

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 1

Last week we finished our teachings on child raising principles, and today we start a new series on how to live strong and encouraged. Sometimes the only one to encourage you is you. When we learn how to strengthen ourselves, we will reach our destiny, fulfil our God-born dreams, and be able to represent Jesus to the world.

We are drawing from the book by Bill Johnson with this title, "Strengthen yourself in the Lord", and I trust that we will learn together from his experience and wisdom. His life is having an amazing impact in the world in this present day.

So in this study we look at David and the secret to his promotion as king. God saw David in his obscurity as a shepherd, but recognised him as a man after God own heart, willing to do everything God wanted him to do. (Acts 13:22).

Why did God say this about him? Firstly, when nobody was looking, or calling prayer meetings, David was pouring out his heart in worship and prayer to God in the fields where he was tending his father's sheep. Although in his day worship was about the sacrifice of animals, his heart led him beyond the letter of the law, to the sacrifice of praise from the heart. Secondly, David's battles against the lion and the bear, showed that he relied completely on God for victory. We know how he came fearlessly against Goliath, winning a great victory over the giant as well as the Philistines.

Then Samuel anointed him as king, but only 10-13 years later he actually became king. In the interim years David endured more difficulty, persecution and rejection than many of us face in a lifetime. King Saul, on the other hand, who

did not face these tests, lacked the strength of character that only comes by winning private battles. His weakness as well as his growing desire for popularity, led him to bring glory to himself, which ultimately destroyed him.

We know the story of how Saul persecuted David for more than 10 years, chasing him as far from the throne as possible. This was a test of David's ability to believe and walk in the Word over his life, even when the circumstances seemed to completely oppose his destiny.

In the village of Keilah, David rescued the Israelites from the Philistines, but these same people turned against him, wanting to turn him over to Saul. By this time David had some followers, but they were “*everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented.*” (1 Sam 22:2) They were the rejects of society, and David demonstrated a true king's heart by embracing these men, and spent the next 10 years training them in life and in warfare. Under his leadership, these “rejects” became his “mighty men”. Interestingly at least four of these men ended up killing giants, just as David had done. So if you want to kill giants, follow a giant killer!

Eventually David and his men moved to Ziklag, a city given him by the Philistines. From there he did raids against the enemies of Israel. But he found himself rejected by the Israelites, and by the Philistines, and then coming home one day, he found the city burned and looted by the Amalekites; every wife, child and possession was gone. At the sight of this tragedy, even these men he had protected and provided for, now turned against him and talked about stoning him. 1 Sam 30:6 says, “*David was greatly distressed.*” But instead of running for his life, or becoming indignant and defending himself as their leader, it says, “*but David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.*” God gave him the strength to

master his own distress, to look past the offence of the men's rejection and to rally them together to get their families back. So they retrieved every person and possession that had been taken. His ability to strengthen himself, instead of collapsing under pressure, saved his life, but also enabled him to lead his men to victory. Only a short time later, Israel crowned David as king. His darkest moment led him to the back door of the throne room.

David went on to write the beautiful Psalms. He established an unprecedented form of worship in Jerusalem, he designed the Temple, and brought Israel into its Golden Age. But he was also named the forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus, who throughout eternity, will be identified as the Son of David, and will sit on David's throne. David was promoted to a place of such favour and influence with God that he altered the course of history forever.

Yet, David was not some kind of superhero, because we read the accounts of his sins. But if he who came into such favour with God, though he lived long before the blood of Jesus was shed, how much more should we, who are covered by that blood, be able to come into an even greater destiny. This is described in Rev 5:9-10 where speaking of Jesus it says, *"You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."* And Ephesians says that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places, so if Jesus is seated on the throne of David, then so are we!

The blood of Jesus was shed not only to save us from our sins, but also to restore us to a relationship of partnering with God, as kings and priests, bringing others under His rule and reign.

The fact is, while God call us "kings", the degree to which we walk in that position is a matter of *potential*. And as Larry Randolph

points out, God is not responsible for making us reach our potential. Even those prophetic words spoken over your life, was pointing to your potential, but it requires your participation. God wants us to become mature to think and act like Him out of our own free will. Then he can trust us with the secrets of His heart, because we will not use the favour for our own purposes, but for His.

God's **love** is the same for us all, but even Jesus had to grow in **favour** "*with God and man*". Why? He had to be tested. He was "*filled with the Holy Spirit*", was led into the wilderness where he was tested, and he returned "*in the power of the Spirit*" (Luke 4 tells us). Because he passed the test, the power of the word over his life, and the favour to walk in His potential, was released in a greater measure. So each of us must grow in favour if we are going to fulfil our destiny in God. God gives us favour in the measure our character can handle, taking us from glory to glory, faith to faith, and strength to strength.

David's life shows us that the ability to strengthen and minister to ourselves, is a vital skill that we must learn. That is going to develop our character to fulfil our potential as kings and priests. Everyone of us has a destiny to influence people around us, as leaders, not to dominate, but to serve, to provide protection and prosperity to all who come under our influence.

David as a leader took the initiative to seek God in the secret place. If we seek God's face and pursue our destiny for our lives when nobody is around, we will have the ability to strengthen ourselves. And if we learn to do this in times of testing, we will experience the breakthroughs that also release corporate blessing to others around us. In testing, God often allows us to stand alone, without friends even, to depend on Him and to learn to minister to ourselves.

Bill Johnson says, God has equipped us for great victory in our own lives, but also to release and establish the dominion of God around us. Yet, it is our responsibility to strengthen ourselves in the Lord. That will enable us to walk in that victory.

God bless you as we continue next week with this study of strengthening ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 2

Last week we spoke about David in the OT, who took the initiative to seek God and worship Him when no-one else was there. If we seek God's face when nobody is around, we are strengthening ourselves in the Lord, like David did. Doing this in times of testing, will let us experience breakthroughs that will also release corporate blessing to others around us.

We are studying the book by Bill Johnson, called, "Strengthen yourself in the Lord." Today we look at how to stay connected with our destiny. We know that there is a seemingly endless list of responsibilities to attend to in life, but Jesus showed us a simple lifestyle, and Solomon said, "*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life*". (Prov 4:23 NASB) So watching over our hearts will determine the outcome of our lives, and give us the Kingdom breakthrough we want to experience.

But we have to learn to understand our heart and the warning lights or signals of the heart. If the oil light comes on in my car, and my response is to put in petrol, I clearly do not understand what the light means. Worse still, the real problem has not been dealt with and will soon lead to a breakdown.

So with our hearts, we need to strengthen ourselves in the Lord, and this is by establishing foundational truths in our thinking, because our hearts and our thinking are closely connected. Prov 23:7 says, "*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he ...*" The Hebrew word for "*heart*" is the whole "*inner man*". Your heart is the seat of your mind, imagination, will, desires, emotions, affections, memory and conscience. It is also the centre of your communications with the Spirit of

God, and the Bible refers to the “*eyes of your heart*” as this place of revelation that enables us to have faith. Faith grows in our hearts, and there we understand the unseen realm that governs the visible realm. Our mind must be renewed and must focus on the truth of God's Kingdom, or else it will focus on the destructive reality of the enemy's kingdom, and the lies of the devil. So, “*Watch over your heart*”.

When we agree with spiritual truth, we will become what we are looking at. So our goal should be to focus and fix our eyes on Jesus, because we will become like the One we are looking at. The more revelation we have of Jesus, the more we will understand our own identity and purpose. The Holy Spirit who lives in us, gives us access to God's presence. But we have to take advantage of that access, and we do that by turning our focus on Him. In that place of communion with Him we come to know Him. And as we agree with the revelation of who He is, His life starts to flow into our lives and transforms us into His likeness. All fruitfulness in our lives flows from this place of intimacy with the Lord.

Because this fellowship with the Lord is the power source of our lives and connects us with our purpose as kings and priests, the king of darkness is always trying to change our focus to something else. The enemy knows our job is to destroy his works, and that we have the tools to do it. So he will use lies of accusation and intimidation to make the problems and conflicts in our lives appear bigger than the solutions we carry.

