



STRENGTH
FOR TODAY

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for Men

365
DEVOTIONS

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Strength for Today for Men

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Introduction

All men have an incredibly important role. We have the opportunity to lead younger generations through turbulent waters, model integrity in relationships, and provide foundations for wise decision-making. There are times we might feel like we've got things all figured out, and other times we feel unworthy of our generation-impacting responsibilities.

Time spent in God's presence empowers you to be a man of character, strength, and leadership. This devotional book encourages you to daily do the work you have been called to. Meditate on a Bible verse, a thought-provoking message, and a prayer designed to challenge, equip, and encourage you to till the soil set before you.

Every day for a year, prayerfully read one page, be marked by its words, and strive to be the man God has called you to be.

JANUARY 2

Your Cross

Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

MATTHEW 16:24 NIV

Following Jesus is a path of great joy but also real sacrifice. Often when we hear the word sacrifice, we think of maybe a mission field or giving away a large amount of money. That's all well and good and is sometimes what God is calling us to do.

But more often, sacrifice looks like waking up at 3 a.m. to help out a sick friend, taking time during your evening to volunteer at a local soup kitchen, or praying with a co-worker. These are the little sacrifices that, when practiced through the course of years, reap the greatest rewards. What might be your "cross" today? How can you take it up and, in so doing, follow Jesus?

Father, help me to be ready to sacrifice my time and energy for those closest to me. I desire that I might love like you love. Give me strength to do this.

JANUARY 3

Affirmation

Jacob took the food to his father.

“My father?” he said. “Yes, my son,” Isaac answered.

“Who are you—Esau or Jacob?”

GENESIS 27:18 NLT

Isaac had always preferred his older son, Esau, to his younger son, Jacob. After all, Esau could hunt and possessed other masculine attributes. Meanwhile, Jacob hung out at home and was also a little conniving while Esau was simpler. Isaac’s heart gravitated toward his older boy. Near the end of Isaac’s life, Jacob, in a crazy effort to take Esau’s inheritance, dressed up like his older brother and deceived his aging father. Jacob was a bit of a sneak, but can you imagine knowing that you’re second to your brother when it comes to Dad’s love? That’s hard to swallow.

Even though this situation is in some ways a little far-fetched, experience reminds us how common it is. Many of us live with an affirmation vacancy, a place where we didn’t receive like we desired. The trick is to remember that when we feel the need for love, we need to remember God, who gave his one and only Son so that we might be called his kids. That’s a love that can heal affirmation vacancies. That’s a love that provides an example of how to let our love spill out to those around us.

Father, teach me your ways. Help me to love like you do! I want to know your love for myself and to pass it on to others.

JANUARY 4

Our Father

“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father....’”

MATTHEW 6:9 NIV

Throughout the Bible, we find many titles for God. We learn that God is creator and powerful, that he is sovereign and knows all. But in the New Testament, when Jesus is sharing how his followers should pray, he calls him, “Our Father.” Let that sink in.

The infinite, sovereign Creator God wants you to know him as “Dad.” Not only that, but Jesus speaks about God being the type of father who scans the horizon, looking for lost sons and daughters, and then runs to them when he sees even a hint of them (Luke 19). God is a father, and the Father’s love is intimate and protective and yearns to know and be known.

God, you are all-powerful, but you also desire intimacy. You want to be known as Dad. Help me to know you as a kind father today.

JANUARY 5

Hallowed Be

“Hallowed be your name.”

MATTHEW 6:9 NIV

When most people hear the word holy, they think “moral” or “religious.” That’s not exactly wrong, but it misses the rich biblical meaning. Holy really means “set apart” or “other.” A few theologians have suggested that when we see holy, we should think of “wholly other.” God is perfect; we’re not. God is all-powerful; we’re not. You get the idea. In the Old Testament, priests had to perform certain purity rituals to come near God. Why? Because God is holy and they weren’t. To approach God, they had to purify themselves, becoming holy. Do not duplicate.

