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MESSAGE 3

BECOMING TRULY STRONG

In the first two messages, we looked at what it means to be truly strong. In this message, we will consider how we can be truly strong, what it involves and how it comes about.

Two senses of being strong in the Lord

I would like to first distinguish two senses of being strong in the Lord:

- Strong in the Lord on specific occasions
- Strong in the Lord in the general sense

Strong in the Lord on specific occasions

We may strengthen ourselves in the Lord on specific occasions even though we may not be strong generally. This is especially true when we are under stress or are facing difficulties. Even when we are generally strong, we may still need strengthening on specific occasions.

An example of strengthening oneself on a specific occasion can be found in 1 Samuel 30. In this chapter, we are told that the Amalekites had made a raid on Ziklag while David and his men were away. When David and his men found out that the place had been burnt and their wives and children captured, they lifted up their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep.

1 Samuel 30:6

Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

It was indeed a very distressing situation. At such a time, a person may feel greatly discouraged. But it is at such a time that it is crucial for him to be strong. The Scriptures tells us how, on this occasion, David "strengthened himself in the Lord his God".

Although David was generally strong in the Lord, he specifically strengthened himself

in the Lord on this occasion.

Strong in the Lord in the general sense

It is more important for us to be generally strong than to be merely strengthened on specific occasions. Being generally strong is an important aspect of quality of life and being, and it is strength of the more stable kind. When we are generally strong, we will be more able to live an overcoming life and live out God's will for us.

Being strong on specific occasions and being generally strong are related. If we are generally strong, it is much easier for us to be strong on specific occasions. Conversely, if we learn how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord on specific occasions, we can also grow to become stronger generally.

Characteristics of the truly strong

If we want to become truly strong, it is helpful to know the characteristics of the truly strong and how we can make good progress in the various aspects.

Being truly strong, especially in the general sense – the more stable kind – is very much related to the moral and spiritual stature of a believer.

There are many aspects to the moral and spiritual stature of a believer. In this message, we will consider the following:

- True knowledge and wisdom
- Faith
- Joy
- Quality of prayer life
- Character and quality of inner man
- Fruit of the Spirit
- Hope

We will look at various passages in the Scriptures and reflect on these characteristics and how they contribute to our being truly strong.

1. True knowledge and wisdom

Proverbs 24:5

A wise man is strong,
And a man of knowledge increases power.

Being truly strong is vitally related to having knowledge and wisdom. Proverbs 24:5 tells us: "A wise man is strong". This tells us that wisdom is an important aspect of being truly strong and contributes to it. And if we are also men of true knowledge, we can be truly powerful.

True knowledge is knowledge of the truth, knowledge of God and His ways. But to be truly strong, it is not enough just to have knowledge, even true knowledge. We need to go beyond that and live it out. We need to respond positively to God and walk according to His ways. Wisdom is the ability to apply knowledge in response to various situations in a manner pleasing to God.

Knowledge and wisdom are very important in spiritual warfare, where deception is a major form of attack. If we are ignorant and foolish, we can be easily deceived. Having knowledge and wisdom helps us understand what is happening, recognise the strategies and wiles of the evil one, and know how to take our stand and overcome him.

Part of true knowledge and wisdom is the ability to perceive and recognise truth. As we go through various situations in life, it is important that we perceive accurately what is going on, what the issues involved are, what really matters in that situation, and how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord to face the situation well.

True knowledge and wisdom have a positive moral and spiritual dimension. So, to grow in true knowledge and wisdom, we have to go beyond a mere mental recognition of the truth God has revealed in the Scriptures and seek to incorporate truth into our lives.

To appreciate this, let us look at Romans 12. In verse 2, Paul says: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". This follows from his description of a life consecrated to God (v. 1).

The renewing of our minds does not involve only the mental faculties. It involves spiritual understanding and a moral response. Our minds are renewed when we receive the truth into our hearts and commit ourselves to live by it. It is the moral and spiritual mindset of the person. The more we incorporate the truth into our lives, the greater will be the renewal and transformation.