In every test, we will either choose to partner with God or with the enemy. We will either strengthen our character and faith to walk in our purpose, or we are tempted away from God into bitterness, doubt, anxiety and disappointment. But we should be like Nehemiah. When the enemy tried to distract him from God's agenda, he said, “*I am doing a great*

work and I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (Neh 6:3)

Bill Johnson says, "*Our co-mission (or calling) comes from our submission to His primary mission: to bring His Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.*" But if we are not convinced of our purpose, then we will entertain the enemy's lies and invite his destruction into our lives. Lamentations 1:9 says about Israel, "*She did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome.*" ESV. The key to either great purpose, or great destruction, lies in where we choose to sustain our focus. Jealously guard your intimacy with Him, for out of that you will understand your destiny.

Let us choose to listen to Him in the midst of our difficult circumstances, more than to any other voice of doubt or unbelief. Then we can act in the way He tells us to. The things David did to strengthen himself in the Lord in his tests, were the same things he did to connect with the Lord before his tests. God let David be tested because he was ready to pass those tests. God will always give us the tools beforehand that we need in each test, to pass it. God is a good Father. He never sets us up to fail – only to grow.

Remember, nothing surprises God, which is why He prepares us for what's ahead, and He gives us the tools we need. So let us start using them when we come up against a challenge. Our foundation response should be the burning conviction that God is good, always good! Then we won't doubt his goodness or fall into anxiety. Connect with what God wants to do in your difficult circumstances. Remind yourself who He is and what He has done in your life. Look back to a Scripture verse or a testimony or a prayer strategy or a prophetic word for example, that God gave you as a tool or key, to overcome in your present situation.

As you become more and more convinced that you are a person with a great identity and purpose, you will be prepared for the

moment you're standing in, and that all of heaven is waiting to back you up for victory in this moment. We need never to be concerned about what the enemy might be planning, because he has never been a threat to God. God could easily wipe out the whole kingdom of darkness in a moment. But he decided that it would be more beneficial and more glorious to share His victory with us, his sons and daughters, made in His image, to display his glory in the test.

So God not only prepares us for conflict, but He uses every situation to work together, to accomplish His purposes in our lives. He has already won. Our job is to align ourselves with the reality of the victory of the Cross, then we can see his purposes around us. With this perspective we will then know that the test is our assignment, our privilege and joy, to see impossibilities and problems bend their knees to the name of Jesus.

Though each of us has a different assignment, in line with his own gifts and talents, it is to one purpose – to establish the Kingdom “*on earth as it is in Heaven*”. Matthew 11:12 says, “*The Kingdom advances forcefully*”. It displaces our carnal attitudes and destroys the works of the devil around us. The safest place for us is to passionately pursue God and the plan to which He has called us. We cannot live in the defensive posture, protecting what we have, like the man who buried his one talent. The moment we take a back seat in our pursuit of the Kingdom, that is the moment we become exposed to fiery darts of deception.

Let us not allow circumstances to distract us from tending and guarding the fire in our hearts. Let us strengthen ourselves in the Lord. Watch the warning oil light of your heart. It's the oil of His Spirit that gives you everything you need, and that anoints you to fulfil your purpose to advance His Kingdom.

To summarise then, your destiny begins in your heart. The more you gaze on Jesus with the eyes of your heart, the more you see who you are becoming and what your destiny is. Then you can say, “*I am alive to burn for God, and to make Him known in this day.*”

God bless you until next week as we continue this study of strengthening ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 3

Last week we spoke about our destiny that begins in our hearts. The more we gaze on Jesus with the eyes of our heart, the more we see who we are becoming and what our destiny is. So the more revelation we have of Jesus, the more we will understand our own identity and purpose.

Today we look at thanksgiving that can disarm the powers of hell. We are studying Bill Johnson's book, "Strengthen yourself in the Lord".¹ Thess 5:16-18 says, "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***" Thanksgiving is an act of our own will, to do God's will. We rejoice, pray and thank Him, and that focuses us on God, so we can agree with His truth, no matter what we feel in that moment. This agreement is what attracts the strength and reality of Heaven into our lives and circumstances. And so we fulfil His will "*on earth as it is in heaven*".

Rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving are tools for strengthening ourselves in the Lord, and are meant to be ongoing in our lives, and not merely for crises and difficulties. So the things we practice as a lifestyle, equip us for difficulties when they come.

Thanksgiving acknowledges the truth that our lives are a gift from God, and that He is sovereign over all. God is extravagantly generous, and the life He has given us, is not to be a life of survival, but one of abundance and blessing. But like with a gift, if you don't understand what you have been given, you won't understand its purpose and be able to experience its benefit. Also with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, many people don't receive what the Lord has offered them, because they don't understand what these gifts are, or how

to use them. Some even reject these gifts, and this is real pride. Everyone knows the hurt when you give someone a gift, and it is rejected or not appreciated. So let us receive with thanksgiving the wonderful gifts of His Holy Spirit.

Thankfulness carries an attitude of humility. It is the only way to receive what God has given us, because it honours our relationship with Him and shows our trust in His goodness. God gives us “*every good and perfect gift*” to make us prosper and succeed in life, and also to show His love as an invitation to a relationship with Him. So let's practice thanksgiving as a lifestyle, because it sets us on a course to knowing God and to finding His plan for our lives.

When God tells us to give Him thanks, it is not to manipulate us. He wants us to thank Him, because thankfulness acknowledges the truth about our lives, that will set us free to see His greatness in us. When we withhold thanks from God, we actually cut ourselves off from who we are in Him.

Rom 1:18-21 says, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men, who suppress the truth by their wickedness ... so that men are without excuse, for although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*” Paul is saying that knowing God is not hard. All you have to do is glorify Him as God and be thankful. But when we fail to be thankful, our minds become futile and darkened; we are cut off from our purpose in Him. A dark heart is unmoved by things of the Lord, and cannot respond to his love, which is the very source of life. It goes on to say in that chapter, that a dark heart leads to perverted desires and into all kinds of sin.

Paul instructs us to “*give thanks in everything*”, as

thanksgiving keeps us sane and alive, not darkened in our minds. But being thankful in times of difficulty and adversity, is even more powerful. 1 Tim 4:1-5 says, *“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith, and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons ... these forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, (food offered to idols) which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”*

Dedication of foods or anything else to idols or demonic spirits, makes it defiled. But Paul says that combining thanksgiving with the Word and prayer is powerful enough to de-authorise this demonic power. Thanksgiving now creates a stronger consecration to the Lord. It sanctifies or sets apart, and actually changes the very nature of the food into something holy. This extends to every situation in your life in which you find other powers at work beside the power of God. Thanksgiving can change that.

Bill Johnson says that God only gives good gifts – He can't give things that are not good, because he does not have them. So giving thanks does not mean you thank God for your adversity that came from Him. But giving thanks in the *midst* of an adverse situation or difficulty intended to undermine your faith, enables you to set it apart to God and His purposes. When we give thanks, the weapon the enemy used to try to dislodge us from our divine purpose, now becomes the very thing that brings us closer to God. Thanksgiving cancels and destroys the very thing the enemy intended to use for our destruction. This alone should motivate us to give thanks!

But we don't battle against the enemy by focussing on the devil. We keep our focus on the King and His Kingdom, and the devil will be unseated by God's every-increasing rule released through our

lives. This shows how powerful thanksgiving is in times of adversity.

Psalms 100:4 says that we should “*enter His gates with thanksgiving.*” So thanksgiving brings us into the presence of God and connects us with what He is doing and saying in our lives. It helps us shift our focus on Him, and that releases heaven into our circumstances.

Bill Johnson says he has purposed to live in a way that nothing ever gets bigger than his consciousness of God's presence. The problems in life, or even conflict on TV can begin to weigh on his heart and grow bigger than his awareness of God. But he then purposely turns his focus on God to become more aware of His presence. God is bigger than that which weighs heavily on your heart. Other forces easily become the things that influence our lives and we begin to live defensively (meaning protecting ourselves against the enemy) instead of offensively (meaning being on the attack against the enemy). So when we stay close to the presence of God through thanksgiving, we become aware of His amazing ability to invade the impossible, and his radical love and delight in us. Giving thanks for the good things He's put in our lives, proves that He is our Father, that He is for us.

The wonderful thing is that when we simply begin to give thanks, even when it seems our problems outnumber the blessings, it isn't long before this focus on His goodness, creates an opening for the Lord's joy! And it is the joy of the Lord that is our strength!

It is really hard to stay depressed when we're filled with the awareness of God's love and goodness in our lives. Thanksgiving reminds us of answered prayers. So when difficulty comes along, we have a long list of blessings to bring into His presence, as well as the joy it is creating in our hearts. When we learn to live in this place, nothing can deflect us from our purpose, and we even make the enemy help us get it done! From heaven's point of view, it is good to give thanks “*in everything*”! This will build strength into our lives.