It’s interesting that Jesus says we should call God “Father” but also know he is holy. Jesus wants us to hold these two important truths together. God is beyond, and God is near. God is powerful, and God is meek. God is a warrior, and God is loving. It’s as if Jesus, right at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer, was inviting us into the beautiful mystery of who God is. When you reflect on this, you may start to stagger. It may blow you away. And if it does, you’re on the right track.

Oh God, all-powerful and holy God, intimate and loving Father. Help me to be amazed by you. May I draw near to you today.

JANUARY 6

Your Will Be Done

“Your kingdom come, your will be done.
On earth as it is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 6:10 NIV

In the ancient world, a kingdom was a place where the values and way of life that the king desired were put into practice. As you can imagine, this could be good or bad depending on the king. Jesus is the ultimate good King. Throughout the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), he heals the sick; includes the social, spiritual, and racial outcasts into his family; and ultimately makes a public spectacle of the world's power by triumphing over it through death. The kingdom of Jesus is like no other.

As we align ourselves with this God who is both beyond and near, we must take up the cause of his kingdom. This can be hard. Within each of us is a little ruler that, left alone, would set up a kingdom that runs according to our basic desires and wants. As we learn to pray like Jesus, we must lay down our kingdoms and take up his kingdom mission. This doesn't mean that everyone becomes a pastor. It doesn't mean that we have to live at the church. It does mean that we, like Jesus, should have a heart for the outcast and vulnerable. It does mean we should familiarize ourselves with sacrifice. And it does mean that we should make Jesus our first allegiance—in all areas of life.

God, give me strength to live for your kingdom. Give me your power to love my family, my coworkers, and my neighbors. Help me to desire your kingdom!

JANUARY 7

Daily Bread

“Give us today our daily bread.”

MATTHEW 6:11 NIV

God is not concerned only with your spiritual needs. He is interested and desires to be recognized in and through all things; after all, he is the one who made it all. Yep, that even means the food you eat.

Previous generations had a much more intimate relationship with their food. They often raised and slaughtered the meat they ate. They depended on the rain and the sun to be “enough.” While we can just pick up a loaf of bread, previous generations saw the wheat grow from the soil. So the prayer below might make more intuitive sense to a group of Jews or Christians from a few centuries ago. Still, when we pray for our “daily bread,” we recognize that God is God of every square inch of creation. We remember that he made it all and cares for all of us. And we then remember that everything, even a slice of toast in the morning, is a gift of grace.

God, thank you for the easily forgotten gifts: for food and friendship, family and employment. You are generous, and I thank you for being my provider.

JANUARY 8

Forgive As

“Forgive us our debts,
as we have also forgiven our debtors.”

MATTHEW 6:12 NIV

Forgiveness is one of those words that sounds beautiful but is terribly hard to put into practice. Perhaps that's the best description of it: a beautiful difficulty. Forgiveness shows up as a beautiful difficulty when a grown woman finds the strength to forgive a mean stepfather and finds the freedom that forgiveness always brings. A beautiful difficulty takes place when a husband says, “I love you, and I forgive you,” to his wife who has just admitted to a moral struggle. This beautiful difficulty shows up when a business owner hugs an employee who has just been caught cutting corners.

However, the best picture of forgiveness as a beautiful difficulty is the cross. On the cross Jesus bore the difficult weight of our sin and offered the beautiful gift of divine forgiveness. When we understand that beautiful difficulty, our calls to forgiveness become a bit less difficult.

Oh God, thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you for the cross. Help me to remember that you forgave me, all of me, and I will remember to forgive those who have hurt or offended me.

JANUARY 9

Lead Us Not

**“Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”**

MATTHEW 6:13 NIV

Jesus’ prayer concludes with a request to not be led into temptation. Sometimes when we’re struggling to overcome a temptation, we find ourselves more likely than ever to start focusing on it. The second a temptation is mentioned is the moment we can’t get it out of our head. Just say the words ice cream to someone who’s counting calories and you’ll know what I mean. The solution to overcoming temptation is to focus on something better than what is tempting us. Do not duplicate.

There’s a reason why Scripture speaks multiple times of fixing our eyes on Jesus. When our eyes are fixed on him, temptations become “strangely dim.” Why? Because our gaze is on something far better than the diversions our culture throws at us. Indeed, our gaze is on the one whom our hearts truly crave.

