

Chris Bolinger has created an instrument that God will use to change men's lives! *Daily Strength for Men* is a practical, powerful platform for leadership and life change. Nothing moves the heart of a man more than a deep dive into God's Word, and that kind of intentionality is driven home on each and every page of the material. I highly recommend *Daily Strength* for every man, no matter what his particular season of life.

– *Dr. Craig Fry, president, Christian Leadership Concepts*

If our hearts are the heart of the matter to God, men will find *Daily Strength* to be the spiritual omega-3 they need to heed the admonition in Proverbs 4:23 to “guard your heart because from it flow the springs of life” (ISV).

– *Doug Pollock, speaker and author of God Space*

Daily Strength for Men helps the men in your church get spiritually healthy by pointing them to God's Word every day.

– *Charles Arn, president of Church Growth Inc.
and author of Side Door*

A 365-DAY DEVOTIONAL



DAILY
STRENGTH
FOR MEN

CHRIS BOLINGER

BroadStreet
P U B L I S H I N G

BroadStreet Publishing® Group, LLC
Savage, Minnesota, USA
BroadStreetPublishing.com

DAILY STRENGTH FOR MEN: A 365-DAY DEVOTIONAL

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978-1-4245-5753-0 (faux leather)

978-1-4245-5754-7 (e-book)

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Cover design by Chris Garborg at garborgdesign.com
Typesetting by Katherine Lloyd at theDESKonline.com

Printed in China
18 19 20 21 22 5 4 3 2 1

FOREWORD

By David Murrow

Spending consistent time in the Bible can literally turn your life around. Research indicates that men who engage with the Bible at least four times a week are:

- 57 percent less likely to abuse alcohol
- 68 percent less likely to stray from their marriage vows
- 61 percent less likely to view porn
- 74 percent less likely to gamble

These men are also:

- More than twice as likely to share their faith and disciple others
- More than four times as likely to memorize Scripture

Obviously, the Bible is good for men. But how do we get men to read it? Chris Bolinger has written a devotional that guides men into God's Word. *Daily Strength for Men* is unique in three ways:

1. Whereas most devotionals give readers a new passage each day, *Daily Strength for Men* camps out on a single passage for two days. Men read the same passage twice, which gives the "seed" a greater chance to take root in their hearts.
2. Bolinger mixes things up by focusing on devotions and prayer one day, Scripture reading and application the next. I appreciate the variety this brings to my devotional time.
3. *Daily Strength for Men* is drawn completely from the Old Testament. Bolinger mines these "forgotten books" and introduces men to the riches found there.

One more thing: I'm a bit of an odd duck. Most men read their devotions in the morning, but I've always been a "Bible-before-bed" kinda guy. I've found

these devotions make great evening reading and serve as a guide for my bedtime prayers.

I hope you enjoy this collection as much as I have.

David Murrow

Director, Church for Men

Author, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*

INTRODUCTION

It was early on a cold Ohio morning in December, and I was meeting with my “CLC brothers,” as I did every Friday. We studied the Bible, shared our lives in our prayer requests and our discussions, and encouraged each other, often citing passages of Scripture. I had come to rely on the strength that I drew from these men, strength that I couldn’t seem to get on my own. Christian Leadership Concepts stresses the importance of having a daily quiet time, but I had found it difficult to get much out of my own Bible readings, and my devotions had been inconsistent at best.

As I left that December meeting, I decided to find a devotional that would give me a daily shot of strength from God’s Word. But I wanted more than that. I wanted to be challenged to go further in my walk with Christ. I wanted stories of men who had overcome obstacles, who had kept their faith under pressure. And I wanted encouragement, because I felt discouraged by the weight of the challenges and stress in my life and the lives of my friends and family members.

After my two-month search for a devotional came up empty, I decided to write my own. I started by listing Bible verses that I found encouraging. Once I had a good set of those, I considered how each verse struck me. Sometimes, a verse made me think of a person who had impacted me. Other times, a verse made me think of a film, a song, or a story.

My notes became devotions. After a few months of work, I stopped to see where I was and discovered two things. First, every verse that I had used was from the Old Testament, thirty-nine books on which I and many other Christian men focus little attention. Second, even though I had written the devotions, each still made me stop and think how I could apply the verse to my life.