God bless you until next week as we continue this study of strengthening ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 4

Last week we spoke about thanksgiving that keeps us close to the presence of God. Paul told us to “*give thanks in everything*”, which changes our perspective and makes us aware of God's amazing ability to invade the impossible. It isn't long before this focus on His goodness creates an opening for joy of the Lord, that is our strength!

We are studying Bill Johnson's book, “Strengthen Yourself in the Lord”, and today we look at what will give us those breakthrough moments we need in our walk of faith. Sometimes we have our full share of “*blue Mondays*”, and we slide into discouragement. This often comes when we begin to compare ourselves with others, or because we keep our focus on the pressures of life, or on problems we may be having in our relationships. This emotional tailspin ends in a huge black cloud hanging over us. But we all know that discouragement and depression are not good things.

Let us look at our identity as believers, which is primarily to be worshippers of the Lord. And everything in our lives should be an overflow of that first ministry to the Lord. The definition and description of praise and worship in the Psalms, is a physical expression, like dancing, shouting, clapping, and making a joyful noise with singing and instruments. Psalm 33:3 says, “*Sing to him a new song, play skilfully, and shout for joy!*” Psalm 47:1 says, “*Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.*” Psalm 149:3 says, “*Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.*” This is a Biblical pattern of worship. We may need a big paradigm shift in our normal patterns of weeping and looking serious as our view of true spirituality. Many may feel awkward at such displays, or could see them as silly and childish.

But stepping out of our “*reserved personality*” box can be very daunting. If we say it is only meant for some personalities, we agree with the lie of the enemy. God commanded us to do it, and He also put into our new nature and personality in Christ, the ability to show our love for God this way. We will discover though, that praise isn't pleasing to the flesh, and that is one reason why it's so powerful in removing that cloud of oppression. Praise, with rejoicing, will cancel the agreement with the enemy, who wants to keep us in a place of despair and darkness.

In times of discouragement, we may be questioning a million things about our life, but we need never question whether we are in the right place when we are giving God praise. It should become our default position when we feel ourselves slide into the fog of confusion or depression.

Put some worship music on and find a private place to shout or even dance before Lord, bringing your soul and even your body into submission to the purposes of God. We need to make sure that the intensity of our praise is in equal proportion to the size of the cloud over our head! Bill Johnson says that as he does this, there comes a point when something inside of him shifts, and he is no longer making an effort. His mind, will, emotions and body are completely filled with conviction of what he is declaring to the Lord, and the heaviness disappears and he finds himself alive in God!

You will come to understand that the cloud isn't just over your head; it is inside you! Focussing on yourself instead of on the greatness of God in your life, is actually agreeing with the enemy that your problems are bigger than God's promises. And to break that agreement with the enemy, we need to repent, which means we need to change the way we think. Feeding our minds on the truth of God's nature and

power, brings us into agreement with heaven, and the reality starts to show in our lives. By lining our body up with what the Word says, brings our whole being into agreement with the truth. Physical obedience brings spiritual breakthrough!

Some say it is hypocritical to do something you don't feel like doing. But Bill Johnson says, if we only do what we feel like doing, we are actually being hypocritical believers! Right actions will release right emotions and a right spirit.

But why does God seem to want these radical expressions of singing, dancing, shouting and leaping, more than silent, awed reverence? The reason is that God is a God we can celebrate. His very actions and thoughts towards us are extravagant expressions of His love, kindness, goodness and delight in us. He gives it all not only to bless us for a moment, but to invite us into the deeper joy of knowing Him. He delights in us, so He wants us to delight in Him. He rejoices over us with singing (Zeph 3:17), so He want us to rejoice in Him with singing. When we give to Him what He gives to us, we step into a deeper relationship with Him, and we strengthen our heart-connection with the source of life.

When we do what He is doing, we align our bodies as well as our spirits and souls with Him, and there is a release of his nature that flows into us in that place of intimacy. The Holy Spirit is the most joyful person in existence, and joy is one of the primary expressions of His Kingdom in our lives. Rom 14;17 says, *“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

His command to *“rejoice always”* is really telling us that He wants us to have joy and he shows us how we are to receive it. We not only rejoice, because we have joy, but we rejoice in our pursuit to find joy. We can't rejoice without having a

reason, and that reason is God's nature, shown in his relationship to us. Praise and rejoicing are 2 sides of the same coin – Psalm 9:2 says, *“I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.”* To praise effectively, we must rejoice, with our body, soul and spirit in an expression of celebration. Let's make it a lifestyle.

Hebrews 13:17 says, *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise...”* Firstly, praise should cost us something. It is the proper response to the God who has given us the costly gift of His own Son. We step beyond what is convenient and beyond all the pressures and stresses we are facing.

And secondly, a sacrifice of praise should always require faith. Heb 11:4 says, *“By faith, Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain ...”* It certainly requires faith to rejoice when that's the last thing you feel like doing in the face of your present circumstances. It doesn't take much faith to hang your head, feeling you are worthless, or that you are completely overwhelmed by life.

Rejoicing requires us to believe the truth that we are already accepted by Him. It requires us to acknowledge His goodness and faithfulness that are more real than our present difficulties. We also come to agree that life is not really about us, but about Him!

So we put this challenge to you, if you are feeling heavy in your spirit, for whatever reason, step out in faith and rejoice in the Lord. Praise him with your whole being, body, soul and spirit, and feel the heaviness leave, and watch the breakthroughs come into your situation.

God bless you till next week, as we continue this study of praise which will strengthen us in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 5

Last week we said that God is a God to celebrate, and we reminded ourselves to praise and rejoice in Him with our whole heart and soul and mind and body. Dancing and shouting our praise brings the joy of the Lord, that is our strength, and it removes any spirit of heaviness. A sacrifice of praise is powerful to release breakthroughs in our difficult situations. So let us learn to praise God with our whole being.

We are studying Bill Johnson's book, "Strengthen Yourself in the Lord", and today we continue this study on praise. Praise agrees with God's perspective on our situation. Praising him has the power to transform us and is the expression of our faith. David says in Psalm 2:11 to "*rejoice with trembling*", which means that sometimes, there are no feelings to start with, but we need to obey, to take that step and rejoice. Thanksgiving and praise reconnect us to our primary purpose – to minister to Him in worship. It brings us into His presence; and in worship, the sacrifice is no longer just a physical expression or verbal declarations, but WE ARE the sacrifice. And fire always falls on sacrifice, so when we are the sacrifice, we cannot help but be changed.

Remember the woman with the very expensive alabaster jar of perfume. She poured the entire contents on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. It had to be broken to be opened, and this extreme act provoked extreme offence in all who were there, including his disciples. They were embarrassed by her emotion and disgusted by the waste of money. But Jesus said that she had anointed Him for His burial – she had given Him exactly the kind of worship He deserved, and so demonstrated her faith. But Jesus wasn't the only one drenched with the beautiful fragrance – it

encircled the woman as well.

That happens when we worship. Like the woman, we say, “*Everything is yours, God*”, but we come from that place of communion with Him, with who He is, and His perfume has rubbed off on us. We can't look at Him and then look back at our circumstances with the same perspective, because when we enter His glory, we will be receiving a measure of His grace and strength.

In order to give God praise, we have to renew our perspective and ignore the problems around us or in us. That is not irresponsible. If we keep thinking about the problem, trying to find a solution, we are being drawn away from the Lord, and we let other voices speak louder than His, and that is actually irresponsible!

Bill Johnson says he has decided to live in a healthy state of denial, because many situations around him can bring him into discouragement. He says most of the time he is living 15 minutes away from discouragement if he make a series of wrong choices. We need to learn to ignore the problems just enough so they don't become a threat to the affections of our hearts. God has promised that if we are faithful to be who he has called us to be, namely worshippers, He is more than happy to bring the solutions. That does not mean we are not giving attention to problems – it means we are addressing them from God's perspective.

Here are some promises in Scripture regarding the benefits we receive when we are faithful to give Him praise and worship. Psalm 22:3 says, “*You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.*” Our praises actually enthrone the King, and release the reality of His Kingdom, in our circumstances. And where the King sits on His throne, He always destroys the kingdom of darkness.

