

REVISED & EXPANDED

CHARLES F. STANLEY BIBLE STUDY SERIES



DEVELOPING INNER STRENGTH

RECEIVE GOD'S POWER
IN EVERY SITUATION



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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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INTRODUCTION

THE HOPE OF GREATER STRENGTH

A great deal has been written in recent years about inner healing, emotional wounds, and reversing low self-esteem. Bookstores and online sites are filled with self-help books. However, what so many people in our world do not realize is that the Bible has been the authoritative book on healing and strengthening the human soul (mind, emotions, and will) for thousands of years. The Bible is not a self-help book but a God-will-help book. The Bible holds out the hope and promise of God's eternal help for those who humbly turn to Him.

When we are faced with times of intense emotional stress, we will eventually reach the end of our strength. While we may be tempted to think at such times that turning to God is a sign of emotional weakness—that we should somehow just “power through”—the reality is that none of us can fully heal our spirit, soul, or body. There are certain problems and conditions that are simply beyond our capacity to self-heal. The good news is that if we are followers of Christ, the end of ourselves is the beginning for God! The help that God offers us in His Word is both eternal and timely. It is highly effective and freely available to all.

This book can be used by you alone or by several people in a small-group study. At various times, you will be asked to relate to the material in one of the following four ways.

First, what new insights have you gained? Make notes about the insights you have. You may want to record them in your Bible or in a

separate journal. As you reflect on your new understanding, you are likely to see how God has moved in your life.

Second, have you ever had a similar experience? You approach the Bible from your own unique background . . . your own particular set of understandings about the world that you bring with you when you open God's Word. For this reason, it is important to consider how your experiences are shaping your understanding and allow yourself to be open to the truth that God reveals.

Third, how do you feel about the material? While you should not depend solely on your emotions as a gauge for your faith, it is important for you to be aware of them as you study a passage of Scripture and can freely express them to God. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will use your emotions to compel you to look at your life in a different or challenging way.

Fourth, in what way do you feel challenged to respond or to act? God's Word may inspire you or challenge you to take a particular action. Take this challenge seriously and find ways to move into it. If God reveals a particular need that He wants you to address, take that as His "marching orders." God will empower you to do something with the challenge that He has just given you.

Start your Bible study sessions in prayer. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear. As you conclude your study, ask the Lord to seal what you have learned so you will not forget it. Ask Him to help you grow into the fullness of the nature and character of Christ Jesus.

I encourage you to keep the Bible at the center of your study. A genuine Bible study stays focused on God's Word and promotes a growing faith and a closer walk with the Holy Spirit in each person who participates.

LESSON 1



RECEIVING GOD'S GIFT OF INNER STRENGTH

IN THIS LESSON

Learning: How can I get rid of my emotional baggage?

Growing: What part does God play in this,
and what part do I play?

When Jesus began His ministry, He announced to the people in His hometown of Nazareth, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

Developing Inner Strength

Jesus came to this earth to take care of our sin problem and make it possible for us to experience forgiveness and eternal life. As He said of His mission on this earth, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). However, in the Bible we find that Jesus also came to make us whole from the inside out. He came to provide wholeness that brings emotional, mental, and spiritual strength.

1. What comes to mind when you think of “inner strength”?

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2. What new insights do you hope to gain through this study?

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THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many people believe all the Lord desires is for us to be born again—that we accept Jesus as our personal Savior and then continue to believe in Him until the day when we die and go to heaven. The Lord most certainly desires this for each of us. But He wants so much more! Our lives in Christ do not end with a salvation experience. Salvation is actually just the beginning point. Spiritual growth, maturity, and inner strength are to be the norm of our lives.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us. He enables us to become more and more like Jesus and experience what He purchased for us on the cross in an ever deepening way. As Paul wrote, the Holy Spirit "helps in our weaknesses" and "makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." As we submit to His work, our relationship with God is strengthened and we begin to demonstrate certain "fruit"—traits such as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23).

As we bear the identity of the Holy Spirit at work in us, and display His fruit, we begin to respond to needs as Jesus would respond—with power, love, and mercy. We begin to think what Jesus would think in response to every situation and to say what He would say. Even in the most troubling times, we discover an *inner strength* and peace that we might not even realize that we possessed. This is a peace from God, "which surpasses all understanding," and guards our "hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

As Jesus was preparing to return to heaven, He spoke to His disciples about this incredible power they would receive when the Holy Spirit came upon them. "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:7–8). This same power is available to each of His followers today.