I decided each verse needed two days of treatment. The first day would be my thoughts. The second day would include Scripture passages for context and enrichment, and questions for reflection and application.

The result is *Daily Strength for Men*. I pray that it strengthens you and brings you closer to God, the source of our strength.

Check out DAILYSTRENGTHFORMEN.COM for additional resources, including a toolkit, which will help you get the most out of this devotional.

CREATED FOR YOU



In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

—*Genesis 1:1*

When you read the first verse in the Bible, do you ask why? Why did God create the heavens? Why did God create the earth?

The answer to these “why” questions will astound you.

For decades, or even centuries, we have been told that there is nothing special about the earth. After all, there are 100 billion galaxies in the universe and 100 billion stars in our own galaxy, the Milky Way. Orbiting around many of these stars are planets.¹

Our planet, therefore, is just one of trillions and trillions of planets in the universe. If there is intelligent life on our planet, then there has to be intelligent life on other planets. In fact, the universe must be teeming with intelligent life.

Earth is insignificant. We, the intelligent inhabitants of earth, are insignificant.

In an interview with Lee Strobel, Dr. Guillermo Gonzales, who earned his PhD in astronomy at the University of Washington, paints a very different picture of our home planet:

We’ve found that our location in the universe, in our galaxy, in our solar system, as well as such things as the size and rotation of the Earth, the mass of the moon and sun and so forth—a whole range of factors—conspire together in an amazing way to make Earth a habitable planet. And even beyond that, we’ve found that the very same conditions that allow for intelligent life on Earth also make it strangely well-suited for viewing and analyzing the universe.

Dr. Jay Wesley Richards, who coauthored the book *The Privileged Planet* with Gonzales, tells Strobel, “And we suspect this is not an accident. In fact, we raise the question of whether the universe has been literally designed for discovery.”²

God created the heavens and the earth for us, the people of earth. He did it so that we could live and, just as importantly, so that we could study and appreciate every aspect of his creation.

Passage: Verse in Context — Genesis 1:1–2, 26–28

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ... Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Related Passage — Isaiah 45:18–19

For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): “I am the LORD, and there is no other. I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.”

Questions for Reflection and Application

- Why did God create you?
- How do the verse, the passages, and the devotion change your views on God? On yourself?
- How do you demonstrate, to God and others, that you are a special creation, important to God? What are two changes you can make in your approach to life to show more honor to your Creator?
- Who are three people whom you can influence, through your words and actions, to realize that they, like you, are creations of a loving God?

*Father, thank you for not only the “what” of Creation but also the “why.”
Amen.*

“LET THERE BE LIGHT”



And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

—*Genesis 1:3*

The first time that God speaks in the Bible, it is to create light. Light is essential to life. In the process of photosynthesis, green plants absorb energy from light and use this absorbed light energy to convert carbon dioxide and water into carbohydrates. The carbohydrates feed the cells of the plant, thereby enabling the plant to live and grow. As a by-product of photosynthesis, plants give off oxygen, which people and animals need to survive.

Light, of course, is also essential to seeing. Of the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch—sight is dominant. We perceive up to 80 percent of all impressions by means of our sight.

In chapter 8 of the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (v. 12). That life is not just life in heaven after we die but fullness of life here on earth.

Many other Bible verses mention light. In fact, the word “light” appears over 250 times in the Bible. Some verses that discuss light are:

- “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1a).
- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).
- “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (Isaiah 9:2).
- “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14).
- “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

God gave us light so that we can live. He gave us the light of Christ so that we can understand and appreciate his goodness. In everything.

Passage: Verse in Context — Genesis 1:3–5

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Related Passage — John 1:1–10

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

Questions for Reflection and Application

- Why do you think that John refers to life as “the light of men”? Why does he refer to Jesus as the “true light”?
- Do you take the benefits of sunlight for granted? What are some other things that you take for granted?
- What strength can you draw from the reminder that God created everything, including light, without which there would be no life on earth?
- How is God calling you to live differently starting today?

*God, you are the maker of light and, like light, you are essential in my life.
Amen.*

GOD'S "SILENCE"



“... for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.”

