

Lenten Prayer Guide - 2022

Week 6 - Courage and Strength

To achieve success at anything takes determination, focus and a sense of purpose or calling. From the Olympic athlete to the professional musician to a business owner, success comes from focus and hard work. This is true in all facets of life. Marriage, raising a family, education, work, and career all take effort and endurance to succeed. In all of life's endeavours we have to overcome obstacles. We have to pick ourselves up after a failure, defeat or a loss and carry on. We have to overcome opposition and manage our fears if we desire success.

In the Christian life, in your walk of faith, you have and will face many challenges – the world, the flesh, and the devil conspire to keep you from a faithful walk with the Lord. It takes courage and strength to face each day with the determination to do the Lord's will. When you desire to do the Lord's will, you may find you have opposition...your sinful nature competes with your spirit for control of your life:

*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.
Romans 7:18*

When you step out in faith and take up the cause of the Kingdom of God, you will face opposition. Your friends, family and associates may oppose your new-found faith. Ridicule and rejection are common accompaniments to a declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

This week be filled with strength and courage. Live a holy life in the Lord in the face of opposition.

This week's breath prayer:

Lord, You are my courage and my strength.

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Day 1 – Be Strong and Courageous

After the death of Moses, the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them--to the Israelites.

Joshua 1:1-2

When God calls someone to a particular calling there is usually little dialogue between them. God issues a command, and the expectation is that the one receiving the command will immediately obey. The reality is many of us, when called to serve in a certain capacity, respond by identifying why we are NOT the one for this job. We immediately list our innermost fears. Like Moses, *"I'm not eloquent enough..." (Exodus 4:10)*. Be honest here, now, how many times have you been asked to do something in the church but have declined because, *"I can't do that because <enter your excuse here>."*

We all have a certain comfort zone where we try to spend most of our lives, rarely stepping into situations that would make us uncomfortable. God does not call you to serve Him out of your comfort zone. There is a temptation for pride when we rely on our own abilities or achievements. No, rather, God is calling you out of your comfort zones, so you have to rely on Him. It is in your weakness and inability that God's strength and ability shine.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Corinthians 1:27

Be strong and courageous today and every day. You have been called into Kingdom service alongside others who have the same weaknesses and challenges. Let God lead and strengthen you.

Lord, give me courage and strength as I face this day. Walk with me that I may walk boldly in faith. Amen.

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Day 2 – Human Strength and Ability?

The world gives its praise and honour to human achievement. Stars are made, athletes are crowned, and accolades are poured out on successful business leaders. This is the way of the kingdom of the world. The human is praised for their human, worldly achievements.

Not so in the Kingdom of Heaven. Success is not from human achievement and humans do not get the honour. In the economy of the Kingdom of Heaven all Glory Praise and Honour is given to the King. God will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). All the achievements and success in the Kingdom of God are accomplished by His power and His might.

God commanded Moses to tell Pharaoh,

“...I have raised you [Pharaoh] up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”
Exodus 9:16

It’s all about God’s power and God’s glory.

When you enter Kingdom service, you enter because you are called not because you are equipped. There is a saying, *“God does not call the equipped, He equips the called.”* So, leave behind all notions of self when you enter His service. Let go of all your ambitions and abilities. God will use you in whatever capacity He desires – if you will submit to be used by Him.

‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.
Zechariah 4:6

What is God going to do through you today? Are you willing to witness the awesome power of God working through you because you are submitted to His call?

Can you say today with all humility and great confidence:

“Here I am Lord, send me!”
Isaiah 6:8.

Lord, I am willing...send me today to do your will. Equip me as I go. Amen.

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Day 3 – God Chooses the Weak.

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Acts 4:13

There is a connection between our spiritual strength and our closeness to Jesus. The Apostles had been with Jesus for three years. They had witnessed astonishing miracles and great teaching. They had seen Jesus thwart the “wisdom” of the religious leaders. The crowds also noted that Jesus,

...taught with authority, not as the teacher of the law.

Matthew 7:29

Being in the presence of Jesus gave these men the background they needed to be preachers of the Kingdom message. They had the Holy Spirit just as we do. We too need to be spending time with Jesus, reading the word, and meditating upon it. Then we too, when the opportunity arises, can speak boldly and with power and authority and with great courage.

Do not rely today on your own strength. Let God use you in your weakness. Whatever your circumstances God can and will use you to advance the Kingdom. Your speech will be gracious and uplifting when you give your voice over to be used by the Spirit of God. In your human weakness and inability let there be less of you and more of Him.

John the Baptist summed it up,

“He must become greater; I must become less.

John 3:30

So let it be with you, let the power of God’s Holy Spirit reign in you.

Feeling weak? Now let Jesus be strong!

Lord, I feel inadequate for the task ahead. But in your strength and with your Holy Spirit’s guidance I will do what you are calling me to do today. Amen.

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Day 4 – Too Young? Don't Know Enough?

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

1 Timothy 4:12

A common concern in the church is people who feel they do not know enough or are too young to be of any use. There are even, unfortunately, some in the church who dismiss the young and those who are new to the faith. Instead of being encouraged, these new believers or young believers are discouraged.

In the early church this must have been a problem too as Paul needed to encourage Timothy, a young pastor. It must have been a source of concern for Timothy and Paul that Timothy was young yet called to the preaching ministry. Paul's encouragement to Timothy was to keep going and not let anyone put him down because he was young. Likewise, those among us who are new to the faith or feel their young age disqualifies them should take heart. God can call anyone at any age. Samuel was a very young boy when he was serving in the temple (1 Samuel).