Isaiah 42:10-13 describes it: *“Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you coast lands and you inhabitants of them! Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the coast lands. The Lord shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up his zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; he shall prevail against his enemies.”*

It is saying that while Israel is celebrating and praising God, he is taking it upon Himself to go out and destroy their enemies. Many testimonies have been reported of sick people who were lost in the presence of God in worship, and only afterwards they realised that they had been healed. Even if they started to rejoice with trembling, God gave them certain reason to rejoice in Him with real joy. He is worthy of our praise.

Let our primary focus not be on getting, but on giving. Times of difficulty give us the opportunity to demonstrate sacrificial love to Him by ministering to Him, instead of attending to our present needs.

So take time each day, to look past the problems and needs around you, long enough to give God an extravagant expression of praise and rejoicing. While His blessings are awesome, He is the greatest blessing of all. And you will begin to see that you are becoming a joyful person. God is in a good mood. If we hang around him, his joy is bound to rub off!

Kamran Yaraei says that letting go of the details of life is necessary to get closer to the Master, because paying too

much attention to details can produce the same fruit as sin – which is separation from the Father. What do you do with the details of life? You lift them up to Him, so that when you worship, you go with all your body, mind, and spirit to visit Jesus. We close our eyes, use our imaginations, and picture our whole body standing in front of Jesus. Yaraei says, our body knows its Creator, so we should allow our body to worship the Lord. We have been limiting our body in worship, and our brain has been the master of our body for too long. So let's release our body to praise and worship its Creator.

Rom 12:2 says, *“Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”* We often see this verse as merely abstaining from sin, to present our bodies as holy before the Lord, as a living sacrifice. But it means more than that – it means we literally use our bodies as a means to glorify and praise and worship Him – as our *“spiritual act of worship”*. It means it is an act or action and therefore active, which is much more than quiet meditation and reverence.

Let us pray that He will help us be more released in our praise, with dancing and singing and movement, engaging our whole being. And as our minds, (that have let go of the problems and details of life) and our words, our bodies, and our spirits open to Him by faith, we enter into His presence. Our ministry to him is giving ourselves fully to him, and we find we walk away with that aroma of His presence and glory, and our difficulties seem smaller, as we now see them from heaven's point of view.

He is worthy of our praise, and He Himself will defeat our enemies while we minister to Him.

God bless you until next week as we continue this study of strengthening ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 6

Last week we spoke about praising God with our whole being in difficult circumstances. We said that our primary ministry is giving ourselves fully to him in praise and worship, and we find we walk away with the aroma of His presence and glory. Then our difficulties also seem smaller, as we now see them from heaven's point of view.

We are studying Bill Johnson's book, *Strengthen Yourself in the Lord*, and today we want to speak about learning how God's words over our lives, can completely cancel our old beliefs about who we are.

Looking at David again - his destiny to be king did not begin with his ascent to the throne, but it began with God's declaration of that destiny through the prophet Samuel. That is what he held onto. When he was in the wilderness, there must have been days when the only thing he had to go on was the memory of what Samuel said. David pursued his destiny to its fulfillment, and he never quitted or took short-cuts. Like Abraham, he also "*considered God faithful who had made the promise.*" (Heb 11:11)

When we are born again, we inherit every promise of God for the believer. Peter tells us in chapter 1:4 that through these "*very great and precious promises*", we may "*participate in the divine nature.*" These promises unlock our potential to become like Christ.

But 3 things must happen before we truly possess them.

1) The promises must be spoken into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. John 16:13-14 tells us the Holy Spirit speaks only what he hears, and he tells us what is yet to come. A word

may have come to you through another person prophesying over you, or through an anointed prayer, or a passage of Scripture, a dream or vision, or the still small voice of the Spirit. But whenever God speaks, he releases his prophetic anointing, and that anointing does not just tell you what will be; it is also *creating* what will be.

2) We must believe those promises. It is impossible for God to lie. His Word is always in complete agreement with His nature and character, therefore his words release his power to accomplish what he has said. The angel said to Mary, *“For nothing is impossible with God.”* (Luke 1:37) *“Possible”* means *ability*, so the verse could be translated like this: *“The freshly spoken word from God contains its own ability to perform it.”* So the latent power in the promises of God shows us why we can trust the faithfulness of the One who promised. So we start on the way by simply receiving the Word. Mary said, *“May it be to me as you have said.”* (Luk 1:38) There was no way she could see *how* the word spoken to her, could possibly happen. All she needed to know, was that the Lord had spoken and that she could trust Him. As a result of her faith, she will be called, *“blessed”* for eternity.

3) Your faith in the promise must be tested and proven. Paul instructed Timothy, *“I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith ...”* (1 Tim 1:18) So when the Holy Spirit declares a promise into your account, He has also put a weapon into your arsenal. This means that we will often have to fight for that Word against the enemy, who will try to steal it from you. And if we contend by using the promise, we will be victorious. Even Jesus - after the Father spoke that wonderful word over him, *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”*, he was challenged by the devil in the

wilderness. He said, *“If you are the Son of God ...”* But Jesus stood on the promise of the Father on the basis that God was one who made the promise. He heard the Word and received it, and believed that the Father's Word over his life was true.

Jesus' response teaches us that the only way to see the promises fulfilled, is to refuse anything other than what God has said. Jesus also rebuked the Pharisees in Mark 7:13 for *“making the Word of God of no effect (or rendered powerless) through their traditions.”* The most powerful thing in the universe, the Word of God, can be made powerless by us. We can shut off our access to that power by choosing religion, our own thoughts, or tradition, as more important than what God has said.

We have to constantly train our minds to think in agreement with that Word, which means that we have to remind ourselves of those promises often. We must learn to meditate on them. Like Mary, let us ponder and treasure them up in our hearts. Joshua 1:8 says, *“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will make your way prosperous and will have good success”*. One of the Hebrew words for *“meditate”* is to *“mutter”*, so it means saying the words God has said, *out loud*, like a mutter. In doing so we release the anointing of the Spirit in a greater measure to bring the Word to pass. The verse says that when we do this, we are actually *“making our way prosperous.”*

Bill Johnson says that all the prophecies spoken over his life, he has written down on little cards that he carries with him, and he reads and meditates on them often. While other business men on the plane, look over their business plans, for example, he is aligning his mind with the words that God has

spoken over his life. He says, he can't afford to have thoughts in his head about himself that God doesn't have for him. He also regularly reads portions of Scripture that the Holy Spirit has given to him especially in his heart, as words for his life. When he is feeling heavy or discouraged, he reads those passages until he senses that agreement with God. We have to continually train our minds to think of ourselves in agreement with what God says about us. Declare that Rhema word that God spoke over *your* life, often.

Bill Johnson also says that when he is bombarded mentally or emotionally, he reads portions of the Psalms until he finds a Psalm that resonates with his heart's cry. And when he does, he stays in that resting place and reads it over and over again, and uses the words as weapons in praise, and believing his way out of any hole he finds himself in. I think many of us have done this, and have found that one of the many Psalms just echoes our hearts' cry and we find comfort and strength there.

Rom 10:17 says, "*faith comes by hearing ...*" And Hebrews 11:33 says that it was through faith that the saints of old "*gained what was promised*". When we believe these promises, the Holy Spirit will transfer even more of them to us, as we have an ongoing relationship with Him. Life does not come from every word that has already been spoken, but by every word that "*comes from the mouth of God*" (Matt 4:4). The Holy Spirit's breath brings us into the place of life and purpose. When we take what we hear and meditate on it, training our thinking, our affections, our behaviour, it becomes a word remaining in us. This word that resonates with the voice of the Spirit, creates life.

Likewise, when we fail to listen to and live by that Word, we cut ourselves off from life. So let us write down the prophetic words and promises spoken over our lives. Let Him breathe on them, so that they become life to you. Review them often. And listen to the voice of the Spirit to take the words in the Bible and deposit them into your heart as a personal living Rhema word to *you*. Receive it, write it down, meditate on it, declare it over your life, and let it draw you into your eternal purpose.

God bless you till next time as we continue this study on how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 7

The last time we spoke about writing down the prophetic words and promises spoken over our lives. And we were encouraged to listen to the voice of the Spirit, to deposit the words in the Bible into your heart as a living *Rhema* word to *you*. Meditate on it, declare it over your life, and let it draw you into your eternal purpose. This word that resonates with the voice of the Spirit, creates life.

