



foreword by
MELISSA B. KRUGER &
COURTNEY DOCTOR

Strong *in the* Lord

A 30-DAY DEVOTIONAL
ON THE ARMOR OF GOD

edited by
WINFREE BRISLEY

“A successful battle comes from knowing our enemy, wearing our armor, and trusting our commander. *Strong in the Lord* is a simple yet profound gift to believers as we fight our spiritual battle. I’m grateful for how it helped me meditate on each piece of the armor of God, pray in response, and ultimately entrust myself to my victorious Lord Jesus. I look forward to recommending it to many others!”

Kristen Wetherell, author, *Help for the Hungry Soul* and the For the Bible Tells Me So board book series

“This devotion is an excellent reset for the woman who has come to the end of herself. It’s so easy to pursue self-sufficiency, but those of us who have gone that route know we fall short. We are limited and weak, in need of a strength that’s outside ourselves. *Strong in the Lord* reminds us that our weakness is a gift because it leads us to true strength found in God alone. Take this book and the armor of God and receive his strength.”

Jen Oshman, author; speaker; Women’s Ministry Director, Redemption Parker, Colorado

Strong in the Lord

THE GOSPEL COALITION

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A 30-Day Devotional on the Armor of God

Edited by Winfree Brisley

Foreword by Melissa B. Kruger and Courtney Doctor

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God does not need your strength: he has more than enough power of his own. He asks your weakness: he has none of that himself, and he is longing, therefore, to take your weakness, and use it as the instrument in his own mighty hand. Will you not yield your weakness to him, and receive his strength?

CHARLES SPURGEON

“The Best Strengthening Medicine”
Sermon preached June 21, 1891

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Foreword

We have a tendency to think that if life is hard, we must be doing something wrong. Our social media feeds are flooded with curated images of beautiful people and places that distort our sense of reality and leave us thinking that if we could just get ourselves together, life would be calm and carefree.

And we can slide into similar thinking in our spiritual lives. We might think that if prayer is a struggle, if reading the Bible doesn't always lead to deep insights and connection with God, if we're repenting of sin day after day, we must be doing the Christian life wrong.

But what if the struggle is actually a sign that you're on the right track?

In his book, *Fighting for Holiness*, J. C. Ryles writes,

The saddest symptom about many so-called Christians is the utter absence of anything like conflict and fight in their Christianity. They eat, they drink, they dress, they work, they amuse themselves, they get money, they spend money, they go through a scanty round of formal religious service once or twice every week. But the great spiritual warfare—

its watchings and strugglings, its agonies and anxieties, its battles and contests—all of this they appear to know nothing at all.¹

If we're honest, most of us would prefer not to know anything about this struggle. After all, who wants to experience agonies and anxieties? But Ryle explains why it's a good thing. "We may take comfort about our souls if we know anything of an inward fight and conflict," he explains. "It is the invariable companion of genuine Christian holiness."²

In other words, if following Jesus and seeking to grow in Christ feels hard, be encouraged! That's evidence that you're putting off sin and putting on Christlikeness (Col. 3:5–17). It's confirmation that you're seeking the good portion that cannot be taken away (Luke 10:42) instead of pursuing the fleeting pleasures of sin.

But if you're like us, even as you find this truth encouraging, you may still feel exhausted. The struggle of life in a broken world can take a toll on us, leaving us feeling worn down and weak. Thankfully, as believers in Christ, we aren't left to rely on our own resources. As Paul explains in Ephesians 6:10–18, God has given us his strength and a whole suit of spiritual armor to help us stand strong in the fight. But we need to understand what this armor is and how to put it on.

In this book, you'll hear from godly women who have experienced their share of weakness and struggle and are relying on God's strength every day as they follow Christ. You won't find five steps to an easier Christian life or a hack to revolutionize your quiet time. But you will find thoughtful reflections to help

you understand each piece of spiritual armor and how it gives us strength to live in light of the gospel. If you feel weak and weary, let this devotional point you to our God—“the one who gives power and strength to his people” (Ps. 68:35).

Melissa B. Kruger and Courtney Doctor

Introduction

Winfrey Brisley

Since I turned forty, I've noticed a theme at doctor's appointments. My primary care physician told me to start taking calcium supplements to strengthen my bones. My dermatologist suggested a cream to strengthen my skin's moisture barrier (whatever that is). And my eye doctor told me to be thankful my prescription was holding steady for now because I would most certainly need bifocals sooner rather than later.

You may not have doctors subtly (or not so subtly) implying that your physical strength is fading, but we all have something in our lives that makes us aware of our weakness and need for help. Maybe it's a broken relationship, a financial need, or a chronic illness. Maybe it's the daily grind of trying to do it all, be it all, and have it all while knowing that even if you give all you have, it won't be enough.

Culture tells us as women to look within ourselves for strength and empowerment, arming ourselves with beauty, education, career success, financial independence, and a picture-perfect family. But in reality, chasing those things leaves many of us much

more aware of our weakness than our strength. We may be able to pretend we have it all together for a while, but eventually we're confronted with the truth that we don't.