So, age is not a deterrent to service. But your example may be. In Paul's charge to Timothy, he dismissed the age factor but emphasized the need for a good example of speech, life, love, faith, and purity. These are the characteristics that we all need to exemplify in Kingdom service.

Regardless of how young you are or how new to the faith, if God has called you to service, rejoice, He will equip you for whatever and wherever He has called you to serve.

Young? New? Inexperienced? Join the team! Be encouraged, get engaged in the Kingdom work and learn as you go. The Holy Spirit will guide you and strengthen you as He leads you to work alongside those who will support and encourage you.

Lord, even though I may have little skill or experience I am willing to learn. Guide me to your calling today. Amen.

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Day 5 – So, You’ve had a Failure?

There are many in the church who have experienced some kind of failure in their life. It could be a moral failure, a crippling disagreement or conflict. But whatever the circumstances or context a failure need not disqualify anyone from turning back to the Lord and once again being part of the Kingdom work. There can be repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Indeed, the church is the very place where these things should be commonplace.

The early church had its difficulties and challenges and interpersonal conflict. The book of Acts is a chronicle of the travels and travails of the apostles. Barnabas and Paul had a major conflict that resulted in their parting company. Their conflict was over a man named John-Mark. John-Mark, a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) had been working with Paul but had abandoned the ministry (Read Acts 15:36-40).

How sad it is when the joy of Kingdom work is spoiled by disagreement among the Lord’s servants. But here in Acts 15 we see that John-Mark had left Paul in Pamphylia and now Paul was reluctant to take him back on another mission. Barnabas, however, could see something different in this man and took John-Mark with him. Whatever happened to John-Mark? It is widely held that this man, John-Mark, is the one who wrote the second Gospel!

There are many bumps and falls along the way as we enter Kingdom work but never give up. God has not given up on you! No matter how you have failed or how far you have fallen, the God of Heaven welcomes you back to the family, restores you and will reassign you once more to His missional work in the world. Do not let a past failure keep you from your calling. Courage and strength can be yours once again.

Lord, I seek your encouragement today to step out and continue to serve even though I have had a failure. Help me to learn and grow from it and to continue to serve you with humility. Amen.

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Day 6 – Are You a Follower or Just a Fan?

To be a follower of Jesus and not expect opposition is to be woefully unfamiliar with the real story of Jesus and the early church. Jesus stood in opposition to the religious leaders of his day. They killed Him. The apostles risked and lost their lives to tell the message to all who would hear. For two thousand years believers in Jesus have died for being called by His name. Nothing has changed. Why should we expect, in a world that has persecuted Christians for two millennia, that our profession of faith will not attract opposition?

“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.”

John 15:20-21

The gospel accounts and the other books of the New Testament open our eyes to the reality of the birth of the church and the struggles against the world that ensued. We are not living in a world that honours God in any way at all. We, Christians, are living in enemy territory. We are like soldiers behind enemy lines. If we declare who we are we will come under attack. There is a cost to being a follower and not just a fan.

Jesus told anyone who desired to follow Him to count the cost before making the commitment.

“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Luke 9:62

Was Jesus being unnecessarily harsh? Why can it not be easy to be a follower? Because service in the Kingdom requires sacrifice. Just an hour in church together on Sunday is not being a follower of Jesus. True faith in Jesus as Lord and savior will call for a changed life, a reprioritized life, a service, a ministry...sacrifice.

What have you sacrificed for the sake of the Kingdom? Where have you experienced opposition for your faith? Can you stand with Paul, Barnabas, John-Mark, the disciples, and Jesus and say I am one of them, I am one with them? Be strong and courageous. Take your stand with those who have endured fierce opposition. Be a follower not a fan.

Lord, forgive me those times when I did not step up in your Name. Strengthen my resolve to be a bold witness and a faithful servant. Amen.

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Day 7 – Courage and Strength

This may have been a difficult week of prayer as we engaged with the subject of being strong and courageous. Throughout the history of God's people, the faithful have come up against opposition. The battle is engaged on planet earth. Until the Lord returns, we are engaged in battle with an already defeated enemy. Take courage in that Christ has defeated the enemy of God's people at Calvary. We serve the resurrected Lord of Lords and Kings of Kings.

Why do we need to be strong and courageous? Because we stand against the enemy of our souls. God has chosen the weak to stand strong against this enemy. God chooses to use weak, fallen and oftentimes sinful people to move His kingdom forward. We sin. We fall away from our calling. We fail. Sometimes we fail big time. But our God forgives quickly so we can get back on the team, proclaiming the gospel of God's love for all the world through Jesus Christ.

We need to take our courage and strength from the fact that the Kingdom of God has come. We are its citizens, and our destiny is secure. Our purpose is clear. We will stand tall. We will be strong in the Lord. We will be encouraged, and we will encourage each other. We are weak but He is strong.

In what areas of your life do you need to be stronger and more courageous? Where do you need to stop being weak and draw on the strength of the Lord for you walk of faith?

Read Ephesian 6:10-18. And put on the full armor of God – each day. You can personalize the scripture as a prayer as follows:

Lord, help me to be strong in you and in your mighty power. I will put on your full armor so that I can stand against the devil's schemes. For my struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, I will put on your full armor, Lord, so that when the day of evil comes, I will be able to stand my ground, and after I have done everything, to stand. I will stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around my waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with my feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, I will take up the shield of faith, so that I can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. I will take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is your word, God. And I will continue to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, help me to be alert and to always keep on praying for all of your people. Amen.