We are studying Bill Johnson's book, *Strengthen Yourself in the Lord*, and today we want to speak about keeping the testimonies of things that have happened in our lives. Let us first look at Jesus who perfectly represented sinful man to God and also represented God perfectly to man, as a powerful miracle worker. And the same Holy Spirit anointing that was on Jesus, has been given to *every* believer. The same Holy Spirit qualifies us as royal priests of God and calls us to continue this ministry of Jesus, to show what God is like through the miracles he does.

Sadly, many believers today deny the fact that we have legal access to the realm of miracles. But this is part of our identity and purpose as believers. This revelation is being restored world-wide today, and we hear of many wonderful testimonies of what God is doing. A testimony is the written or spoken record of anything that God has done, and that becomes your family history the moment you are born again. David declared in Ps 119:111, "*I inherited your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart.*" This means that every miracle or sign that God has ever performed, is your story, because you are related to the God who made them happen. These testimonies are tools that equip us to walk in our purpose to show the world what God is like through the miraculous. Firstly, they reveal God's nature and how he

does things – his ways. And secondly, as we become aware of who God is, it gives us an expectation in our hearts for God's ways to be real in *our* lives.

The Hebrew root word for “*testimony*” means “*do again*”. So every record of what God has done, even in past generations, is a promise of what He will do again in our lives, because He is the same yesterday, today and forever and is no respecter of persons. And Revelation 19:10 says, “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*” The testimony releases an anointing. So when we declare what God has done, power is released to make that testimony happen again in the lives of those who hear it.

The testimonies of God also connect each generation of believers to His covenant promises. In the Law of Moses God instructed his people to rehearse the testimony daily and teach it to their children. They also had to build memorial stones, after crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, reminding them and the next generation of what God had done. “*This is your God, too! He will also keep his promises in your generation.*”

In Psalm 78:5-7 David explains it like this: “*For He established a testimony in Jacob, and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers, to teach their children; so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands.*”

So, keeping the testimony caused Israel to “*put their trust in God.*” It kept their expectations high for God to keep His promises through miracles of power. Our own expectation of God, is what determines our level of faith. The Israelites were given a mission from God to take the Promised Land

from their enemies and establish themselves as a nation. God gave them the strategies and the strength to do the impossible. And as long as they remembered what God had said and done and stepped out in faith with His strategies, they won supernatural victories. But when they stopped keeping the testimony, their faith for the miraculous diminished, and so did their obedience to His commands. Every time they stopped walking in their covenant with God was because they forgot His works.

Today we, too, need to have faith in order to “*keep His commandments*”. Christ's commands to “*heal the sick*”, to “*love your neighbour*” are only possible through the supernatural empowerment of His Spirit that comes through faith.

We know how quickly a person forgets the most extraordinary things, particularly the miraculous. Forgetting is a downward spiral that begins with the natural tendency to gradually talk less and less about the cancer that was instantly healed, for example. Other things start to occupy our minds, and this lowers our expectation to see the miraculous again. And the less we experience the miraculous, the less we have to talk about. So we talk less, expect less and experience less. Even if we face a similar situation where God intervened before, our expectation and faith are small. So the failure of the Israelites to keep the testimony led to them coexisting with their enemies, and they became vulnerable to idolatry, which led to all kinds of curses and problems in their lives. They lost their identity as the people of God and became just like the people around them. So failing to keep the testimony not only makes us forget who God is, but who we are.

The only thing that distinguishes us believers from the rest of the world is the reality that God is active among us. When we lose sight of that, we are no different than anyone else – with one exception – we will face more serious consequences because we are accountable for the revelation of God we've received in the testimonies.

How do we avoid the downward spiral and instead represent God with power to the world? We are to establish a culture of the testimony in our personal lives, in our homes, and in our churches. We're to talk about it when we get up, when we eat a meal, when we go to work, and when we go to bed. We're to build memorials that remind us of what God has done and consider them regularly. We can start keeping a journal to record the answers to prayer we've had, and heard about, and the miracles we've witnessed. We owe it to our children and future generations of God's interventions in our generation.

Bill Johnson says in his congregation they begin their staff and board meetings with testimonies of what God has done in the previous weeks. One of the most significant fruits of this testimony culture is that more and more of the miracle stories that they are hearing, are related to the sharing of previous testimonies. If we lack the awareness of God who invades the impossible, we will lack faith and courage for our mission that God has given us. When we hear of miraculous answered prayer, we feel encouraged by the goodness and power of God, and we leave full of faith that God intends to do it all again. And as we continue sharing them, these testimonies have the potential to multiply themselves in the lives of others, too.

Declaring the testimony creates a divine moment for God to do it again! Each of us is accountable to keep the testimony lifestyle, as a tool to strengthen ourselves. Keep them in your conversation, meditate on them. It actually renews your mind. If you are someone who has not seen very many miracles, remember that every story of God in the Word is your own. Study these, collect stories of historical saints and meditate on them. This meditation trains your mind to think from the realm of faith. David says in Psalm 119:99, "*I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.*" David was the only man in the OT to walk the dual role of king and priest. How much more we who have the Holy Spirit of revelation, who will bring us into our destiny as kings and priests. Our entire identity stands on the foundations of our family history in God. Let us learn to keep the testimony.

God bless you till next time as we continue this study on how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 8

Last week we spoke about keeping the testimony. Like Israel, we must build memorials that remind us of what God has done for us. We can start keeping a journal to record the answers to prayer we've had, and heard about, and the miracles we've witnessed. We owe it to our children and future generations – a record of all God's interventions in our generation. This also builds the faith of others who hear these testimonies, and remind *us* that God can do it again.

We are studying Bill Johnson's book, "*Strengthen yourself in the Lord*". Remember that Christ is the source of our strength, he who upholds all things by the word of His power. And today we look at how controlling our environment and those we connect with, can influence our faith. Jesus said in Mark 4:24, "*Consider carefully what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more*". What we value and hold to, will increase even more in our lives. Whatever we listen to, we allow to gain our attention and focus. This in turn will influence our beliefs and values. These beliefs and values set a standard for us that ultimately selects the voices that we pick up around us. This standard is what also draws us to certain people more than to others.

If I set a standard that values the testimonies of what God is doing, I will also attract people who share the same values. On the other hand, people with ungodly values are also attracted to people with that same standard. We find that gossips very quickly find each other, even in a new situation, or people with certain problems or brokenness also attract people with similar problems. Our values communicate something in the spiritual realm that alerts others with the same values, to be drawn to us.

Because we are so influenced by what we hear, we need to learn to listen to the voice of God more than to other voices. Then we will agree with Him and obey His voice. And this agreement is what releases heavenly power into our lives and circumstances.

But God can also use other people who speak and live from a heavenly perspective, to give us encouragement and heavenly strength. Therefore we must purposefully associate with people who share godly values, and then control our interactions with people who don't share them.

Certainly there will be people who don't share our values, that God calls us to befriend over a period of time in order to introduce them to Jesus. We are to accept everyone unconditionally, and show them the love and power of God. These, however, are different from friendships in which we open up ourselves to the influence of their perspectives and values. Close friendships, especially our spouses, built on covenant, allow a spiritual influence from one to the other. This is why it is vital to develop friendships with people whose lives consistently display the fruit of the Kingdom. They can also be a source of strength to help us to persevere in difficult times.

I am blessed to have close friendships with people of genuine faith. Time and time again I have been uplifted and strengthened simply by being with a friend, or praying with her. Friends who are people of faith, exude hope, promise and joy. It doesn't take long when we're with them, for their attitude and spirit to be infectious. They remind us of our purpose and identity. When our vision for those things is renewed, usually our strength is too. So one of the best ways to strengthen ourselves when we are tired or discouraged is to spend some time with a godly friend.

On the other hand, when we are emotionally vulnerable or even if we are just physically tired, we have to be careful to make sure we are not around people who like to complain or be critical. People who speak from a place of negativity or unbelief can have a negative influence on our spirit. We can minister to them, but we should not give them access to our lives. When we lack strength, we must actively avoid them.

We are the only ones responsible to keep our hearts free from doubt and judgement, and we alone can recognise when we are vulnerable to the influences of people who agree with these negative spirits. Solomon warns us in Proverbs 22:24-25, "*Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.*"

These influences don't always come from the ungodly, but even from God's own people. While some people may mean well, they lack the faith perspective that we strive for, and they tend to work to make us more like *them*, than actually trying to help us to become stronger in our trust in God. Our job must be to protect ourselves from such influences. Our hearts are gardens. Some people are good at planting weeds, while others plant the Kingdom. My job and yours is to know the difference.

