways. The Scriptures is intended by God to help us know the truth, grow in moral and spiritual stature and be properly equipped for every good work. It is therefore critical that we hunger for God and truth, seek an accurate understanding of what God intends to teach us through the Scriptures, and then absorb the truth and live out our lives accordingly.

The less dramatic forms of communication also require greater participation and deeper understanding on our part. This can promote our fellowship with God, our spiritual development and the renewal of our minds, all of which are at the heart of God's concern for us.

## **A healthy approach to growing strong in the Lord**

Some people are easily impressed with the outward appearance of things – the dramatic, spectacular and that which appear spiritual. But we would do well to remember the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12:39: “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign”.

Yes, God can work in spectacular ways. But let us leave it to Him to work as He sees fit, according to His perfect wisdom. On our part, let us consider our basic approach to life and concentrate on what really matters, the things that truly count in God's kingdom, which is to grow well and be ready and available to the Lord for whatever He desires for our lives.

Growing strong in the Lord is a process. Moral and spiritual stature takes time to develop. The final objective is maturity in the Lord. This is God's primary reason for placing us in this world and allowing us to go through all kinds of trials – that we may be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

For us to attain to spiritual maturity, we must respond well to God's training programme for us. The many varied circumstances of life are intended to help us grow strong in the Lord. When we consecrate our lives to God and experience the empowering of the Spirit, we will be able to go through life well. This then leads to growth in moral and spiritual stature and in spiritual strength and stamina. We will thus be properly grounded in truth, love and knowledge. This, in essence, is what it means to grow truly strong in the kingdom of God.

### **Personal reflection**

Let us then examine our own lives. What do we really long for? Do we long for obvious and dramatic spiritual experiences that may give us a sense of spirituality and power? Are our longings in line with biblical emphases and the heart of God?

Let us ask the Spirit of God to search our hearts and show us our deficiencies. And when He does so, let us repent and take corrective steps, so that we may grow well in the Lord and not be susceptible to the working of the evil one.

Ask yourself: Have I truly consecrated my life to God? Am I developing well in my prayer life? Am I spending sufficient time to read the Scriptures? Am I absorbing God's truth and letting it renew my mind? Am I growing in true knowledge and wisdom? Am I sensitive to what God desires to teach me in daily life? Am I responding well to God's training process and to the different situations of life God brings me through? Does the Holy Spirit have the freedom to transform my life and character? Am I seeking to understand the will of God and what is important to Him in the outworking of His purposes? Am I an effective member and soldier in the body of Christ, contributing my part to the advancement of God's kingdom? Am I growing strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might?

Let us learn to be true, effective and faithful representatives of God in this fallen world. Let us learn to be truly strong in the Lord.