- 3.** How would you describe the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? How have you received strength from God in the past when you most needed it?

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- 4.** What are some areas of your life that you would like to see further strengthened?

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LIFE TO THE FULL

No matter who we are, we are all “poor” in some way. We each lack something or are weaker in one area of our emotional makeup than in others. No person is strong in all areas of life at all times. Just as we are healthier physically on some days than on others, so we go through periods when we experience a weakness in our emotions.

When those times of emotional weakness come, we generally experience emotional pain. If we deal with our emotional pain as soon as it arises, receiving God’s help and healing for the injury that we have suffered, this pain is generally temporary. At other times, however, the

emotional pain lingers. We may not deal with it, hoping that it will go away or heal itself. We may not know how to deal with the pain, and continue to struggle on without relief. We may not believe that we should deal with the pain, thinking perhaps that pain is inevitable and a normal part of every person's life.

If you are experiencing emotional pain today, I have three thoughts that I want to share as we begin this study. *First, time will not heal your pain, but Jesus Christ can.* He will heal you in your emotions if you turn to Him and receive the strength that He offers to you. *Second, the Bible presents God's ways for dealing with emotional pain.* For this reason, you must learn what the Bible says and apply God's truth to your life. *Third, God wants you to live in emotional freedom and strength.* He wants you to be unshackled from emotional weakness or inner pain.

The results of lingering emotional pain that goes unaddressed and unhealed can be devastating to a person and to a family. Lingering or pervasive emotional weakness will sap your energy, drain away your creativity, divert your personal motivation and enthusiasm for life, and affects your relationships. If left unhealed, it can even cause serious damage to your physical health and to your overall effectiveness as a witness for Christ in this world.

None of these conditions are God's desire for you! Rather, the Lord wants you to be filled with a vitality and enthusiasm for life, be creative in every area of talent and skill that He has given, have healthy and vibrant relationships, and be an effective witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wants you to have a full life. As Jesus also said of His mission on this earth, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Let me ask you several questions. *Are you lonely? Do you feel restless and frustrated? Is anxiety eating away at your joy? Do you feel burned out, insecure, broken—as if you are a failure?* These conditions are symptoms of emotional wounds that can weaken you and make you more vulnerable to manipulation by other people and attacks in the spiritual realm. These are the symptoms Jesus came to heal and to strengthen.

Developing Inner Strength

Remember, Jesus said that He came to heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, bring sight to the blind, and set at liberty those who are oppressed. Emotional pain and weakness will cause you to feel dejected, “bound up” inside, blind to the goodness of God, and imprisoned in darkness. Jesus came to set you free and make you whole. He came to impart to you a deep, abiding, and consistent strength . . . and develop His strength within you.

- 5.** “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). How does the world give “peace”? How does this differ from the peace that Jesus brings?

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- 6.** “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). What encouragement does this verse offer you?

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SET DOWN EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

Jesus is the Savior, the Healer, the Deliverer, and the One who makes you whole. However, there is a twofold role that you are required to play in bringing about healing of your emotions and receiving God's strength.

First, you must be willing to set down your emotional baggage.

“Emotional baggage” refers to old feelings, thought patterns, and past experiences that continue to traumatize you every time they are triggered or recalled. Some people have become so accustomed to carrying such heavy emotional baggage they cannot imagine life without that burden. They are so familiar with emotional pain that they can't imagine life without it. In fact, the thought of letting go of something in their past is threatening to them.

In some cases, people may feel they are opening themselves up to increased vulnerability or greater accountability—which may be true. But what is *not* true is that greater vulnerability or accountability automatically leads to renewed pain. Jesus can be present in any situation to comfort, love, and nurture you when you make yourself vulnerable to Him and open up your life to receive the fullness of His love and forgiveness. Jesus is present whenever you face up to your sin and make amends. He will help you to become accountable to Him and to others, always in a framework of love and forgiveness.

There is no benefit in continuing to carry old emotional burdens. There is no good reason for hanging on to what slows you down, keeps you from being vibrantly alive and strong, or stops you from experiencing the fullness of life that God has prepared for you. On the other hand, there is every good reason to set down your emotional baggage at the foot of the cross and to walk forward in your life with a new freedom to your step!

Today is a great day to come to the Lord and say, “Jesus, I am at the end of my ability to heal my own emotions. I cannot make myself strong. I lay down my emotional burdens, pain, and weakness at Your feet, and with Your help I resolve never to pick them up again.”

7. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17)? What does it mean to be a “new creation” in Christ? What “old things” have now passed away?

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8. “One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14). What are some things you need to “forget” and leave behind you so you can press on toward the life that God wants you to have?

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LET THE LORD DO HIS PART

There is another step you must be willing to take to bring about the healing of your emotions and receive God’s strength: *you must invite the Lord to do His work in your life*. The Holy Spirit will not overstep the

boundaries of your will. God will not invade your life and strip away painful memories or heal your withered emotions unless you ask Him to do this work in you.

Today is a great day for asking the Lord Jesus to take from your heart the emotional load that you are carrying! He wants to heal your emotional wounds, bind up your emotional pain, and set you free from emotional bondage. *Your past and present do not need to continue into your future.* What is a reality today does not need to be what will be the reality of tomorrow.

If you are feeling unloved, you can feel love. If you are weighed down under a load of guilt, you can receive forgiveness. If you are wallowing in a cloud of confusion, you can experience God's wisdom and guidance. If your life is in turmoil, you can have peace in your heart. If you are rejected, you can be accepted and surrounded by genuine Christian friends.

God created you with a great potential for good and God desires to help you fulfill your potential. Your future can be better than your past or present. You can grow and develop and be ever more transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. You can experience greater fulfillment and wholeness than you are presently. You can have an even more abundant life than the one you presently have.

Those who are discouraged tend to feel they are locked into their present position—emotionally, spiritually, physically, materially. God has the keys to your prison. He can make a way out of your present circumstances and situation where you do not see a way. He can sovereignly change hearts and remove roadblocks.

The message of God's goodness is that you *can* survive the assaults of the devil against your life, endure the persecution that comes your way, be victorious over the circumstances that assail you, and—in the midst of any kind of trial, trouble, or tribulation—know God's peace and joy. You have the hope of Christ within you . . . and you also have the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit at work within you.

Developing Inner Strength

So today, invite Christ to begin a healing work within you. Simply pray, “Lord Jesus, I ask You to heal me and make me strong in emotions, mind, and will. Please give me the courage to walk through life without the pain, insecurities, frustrations, and alienation that I have been feeling. I trust You to set me free, make me whole, and keep me strong.”

Today is a day for new beginnings toward a stronger tomorrow!

- 9. “Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43:19). What new thing do you long for the Lord to do in your life?

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- 10. How have you invited God to begin that healing work within you? What do you need to do if you haven't yet taken this step?

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TODAY AND TOMORROW

Today: God wants me to be free of my past and move into the future that He has in store for me.

Tomorrow: I will seek God's help in letting go of my emotional baggage.

CLOSING PRAYER

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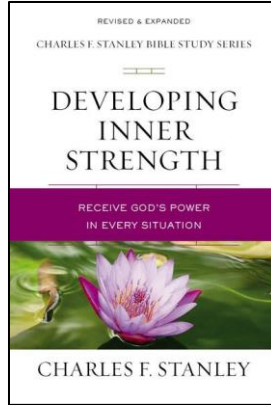
Father, we thank You for loving us so gently, kindly, and with patience beyond our understanding. Be with us today as we begin to evaluate the emotional baggage we have been carrying with us through life—baggage that has only been weighing us down. Help us to leave our past at your feet so we can press on toward the life you intend for us. Thank You for being so willing to provide everything we need. We love You, praise You, and thank You for being the kind of loving Father who is ready and willing to help us.

NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS



Use this space to write any key points, questions, or prayer requests from this week's study.

A series of horizontal dotted lines providing a space for writing notes and prayer requests.



DEVELOPING INNER STRENGTH

by Charles F. Stanley

Are you lonely or anxious? Do you feel burned-out and exhausted with life?

In *Developing Inner Strength*, you will look first at Scripture, and then at yourself. You will be led through a variety of emotional issues—including fear, brokenness, abuse, guilt, and frustration—and learn what the Bible has to say about gaining victory over those areas of your life. Best of all, you will learn that God's Holy Spirit is available to you—every day, in every situation—to bring you the peace and joy of God.

The **Charles F. Stanley Bible Study Series** is a unique approach to Bible study, incorporating biblical truth, personal insights, emotional responses, and a call to action. Each study draws on Dr. Stanley's many years of teaching the guiding principles found in God's Word, showing how we can apply them in practical ways to every situation we face. This edition of the series has been completely revised and updated, and includes two brand-new lessons from Dr. Stanley.

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