—Deuteronomy 20:4

The people of Israel didn't have to look too far to spot their enemies. Those enemies were all around, and Israel battled regularly against them. Chapter 20 of Deuteronomy begins with this: “When you go out to war against your enemies ...”

Unless you are serving in the military, you probably will not be going to war anytime soon, right? Wrong. You already are at war. You're fighting a battle against your enemies every day. And just as God was with the Israelites, God goes with you to fight for you against your enemies.

In chapter 10 of the book of Daniel, Daniel has a troubling vision. It's so troubling that Daniel prays to God for understanding and begins to mourn, refusing to anoint himself, eat meat or other choice food, or drink wine. Three weeks later, an angel finally appears and explains the vision.

What took so long? The angel explains that God dispatched him as soon as Daniel prayed, but the angel was ambushed by a “prince of the kingdom of Persia” (v. 13). That prince, or demon, was so strong and the battle was so fierce that after three weeks the angel and the demon were still deadlocked. The archangel Michael had to join the fray and battle the demon so that the angel could go and meet with Daniel.

When we pray, God hears us, and God responds, often immediately. But our requests are coming from the frontlines of a fierce war that has been raging since the dawn of time, and our enemies are doing everything they can to prevent God's response from getting through.

God and his angel armies are with us and fighting for us against our enemies. Sometimes when God seems silent it's because his troops have their hands full.

Hang in there.

Passage: Verse in Context — Deuteronomy 20:1–4

“When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people and shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.’ ”

Related Passage — Daniel 10:10–14

And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, “O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

Questions for Reflection and Application

- How often do you get a quick answer to prayer? How often does it seem like you get no answer?
- How do you feel when you read that there is a war raging in the spiritual realm? Does it feel real? Have you ever witnessed anything that persuaded you that the war is real?
- Where are you most vulnerable? Where is the devil most likely to strike you? What should you do about it?

God, I thank you that you and your angel armies fight for me in battles that I can't see and have trouble imagining. Please give me patience when my prayers seem to go unanswered. Amen.

YOU CAN DEPEND ON ME



Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come;
you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

—*Psalm 71:3*

One of the most popular film genres of all time is the western. Westerns became popular because Americans romanticized the frontier spirit of the Old West, where people succeeded because of hard work, determination, rugged independence, and self-reliance.

The icon of the western was Marion Morrison, better known as John Wayne. He appeared in 142 films, most of them westerns, and was a top box office draw for three decades. Wayne's hit films included *Red River*, *The Longest Day*, *How the West Was Won*, and *True Grit*. Here are some famous lines uttered by Wayne in films:

- “Well, there are some things a man just can't run away from.”
- “Sorry don't get it done, Dude.”
- “Well, son, since you haven't learned to respect your elders, it's time you learned to respect your betters.”²⁸

In the films of John Wayne, dependence is a sign of weakness. In the world of David, dependence was a necessity.

David was the king of Israel. During his forty-year reign, he ruled over a united kingdom, led them to victory in many battles, expanded the area of the kingdom, and paved the way for his son, Solomon, to build the Temple. David recognized, however, that his successes in life were blessings from God. He owed his accomplishments, his position, his possessions, and his very life to God.

In Psalm 71, David admits that he needs God, every day. He prays that he can depend on God continually, as he has done throughout his life. David is not ashamed of his dependence on God; instead, he celebrates it. After all, the “God of angel armies” (see April 27–28) has commanded his troops to protect David.

God is the rock of refuge to which you can come any time you need to, Pilgrim.

Passage: Verse in Context — Psalm 71:1–12

In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame! In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me, and save me! Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come; you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man. For you, O LORD, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.

I have been as a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all the day. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent. For my enemies speak concerning me; those who watch for my life consult together and say, "God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is none to deliver him."

O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!

Questions for Reflection and Application

- How much value do you place on hard work, determination, rugged independence, and self-reliance? How much of your self-worth comes from what you have achieved and accomplished?
- How do you feel when you are unable to do something on your own and must depend on others?
- For what things are you completely dependent on God? For what additional things should you be?

Father, our world in the Western Hemisphere has the western movie mentality that dependence means weakness. Remind me that reliance on you equals strength. Amen.

