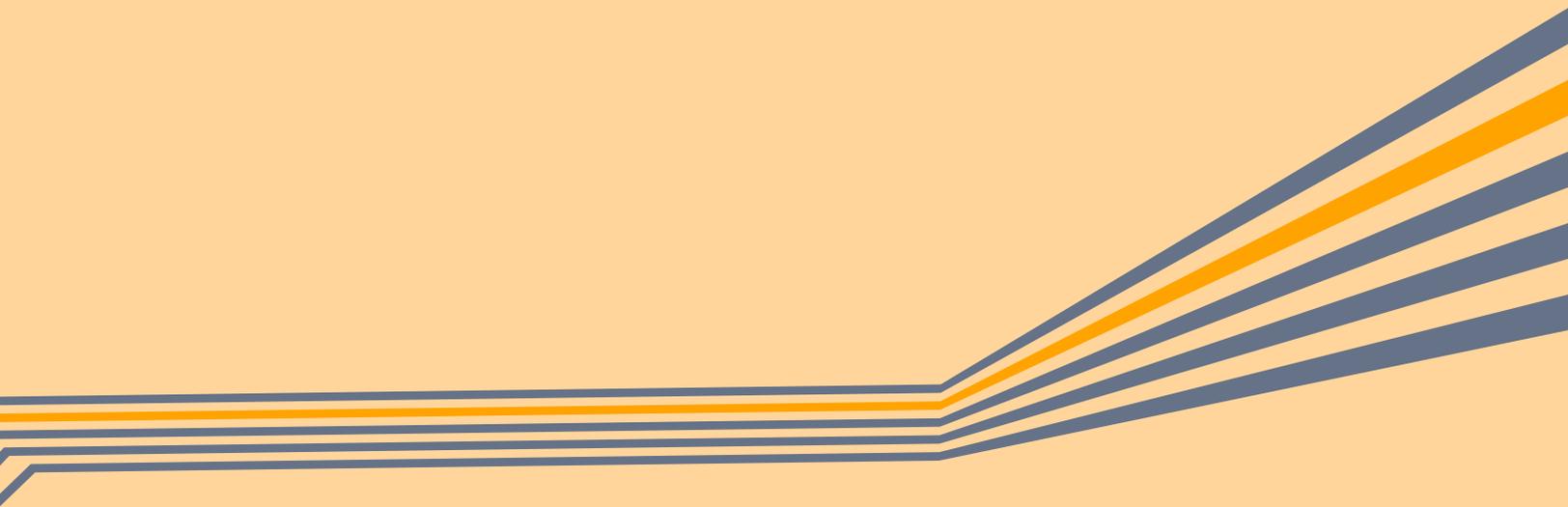


SESSION 3





A STRONG LIFE **Session 3**

Life can feel like an endless barrage of challenges, setbacks, and disappointments. Thankfully, the Apostle Paul's mindset and attitude provides us with a blueprint for enduring adversity. This week, we'll find four keys to lean into God's strength during tough times.

- 1. Be Positive:** Because our God is good, there is always good to be found.
- 2. Live Purposeful:** Challenges are the very things that shape us, refine us, and point us to true north.
- 3. Maintain Perspective:** The Bible calls life, with all its ups and downs, a vapor. Our home is in heaven, so we can live in light of eternity.
- 4. Stand in Christ's Power:** Jesus is on your side! So even when you feel weak, remember, you can stand firm because His power is made perfect in your weakness.

No matter what you're facing this week, God's ready to share exactly what you need to build a strong life!

SESSION 3

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL



DAY 8:

ACORNS INTO OAK TREES

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-13

Imagine an acorn. It's first planted in complete darkness. Then, in time, it sprouts roots to access the water in the soil and a shoot that stretches to the sun. This small seed buried in the ground becomes *exceptionally different* and *radically better*.

Even the mightiest of oaks start in a dark place in order to grow into God's grand design. In a similar way, our hard times can feel like the soil. You question, "Why am I here in this place?" But God can use those difficult places of darkness and isolation to grow into something more wonderful than we ever thought possible.

Paul's imprisonment was similar "soil." His seemingly awful situation "actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." What seemed buried, done for, and gone for good was just getting started. When Paul shared the Gospel, he planted a "seed" in someone's heart. Jesus explained in Matthew 13:23 that everyone who heard and understood the Gospel had a heart made of "good soil." Good soil produces new life!