When our minds are renewed, we will be more able to appreciate the truth and respond to life's situations with wisdom. If we merely understand things at the mental level, we will find it difficult to go through trying situations of life. But if truth has become a part of us, we will be able to perceive issues of life more wholesomely. When confronted with difficult issues, we will be more able to deal with them. This is the kind of knowledge God desires us to have.

2. Faith

Isaiah 30:15

For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said,
"In repentance and rest you will be saved,
In quietness and trust is your strength."
But you were not willing.

This verse teaches us that if we want to be strong, trust or faith in God is very important. Note that "in quietness and trust is your strength" is preceded by "in repentance and rest you will be saved".

Sometimes, we try very hard to trust God, to exercise faith, but we find that we are not able to. This could be because we have not repented and put our lives right before God.

If our attitudes in significant things are not right, for example, if we have wrongful desires or bitterness in our hearts, and we refuse to put them right, then no matter how hard we try to trust in God, we may find that we are not able to truly trust Him.

It is also helpful to see the close relationship between faith, wisdom and knowledge. When our exercise of faith goes together with wisdom based on our knowledge of the truth, it becomes very powerful. Exercising faith in what is not true will not work; neither will knowing the truth without the exercise of faith.

Only faith in the truth will work. To go through a situation well, we need to understand the principles involved. We need to know the truth and God's will for us in that situation. We also need to know the correct way to go through it and the posture to adopt. Having recognised these things, we must then exercise faith whatever the outward appearance, no matter how difficult or impossible a situation may appear to be, no matter what others may think of us. If we go through situations with the right kind of attitude and posture, we will overcome in the Lord.

Often we fail to go through situations well. We stumble and falter. We are spiritually weak because we are anxious, troubled, and full of doubts. We fail to properly exercise faith in God and trust God in what He has revealed and promised in the Scriptures. But when we have learnt to exercise faith in God and trust His promises, we will be strong.

Many of us have been through situations where we found ourselves faltering, but when we were helped to recognise the issues involved and encouraged to exercise true faith, we found ourselves more able to go through those situations well. While it is good that others could offer help and encouragement, it would be better if we learn to be strong so we could trust God, exercise faith in Him and live out the truth accordingly. In this way, we need not always rely on help and encouragement from others.

As we trust God and walk in the truth, He will see us through every situation in life. Our lives will not be lived in vain. Even when we appear to be faring poorly in the eyes of others, there will be true meaning, quality and accomplishment in our lives.

But we must go beyond just learning to exercise faith in particular, specific, situations. We must learn to have a restful faith in God all the time. If we are convicted of the major truths God has revealed to us and we live by them, we can

have quiet confidence in Him as we go through life. In this way, we can be stable and strong in the Lord, whatever the circumstances. It is important for us to have a contrite spirit, always seeking to put right our lives and consecrating ourselves to live by the truth. In so doing, we can have a quiet and unshakeable confidence in the Lord and in the truth.

3. Joy

Nehemiah 8:10

... Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Nehemiah 8 records Ezra reading the Law of Moses before an assembly of God's people. When the people heard the words of the Law, they were grieved, for they were conscious of their failures.

There is a place for such grief. The Lord Jesus Himself says: "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4). Nehemiah was, however, concerned that the people might become discouraged, because that kind of grief could turn into worldly sorrow and sap spiritual strength and true quality of life. So he encouraged them, saying: "The joy of the Lord is your strength".

If we learn how to rejoice in the Lord, we will be strengthened. When we encounter difficult and distressing situations, we need not be discouraged. We can instead choose to be joyful.

In Philippians 4:4, Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always". This is an instruction and an exhortation. It implies that we can and should choose to rejoice in God. Paul says "rejoice in the Lord *always*", which means it is a posture that we are to maintain continually, even when we are going through difficult and painful situations. This posture will strengthen us and help us go through not just specific occasions, but all situations well.

