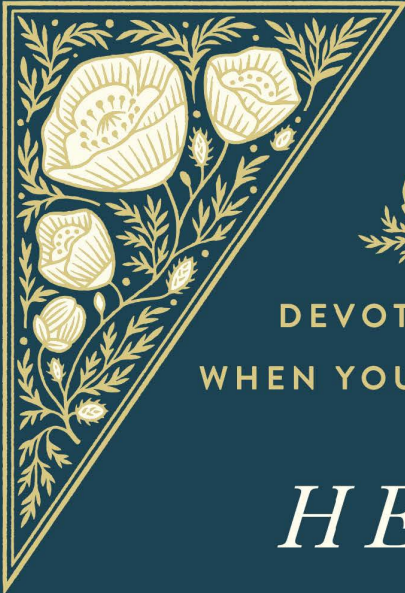


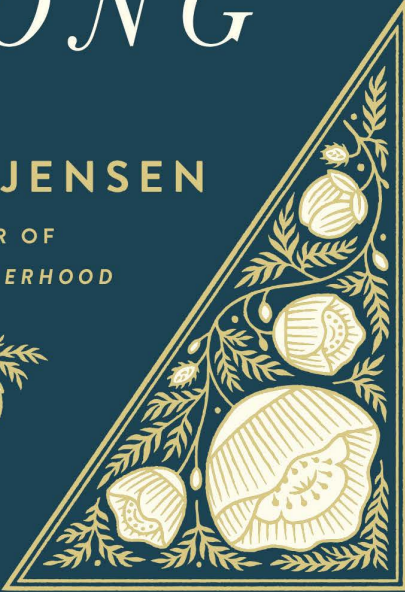


DEVOTIONS *for*
WHEN YOU FEEL WEAK

HE IS
STRONG

EMILY A. JENSEN

AUTHOR OF
RISEN MOTHERHOOD



“Emily’s invitation to embrace our weakness because God is strong will give you hope and encouragement for life’s most challenging circumstances. Her personal stories and reflections along the way are a gift to any reader!”

—**Ruth Chou Simons, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author, artist, and founder of GraceLaced**

“With refreshing honesty and biblical wisdom, *He Is Strong* turns our eyes away from ourselves and onto Jesus—the One who is able to give us strength when we are weary and courage when we are fearful.”

—**Melissa Kruger, author and director of women’s initiatives for The Gospel Coalition**

“The greatest desire of the human heart is to believe that even in our deepest inability—in our abject weakness—God still loves us and is in fact for us. Full of refreshing transparency and clear biblical application, these devotions will strengthen your soul and stir your affections for Jesus.”

—**Jared C. Wilson, pastor, professor, and author of *Love Me Anyway***

“*He Is Strong* offers time-tested wisdom to fortify the weary soul, wrap the reader with a comforting hug of encouragement, and lead us to the source of strength—Jesus Christ. This devotional will be a staple on my nightstand, serving as a constant reminder to accept my weakness as an opportunity to experience God’s strength.”

—**Gretchen Saffles, best-selling author of *The Well-Watered Woman*, founder of Well-Watered Women**

“To this day, whenever I feel overwhelmed with a sense of my weakness and inadequacy, that sweet chorus, ‘I am weak, but He is strong,’ infuses my heart with fortitude and grace. The truth of His unassailable strength and love will do the same for you.”

—**Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, author and founder of *Revive Our Hearts***

“Emily is the friend you want with you in the trenches. *He Is Strong* spoke to some of the most tender parts of my soul. Emily expertly weaves truth, light, and warmth through the entire devotional. You want to savor it, because it’s such a comfort, yet at the same time you want to devour it, because it’s so helpful. I recommend this book for everyone.”

—**Laura Wifler, author, podcaster, and cofounder of Risen Motherhood**

“*He Is Strong* invited me to humbly consider my weaknesses while leaning into Christ’s strength. With engaging stories and Scripture woven throughout, this devotional will encourage the fainthearted with the hope of their strong, steadfast God.”

