

BUILDING A STRONG SPIRIT

Good morning! We're starting a new series I'm calling "BTS". You know what it means? Many of our youngsters would know, right? If you don't know, you can google it. Anyway, BTS, as far as our series is concerned, stands for "Built to Stand". In this series, we're going to look at how we can stand strong in the midst of chaos that's happening around us, in the world, and in our personal lives. In the next four weeks, we're going to learn how to be stronger spiritually, then stronger physically, then stronger mentally, and finally, stronger emotionally. So for four weeks we're going to look at how to build a stronger you this year.

We all want to stand strong, right? We all want to not buckle when circumstances beyond our control take control of us. Stresses and pressures can really squeeze us and make us feel anxious and afraid and just run away or hide. How can we stand strong? How can we be firmly planted on the ground when it's shaking underneath us?

Let's look at this verse from which I've based this message on. Ephesians 3:16. It says, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." I also like what the Amplified version of the Bible says, "May He grant you out of the riches of His glory, to be strengthened and spiritually energized with power through His Spirit in your inner self, [indwelling your innermost being and personality]". Church, that's my prayer for each of you this year.

Now, I want us to look at the life of Samson who was known as the strongest man in the Bible. But he had glaring, glaring weaknesses. I'm going to talk about them so we may be aware and they will serve as warnings for us. And then I will also share with you how we can overcome these weaknesses.

So, please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Judges beginning chapter 13. It tells us the story of Samson. His story ends in chapter 16. In these chapters, we'll see **three attitudes that weaken my spirit.**

Physically, Samson was a Rambo. But spiritually he was a dumbo. A wimp, a weakling. He had everything going for him. He had talent. He had good looks. He had ability. God blessed him in every kind of way. He started off great. He had a lot of early successes. But one day he lost it all. And he was a broken man. He became a failure. One day he woke up and all his strength was gone.

I don't want that to happen to you. I don't want you to wake up someday and you go, "All my spiritual strength is gone. I'm not the man/I'm not the woman I used to be. What happened?"

What happened with Samson is that he chose a lifestyle that sapped his spiritual strength. He fell into three traps and I want you to avoid these three traps in your life. So, please take note. The first trap that weakens my spirit is self-indulgence.

1. SELF-INDULGENCE WEAKENS MY SPIRIT.

Self-indulgence weakens my spirit. We find an example of this in chapter 14 of the book of Judges, verses 1 through 20.

Samson lived a very self-indulgent life. He was very undisciplined. He lived only for his feelings and his big weakness of course was women. Some people have wine, women and wealth. For Samson it was women, women, and women. In fact, he falls for three different women. First, a Philistine woman, then a prostitute, then another Philistine woman named Delilah.

She wasn't Jewish. She wasn't even the right woman that God had chosen for him. But he said she looks good for me. She lights my fire! And he got burned.

So, the first trap that weakens your spirit is when you make decisions based on pleasure rather than principle. When you make a decision based on convenience rather than conviction.

Samson sees a woman. He doesn't check her out. He doesn't find out, is this a woman who's going to strengthen my spirit or is she going to tear me down? Is she going to build me up spiritually or is she going to pull me down spiritually? He just says she looks good. She's a looker. She pleases me. So, he ignores his plans and says, "I've got to have her."

Have we ever said that to ourselves? I've got to have that thing. I've got to have it. Without thinking of the consequences. Like, I've got to have that car. I've got to buy that phone. I've got to go on a leisure trip. When we don't have the means and we find ourselves in debt. Little unwise decisions can lead to big, destructive results.

If you went on a cruise and the captain came on the loud speaker and said, "Hi folks! We're on this two-week cruise. We've developed a small leak but I just want to tell you it's just a small leak."

That wouldn't be any comfort to you because whether it's a small leak or a big leak, a leak is a leak is a leak. And a small leak will sink the ship just like a large leak will; it just takes a little bit more time.