When we rejoice in the Lord, it facilitates God's working in our lives. It also facilitates the efficient functioning of our faculties. When we are discouraged or depressed, we can neither think well nor exercise our spirit well. Our spirit becomes stifled. Our ability to choose and respond well to situations will be hampered. We must choose not to be depressed. We must choose to trust in God. Even when negative things are taking place, we can continue to rejoice in God and affirm our faith in His goodness and sovereignty. As we love Him and walk with Him, we can have the confidence that He will continue to cause all things to work together for good to those who love Him.

If we are walking with the Lord, there is meaning in what we go through in life, and there will be good lessons that we can learn. And so, we can rejoice in Him. Having such a positive posture of rejoicing in God provides the environment for the Spirit of God to have greater freedom to work in us and help us go through situations well.

4. *Quality of prayer life*

Another aspect of being truly strong is that of having quality prayer life. It is not just about being prayerful and being conscious of God; it is also about the depth of our fellowship with God and the quality of our dependence on Him. Also important is *power in prayer*.

In Luke 21, the Lord Jesus speaks of the last days, before the Second Coming of Christ. In verse 34, He tells us to be on guard, that our hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness and worries of life, lest the day comes on us suddenly like a trap.

He continues in verse 36: "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength". In this verse, "praying" refers to a continuing posture of prayer. We should be alert and praying at all times, so that we may have strength.

In Matthew 26, the Lord Jesus again speaks of the need for watching and praying. The context here is that of significant spiritual pressures that the disciples were going through as part of the circumstances surrounding the significant event of the death of Christ.

Matthew 26:41

"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

During times of stress, difficulties and testing, we often find ourselves failing. We want to do what is right, to be overcomers and not yield to temptations, but we fail time and again. Our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak. So what is the answer to our predicament? Prayer.

Through prayer, we can be joined to the almighty God. And when we are joined to the almighty God, we can experience His power and strength. The flesh is always weak, but when we are praying and depending on God, we can overcome the weakness of the flesh because we are enabled by God's power and strength.

We can look at praying in Matthew 26:41 from two angles. One angle has to do with praying that calls upon the Spirit of God to work in us so that we can go through a situation well. The other has to do with the Lord Jesus exhorting us to be continually alert, watchful and prayerful. And it is this continual praying that will deepen our relationship with God, contribute to the quality of our prayer life and strengthen our inner man.

As we learn to be vigilant and pray continually, we will find that the principle of "the spirit is willing" becomes very meaningful, because the Lord will strengthen our spirit. So even though the flesh is weak, we will grow and develop and we will be able to overcome its weaknesses.

We are in the context of ongoing spiritual warfare and therefore need to be prayerful at all times, especially during times of intense spiritual opposition and severe testing.

Prayer and being strong in the Lord are closely linked. This is alluded to in Matthew 26:41. As we pray, we strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

We noted earlier that David strengthened himself in the Lord when he was very distressed (1 Sam. 30:6). We are not told how David did so. But it is likely that a major aspect has to do with his posture of looking to God. He strengthened himself in the Lord through prayer, through his dependence on God and exercising faith in Him.

In a life of continual prayer in faith with knowledge and wisdom, we can properly rejoice in God always, and have proper confidence in Him at all times.

We can pray for ourselves to be strengthened. We can also be strengthened through the prayers of others. In Ephesians 3, we see Paul praying that the believers would be strengthened.

Ephesians 3:14, 16

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

We can therefore pray for one another that God may strengthen us and that we may be able to live well for Him.

5. Character and quality of the inner man

Another factor that helps us to be truly strong is the quality of our character.

Quality of character refers to the degree to which we are conformed to God's character. It is needful for us to develop wholesomely in every aspect of our moral character and not neglect any aspect of it. How well we have developed our character is closely related to the depth of our oneness with God, our fellowship with Him and the degree to which Christ has been formed in us. The quality of our character bears a relationship with the freedom the Spirit of God has to teach and strengthen us, and to work in and through us.

Let's look at Ephesians 3:16 again. Paul prays that God the Father "would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man". The way Paul prays helps us appreciate the significance of the issue being communicated. He prays for the Spirit of God to strengthen believers because we cannot be strong in ourselves. Also, such strengthening takes place "in the inner man".