JUNE 12

Day 1

GROUNDHOG DAY



For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

—*Psalm 84:10a*

Imagine a few days in the vacation spot of your dreams. Now imagine a month there. Six months. A year. Over two-and-a-half years. One day in the presence of God is better than one thousand days there.

In the film *Groundhog Day*, TV weatherman Phil Connors spends at least a thousand days not in God's courts, or even in his ideal vacation spot, but in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, a town that he hates. Every day he wakes up in Punxsutawney on February 2, or Groundhog Day. He is doomed to repeat the same day, in the same place, over and over again.

After learning that his actions have no consequences (no matter what he does, including killing himself, he always wakes up the next morning and it's February 2 again), Phil decides to seduce his producer, Rita, by talking with her and learning what she likes. When that fails, Phil begins to consider what he can do to help others in the town. Along the way, he learns a variety of skills, such as playing the piano, speaking French, and sculpting ice.

Eventually, Phil becomes a beloved man in Punxsutawney, even though to all of the townspeople he is there only one day. He also wins over Rita and, near the end of the film, he confesses to her, "No matter what happens tomorrow, or for the rest of my life, I'm happy now, because I love you."

The more we appreciate God and all that he has done, and does every day for us, the more that we want to worship him, talk with him, study his Word, and just be with him. We want to be in his courts. The good news for us is that we can be in his courts at any time and all the time, regardless of where we happen to be on this earth.

Even in Punxsutawney.

Passage: Verse in Context — Psalm 84:1–13

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.

O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed!

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

Questions for Reflection and Application

- What is the vacation spot of your dreams? What would you do there?
- What is your favorite way to spend time with God? How often do you do that?
- How can you be more disciplined in spending time with God? What are some ways that you can remind yourself of what God has done for you, especially when you are busy or stressed?

Father, your unbelievable goodness is all around me, and yet I choose to complain. Forgive me! Thank you for allowing me to be in your courts, right now. Amen.

FORGIVING EVERY PENNY



For you, O LORD, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

—*Psalm 86:5*

Do you ever get tired of forgiving someone? Peter certainly did.

After Jesus explained to his disciples how to respond when “your brother sins against you” (Matthew 18:15), with the goal of getting your brother to repent so that you can forgive him, Peter asked, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” (v. 21). He was stunned by Jesus’ response: not seven times but seventy-seven times—or, in some translations, seventy times seven times (v. 22).

Jesus then told a parable about a king who wants to settle accounts with servants who owe him money. One servant owes the equivalent of two hundred thousand years’ wages for a laborer. (If a laborer earns \$25,000 a year, then the servant owes \$5 billion.) Incredibly, the king forgives the entire debt.

As soon as he leaves the presence of his unbelievably gracious king, the forgiven servant finds a fellow servant who owes him one hundred days’ wages (or using our previous math, about \$8,000). The forgiven servant demands that his \$8,000 debt be paid. When it can’t, he has his fellow servant thrown in prison. When the king finds out, he throws the first servant in prison for the rest of his life. Jesus ended the parable with this sobering statement: “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (v. 35).

Why does God command us to forgive those who sin against us? Every time? Because God forgives us. Every time. He never gets tired of forgiving us, because he is good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on him. The debt that each of us has accumulated with God is more than \$5 billion. A lot more. We can’t count it all.

And he forgives every penny.

Passage: Verse in Context — Psalm 86:1–10

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for to you do I cry all the day. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. For you, O LORD, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me.

There is none like you among the gods, O LORD, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O LORD, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Related Passage — Matthew 18:15–17

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Questions for Reflection and Application

- Why doesn't God get tired of forgiving you?
- What sins do you tend to commit over and over? Why do you do that? How can you break yourself of your patterns of sin?
- Think of some people who have sinned against you repeatedly. Why have they done that? How do their sins against you compare to your sins against others?

Father, when I refuse to forgive someone's sins against me, remind me of how much you paid to forgive mine. Amen.

THE GIFT OF TODAY



The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

—*Lamentations* 3:22–23

“Don’t you just love New Year’s? You can start all over. Everybody gets a second chance.”