Another way to control our environment, is to find place of solitude as a means to be restored. Jesus took His disciples away from the crowds to rest and be together. Bill Johnson says we need to learn when and how to do this. When we have been busy, even for God, we need physical rest and need to cultivate life-giving relationships with family and friends who would reaffirm our focus on the Kingdom.

If we are going to become people whom God can trust with greater measures of favour and anointing in our purpose as royal priests, we must also realise that we are going to attract needy people. People's needs can exert tremendous pressure on us, and that pressure could make us care more about meeting the expectations

of others, than doing only what Jesus wants us to do. In Jesus' ministry, he met the needs of many, but also walked past many needy people. He knew that the only way he could succeed was not to be motivated by human need, but by His Father's heart.

If we are to minister with fruitfulness, we need to be intimate with the Father, and we need to have close relationships in our lives. This will help us minister from a place of faith and obedience, rather than striving to please or help people. Bill Johnson says that those who easily overextend themselves on behalf of ministry, are people who struggle with intimacy – both with God and others. These people are being set up for burnout or compromise. All true fruitfulness flows from an intimacy with God.

Then lastly, choose to spend time with those who can contribute to your life with a sense of humour. To have joy in our trials, needs faith. Those whom we can trust, who help us laugh at ourselves, sharing joyful experiences, as a good medicine, will strengthen us and build us up.

Then there are 3 distractions we must learn to overcome to stay on track with our destiny. They are 1) distractions from the devil – eg our old fears and addictions. But as our minds are transformed and we learn to hunger and thirst for God, those temptations don't hold much interest anymore. 2) Distractions from ourselves – our old ways of thinking can keep us from responding to what God is trying to teach us. 3) Distractions from God-things, eg prosperity, miracles, etc, that become more important to us than the Giver and Friend, God Himself.

So to sum up, we need to control our environment, because it will influence our faith. Build into your life friendships that will strengthen your values and faith. Be careful of people who can influence you to doubt or negativity. Don't be led by the needs of people, but by the heart of your Father. Remember to come apart to rest at times, with friends and family, and connect with those who spread laughter and joy to your spirit. Let God Himself be your most important Friend.

God bless you till next time as we continue this study on how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 9

Last week we spoke about controlling our environment, because it influences our faith. We said, build friendships into your life that will strengthen your values, and be careful of people who can influence you to doubt or negativity. Don't be led by the needs of people, but by the heart of your Father. Remember to come apart to rest at times, and let God Himself be your most important Friend.

We are studying Bill Johnson's book, "*Strengthen yourself in the Lord*". Today we look at how we are to fulfil our destiny, when we still see defeat in our lives. Sometimes we may see areas of sin or weakness in us, and we convince ourselves that we are hopeless cases. We might also feel that we need to weep over the fact that we don't measure up to God's standard, and that weeping is a sign of conviction and repentance. We think that holiness is something usually associated with sombreness and tears.

But in the story where Nehemiah in (8:9-12) was rebuilding the fallen city of Jerusalem, the priest read God's Word publicly. Israel realised that they fell far short of what God required of them, and began to weep. But Israel was told, "*This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep*". Instead, they were told, "*Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" There is a place for tears, as we also read that godly sorrow leads us to repentance. But when we have a wrong view of God as a legalistic father, who is unhappy with our every move, we distort what was supposed to lead us to a life-changing encounter with Him. We should understand the fullness of His grace. Grace does not only forgive our sin, but

empowers us to live like Him. If we don't understand this, the accuser, the devil, will convince us that because of areas of sin or weakness, we are hopeless cases. And we will be deceived into thinking that his accusations are godly convictions, because we know that we need to change.

The problem is not in what we lack, but how we respond to God. If we are focussing on our problems more than on God's answers, it should be a clear sign that we are really dealing with condemnation. So, focus on God's answers. The Holy Spirit's conviction, on the other hand will turn our focus away from our sin and our limitations, and will draw us to Him and allow His grace to change our lives.

But why are we so conscious of our weaknesses? We must remember that the real tests do not challenge our strengths, but they expose our weaknesses. Most of the warfare we deal with in the Christian life is really internal. When our weaknesses are exposed, God has already given us the tools we need to overcome them. This is why the Israelites were commanded to rejoice in the face of their shortcomings. The Holy Spirit will also convict us of our destiny and equip us with His promises. The convictions of the Holy spirit is actually a call to turn our focus away from our sin and put it on Him and our destiny. The joy of the Lord is our strength. It is the Lord's joy that gives us the strength needed to step toward our destiny.

And how do we get that joy? We rejoice. We align our bodies and souls to rejoice in Him, because that posture invites the empowering of the promise. Of course it requires faith. To rejoice before you get your desired breakthrough, takes faith.

Strengthening ourselves is about being prepared to receive and give out what we have received. With our eyes off

ourselves, we hold on in faith for our destiny. So we first need to focus on preparing ourselves to receive by faith. We know what happened at Pentecost in Acts. The disciples “*all joined together constantly in prayer ...*” (1:14) They waited and prayed in constant readiness for the promise of the Holy Spirit. They did not go about business as usual, but stayed in one place and contended in prayer. When Heaven invaded earth on the Day of Pentecost, it was because earth had invaded heaven for ten days. Their persistent faith-praying for the promise of the Holy Spirit, prepared them to receive it.

The Holy Spirit did not come only to dwell within us, but to rest upon us with the same Christ-anointing Jesus had. This was in order to release Heaven's answer's to earth's problems. He came to show us the Kingdom. So we also must never stop contending for and experiencing further encounters with the Holy Spirit. But it depends on how we use what God has given us. Increase comes to those who are faithful with what they've been given. He will entrust us with more of His authority, as we serve and use what he has already given us. If you have a longing to preach the Gospel, a first step might be to share the Gospel with a friend. Taking the first step in faith begins to conquer our fear of failure, as we embrace a journey of transformation.

As in Nehemiah, our desires are usually connected to the places where we need to grow in our character. And the places of lack in our lives are the very places where God intends to bring us into our greatest victories – if we will take the risk to believe and step out for Him.

Bill Johnson relates how he never saw miracles in his ministry. He became consumed with godly jealousy for God's power to be evident. Then he received a prophetic word from a friend, saying that God was going to anoint him to walk in a ministry of healing and miracles. So he took that word, wrote it down, and began to declare it over his life on a regular basis. By faith he laid hands on the sick, and as a result, the Lord began to fulfil His Word. Now he consistently and increasingly sees the miraculous when he

ministers the Gospel.

It is like Hannah, who wanted the very thing that her barrenness prevented her from having – a child. But instead of giving in to bitterness and disappointment, she cried out to the Lord. In her cry of faith, even before God answered, she resolved to set apart her desired son completely to the Lord. We must also be so consumed by our desire that we lose all consciousness of what others think of us.

We don't know however, how long we need to keep praying and laying hands on people in expectation for the prophetic word to be fulfilled. Our hearts must be set in the pursuit of the promise and each day will bring us closer to God's breakthrough. Let's set our hearts on the end goal, and not on our weaknesses, and let's not despise the day of small beginnings. God wants us to succeed, and has set us up to succeed. No one else can possess my promises. No one else can fulfil my destiny for me. Only as I step out to do the supernatural things He has asked of me, can I appropriate the supernatural power He's already given me to achieve these impossible tasks.

Refuse to let circumstances and areas of personal weakness determine your level of faith and passion, and you will discover the secret of victory in every situation. The Holy Spirit has already been poured out into our lives, and Jesus promised that rivers of living water would flow from our hearts. (John 7:38) When we believe for the promises of God in a place of weakness, we attract the outpouring of the Spirit that will bring a new anointing. Despite the barren areas of our lives, the areas of great disappointment, we need to step out in faith. He will draw the springs of life from our own hearts, and by His Spirit, the rivers will begin to flow.