True strength is not in our physical muscles, and it does not depend on our mental

knowledge, skills or talents. True strength has to do with the inner man being strengthened by the almighty God, according to His bountiful grace and through His Spirit. It has to do with the strength of the spirit and the development of the inner being as well as our spiritual maturity and stature. The truly strong have the spiritual strength and stamina to carry on well even under mounting spiritual pressures and difficulties.

Paul's prayer continues in verses 17-19:

Ephesians 3:17-19

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you,
being rooted and grounded in love,
18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth
and length and height and depth,
19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you
may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

These verses show the close link between being strong in the Lord (v. 16) and our faith, character and relationship with God.

Being strong in the Lord is linked to *faith* – “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”.

Being strong in the Lord is also linked to *character* – “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love”. Love is a major aspect of good character.

It is also linked to the quality of our *relationship with God* – “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts”. When we are strong, we are able to develop further the quality of our relationship with God and our character. Conversely, the quality of our relationship with God and our character will have a bearing on our growing stronger in the Lord – it is a mutual relationship.

When Paul prays “that Christ may dwell in your hearts”, he is not referring to Christ coming to dwell within them, since Christ already dwells in believers. He is talking about a life that is consistent with Christ dwelling in them – that more and more, they may be conformed to the character of Christ. This transformation of life and character is related to the quality of their relationship with Christ and their oneness with Him, their submission to His lordship, and the freedom with which Christ can express Himself in their hearts and lives. Paul adds: “that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God”. This refers to the goal of moral and spiritual maturity and stature and oneness with God – what God intends for every believer in Christ.

6. *Fruit of the Spirit*

When we are strengthened by God's Spirit in the inner man and are walking

according to the will of God, we will manifest the fruit of the Spirit, and with it the qualities of God's character.

Galatians 5:22-23

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

One who is strong in the Lord will continually manifest the fruit of the Spirit. And if he is growing stronger in the Lord, he will manifest these qualities in increasing measure.

An important aspect of the fruit of the Spirit I wish to highlight is self-control. To what degree we are able to exercise self-control is an important indicator of our true strength. When we have self-control, we will be more able to persevere in the truth and bring our body and emotions in subjection to the truth.

7. Hope

In Psalm 31, the psalmist exhorts us to be strong.

Psalm 31:23-24

23 O love the Lord, all you His godly ones!

The Lord preserves the faithful

And fully recompenses the proud doer.

24 Be strong and let your heart take courage,

All you who hope in the Lord.

If we want to be truly strong, to be able to face all situations with courage, we must have hope in God in the context of loving Him and being faithful to Him.

Our hope in the Lord is grounded in our confidence in the Lord and in His assurances to us of what awaits those who love Him and walk with Him. These are the things which will strengthen us to persevere in the midst of trials and spiritual pressures: our faith in the power, knowledge and wisdom of God, His steadfast love towards us, His watching over our lives and keeping of all those who trust Him, and our looking forward to what awaits us in God's eternal kingdom for those who are true to God.

Identification with God and His purposes

I would like to go on to a very important aspect that can help us to appreciate how we can become spiritually strong and stable in the Lord.

Let us consider Ephesians 3:18 again.

Ephesians 3:18

may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

In this verse, we find another aspect of truth related to being strong in the Lord and to the development of the inner man (Eph. 3:16). This aspect of truth has to do with the areas of knowledge, understanding and comprehension. Paul desires the believers to "comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth". But what does Paul desire us to comprehend? Verse 18 does not mention what it is that Paul desires the reader to comprehend in such great depth.

One interpretation is that it refers to the comprehension of God's love, since verse 17 talks about being rooted and grounded in love, and verse 19 talks about knowing the love of Christ.

Personally, I think this interpretation does not fit in well. The verse does not say: "the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love". Instead Paul tells us that being rooted and grounded in love enables us to comprehend this thing.