So says Lenore, a “friend” of Lieutenant Dan, in the waning seconds of 1971 in the film *Forrest Gump*. Her statement foreshadows a fresh start for Lieutenant Dan in 1974. The man who had become a bitter alcoholic after losing his legs in Vietnam decides to follow Forrest to Louisiana and become his first mate on a shrimp boat. When Hurricane Carmen destroys all shrimping boats except Forrest’s, the pair makes a fortune, and Dan makes his peace with God.

Many of us can’t wait a few years, or even a year, for a fresh start. But we don’t have to. God offers us the opportunity for one every morning, as Chris Rice reminds us in his song “Life Means So Much.”

In the first verse, Rice compares today to the latest page in your journal. What will you write in that journal? A curse or a blessing? In the second verse, Rice compares today to the latest deposit of time in your bank account. Everyone is paid the same: twenty-four hours each. How will you spend your currency? Will you help someone else or look out only for yourself?

After each verse comes Rice’s prayer as the chorus: “Teach us how to make each day count, God, because life means so much.”

One man understood and demonstrated the value of life, sings Rice near the end of the song. That man gave his life for you, to demonstrate the value of your life.

God is faithful. His love is steadfast. He offers us unending mercies, including new mercies—and a fresh start—every morning.

Every day of your life is a gift. Make the most of it, starting today.

Passage: Verse in Context — Lamentations 3:19–27

Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Related Passage — Psalm 30:1–5

I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit. Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

Questions for Reflection and Application

- In what area or areas of your life are you longing for a fresh start? Why?
- If today were January 1, then what would your New Year’s resolution be?
- How are God’s mercies new every morning? How can you take advantage of that?
- How can you make the most of today? Tomorrow? Every day after?

God, teach me to count the days and make the days count. I often forget how precious every moment of life is. Amen.

NEW AND IMPROVED



His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

—*Daniel 7:14b*

In the 1980s, Procter & Gamble, long the king of marketing consumer products, was losing share of the \$4 billion United States paper diaper market to its rival Kimberly-Clark. The K-C's Huggies® brand had become the market leader, surpassing P&G's Pampers® brand. What was P&G to do?

Pampers became New Pampers. Then Ultra Pampers. Then Ultra Pampers Plus. Unable to top the combination of “Ultra” and “Plus” in the product name, P&G went back to Pampers but made it gender-specific: Pampers for boys and Pampers for girls. Then it was Pampers Phases, which P&G called the world's first “developmental diapers.”⁹²

Consumer products companies such as P&G know that we crave the new. If we can't have brand new, then we want new and improved. Except when we don't.

Beginning in 1975, PepsiCo began hammering its rival Coca-Cola's flagship cola product with the “Pepsi Challenge.” Consumers did blind taste-tests of Coke® and Pepsi®, and the majority of the time they picked Pepsi. As Pepsi gained market share, Coca-Cola decided to reformulate Coke. The new, sweeter Coke hit the shelves in April 1985, horrifying loyal Coke drinkers and leading to nationwide protests. Just seventy-eight days after the introduction of “New Coke,” the company brought back its original formula, renamed Coca-Cola Classic, and phased out New Coke.⁹³

God doesn't need to pore over market research studies before deciding what to do. He is all-knowing, so he knows not only what we want but also, more importantly, what is best for us. Everything that he does is perfect, so he never has to change anything. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

In his visions, Daniel saw “the Ancient of Days” (God) put the Son of Man (Jesus) over all people (Daniel 7:9). His dominion will never end and his kingdom will never be destroyed.

God's dominion and kingdom are not new or new and improved. But they are reassuring. Every day.

Passage: Verse in Context — Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14

“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. ...

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

Related Passage — Hebrews 13:5–8

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Questions for Reflection and Application

- When has an “improved” product or an “improvement” in your life disappointed you? Alternatively, when has an improvement proved superior to its predecessor? What were the primary differences between detriments and enhancements?
- When you hear or read “Ancient of Days,” what images come to mind?
- What things in your life have stood the test of time? Why?

God, I thank you that I can rely on you to be the same—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Amen.

A BETTER MAN



Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

—Joel 2:13b

In the film *As Good As It Gets*, Melvin Udall is a self-absorbed loner with a severe case of obsessive-compulsive disorder. He is rude to everyone except Carol Connelly, the only server at his daily restaurant who can put up with him. He regularly berates Simon Bishop, a gay artist in the apartment next to his.