Thankfully, the Bible has good news for us. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, we learn that God's "power is made perfect in weakness." And in Ephesians 6:10, Paul tells us we can "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might," when we put on the armor of God.

There's a strength we all need that can't be captured in a photo, absorbed from a vitamin, measured in dollars, or displayed on a diploma. It's spiritual strength, and we don't need to muster it ourselves. We need to receive it from God.

In this devotional, we'll study Ephesians 6:10–18 where Paul explains why we need spiritual strength and how we can find it. We'll seek to grow in understanding what the armor of God is and what it means to stand strong in the Lord. We'll examine each piece of armor—the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of readiness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit—along with prayer which undergirds them all, considering what Ephesians 6 teaches us about each one and looking to other passages of Scripture that will help our understanding.

Each day of this devotional includes a verse to read, a devotional reflection, questions to help you respond to what you've learned, and a prayer to help you look to the Lord for strength. You might choose to work through this devotional on your own over thirty days (or however many it takes!). Or you could read it with a friend or a group, discussing what you learn and encouraging one another along the way.

If you've been around the church for long, you're probably familiar with the truth that people are weak and God is strong.

After all, one of the first songs we learn to sing as children says, “[we] are weak but he is strong.”³ Maybe you even learned a song about the armor of God during vacation Bible school, and you can sing the whole list of armor with hand motions. But if you’re like many Christians, you may not have studied the armor piece by piece before or considered how it can strengthen you in daily life.

So let’s find out. As we take a closer look at the armor of God, we’ll see that the beauty of the gospel is displayed in every piece.

TAKE UP THE
ARMOR OF GOD

Winfrey Brisley

DAY 1

You Can't Do It

Read

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
(Eph. 6:10)

Reflect

For the most part, I have fond memories of elementary school. I went to a small school in a small town where my teachers and classmates felt like family and learning felt like fun. Except the one dreaded week each school year when our PE teacher administered the President's Physical Fitness Test.

I can still vividly see myself hanging from the pull-up bar on the playground, struggling to no avail to pull my chin above the bar. Despite my kind PE teacher's encouragements of "Be strong, Winfree. You can do this!" I don't think I ever successfully completed a pull-up. I simply couldn't muster strength I didn't have, and it was discouraging.

But when I read Paul's exhortation in today's verse, I breathe a sigh of relief. He calls us to "be strong," but he understands that

on our own, we're not strong. So he adds, "in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (Eph. 6:10). We can't muster strength we don't have—unless we have access to someone else's strength. The only way my chin would have ever cleared the pullup bar was if someone else took hold of my legs and pushed me up. Paul is telling us that, in the Lord, we have access to much more strength than that.

Earlier in Ephesians, Paul prays for the believers in Ephesus to know "the immeasurable greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead" (1:19–20). So when Paul tells us to "be strong in the Lord," that's the strength he has in mind. God's power is so great it can't be measured by a test of strength. God's power is toward his children—never against us—always working for our spiritual good. God's power defeated death itself when Jesus rose from the grave.

God's power isn't just enough to get our chins over the bar in the Christian life. It's enough to "do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). And if you're in Christ, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, you already have full access to it—it's "the power at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). If Christ is not yet your Lord, start by considering your need for his power to save you from your sin. Before we can "be strong in the Lord," we have to submit to Christ as Lord and trust him alone for salvation.

As we'll see in the coming days, being strong in the Lord isn't about flexing physical muscles or showing our coworkers who's boss. It's the spiritual strength that enables us to stand firm in our faith, to hold fast to truth, and to walk in righteousness whether we're at the gym or at the doctor's office, at work or at home. So

be strong, friend! You *can't* do it all. But if you're in Christ, God's power is at work in you, and he can do much more than all you ask or think.

Respond

Read Psalm 28:7–9. List the different ways the psalmist describes God. How does the psalmist find help? What's a situation in your life where you need the Lord's strength to help you?

Request

Father, thank you that the same power you used to raise Jesus from the dead is at work in me through your Holy Spirit. When I'm tempted to rely on my strength, please help me to rely on you. Enlighten the eyes of my heart that I would know “the immeasurable greatness of [your] power toward us who believe, according to the working of your great might” (Eph. 1:19).

DAY 2

Know Who You're Fighting

Read

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:11–12)

Reflect

As a mom of three boys, I deal with some incredibly dirty laundry. But no matter how stubborn the stain, I'm more stubborn. Armed with an array of stain fighting gels, sprays, and detergents, even the toughest stains from grass and mud to pizza sauce and red popsicles are no match for me.

Occasionally though, I encounter a mysterious stain that I can't readily identify. So I'll ask the owner of the clothing—"Hey buddy, do you happen to know what this stain is?"—because if he can tell me what caused the stain, it's much easier for me to get it out.

In today's verse, Paul explains that there's a similar principle at work in our spiritual lives. We're engaged in a battle, and we need to know what, or rather who, we're fighting against.