I think a more meaningful interpretation is to connect the phrase to the subject that Paul is absorbed in. A central theme of the epistle to the Ephesians is Paul's deep concern for the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose. This is at the heart of his ministry. It is reflected in the preceding verses. Let us look at some of them:

Ephesians 3:8-11

8 To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,
9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;
10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.
11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

At the heart of the mystery (v. 9) is the eternal purpose of God, which He carried out in Christ Jesus (v. 11), the unfathomable riches of Christ (v. 8), and the manifold wisdom of God being made known through the church (v. 10).

Paul prays for the believers to be strengthened through the Spirit in the inner man, and that being rooted and grounded in love, they may be able to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth. It seems to me that this has to do with comprehending the eternal purpose of God and the issues involved – what is in God's heart, what He desires to accomplish, how it is to be fulfilled, how this is bound up with the unfathomable riches of Christ, how it is carried out in Christ, and how the manifold wisdom of God can be manifested through the church.

Being rooted and grounded in love is a major link in appreciating all these things (vs. 17-18). And as we appreciate these truths and realities in increasing measure and enter into what God intends for us, we will know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (divine love that is deep and rich), and increasingly, we will be filled up to all the fullness of God (v. 19). We will be men and women who understand God's call in all its breadth and length and height and depth; men and women of deep conviction and strong motivation, who are not easily distracted or shaken, and who will not waver in our commitment to the Lord and in the fulfilment of God's purposes.

Comprehensive, wholesome knowledge of the whole counsel of God

What I want to highlight is the importance of comprehensive, wholesome knowledge. It is knowledge concerning the whole counsel of God, especially those aspects that are very important in God's heart. It is only as we gain insight into the whole counsel of God, His eternal purpose, His calling for us in Christ, that we can grow well in a comprehensive and wholesome manner, in all aspects of our being, and become stable and resilient in the truth. When we understand all these things, we can then effectively exercise true faith and develop healthy prayer lives. All these are closely related to being strong in the Lord and the development of the inner man, and to the work of the Spirit of God and our experience of the fullness of God.

In Ephesians 4, Paul encourages the believers to walk worthy of the Lord. He then speaks of how Christ has ascended and given gifts to believers. He also speaks of the oneness of the body. In verses 11 to 16, he tells us how we can be equipped and grow well in the Lord. The desired outcome is expressed in verses 13 and 14:

Ephesians 4:13-14

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Believers who are weak in faith will find themselves tossed here and there, confused and deceived by false doctrines. But it is not just false doctrines that will toss us here and there. There could be other ways by which our faith can be shaken and become unstable. Behind the trickery of men, behind their "craftiness in deceitful scheming", are the powers of darkness and the evil one at work. The evil one is described in Genesis 3:1 as the crafty one and in Revelation 12:9 as the deceiver. He is the master deceiver, deceiving us through wrong doctrines and through many other means.

Paul encourages us to grow towards full maturity, towards comprehensive and wholesome development. We will then no longer be children, easily tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine. We will not be weak, faltering easily, or easily

deceived. In other words, we will become strong in the Lord.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of knowledge and wisdom. We need true knowledge and wisdom to grow unto maturity in Christ and for Christ to be formed in us. We also need knowledge and wisdom if we want to grow deeper in our relationship with God and in our oneness with Him. It is such living knowledge and wisdom which can help us to respond well to all situations, including the craftiness of men and of the evil one.

Growing in knowledge and wisdom is an important aspect of the equipping of the saints. The Lord Jesus gives gifts to the church: "some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints" (vs. 11-12). And we are to be equipped so that we become mature, "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (v. 13). This comes about as we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, as Christ is formed in us and as we grow in our relationship and oneness with the Lord. It is this deep personal knowledge of Christ and relationship with Him that can make us truly strong and stable. It is this that prevents us from being easily tossed to and fro and enables us to persevere in the truth consistently.

Ephesians 4:15 speaks of that kind of relationship with Christ and His being formed in us, and verse 16 links the body being built up to growing up in all aspects into Christ.