The point is this: Any area that you're undisciplined in is going to weaken your spirit. And any area that you're undisciplined in will eventually catch up with you. So remember this. **To be strong in spirit I must discipline my desires.**

2. RESENTMENT WEAKENS MY SPIRIT.

The second trap that Samson fell into that caused him to lose his strength was resentment. Resentment will weaken you spiritually. It weakens your spirit. We find this in Judges 15. Samson lived his entire life in a continual state of disappointment and anger and resentment and bitterness.

He was a very, very angry man. He felt misunderstood. He felt disappointed. He reacts violently to everything. His primary motivation in life was to get even. He had a victim mentality.

Do you have that? The attitude that everybody is against you and you're a victim of the world? That's going to cause you to not grow in spirit.

One time Samson actually killed thirty men just to get even on a bet. He was a very resentful, very angry, very bitter person. In Judges 15 you always find his excuse is this: They hurt me first.

Let me ask you: Who has hurt you that you're holding on to that hurt? You need to let it go because that will sink your ship. That will sap your strength. That will shrivel your spirit. You will lose your spiritual vitality. And if you're going to be spiritually strong you not only have to avoid self-indulgence by disciplining your desires, you have to avoid resentment.

Every one of us is hurt in life. We all get hurt. By what people say, by what people do, by what people think. You can't live in a broken world and not be hurt.

But Samson's second mistake is he *reacts* instead of *acts*. Resentment is always self defeating. It always hurts you more than it hurts the other person.

Job 5:2 says, "**Resentment kills a fool.**" The Bible says anytime I get resentful, anytime I hold a grudge I'm a fool. You see, when you hold on to anger it's like taking fire in your heart. You're the one who's going to get burned. It's like swallowing poison and hoping it kills the other person. Resentment always hurts you more than it hurts somebody else.

And Samson lost his spiritual and physical strength not just because of self-indulgence but because he never managed his anger. He never learned to let it go. He never learned to forgive. So, remember this. **To be strong in spirit I must control my reactions.**

3. CARELESSNESS WEAKENS MY SPIRIT.

And the third one – This is a big one because it catches us off guard: Carelessness. Carelessness will sap your spiritual strength. It will shrivel your spirit. It will weaken your spirit.

We see this in the next chapter, Judges 16:1-20. Anytime you get careless with your time, with your health, with your money, with your words, and with your commitments, you're headed in the wrong direction.

Samson had amazing strength. His strength was actually a gift from God. God had given it to him. It was a result of a commitment that he'd made. Samson made what was called in the Bible, a Nazirite vow. A Nazirite vow was a vow to live holy before God. And as a symbol of that vow there were a number of things you were not to do. If you took the Nazirite vow, you were to be dedicated to God 100 percent. You were to have no alcohol. You were never to drink any alcohol in your life. You were to eat a special diet. And the fourth thing that was the most notable was you were to never cut your hair. That was a part of the Nazirite vow. You never cut your hair as a symbol of your commitment to God.

Why did people make this Nazirite vow? It was simply a way of saying that God's servant is to live differently. We're to be above reproach. We're to be different than the culture.

Samson however was careless with his vow. He made a vow but he didn't keep it. He continually compromised his commitment out of convenience. He toyed with temptation. His attitude was not, "How close to God can I get?" His attitude was, "How close to the fire can I get and not get burned?"

A lot of people live their lives that way. They go, I'm a Christian and I know this is wrong but I wonder how much can I do and not get burned?

In chapter 16 we have the story of Delilah. Delilah is hired by Samson's enemies. Samson is an enemy because he represents the strength of God.

The people who hated God wanted to destroy Samson. So they hire this woman Delilah to find his secret of strength.

Samson knows exactly what's going on. He's aware of the game. He knows that she's trying to find his secret of strength and he actually toys with her. He teases her. The first time when she comes and says, "Oh honey! Please tell me. What's the secret of your strength?" He says, "If you will tie seven bowstrings around me then I won't be able to break from them." He lets her tie him with seven bowstrings and immediately, men who were hiding in their room attacks him. He immediately breaks the bow strings and kills these men.

The next day she does it again. She says, "Oh, honey! Please tell me what is your secret of strength?" He says, "My secret of strength is if you'll just tie seven new ropes around me then I won't be able to break them." She ties him then men who were hiding jumps at him but he broke the ropes and kills them.