Paul experienced great difficulties in his life. It was in prison, he wrote this letter to the Philippians that millions have been encouraged by for two thousand years. The beauty is, God uses the seemingly irredeemable to grow abundant life. He does the same for us today. He turns our hard times into moments of victory.

Finding joy in dark times starts with a perspective shift. Like Paul, we can zoom out and see He's still turning acorns into oak trees. He can do the same in your life *now*.

REFLECT

Memory Verse

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21

To aid in your memorization, write out this week's memory verse:

Have there been moments in your life where unexpected joy or growth sprouted from difficult circumstances? Describe one.

In what areas of your life might you need a perspective shift to see God's purpose at work, even amidst challenges?

How can you embrace the concept that, like Paul, your hardships might "actually serve to advance the gospel" in your own life or the lives of others?

What practical steps can you take to seek joy and purpose when facing trying times, just as Paul did?

DAY 9:

LIVE WITH ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

PHILIPPIANS 1:23-24

The tug-of-war of life often leaves us caught between our earthly realities and the promise of an eternal home. I can't wait for heaven! It's going to be amazing. Especially during those moments when life feels overwhelming. It's comforting to imagine a place with no sorrow, pain, or tears—a place where all things are made new.

In Philippians, Paul shares his own tug-of-war. He feels the pull toward heaven with *"a desire to depart and be with Jesus."* Yet, he knows there's work left to be done on Earth. For Paul, it's not about escaping troubles but understanding the bigger picture.

When we remember that our stay here is temporary, our current struggles feel lighter. Our problems, no matter how large, become blips on the radar of eternity.

Like looking out across a landscape from a mountaintop, an eternal perspective helps us see life's challenges in their true scale. It reminds us that every heartache, every struggle, and every pain has an expiration date. This doesn't make our trials insignificant, yet it certainly changes how we respond to them.

Set your sights on the eternal, knowing that this world is not your home. As Paul shared in 2 Corinthians 4:17, *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."*

What is coming far outweighs what is happening now. Today, make the decision to live with an eternal perspective, which is "far better."

REFLECT

Memory Verse

*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. **Philippians 1:21***

To aid in your memorization, write out this week's memory verse:

How does having an eternal perspective influence your daily decisions?

What aspects of your life need a heavenly perspective?

How does focusing on heaven bring comfort during trying times?

In what ways can you remind yourself of the eternal when faced with the temporal?

DAY 10:

PROGRESS AND JOY

And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.

PHILIPPIANS 1:25

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is a well-known and famous 19th century British preacher. However, not many people know much of his wife, Susannah. Early in their marriage, she became so sick she could barely leave their house. But she felt a strong need to do something more for their ministry. She decided to help pastors who couldn't afford her husband's books. So, from the confines of her home she started a program called the "Book Fund". Susannah's "Book Fund" gave thousands of pastors the books and resources they needed to advance God's mission in their own ministries.

Susannah was a trailblazer, and a perfect illustration of the "progress" Paul speaks about in today's guiding verse. His aim was directed toward the Philippians' progress and joy in faith.

The Greek word for *progress* here (*prokopé*) isn't defined as a meandering trudge along an ambiguous path. Instead, it means more like cutting a direct path through dense forest and underbrush to advance a marching army.

Paul knew the Philippians were called to be pioneers for the Gospel. They were persevering through persecution. They were coming against demonic opposition. They were sharing the hope of the Gospel! What was the outcome of that pioneering progress? Joy.

Making progress in our faith, both in our character and our actions, produces joy. So try this—the next time joy seems to be eluding you, ask the Holy Spirit for a perspective shift—to show you the next step in your "progress...of faith." Then, take the step in faith—joy will most certainly follow.

REFLECT

Memory Verse

*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. **Philippians 1:21***

To aid in your memorization, write out this week's memory verse:

In what ways are you currently pioneering or "cutting a path" in your faith journey? Are there obstacles or "underbrush" that you need to clear to advance?

Like Susannah Spurgeon, what limitations or challenges are you facing right now that could actually be avenues for progress and joy in your faith?

What is the next step in your "progress...of faith," and how can you take it to experience joy?