Ephesians 4:15-16

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Let us look at another passage dealing with the same theme.

Colossians 1:9-11

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

This passage shows the importance of knowledge, wisdom and understanding, and their relationship with being "strengthened with all power".

In verse 11, Paul speaks of his prayer for the believers, that they may be strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might for the attaining of all steadfastness. Here, "steadfastness" clearly has to do with being able to take our stand, to carry on faithfully in the truth, even when we are buffeted by difficult circumstances or when we come under attack by the evil one or by men.

In the midst of trials and testing, we need to be strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might so that we will be truly strong and will be able to go through these difficulties with patience, endurance and steadfastness.

Paul begins his prayer with "that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding". This shows that it is important for us to have the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Only then can we walk worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way, bearing good fruit, continually deepening in our knowledge of God and strengthened with all power. And we are to press on in this path, never to be self-satisfied.

The passages we have seen show that the major issues – knowledge, wisdom, growth and spiritual stature, being strong in the Lord, the quality of relationship and oneness with the Lord, the fullness of Christ – are all intertwined. They bear a vital relationship with one another; there is an organic unity.

Concluding remarks

The world's idea of being strong and powerful is often associated with the desire and ability to fulfil one's personal ambitions without due regard for what is important to God. As Christians, our desire to be strong must not flow from the same motivation. It must instead flow from our love for God and our desire to be faithful to Him. This is what it means to be truly strong from the perspective of God's kingdom, and it is in sharp contrast to the perspective of the fallen world.

To be truly strong, we must develop a strong, healthy spirit and a renewed mind. A strong, healthy spirit and a renewed mind will help us to have self-control and to bring our bodies and our emotions under subjection to the truth. We will then be able to live out a life of commitment to God and truth. We will be steadfast and be able to fight a good fight of faith. We will have strength and stamina and competence in spiritual warfare, all of which are important characteristics of the truly strong.

There is a well-known saying: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". That is what we often see in the world. But true power is not corrupt and does not corrupt. It is not self-serving. True power helps us to be pure, holy and faithful to the Lord. It helps us to respond to God and fulfil His purposes for us in this world.

Consecration an important pre-requisite

To be truly strong, we need to first consecrate our lives to God, and this consecration has to be deep. It has to be seen in our love for Him, our commitment to Him and in our relationship with Him.

If we do not consecrate our lives to God, we will not be able to properly develop the various characteristics of the truly strong, such as true knowledge and wisdom, faith, joy, power in prayer, the qualities of the inner man, and spiritual maturity and stature.

In Romans 12, Paul urges us to consecrate our lives to God. It is only as we consecrate our lives to God that we will be effectively transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is only when we have consecrated our lives to God that we can meaningfully look to the Holy Spirit to fill us, teach us, guide us and empower us to live according to the truth and the will of God. When this takes place, we will become strong, not just in specific situations, but in the general sense.

God's training process

Growing strong in the Lord is a process. The final objective is maturity in the Lord. Moral and spiritual stature takes time to develop. God has His training programme for us. The varied circumstances we go through in life are intended to help us grow strong in the Lord. This is a primary reason for God placing us in this world – that we may be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

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, in love, in knowledge, guided and empowered by the Spirit. This, in essence, is what it means to grow truly strong in the kingdom of God.

Take time to ponder over this subject. What are the areas in your life that are lacking? Have you neglected the development of your prayer life and your character? Are you deficient in knowledge and wisdom? Have you deeply consecrated your life to God? Are you responding well to God's training process?

Let us ask the Lord to help us recognise the steps we need to take to progress well in the direction of His calling. May the Spirit of God have the freedom to speak to us, and may we respond well when He does so.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Share your understanding of the two senses of being strong in the Lord as discussed in this message. How are these two senses related?

2. How do the following areas contribute to our becoming truly strong?

- True knowledge and wisdom
- Faith
- Joy
- Quality of our prayer life
- Our character and the quality of our inner man
- The fruit of the Spirit
- Hope
- Our identification with God and His purposes
- Our deep consecration to God

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