The next night Delilah says, "Honey, you're really embarrassing me. You're making me look bad." It's pretty blatant. She's actually caring more about the money she's going to be paid than she cares about Samson. But he doesn't care. He's toying with her. He's teasing her. This time he says, "If you will braid my hair, I'll lose my strength."

Notice he's actually getting close to the real secret. The secret was in his hair. Not that his hair made him strong. It was his commitment to God that made him strong and the hair was a symbol of his commitment to God. He says, "If you braid my hair." He's flirting with temptation. He's saying, "How close can I get?"

Let me just stop here. What are you flirting with? What do you know in your life is flat out wrong? Pornography? And you're flirting with it. Cheating on your income tax? And you're flirting with it. Flirting with a man or a woman at work? And you know it's wrong. You say, "I can handle it. I can handle this. I can get away with it." You're getting closer and closer.

Samson knows what's going on here. He knows exactly what he's doing.

In Judges 16:17. He finally tells her. He says, "If you cut my hair then I'll lose my strength." He finally gives in and his lifestyle had become so weakened from compromise after compromise after compromise. He'd said "It'll be different for me. I can handle it."

When you say those words, you're being set up by Satan. You see, nobody ever plans to fail spiritually. Nobody ever plans to have their marriage fail, their life fail, their business fail, their health fail, their finances fail. Nobody ever plans a bankruptcy. But it's one little decision after another. People don't fall off a cliff overnight. It begins with small slippages. I start to let things slide and I wake up one day and go, "What happened?"

The fact is a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. What's the weak link in your life? You see, you are only as strong as what you're committed to. If you're chipping away at that commitment, you're getting weaker and weaker every day.

So, remember this. **To be strong in spirit I must develop good habits.**

Before we go to these habits, let me ask you: What's the weak link in your life? Is it self-indulgence in some area? Is it carelessness in some area? Is it resentment against someone and you just won't let it go?

Now, I want to share with you three habits that will change your life. I've been following these habits almost all my life. They are the secret of my own spiritual strength. And every man or woman of God who has been used in history has developed these habits. If you will develop these habits you are on your way to building a strong spirit.

By the way, the Bible says this in **Ephesians 6:10: "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power"**. You see, you have a part in building your strength and God has a part. Paul says you've got to do something and then God will do something in your life.

So, what can you do so that God can give you his mighty power to make you strong in spirit? Let me now share with you the **3 Habits That Strengthen My Spirit.**

1. Get time with God EVERY DAY!

Get time with God every single day of your life. If you're not doing that, you're not growing spiritually. We call this a daily quiet time. Now, for each of these three habits I want to give you the reason, the routine and the results. We're going to go through these pretty quick.

THE REASON:

First, the reason. Why should I have a daily quiet time? **Psalm 25:4** says, *"Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths."* You need a daily quiet time for guidance. If you're not having a daily quiet time, you're not getting guidance from God. You're out there on your own. That's the reason to get guidance from God.

THE ROUTINE:

What's the routine? It is to get alone by yourself. The Bible says in **Luke 5:16**, *"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."* It says often. That means it was habitual. It was his habit. So, you get in a place where you can be alone with God and be quiet and you can pray and read the Bible.

THE RESULT:

What's the result? **Isaiah 40:31 (TLB)** says, *"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."*

Did you know that waiting on God in prayer can actually strengthen you? That's why the Lord Jesus spent so much time in prayer. That's where his strength came from. The more strength he needed, the longer time he spent on prayer and the more intense it was. In Gethsemane, he spent hours praying because of the huge challenge he was going to face that night and the next day.

And God's grace was strong on him and he didn't give up in the face of unimaginably trying circumstances. I pray that right now as you're listening to this you go, "I'm going to do it. I'm not going a single day in 2022 without having time alone with God in prayer and Bible reading."

Get time with God every day.

Here's habit number two...

2. Get together with believers EVERY WEEK.

I know this continues to be a challenge for some folks. But as the infection rate comes down, like here in VA it has come down significantly, it's time to get back to what we should be doing. This is a habit that we must not give up. It's important for our spiritual well-being.