After Simon is assaulted and hospitalized, Melvin is intimidated into caring for Simon's dog and becomes emotionally attached to it. Not wanting to give up the dog, Melvin invites Simon to move into his guest room. To keep Carol working at the restaurant, Melvin pays the medical expenses for her acutely asthmatic son.

Simon is unable to pay his medical bills and approaching bankruptcy, so Melvin agrees to drive him to Baltimore so that Simon can ask his estranged parents for money. Carol comes along. At a restaurant, Melvin gives Carol the best compliment of her life—because of her, he has started doing something he hates: taking pills for his OCD. “You make me want to be a better man,” he says. But a few minutes later, he once again says something rude, driving her away.

When they return to New York, Carol tells Melvin that she does not want him in her life anymore. Simon convinces Melvin to go see Carol, and the two walk to a nearby bakery. Outside it, Melvin tells Carol that she is the “greatest woman alive” and kisses her. As he opens the door of the bakery for Carol, Melvin looks down to see that he has stepped on a crack. Unphased, he proceeds into the bakery.

Melvin's love for Carol makes him a better man. Our love for God can make us better men too. God knows our hearts. When we stray, he encourages us to return to him, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

God is as good as it gets.

Passage: Verse in Context — Joel 2:10–17

The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, “Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

Questions for Reflection and Application

- Before Joel’s call to return to God, there is an implied warning. What is it?
- When do you judge others by their outward actions? Why? How do you feel when others judge you by your actions without knowing your background, situation, and intent?
- What are some ways that God has made you a “better man”? Where would you like God’s help to improve?

*God, you make me a “better man” when I spend time in your presence.
Amen.*

WHOLE AGAIN



“But for you who fear my name,
the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”

—*Malachi 4:2a*

Most of us need healing.

The expression “time heals all wounds” is bunk. Time doesn’t heal anything. Only the Great Physician can heal us. As Malachi tells us, God has the healing that we need in his wings. All we have to do is ask. Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you. ... If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:7, 11).

But we don’t ask. Instead we project an image that everything is fine and, privately, try to fix ourselves and everything else on our own. This is captured in the song “Missing Love” by the group PFR. The song laments the fact that life becomes about surviving wounds and protecting our hearts from further damage. We long to live in freedom from fear, shame, and the lie that we’ll never change. But in our hiding we end up missing the love and the healing that Christ offers. Thankfully, our Savior pursues us relentlessly and does not rest until we are healed and whole.

The Gospel of Mark includes the story of a blind man named Bartimaeus. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, who was begging on the roadside, called out to Jesus, asking for mercy. People nearby told him to be quiet, but he yelled louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stopped and called Bartimaeus, who threw off his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus asked Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus replied, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well” (Mark 10:48–51). Immediately, Bartimaeus could see. And he followed Jesus out of Jericho.

Jesus has the same question for you: “What do you want me to do for you?” Ask for healing. He’ll make you whole again.

Passage: Verse in Context — Malachi 4:1–6

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Questions for Reflection and Application

- If Jesus were to ask you, “What do you want me to do for you?,” how would you respond? Would Jesus do what you ask? Why or why not?
- Where has your trust been broken? Where are you protecting your heart? Where are you living as a captive instead of as one who is free? What lies about you have you taken to heart?
- Where else do you need healing in your life? Where do you go for healing?
- What is one step you can take to model yourself after Bartimaeus when asking for healing?

Jesus, I want you to heal me and make me whole. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Bolinger is an “average Joe” Christian who writes for guys like him. After a twenty-seven-year career in high tech—including stints as a software engineer, product manager, and entrepreneur—Chris left the tech world to focus on providing resources to small church leaders and other Christians. While *Daily Strength for Men* is his first book, he has written more than a hundred articles for newspapers and other publications. He has interviewed Christian authors and church leaders for his radio show and was an executive producer of the film *The Song*.

Chris is a competitive tennis player from a family of athletes and has coached basketball and tennis at the junior high and high school levels. A native of Akron who moved back to northeast Ohio in 1999, Chris sheepishly admits to being a fan of the hapless Cleveland Browns.

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