So, take your focus off your weaknesses, and instead of paralysing condemnation, choose to rejoice in him and his promises. Focus on the Spirit of life within you, and your destiny. Believe and hold onto His promises. Step out in faith. Then you will see the breakthroughs you long for, and heaven will begin to invade your earthly life. God bless you till next week as we share the last session in this study on how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 10

Last week we spoke about how we are to fulfil our destiny, when we still see defeat in our lives. We said we are to take our focus off our weaknesses and instead being paralysed by condemnation, we must choose to rejoice in him and his promises. Focus on the Spirit of life within you that is greater than your weakness, and focus on your destiny. Believe and hold onto His promises. Step out in faith. Then you will see the breakthroughs you long for, and heaven will begin to invade your earthly life.

We are on the last chapter of Bill Johnson's book, *“Strengthen yourself in the Lord”*, and today we discuss our call to disciple nations, but that begins with our own understanding of what it means to be a disciple. Jesus said in Matt 10:38, *“Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me”*. This does not speak of being punished for our sins, because that was Jesus' cross to bear. Taking up our cross means embracing the truth that our life is not about us. Romans 14:7 says, *“For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself alone.”* Just as Jesus' cross was about pleasing His Father and redeeming us, likewise our cross is about living our lives for Christ and doing our part to make His mission succeed on earth.

Jesus had a destiny to fulfil that demanded great strength, strength to be able to resist temptation, and to resist distraction or opposition that could turn him from His course. And his obedience released blessing for the whole human race. So also the cross we embrace, will release a blessing to those who will also come to benefit from this salvation.

Paul tells us that we are *“ ... heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share with Him in his sufferings, in*

order that we may also share in his glory.” (Rom 8:17) Jesus suffered by resisting the kingdom of darkness which he would overcome through his death and resurrection. So, the suffering we endure is the resistance of the enemy forces that we have been delegated to displace. As we exercise the authority he gave us to take back territory from the enemy, that is what makes us strong, to stand in that place of influence to establish the Kingdom. We are to bind the strongman, kick him out of the house, and take back what he has stolen from us. And we are then to release the blessings of Heaven to fill the house.

In Mark 4 Jesus and his disciples crossed over the lake, to a region of Gerasenes, where they had not yet heard the message of the Kingdom. And on the way they encountered a storm that tried to destroy them. They awoke Jesus, who calmed the storm with a word, and they continued their journey. We know how they met the demon-possessed man who started worshipping Jesus. When Jesus cast the demons out, they begged not to be sent away, because they were in control of the principality over the region. That man was their strongman to create an atmosphere of chaos in the area, and the storm that tried to prevent them from coming, was the manifestation of their power. But no number of demons could stop the man from worshipping Jesus, and *that* brought him under the superior authority of the Kingdom, and the principality over the region was displaced.

This disturbed the people, who became fearful and they asked Jesus to leave. But Jesus commissioned his new disciple to lead His evangelistic outreach to the Decapolis. And the wonderful thing is that sometime later almost every person in every city in that region showed up to hear Jesus the next time. Matthew also says, *“Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region*

across the Jordan followed him.”

But if we look at the story of the storm, we may think Jesus' response to his disciples was a bit extreme. He said, *“Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?”* (Mark 4:40) We think it's our job to ask God to fix our problems, and it is His job to answer. But Jesus was saying, *“I just had to do the job that I've trained **you** to do.”*

We now have the Holy Spirit living inside us, and if we follow His lead, we will always have authority over the storm. We should not just hang on until we die or until the Rapture, but recognise the assignment and destiny the Father has given us. It will bring personal breakthrough in our faith, and cause others to experience the blessing that is released when our faith displaces an oppressive atmosphere with a heavenly one. People of faith look into the storm and they see it as an opportunity to exercise their authority over it.

There have been spiritual giants who have risen in history's darkest moments, to meet the challenge of the day, eg Jonathan Edwards, who brought in a move of God, William Booth, who saved alcoholics from the gutter, John G. Lake, who brought in a healing revival, William Wilberforce, in the abolition of slavery. They looked into the storms of their day – the manifestations of the kingdom of darkness where they knew God wanted to establish His Kingdom – and they rose up with faith to displace those storms, declaring, *“Not on my shift!”* They refused to give in to the sheer volume of darkness that surrounded them. And they saw that all of Heaven backed them in their humanly impossible assignment.

Bill Johnson says Jesus never intended that only a few special believers would walk in a great anointing like His, to change the spiritual climate over regions. Everything Jesus did was a model for

our personal assignments. He had trained every one of His disciples in that boat to do what He did. It is time for our generation of believers to embrace the opportunities before us – to take up our cross and contend for the breakthroughs that will allow God to entrust us with great enough measures of anointing to take back the inheritance of the promised land, and to share this glory with Him.

To do this, we will need great courage, because we will be required to take risks when we step out in faith into what we've heard from the Lord. We will never take that step if our hope rests on experiencing another great event, or waiting for the next wave of revival to sweep in. We must take personal responsibility to strengthen every weak place and break our agreement with fear. We must become the ongoing expression of revival and stop waiting for outside circumstances to line up with our dreams.

So let's take up our cross, so we can access the strength and courage we need in the midst of the storm. Let us remind ourselves of who we are and what God has called us to do. Remember, that we are fully equipped for victory, not because we have a formula that always works, but because God is with us and within us.

So to summarise the last 10 weeks of ways to strengthen ourselves in the Lord, we, like David, need to seek the Lord and worship him. We need to watch our hearts and consider our destiny. We need to continuously give thanks, and learn to rejoice at all times, pray as He prays, and meditate on His promises and on the testimonies of what He has already done. We are to associate with people of faith, and focus on His power and not our weaknesses. We are to take up our cross and contend for territory the enemy has taken – not just when others around us are doing so, but continuously, as a lifestyle.

This is his promise for every son and daughter who hears the call to contend for their promised land: *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”* Joshua 1:9

We have finished our study with Bill Johnson, but in the next two weeks we will look at two more general ways of strengthening our relationship with God. God bless you until next week then.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 11

Last week we concluded our study of Bill Johnson's book, called, "*Strengthen yourself in the Lord*", and spoke about taking up our cross. This releases the strength and courage we need in the midst of the enemy attack. Jesus' obedience to the cross, released blessing for the whole human race. So also the cross we embrace, will release a blessing to those who will also come to benefit from this salvation.

Today we continue looking at another way to strengthen ourselves in our daily walk with God. We want to look specifically at learning how to receive the love of the Father. Jude says in vs 20,21, "*But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith, and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love, as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*"

Tom Davis in his book, "*Fields of the Fatherless*" says, we are all cosmic orphans. We are looking for a reason to explain who we are and where we come from. Any adopted person has deep questions about love and the very meaning of life, no matter how loving his or her adopted parents have been. He feels incomplete because a major piece of life is missing that might help explain his future.

But the real need is to have these questions answered in a spiritual sense. The orphan, the widow, the stranger and you and I are all asking the same question: *Who is my true Father?* Jesus revealed to the disciples, the loving heart of Father God. And even these rough-and-tough disciples were frightened when Jesus was talking about leaving them. Why were they afraid? Because they had built a relationship with this amazing person. But he said, "*Where I am going, you cannot follow now; but you will follow later.*" (John 13:36) He

encouraged and comforted them, letting them know he was not abandoning them, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”* (John 14:18) *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.”* (vs16) *“He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”* (vs 21) *“If anyone loves me, ... my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”.* (vs 23)

Through Jesus' love for them, the disciples had begun to understand and know their true Father. Jesus showed them what life was about and how to live it. They were no longer orphans. They were children of God!

This is the greatest need each of us has – through Jesus, to know our true Father. If we are born of God, He is our Father. It is by faith and never depends on our performance, or lack of it. Knowing Him brings definition, fulfillment, and completion to our lives. It truly answers the questions of our existence, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Paul says in Rom 8:15, *“You have received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’”* Abba means *“Daddy”*. The greatest cry of our heart is to know our true Daddy. When we know we belong to him, our feelings of abandonment fade away, and we know we are loved unconditionally. You have a purpose for living and He will parent you as a perfect Father should.

Rom 8:16-17 *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”* As his children, we inherit what Christ inherits. We are true card-carrying children of the Father, and we are created in his image!

The greatest desire of man is to be singled out, cherished,

and loved in a way that makes him feel he is significant. Henri Nouwen puts it like this: *Nothing could give us more confidence in this truth than hearing the voice of God saying to us, 'I have called you by name. From the very beginning you are mine and I am yours. I have knitted you together in your mother's womb, I have carved you in the palm of my hand and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infiniteness of tenderness, and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger, and give you drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. On you my favour rests. You belong to me.'*

We need to learn how to open our hearts to Him and learn to receive his love by faith – that unfathomable love that has no end, that will never let us down, that will never abandon us, that love that surrounds us each moment, and that nurtures our lonely hearts. That love is the expression of his faithfulness, his mercy and grace, and his forgiveness and acceptance.