We can get together every Sunday or in our small groups. You see, our small groups are restarting gradually. The men began to meet again in person like two weeks ago after two years of inactivity. Our young adults will start to meet regularly in person this week. And our kids Sunday school are also meeting now. And, our home groups will restart as well pretty soon.

THE REASON:

Here's the reason: *Hebrews 10:25, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another."*

Notice the habit of meeting together. It's like coals in a fireplace. The coals are all hot. If I were to take one of the coals out of the fire and put it down somewhere by itself, it would grow cold and it would lose its heat. But if I take that coal and put it back in the fire it gets hot again.

This is what fellowship does. You by yourself, you're going to grow cold. You're going to grow weak. You must be in a small group where iron sharpens iron and the fire helps each other stay warm.

THE ROUTINE:

What is the routine? We find the routine for fellowship or small groups in Acts 5:42. It says, *“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house...”* Temple courts is the large group worship. And house to house is small group fellowship. You need both of these to be spiritually strong.

You’re right now in the temple courts. You’re in large group celebration of worship. That’s a good thing. But you also need the small group fellowship.

THE RESULT:

What’s the result of getting together with believers every week? The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.”*

There are going to be times this next year when you need somebody else to be there for you. Do you have that safety net in place? When the crisis, the rogue winds, the terrible storm – those are going to come into your life. And you need some people in your life who you’ve already made the contact with when that happens. Who in your life would show up right now if you had a disaster?

You need a daily time with God and you need a weekly team for God. There’s one other thing.

3. Get the Word out EVERYWHERE

Get the Word out everywhere. It means spreading the good news about Jesus wherever you go or wherever you are. I can’t emphasize this enough. This is one of the most important habits that we Christians should cultivate. When was the last time we spoke to someone about Jesus? Are we intentional? Do we find ways to let others know about what Jesus has done in our lives? I believe that speaking about Jesus and what he has done in your life has tremendous benefits in your spiritual being.

THE REASON:

We all know the reason. **Matthew 28:19**, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nation.” Notice he says “Go”. It’s a command, not a suggestion, a plea, or a request. He wanted us to go because he loves everyone in the world as John 3:16 says and he wants everyone to be saved. Many will not be saved, however, because they will reject Jesus. But that shouldn’t stop us or discourage us. We should just follow our marching orders. As **Bill Bright** said, “Successful witnessing is taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.”

THE ROUTINE:

What is the routine? The routine is laid out for us in Acts 1:8 where Jesus says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” He’s talking about witnessing first to those close to you. Like your unbelieving family members. Then, you spread it next to your friends or neighbors or acquaintances at work, in school, etc. And then, you go out further, maybe become a missionary in some part of the country or the world. And note, you will do this not in your own power, but in the power of the Holy Spirit because he empowers you.

THE RESULT:

What is the result? It will bring great joy to you and to people who are saved. Paul says in **1 Thess. 2:8, 19**, “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well... For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”

The Bible also tells us in **Acts 8:39**, “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.”

Folks, leading someone to Christ, giving someone hope, is one of the greatest joys you'll ever feel. Your spirit is lifted up, you are strengthened, and you know that God is at work and his power to save is real.

So, let me give you a TikTok challenge. Why not share Jesus this week and then share with us the joy of sharing Jesus? You can post it on our Fil-Am chat or maybe on TikTok.

Folks, spiritual strength is not accidental. It's the result of choices we make and habits we develop. I've developed these habits and they've brought spiritual strength to me. And I challenge you to do them too.

You can't do these habits on your own. You don't have the power to do them on your own. You need God's power. And where do you get it? By keeping in step with God. To keep in step with God, first you need to have Jesus in your life, if you don't have him yet.

If you've never opened your life to Christ, if you've never developed a friendship with Christ, that's your starting point. You need to believe that he died for you, that he was buried, that he rose from the dead. You need to acknowledge that you're a sinner and you need to realize that only Jesus can save you, not your good works, your religion, your philosophy, or whatever.