God, you are worthy of my complete focus. Help me to see you in your power and strength today. May I get a glimpse of you in your love. Then I will not slip into distractions.

JANUARY 10

Be One

“That all of them may be one, Father,
just as you are in me and I am in you.”

JOHN 17:21 NIV

A team will rise and fall based on how unified it is. It doesn't matter if it's a company, a platoon, a soccer team, or a family. Relational fracture in a team environment leads to failure. The 2004 United States Olympic basketball team is one example. Although they were the best players in the world, they fell short of gold. This happened because each person wanted to be the star; they weren't unified. A team's fracture leads to a team's failure. It's that simple.

Simple, sure, but hard to put into practice. The second you have any type of team, you have broken and rebellious human beings in the same environment, and there's bound to be tension. Like porcupines cuddling in the cold, we often hurt each other as we seek connection. But just as often as there is fracture, there is also the opposite—harmony. When two voices harmonize, a beautiful song can result. The same is true when lives merge in a team environment. This is why Jesus prays that his disciples (throughout all ages of the church) might be “one.” Jesus wants harmony, not fracture.

God, today I pray for all the relationships in my life. I pray that I would be, through your work, a harmonizing voice, a team player, and a loving friend. Help me with this, God, because by myself, I slip up and make it about me.

JANUARY 11

Proof

“May they also be in us
so that the world may believe
that you have sent me.”

JOHN 17:21 NIV

The proof is in the pudding the old adage says, meaning the only thing that really matters is if something works. You get it, right? In the end, the advertising and sale price mean nothing if the product falls apart right when you open it.

Jesus continues to pray for unity, suggesting that when the church is unified, the world will believe. The proof of the church is in the unity here, we might say. That means that when it comes to unity, there is something on the line: our spiritual integrity and our testimony to a world that needs to know God's love.

God, help me to radiate your love so the world will know your love. May I live a life of unity so the world will know your power and love!

JANUARY 12

Our Helper

*"I have given them the glory that you gave me,
that they may be one as we are one."*

JOHN 17:22 NIV

Have you ever been asked to do something, maybe a particular job at work or an essay in a class, without the proper resources or training to accomplish the goal? If so, what was the result? More often than not, it's suboptimal. When it comes to Christian unity, Jesus has thankfully not left us under resourced! In the above verse, Jesus describes Christian unity as a reachable goal. Not because we're really talented or incredibly friendly. Nope, from Jesus' perspective, Christian unity is possible because he's given us his glory, which is God's very presence in the life of his believers. The presence of God in the followers of Christ brings real and lasting Christian unity.

In a way, this is encouraging: Jesus hasn't left us to figure it out. He's given us a helper, his Holy Spirit. But, in another way, this means we have to work at it. Unity doesn't come naturally; we have to yield to others and the Holy Spirit. We have to lay down our agendas. If we really want the unity that Christ has prayed we would experience, we have to keep in step with the Spirit, saying daily, "Not my will, but yours."

God, I confess I need you. Specifically, I need your Holy Spirit in my life. I want to see you work. I want to grow as a man. For that I need your presence. Please give me your strength today.

JANUARY 13

One Body

In Christ we, though many, form one body,
and each member belongs to all the others.

ROMANS 12:5 NIV

A bicycle has many parts. The handlebars help us turn corners or keep the bike straight while cruising downhill. The gears can shift with a touch of the fingers, helping us climb hills. The pedals that connect to the gears move the chain and the rear wheel. And the brakes let us stop when the light turns red. If we took one of these parts away, the bike wouldn't work or would be dangerous to ride.

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Now think of your family, your church, or even your workplace. There are those who are gifted with administration; they can organize and create systems. There are gregarious extroverts, always making new connections. Some have a kind and warm presence, the type that make you feel safe. Cautious and conservative personalities help us play it safe and not wade recklessly into new waters. Pioneers balance the cautious voices and challenge us to have faith and get out of the boat even when it's uncomfortable. Creative types imagine beautiful God-honoring creations that inspire us to be in awe of God. Then there are the straight shooters who can look you in the eye and tell you what you need to hear. If you took away one type of person from your family, church, or workplace, the difference would be noticeable.