—**Hunter Beless, founder of Journeywomen and author of *Read It, See It, Say It, Sing It!***

“We are small. We are finite. We are weak. When we admit our weakness, we can turn to God for his strength. That is the theme of this lovely series of reflections, which will bless all who are enduring a period of difficulty, a season of sorrow, or a time of trial. The Father’s heart is inclined toward you and his hand is stretched out to bless and strengthen you.”

—**Tim Challies, author of *Seasons of Sorrow***

“With theological grounding and practical and poignant insights from her own life, she welcomes her reader to lean on Christ, who knows our weaknesses (and embraces them) better than we do ourselves.”

—**Amy Gannett, founder of Tiny Theologians and author of *Fix Your Eyes***

“Your weakness is a gift—an opportunity to lean on the strength of Christ and receive his help. This book will point you to the comfort of knowing that you do not walk alone.”

—**Russ Ramsey, pastor, author of *Rembrandt Is in the Wind***



*HE IS
STRONG*

EMILY A. JENSEN



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*To all the
“little ones”*





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DEVOTIONS







1

WHEN YOU'RE AT THE END OF YOURSELF

*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean
lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean
lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*

ISAIAH 6:5

My hands gripped the steering wheel like I was driving through a thunderstorm, but the car wasn't moving. I sat in a dark parking lot with my hands at ten and two while tears streamed down my cheeks. Not the pretty kind you might see in an old film, where a single tear can be gently dabbed away with a tissue. My chest heaved, and I wailed more like a child than the twenty-year-old woman I was. It was a cry from the deep—not just tears for another failed relationship but the

physical response of disappointment heaped upon disappointment, mess upon mess that I'd made of my life. I'd lived apart from God, but *could I even call it life?* For all I'd done and tried, I had nothing but ruins to show for it.

I was desperate and confused. My thoughts weren't linear, and for once I had no optimism or clever plan. I sat in my car with no strength left and nothing to offer. My inner defense lawyer had given up my case, slammed down her papers, and walked out of the courtroom. I was open to judgment. For the first time in my adult life, I raised a sincere cry to God. With head low, I could mutter only two words: "Help me."

And help he did.

Within the week, I heard the gospel and believed. I surrendered my life to Christ. God helped me not by instantly cleaning up the mess I'd made of life but by giving me new life in him.

When I look back on those moments, nearly twenty years ago now, I think of the deepest kind of weakness a person can experience. Something worse than being keeled over with back pain or feeling insufficient for a task. It's the kind of weakness that each person must reckon with before a holy God. Our souls suppress it because we don't want to face how minuscule, broken, dead, and incapable we are apart from him.

Knowing you need a strength outside of your own might be something you considered at such a young age that your memory of surrendering to Christ comes in shadows and flashes. You've spent your life walking with God and experiencing joy in Christ, even though it's not been a perfect

journey. Through the doubts, the ups and downs, you know the weakness of your flesh and your need for grace. For as long as you remember, you've lived as a debtor forgiven and saved.

Or perhaps, as in my case, God opened your eyes and ears to the gospel as a teenager or young adult, and you made the walk of a prodigal into the arms of your heavenly Father. He gently sifted your life through a colander, his loving hands shaking away every worthless thing, leaving only bits to build from as you walked forward in faith and obedience.

Or maybe you've never reckoned with your weakness. Perhaps you're tired, overwhelmed, discouraged, worn down, and frustrated with your own striving. You've tried every option for hope and help under the sun, and you're out of ideas. You sense a weight on your soul heavier than you can lift, and it's pressing your knees to the ground. Oh, friend, low is exactly the right direction to go.

In the book bearing his name, Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet, describes his vision of God. Seeing the Lord seated on a throne, surrounded by fearsome heavenly beings and quaking foundations, Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me!" In modern English, we don't use the word "woe" to describe our feelings. But Isaiah's vocabulary included "woe," and he would have used it to reflect deep despair and desperation. His listeners would have known "woe" was a cry full of passion and lament—almost an involuntary reflex. For Isaiah, "woe" was a sinner's wail upon seeing a holy God. And he brings us further into his state of mind when he adds, "I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips." I love the King James Version's translation: "I am undone." When Isaiah finds himself face-to-face with

perfection and holiness and unimaginable glory and power, he instantly recognizes his weakness, confesses his humble state, and laments over his sin.