It's not hard for us to understand why Paul assumes that wrestling is part of life. We wrestle with decisions, with emotions, with expectations, and with other people. But Paul says there's more to our wrestling than meets the eye. It's not just against flesh and blood—other people, our own bodies, or our fleshly struggles with sin. We have a spiritual enemy, Satan, who operates in the spiritual realm.

The idea of an evil, invisible enemy working against us may sound strange to our modern sensibilities. But Christians throughout history have affirmed this understanding of today's verses. Puritan minister Thomas Brooks even wrote a book called *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* in which he details many of the specific ways Satan works against us and explains how we can stand against him.

Brooks explains that Satan has devices to draw us into sin, devices to hinder us from holy duties and religious practices, devices to keep us sad, doubting, and questioning, among others. The good news is the armor of God helps us fight Satan's schemes. But we have to start by understanding he's a real enemy that we need to take seriously.

For example, why do we so often think we don't have time to read our Bibles? Is it really true that we don't have five or ten minutes at some point in our day to open God's word? Probably not. On the surface, it may seem that we're wrestling against our busy schedules, but Brooks says this could be one of Satan's schemes—presenting the difficulty of performing religious duties.⁴

Satan doesn't want us to spend time in God's word, so he may try to convince us that we don't have a minute to spare, or that if we tried to sit down and read, we'd be interrupted anyway.

The more aware we are of Satan's schemes, the better equipped we are to wrestle against him rather than give in. And our wrestling is not in vain. James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Thankfully, it's not our job to defeat Satan. Christ has already done that on the cross, and he will return one day to banish Satan forever. In the meantime, we have this assurance—as we submit to God and resist the devil, Satan will flee. He's fighting a losing battle because Christ has already won.

Respond

Read Genesis 3:1–13, which tells the story of Satan's original scheme to get Adam and Eve to sin. How did Satan convince Eve to eat the fruit even though God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat it? How might Satan be tempting you to disobey God? What would it look like for you to submit to God and resist the devil?

Request

Father, please shine the light of your truth to help me see how Satan's schemes are at work in my life. Give me strength to resist him and submit to you. Thank you that you have already won the victory through Jesus.

DAY 3

Get Dressed

Read

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (Eph. 6:13)

Reflect

When I was a freshman in college, I had a five-minute walk from my dorm to my first class. One morning when I was halfway along my route, the blue sky overhead suddenly turned gray. A torrential downpour ensued, and I was caught totally unprepared. By the time I made it inside a building, I was so wet that I wrung out my socks in the bathroom sink before sloshing down the hall to class.

After that experience, I purchased a high-quality rain jacket and waterproof boots. I checked the weather forecast before heading off to class each morning and kept an umbrella in my backpack—just in case. And I never went to class soaking wet again. Wearing the proper attire when a rainstorm hits makes all the difference.

Being properly outfitted is also important spiritually. To withstand Satan's schemes (which come without warning), we need to "take up the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:13). And as I experienced in that unexpected downpour, the time to put on your protective gear is *before* the storm hits. But how can we put on the armor of God, and where do we get it in the first place?

Notice that Paul's instruction is to "take up" the armor of God. He doesn't tell us to make or fashion armor for ourselves. He doesn't tell us to search the internet or local stores to find each piece of protective gear. He doesn't even tell us to borrow it from a friend at church. No, because it's the armor of God, we can only get it from God.

Here's the good news: if we're in Christ, we already have it. Remember the pieces of armor? They're the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of readiness given by the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And the New Testament writers connect each one to Jesus.

He is the truth (John 14:6) and the source of our righteousness (Rom. 3:21–22). The good news of the gospel is that Jesus made peace by his blood on the cross (Col. 1:20). He is the object of our faith (Gal. 2:16), the means of our salvation (Acts 4:12), and the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14). We have the whole armor of God in Jesus!

But we have to take it up. Armor only protects us if we put it on.

Tim Keller explained taking up the armor of God like this: "You've got something in Christ. You've got benefits and privileges and powers. . . . Are you acting as if they're true?"⁵ That's ultimately

what it means to take up the armor of God—to apply the truth of the gospel in our everyday lives. To live as if the things the Bible teaches are really true.

But before we can apply the benefits of the gospel, we need to understand them. So in the devotions that follow, we're going to study each piece of armor—each benefit, privilege, or power—considering what it is and how we can live like it's true. Thankfully, God gives us the strength even for this—for “his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). God not only gives us his armor, he also gives us the strength to use it.

Respond

Read Ephesians 3:14–19 where Paul asks God to grant the Ephesians spiritual strength. What specific requests does Paul make on their behalf? How does Paul's prayer change or deepen your understanding of spiritual strength?

Request

Father, thank you for providing the spiritual armor I need through Jesus. Help me to put it on by applying the truths of the gospel in my life. Please “grant [me] to be strengthened with power through [your] Spirit in [my] inner being” that I would “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:16, 19).