God, help me to recognize and honor the diversity you have placed in my home, church, and workplace.

JANUARY 14

Legacy

“My prayer is not for them alone.
I pray also for those who will believe in me
through their message.”

JOHN 17:20 NIV

What do you think of when you hear the word legacy? Do you think about money? Or some family values passed down through generations? Jesus prayed the ultimate “legacy” prayer as the cross got closer. In that prayer he didn’t just pray for himself, though he was in the midst of crisis. He didn’t even pray just for his friends and followers, though they would soon face crisis. To save the ends of Jesus’ earthly life, he prayed for us. That is amazing. You. Me. The person in your small group who always shows up late. Everyone. Jesus, in one of his last moments on earth, thought about us.

What would it look like for you to think two or three generations beyond you? How might that affect your life? When you think about that, you start getting a vision for leaving a legacy, and you’re closer to having the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

God, give me a vision for my life that is bigger than me. I pray for a vision for my future that is even bigger than I can imagine; a God-sized vision. Help me to think about the legacy I am passing down. I desire it to be one that honors you. Please give me strength.

JANUARY 15

Set On

Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

PSALM 84:5 NIV

What is your heart set on? One way to tell is to think about what you spend your time thinking about. Another could be to consider where you spend your money or time. The psalmist says that the blessed have set their hearts on a journey. The word pilgrimage means a pursuit after something that has real meaning—something that is spiritually significant. So it's bigger than the next raise or a new house.

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The man who has set his heart on pilgrimage is pursuing something that is bigger than himself. The man who has set his heart on pilgrimage knows his weaknesses and moral deficiencies and is seeking to grow in those areas. The man who has set his heart on pilgrimage is pursuing Jesus. It is that man who is truly blessed.

Father, I want my heart focus to be on you. I don't want to settle for lesser things or smaller goals. I want your plans to be my plans. So I surrender. You will be my life journey's destination.

JANUARY 16

Heartbroken

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

NEHEMIAH 1:4 NIV

Have you ever experienced something in your life that upset you deeply? Typically, we see these experiences as negative, and they often are. But they also have the power to propel us toward action. A quick survey of history shows that the men who have affected the world most positively have been moved to action by some grave need, something that broke their heart. Nehemiah is one example. When he heard about the destruction of his hometown, his heart broke, and that led him to return to his hometown and work for its restoration. He surveyed the problem and got an understanding of what needed to be done. He gathered people to help restore the broken walls and structures. He persevered through challenges when people mocked his efforts. All of this happened because his heart broke when he heard some news.

So what gets close to breaking your heart right now? Is it a family you know that is in need? Is it neighborhood kids who need a good male influence? Is it for people to know the loving kindness of God? When you're able to answer those questions, you may, like Nehemiah, be sent into action.

Father, help me to have a heart that breaks for the things that break your heart. Help me then know what to do.

JANUARY 17

Opposition

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said,
“What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it
would break down their wall of stones!”

NEHEMIAH 4:3 NIV

What do you do in the face of opposition? It's easy to let opposition push us into a sense of defeat. Other times it's easy to lash out, launching a counterattack at the person who opposes us. Perhaps hardest of all is to persevere, pressing through the opposition. You may remember that Nehemiah's heart had broken when he heard the news of his hometown lying in ruins. He went to the king and petitioned for help. For as long as it took to rebuild the wall, he met opposition. He didn't spout back insults or sink into defeat. Instead he found strength to persevere. His secret to this is found in prayer: the first thing he did when the critics raised their voices.

When you're seeking to make a positive impact, you will encounter opposition. The opposition comes internally as you experience self-doubt and find yourself distracted. The opposition comes externally as you hear the voices of critics and questioners. Whether the opposition is internal or external, the path of perseverance begins with prayer. It's when we pray that we are reminded by God of the urgency of what we're doing and find the strength to keep at it.

God, help me to persevere. Remind me of the urgency of caring for those around me. Remind me of the importance of showing your love in my neighborhood. Remind me of how the stakes are high.