At some point or another, like Isaiah, each of us will be undone. You'll kneel before the one true God (Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10-11). You'll cry out and feel exposed in your sin (Revelation 20:11-15). This can happen now, or it will happen later, at the second coming of Christ and final judgment. The certainty of our humbling is why Scripture implores us, "*Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15, emphasis added). The gospel, or the good news, is that each of us can turn to him for grace now, while the joy and reward are immediate, abundant, and eternal. God promises to do for us what he did for Isaiah, taking away our guilt and sending us on mission (Isaiah 6:6-9).

As we move forward in this devotional and consider many types and experiences of weakness, it's important to have this facet of weakness settled. Our soul-level weakness is not just a feeling and it's not imagined—the Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But it also says that the grace of God appeared in Christ to save sinners like me and you (Titus 2:11). The strength of our holy God is exercised on behalf of our weakness.

Today, if you feel weak because you've made mess upon mess of your life, or because mess upon mess has been heaped upon you, let the weight drop you low. Collapse beneath the load in sweet relief. And leave the weight of your weakness again at the feet of Jesus Christ. There is no reason for you to try to clean up the mess in a strength you don't possess. Instead,

cry out to Jesus Christ. He allowed himself to be crushed so you could walk freely today. And he lends his ear to every “woe.”

Additional Reading

Matthew 11:28-30

Philippians 2:1-11

Isaiah 6

Questions for Reflection

I am weak

- Have you ever considered who you are in relation to a holy God? Spend a few minutes reading and reflecting on the passage in Isaiah and consider what it means for your life.
- What aspects of life have left you feeling undone? Share them with the Lord.

He is strong

- What is God's response to those who come to him undone, needing salvation and hope?
- How does it change your perspective on your life and weakness to be free of the guilt of sin and find new life in Christ?





2

WHEN YOU SEE YOUR WEAKNESS EVERYWHERE

*Let us run with endurance the race that
is set before us, looking to Jesus.*

HEBREWS 12:1-2

On vacation in Florida, my oldest son asked me to name my dream car. Weaving between palm trees with light flickering through the open sunroof, I turned to my captive back seat audience and said, “If I lived down here? A white Jeep Wrangler Rubicon.”

“But, Mom, what does that look like?”

From that point on, we were on a mission to spot a Rubicon in the wild. And once we saw one, they started to pop up everywhere. I spotted them in the neighborhood where

we were staying. They were parked near the beach and driving down the highway. I'd never noticed before, but white Jeep Wrangler Rubicons are popular in South Florida. Even after we settled back into Iowa life, I kept seeing them everywhere. There's even a Jeep owner that drives my "dream car" down our street several days a week.

Have you ever had this phenomenon happen to you? Someone points something out and then you start to see it everywhere? There's a name for that experience; it's called "frequency illusion," otherwise known as the Baader–Meinhof phenomenon.¹ It has everything to do with selective attention because we pay attention to the things we're already looking for. It's a form of confirmation bias.

Frequency illusion isn't a big deal when it comes to noticing Jeep Rubicons in small-town Iowa, but what about when it comes to spotting our flaws? For those of us who've seen our weaknesses, it's possible to focus selective attention on our inabilities. People need to see their weakness, letting it humble them in dependence on the Lord, realizing they have no reason to boast. But for some of us, seeing our needs escalates to staring at our weaknesses all too closely, as if mulling them over will help us overcome them. Some of us let the reality of our weakness become a fixation and fixture of our identity.

When we give selective—even obsessive—attention to our weakness, we don't just see our flaws and insufficiency; we let the pain of it settle into our bones. We start to look for our

1. Wikipedia, s.v. "Frequency illusion," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frequency_illusion.

weakness, and we see it everywhere, prompting the narrative, *I'm so pitiful and pathetic. I'm so bad at everything. Why am I so useless?* When our weakness is the focal point of our story, we begin to pull back from kingdom life convinced we don't have what it takes to live a life of faith. If we become what we behold, and we constantly behold our weakness, we'll eventually give way to despair.²

I'm so bad at being creative and fun with kids; I'd be a useless Sunday school teacher.

I'm so awkward; I might as well just stay home instead of meet up with friends.

I have such a low tolerance for discomfort; I ought to say no to that mission trip.