DAY 11:

BUILDING SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

JOHN 16:33

In both the gym and life, progress typically comes through pressure. How is that for a perspective shift? At the gym, you lift weights or run to build physical strength. Similarly, in our spiritual lives, we face various forms of pressure—job stress, relationship issues, and other life challenges. The key in all life scenarios is how we respond. Just as the improper lifting of weights can cause injury, responding poorly to life’s pressures can set us back.

It’s important to understand that adversity is not a sign of divine punishment; it’s a part of life Jesus guaranteed would come! He said in the world we’ll have *tribulation*, or difficult trials. Adversity will come. Just like Jesus, Paul went through many trials and temptations. But he didn’t give in to them—he stood firm. As a result, when he allowed God to work through them his life became a powerful testimony to the grace of God.

Pressure builds strength! But it also reveals.

So, why do we face trials? They serve as spiritual workouts, producing pressure that can reveal wrong attitudes and impure motives. When we address these issues, we grow stronger in our faith. In essence, it’s not the trials themselves, but it’s our response that leads us to spiritual growth.

Just as you wouldn’t avoid lifting weights or going for a run to build strength, don’t shy away from life’s challenges. They are opportunities for spiritual growth.

REFLECT

Memory Verse

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21

To aid in your memorization, write out this week's memory verse:

Reflect on a recent challenge or pressure you've faced. How did you respond, and what did it reveal about your spiritual strength or areas for growth?

Read John 16:33. How does this promise affect your perspective on the trials you're currently experiencing?

What practical steps can you take to respond to life's pressures in a way that strengthens your faith this week?



DAY 12:

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness..."

2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-9A

Do you ever feel like adversity seems to follow you? You may find it counterintuitive, but accepting our weakness can lead to our greatest strength. Sounds like a paradox, right? But this is precisely what we see in Paul's life.

In today's guiding verse, Paul "pleaded" for the Lord to remove what he called a "thorn" in his flesh. While we don't know exactly what it was, we do know that it was a serious challenge for Paul. Yet, Jesus's answer wasn't what he'd expected. *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."* Talk about a perspective shift!

In this, Paul learned that no matter how strong or problem-free we seem, none of us has the power to walk the Christian life in our own power.

In our culture of self-reliance, we're told to power through, to be strong, and to embrace independence. The reality is, we all have cracks and limitations in our lives where we don't feel quite as sturdy. God specializes in filling those very gaps. He doesn't just want to make us stronger; He wants to be our Source of strength.

So today, don't shy away from your adversities. Embrace them, because in doing so, you're opening doors for God to work in miraculous ways. "His strength is made perfect in our weakness."

REFLECT

Memory Verse

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21

To aid in your memorization, write out this week's memory verse:

What are some weaknesses you've been hesitant to embrace?

How can your weaknesses become a testament to God's power in your life?

Are you relying on your own strength or inviting God to fill in your gaps?

How can embracing weakness lead to a deeper relationship with God?

DAY 13:

TURN BARRIERS INTO BRIDGES

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14

When life puts you in chains, where do you see yourself: trapped in a prison cell or in the center of a new opportunity? Let's talk about Paul's perspective.

Paul was under surveillance and imprisonment by the infamous and elite Praetorian Guard. They were special forces like the Navy Seals or Green Berets. They were the elite of the elite, responsible for protecting Roman emperors.

To most, they would mean it's the end of the road. But Paul? He saw an audience. He discerned the deeper opportunity. He was physically chained, but his spirit was unbound and free. Rather than seeing the Praetorian Guard as his jailers, he saw people who desperately needed the Gospel.

Our circumstances can be hard—even grave. But Paul shows us that opportunities can lie behind our obstacles and circumstances. It's not about ignoring reality but understanding God's deeper purpose behind it. So what if your challenge, your "prison," is the gateway to impacting people you'd never imagined you could reach? Can you say, like Paul, "My chains are in Christ"?

Sometimes, the things we see as barriers are bridges to God's purpose for our lives. Today, shift your perspective to match His and watch it turn out "for the furtherance of the Gospel."

REFLECT

Memory Verse

*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. **Philippians 1:21***

To aid in your memorization, write out this week's memory verse:

Which areas of your life have felt restrictive lately? What might be the hidden opportunity within them?

Considering Paul's perspective with the Praetorian Guard, how can you shift your view of current trials?

Think about a recent challenge. How might that situation serve a greater purpose than you initially thought?

WEEKLY REFLECTION

What are the top three realizations you had this session?

What is the main thing you believe God wants you to apply?