The more you actively receive this love by faith, it will begin to fill every lack and crack in your life. See the Holy Spirit pour it into your heart. It will satisfy so fully that you will not hunger for the pig food of this world, as the prodigal son did. And the woman at the well, who was thirsty for love, tried again and again for one man after another to meet that need. But after five men she was still thirsty – until she drank from that living water. We will not crave and thirst for the temporary entertainment that does not satisfy, but that creates an even bigger thirst. You will no longer need those all-consuming cravings for stronger and stronger pornography. His love heals every pain and feeling of loss. It heals the deep disappointment or pain caused by a broken earthly father. The Father's love will meet that sense of unfulfilment, and you will no longer crave ungodly illicit sex. It will satisfy that sense of inadequacy, and will dissolve that

anger that wants to dominate or violently hurt another.

The Father's love will satisfy that emptiness that seeks to prove yourself to everyone, that hunger for recognition. His amazing love will even satisfy the need for more and more money, that you think will fill a real need in your life. His love will fill every vacuum and hollow place and lack in your life.

But we have to feed on His love as that living bread. We need to drink of his living water that will cause us never to thirst again. Both hunger and thirst is a daily need – so daily we need to eat that Bread of Life, and drink from his fountain of love, to remain satisfied.

What is your deep hunger? What is your deep thirst? Only the living bread and the living water will satisfy those appetites - nothing else. His never-ending love will feed, quench, heal and restore any hurt in your life. One of the primary activities of the Holy Spirit is to continually pour out God's love within our spirit, but as we encounter various trials in life, often our love begins to grow cold. Jesus said it would be an endtime sign in his church, *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most shall grow cold.”* (Matt 24:12) As we daily have to satisfy our hunger and thirst, so we need to constantly draw from his love, or else we will begin to be hungry for things that cannot satisfy, and begin to feed on the pig food that brings spiritual sickness and even death.

So, to sum it up - you need to be born again, born of God. Then come to understand the vast measure of the love of the Father. Receive it by faith, and you will find full acceptance and purpose – and be healed from that orphan-spirit of abandonment and carnal desires. Come daily to receive and feed on His love, and so you will become strong in the Lord, and no longer crave the things of this world that don't satisfy. And nothing will be able to separate you from that wonderful love of your Father. *“Keep yourself in God's love”*, Jude said.

God bless you till next week as we conclude our study of strengthening ourselves in the Lord.

Strengthen Yourself in the Lord

Chapter 12

Last week we spoke about keeping ourselves in the Father's love. We said if we receive that love by faith, we will find full acceptance and purpose in our lives – and we will be healed from an orphan-spirit of abandonment and carnal desires. We need to come regularly to receive and feed on His love, and so become strong in the Lord.

Today is the last teaching in this study of strengthening ourselves in the Lord. We will be looking at keys to help us deal with temptation. Bruce Wilkerson discusses this so clearly in his book, *“Beyond Jabez.”*

Let's look at the first source of temptation, the **flesh**, which is simply your own desire to sin. Galatians tells us the works of the flesh include adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, idolatry, etc. No matter how long we've walked with God, our flesh will always be with us this side of death and will always fight against what God wants. Paul tells us the Spirit wars against the flesh and that these things are opposed to one another (Gal 5:17). Bruce Wilkerson says, our flesh never improves, it never becomes more like the Spirit over time. But the grace and power of God are available to us to depend on the Holy Spirit and overcome the desires of the flesh and so bear the fruit of the Spirit.

The second source of temptation is the **world**, which is a system of values and beliefs, which war against the love of God, because that system is controlled by the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the devil. And Paul warns us in Romans 12:2 not to let the world squeeze us into its mold. But we are bombarded constantly with the world's messages – in schools, in the media, in business. Advertisements try to create discontentment, and entice us to become obsessively

greedy. But God says, *“Do not love the world or the things in the world.”* Shift your affections from things of the world to eternal, lasting wealth that makes this world's attractions seem worthless.

The third source of temptation is the **devil** or Satan himself. And he has an army of fallen angels – or demons - working for him. Paul says in Eph 6, *“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*

Satan is a real and vicious enemy. Isaiah 14: 12-15 tells how Lucifer, the strongest and most brilliant of angels, rebelled against God and suffered an eternal defeat. Now he hates God and wants to hurt him by hurting those who serve Him, and keep as many people as possible in spiritual darkness or bondage to sin, so they cannot serve God. Bruce Wilkerson says, *“If you live your whole life within your comfort zone, you're not much of a threat to the enemy. But when you stretch yourself for God, and when God enables you to take new territory – that's when Satan begins to oppose you most actively”*.

But 1 John 4:4 tells us he need not rule over you, *“because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”* And James 4:7 says, *“Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*

Although we believe that Jesus has paid for our sin, and we have forgiveness through Him, there are still consequences of sin – sometimes as a natural result of our actions, often resulting in severe trauma to others, other times God steps in and disciplines His children. Some sins carry heavier

consequences for those who have lived many years for God or hold an office of spiritual authority. James 3:1 says, “*We who teach will be judged more strictly.*”

We read in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that says, “*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*”

So God allows only those life experiences to occur that are within your Spirit-empowered ability to bear, and He also promises to make a way of escape. Cry out to Him in any temptation, “*Lord, where is the exit door?*” And He will show you the way out. You may have to leave your cloak and run away like Joseph did in the face of great temptation.

But when we fall into temptation of any kind, we are usually plagued by guilt, blame and condemnation. Sometimes it originates in our own mind, but is certainly reinforced by the accuser, the devil. Then we need to go back to the Word and read again and again, that Jesus came to take away our sin and our guilt and judgment. As we come to accept this and believe it, we can be set free from the paralyzing condemnation that keeps us inactive and unfruitful. We have to resist the accuser and believe that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We can, however, ask God for protection against temptation, “*Lead me not into temptation.*” Jabez also prayed, “*Keep me from evil*”. Pray for protection against **pride** – taking God's glory for yourself, **power** – lording it over others, **possessions** – a dangerous attitude towards wealth, and **sinful pleasure** – often God-given desires expressed in a sinful manner, beyond the clear biblical boundaries.

Bruce Wilkerson says there are 4 basic steps for protection. 1) expect temptations, especially as God begins to use you. 2) get rid of that sin that repeatedly defeats you. Hebrews 12:1 says, “*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,*

and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” In His strength, you will be able to lay aside your encumbering sin that is like a weight. 3) be continually filled with the Spirit's power. Ephesians 5:18 says, *“Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”* We need to choose to give God's Spirit more control in our lives – a commitment we must renew continually. 4) we must stand in the power of God's might. You do this by fighting the battle until you experience victory. Always keep uppermost in your thinking that Jesus is stronger than anything that will ever come against you. Eph 6:10 says, *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”* In His power, you become His mighty warrior, and so are strengthened in the Lord. Put on the armour of God – truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith and salvation and take up His weapons – the Word of God and prayer. (Eph 6:10–18). And fight, to stand your ground! And if you are wounded, ask a friend to help and pray for you. God wants you to stand and He will provide all your need to stand firm.

If some sin has you trapped, it is now time to deal with it honestly. No matter what has you trapped, or how strong its hold, Jesus Christ's death on the cross has broken the penalty and the power of that sin. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to lift you up out of your private pit. Sometimes it takes great courage to make a break with the sin that has you locked in its power. It might be a sexual relationship outside of God's plan of marriage, that needs to be ended today. Ask God's forgiveness and make that phone call to break it off today. You will be an overcomer. Revelation tell us that there are wonderful rewards for overcomers.

Pray with me as we close, *“Father, today as I face temptation, I choose to lay aside this weight of sin that always entraps me. By faith I receive the full power of your Holy Spirit, to fill me and set me free. I put on your armour – your salvation, your truth, your righteousness. And I take up the weapon of your Word and I believe in your power to protect me. As I submit to You and resist the devil, I believe he will flee from me. Help me to stand in your power. Help me to take the way of escape that you have given me. Thank you, Jesus for your victory on the cross. Amen.”*

God bless you till early next year when I hope to resume this time of short teachings from the Word of God.