I'm already the least popular mom on the PTO; if I talk about my faith, it will just make it worse.

Looking at our inability and weaknesses does nothing to equip or condition us to run the marathon of faith throughout our life. Yes, we have many weaknesses, but we are running a path blazed by Jesus Christ himself, and he has called us to follow in his footsteps, has filled us with the power of the Spirit to keep placing one foot in front of the other. We might seem insignificant, but we're a chosen part of an epic story serving a perfect hero.

That fixation reflex is right, but not on ourselves. Instead we need to fixate on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, not our flaws (Hebrews 12:2). Where we see "weakness,

2. Sometimes introspection can lead to depression. If you have deep, persistent, and ongoing feelings of despair and rumination, please reach out to a pastor, doctor, or licensed professional for help.

weakness, weakness,” we need to practice seeing “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” Instead of obsessing over the myriad ways we’re unqualified, unable, and insufficient, we need to rehearse how he is qualified, able, and fully sufficient. Time is too short to tell every story in the Scriptures that proves Christ’s sufficiency, but the multitude of other believers, running with Christ’s strength in the midst of their own weakness, also shows us this is true. The endurance and capability of Jesus have been conveyed to us by the cross, and he is our all in all.

Are you wasting away while you count your weaknesses? Are your spiritual muscles atrophying? You don’t have to deny your weakness to lay aside its weight and look to Christ. The author of Hebrews argues that we need to stop navel-gazing; we need to recognize the power of Christ in us, throw off our sin, and get rid of anything that’s holding us back from running the race of life. If we don’t want to grow weary of doing good, we’ll “consider” Christ (Hebrews 12:3).

When we consider Christ, we can say yes to volunteer opportunities at church we know we have the capacity for, even though we’re not 100 percent qualified in that area yet. We can be self-forgetful when we’re out with others, focusing on how we can love and serve them in conversation. We can go on the mission trip, giving our fears and discomfort to the Lord. We can boldly talk about our faith, knowing our greater mission and security is in Christ. This is not because we’ve suddenly become strong, but because we have faith that the Spirit will propel us forward in spite of our many weaknesses.

Additional Reading

Hebrews 11:1–12:3

2 Corinthians 12:5–10

Romans 8:25–27

Questions for Reflection

I am weak

- Do you struggle with “frequency illusion” when it comes to spotting your weaknesses? How do you know?
- In what ways is it helpful to see and acknowledge your weakness? In what instance has focusing on your weakness hindered your kingdom work?

He is strong

- Based on the Scriptures above and your own personal experience, what evidence do you have that God isn’t hindered by your weaknesses and will help you in the midst of them?
- What would it look like to “consider Christ” in your life today? How could you practice seeing Jesus’s strength, grace, and power everywhere?





3

WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

ACTS 4:13

In the fall of 2009, I pulled into an unfamiliar church parking lot to attend an unfamiliar thing called a Bible study. As a newlywed and a new believer, I was looking for ways to meet other women in our area and grow in my walk with the Lord. Since my husband and I hadn't settled on a church quite yet, I

took a recommendation from a friend and decided to try Bible Study Fellowship.¹

It was humid and I was already running a couple of minutes late. I hunted for a parking spot and hurried in alongside moms lugging toddlers as women in tailored tweed jackets and stylish flats swung the church doors open to greet me. Within a few heartbeats, I could tell this was more than I bargained for. I almost walked out but was so mesmerized by the wealthy suburban women singing hymns that I collected my name tag and found a seat in the back.

For thirty weeks, I walked through those church doors to study the Gospel of John. Each week, I'd struggle to complete my homework, and I'd skip over what I would now consider to be the most basic questions. I sang in a whisper during worship because I didn't know the melody of these apparently "classic" hymns. Praying out loud made me sweat and mumble pat phrases over and over. Though I'd carried my Bible everywhere for the better part of three years and I'd read it frequently, formal Bible study showed me I didn't know what much of it meant. I was held by the gospel of grace as I grasped for understanding.

Maybe you're a new believer and you can relate to being in over your head with Bible study. You show up to church and are moved by the sermon, but there are a lot of things you still don't understand. You smile and nod in deep conversations

1. Bible Study Fellowship is a global, nondenominational Bible study that I participated in in two cities over the course of about seven years. Visit <https://www.bsfinternational.org/> for more details or to find a study in your own area.

with older believers, but later, you Google words like “justification” and “orthodoxy” to find out what they mean. You know the feeling of being weak in your knowledge of God, and you hope you can catch up before somebody catches on.

Or maybe you've been in church all your life and you think you have no excuse for not knowing the answers. You've attended decades of Bible studies and listened to countless sermons, but sometimes you still question elementary doctrines and forget the finer details of your faith. As a seasoned believer, you don't want to come up short with your Bible facts and look foolish.

There's good news for those of us who are still learning—no matter what leg of the journey we're on. Though God wants us to grow in our knowledge of and love for him (Philippians 1:9-11; 2 Peter 3:18), he doesn't need us to look super smart and impress people with all the big words we know. Though some Christians will be brilliant, glorifying God through intelligence, research, and clear communication of truth, those qualities aren't the only way to give God glory. Ultimately, Christians aren't recognized by *what* we know but *who* we know.

This was the case for two of Jesus's apostles in the early church—Peter and John (Acts 4:1-22). They stood on trial before some very important religious leaders who demanded answers and explanations. *How and why had they healed a lame man? Why were they preaching about the resurrection?* When Peter responded to the council, he spoke through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8). The answer to the religious leaders'

questions boiled down to a name they didn't want to hear: Jesus Christ.

Peter and John were not the kind of men with verified blue check marks on their public profiles. They weren't Ivy League grads or on track to launch the next big tech startup. They weren't about to whip out a bunch of research studies on healing and quote famous philosophers on the resurrection. They were just common men—average guys you'd walk by and not even notice. But their ordinariness was the perfect contrast to the brilliance of Christ.

As you go about life today and fumble to find a helpful piece of advice for a hurting friend or a clear and convincing response to your child's toughest spiritual question or the right answer to this week's Bible study question, don't despair. If you know Christ, you already know the most important person and the most important truth (John 17:3). In spite of all you don't know, it could be your humble boldness and simple explanation of Jesus that cause your friend or your child or your fellow churchgoers to marvel and grow. Not because of you but because of him. And isn't that what you want after all?

Additional Reading

Acts 4:1-22

Jeremiah 9:23-24

John 17:3.

Questions for Reflection

I am weak

- Where are you on your journey of knowing God and understanding his Word? In what areas do you still fear looking weak and foolish, even if you've been a believer for a long time?
- Why is it so scary to not have all the answers? What do you hope to gain by having more Bible knowledge or theological prowess?

He is strong

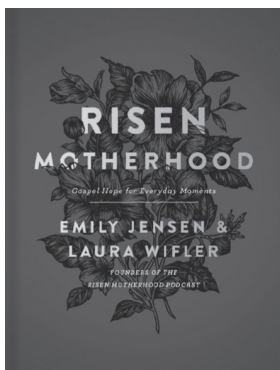
- How might believing the gospel, knowing Christ, and being filled with the Spirit equip you to glorify God in a regular situation today?
- How does knowing that God is able to work mightily in and through anyone (even “uneducated, common men”) give you hope and courage? What action steps might you take to share more boldly or keep learning?



ABOUT EMILY

Emily A. Jensen is an author, podcaster, and the cofounder and content director at *Risen Motherhood*, where she and her sister-in-law, Laura Wifler, help moms connect their faith to their everyday lives. Emily's greatest passion is knowing Christ and making him known—in her home, her community, and to the ends of the Internet.

When she's not writing, speaking, podcasting, or encouraging women on Instagram, you can find her prepping a meal, pulling weeds, playing in the backyard with her children, or huddled up with a good book.



Speaking of good books, Emily is the coauthor of *Risen Motherhood* which has sold over 100,000 copies and been translated into multiple languages. Along with Laura, Emily walks readers through the redemptive story and reveals how the gospel applies to moms' everyday lives, bringing hope, freedom, and joy in every area of motherhood.

Emily lives in central Iowa with her husband and their five children.

Learn more about Emily and the *Risen Motherhood* book at **[EmilyAJensen.com](https://emilyajensen.com)**.