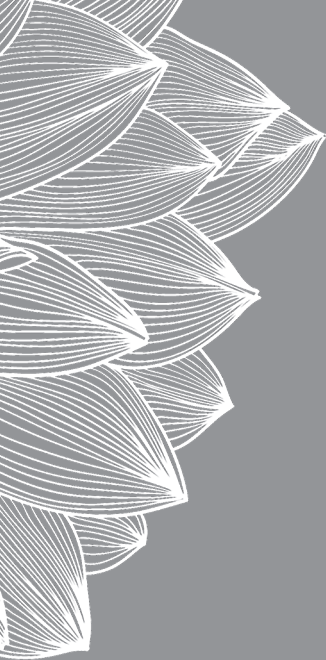


FOREWORD BY KATHI LIPP

MOM *Essentials*

10 WORDS SUCCESSFUL MOTHERS LIVE BY
— A BIBLE STUDY —

Kasey Johnson



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THEME 1



PUT TOGETHER



STRENGTH SOURCE

☞ Mom Essential: STRENGTH

MOM MOMENT

Psalm 105:4: “Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.”

I was in the sixth grade and excited to be with my friends from school on our field trip. My parents had given me a little money to spend in the gift shop and I was proud of my purchase: a set of bookmarks. As I recounted our trip for my parents, I proudly read the sayings and quotes from my bookmarks. One of them said, “If it is to be, it is up to me.” Initially I read that phrase and thought the quote showed confidence while echoing my desire to accept any challenge that came my way.

The look on my parents’ faces quickly alerted me to the fact that they did not interpret the saying in the same way. I asked what was wrong, and they lovingly educated me concerning the origin and meaning behind such a statement. In my youth, I didn’t know that by speaking this phrase I was saying I could do everything and anything all on my own. Basically, I was boasting in my own strength and unknowingly saying I didn’t need anyone or any help.

As a grown woman, I’ve learned to appreciate my strengths and my weaknesses, even though I don’t enjoy admitting there are areas of life where I struggle. I used to see weakness as a negative trait. After many attempts to be everything to everyone, I call my weaknesses by a different name—I call them limitations. Perhaps it’s a bit of a mind game, but for whatever reason, I’m able to accept the term “limitations” much easier than I can accept the word “weakness.” I now understand that relying on my

own strength for all areas of life would leave me feeling very lonely, overwhelmed, and stressed. Being a mom is tough; trying to do it alone can be detrimental.

When it comes to fulfilling every responsibility and completing each task in our day, our strength can quickly be depleted. The world offers various sources we can use to replenish our strength. As Christians we understand these sources to be short-lived and sometimes inadequate, but many women reach for these options when things get tough. In your opinion, circle the most prominent strength sources people gravitate toward when their weaknesses (or limitations) become a reality:

EDUCATION	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
FAMILY BACKGROUND	BUSY SCHEDULE
JOB TITLE	IQ
MONEY/SHOPPING	SOCIAL STATUS
PHYSICAL STATURE	SUBSTANCES

Each of these sources can initially appear as positive and healthy, but even good intentions can develop negative results. When the world's strength sources (like the ones we circled) become idols in our lives, or become our primary strength source, we forget to seek God's face.

Have you endured some particularly tough events in the past? What were some of your strength sources during the tough times? There are no wrong answers. Just be honest and write down who or what helped you make it through:

During my biggest struggles in life, God has been faithful to provide peace and strength through Scripture. In chapter 1, we established that, in our lives, reading Scripture shouldn't be seen as an extra, but as an essential. Many times a verse from the Bible or a sentence from a devotional reading can bring the peace, strength, direction, and even the rebuke we need. Sometimes I handle the tough times with uncharacteristic grace and strength. During other moments I struggle to put on a happy face and make it through the day.

Thinking back to our worldly sources of strength, it's easy to see how quickly we can begin to rely on any one of those items. After all, they are easily accessible and yet incredibly counterfeit. When the world's strength runs out and we still have a battle to fight, we can rely on a never-ending, powerful strength source: Sovereign God. Take a moment to look back to the beginning of this chapter and read our mom essential from **Psalm 105:4**.

David, the writer of many psalms, knew what it meant to struggle and have his emotional, spiritual, and physical strength completely depleted. Throughout the Psalms we read David's songs and prayers to God. Some verses are filled with praise, others with pleading, and still other verses reveal that King David questioned God. Wow! David was completely real and transparent with God. In return, David was able to see the true strength and power God provides to those who need him. In verse 4, what are we told to do? Fill in the missing words to discover how we can discover our strong, powerful, and capable God.

“_____ to the LORD and his strength; _____ his face always” (Psalm 105:4).

As women and mothers, I think it takes a lot to truly find the end of our strength. My friends and I joke about it, but for many of us the following scenario is all too true: we could have a fever and be throwing up and still find a way to get laundry done, feed our children, care for them, and even make dinner. We don't know the meaning of the word “can't,” mostly because for many of us we don't have a choice—we have to keep going! Even though we are incredibly capable, we are still human and our humanity brings limitations. We must choose to look at and seek after the Lord. Our focus needs to remain on God and not on our situation.

Because God is divine, he isn't bound by physical limitations. Throughout Scripture we discover how strong God is. Because of our relationship with Christ, we can claim his strength as our own. Let's discover some of the scriptures that describe how God's strength helps us when we seek him during difficult times. Fill in the missing words as you read through these essential scriptures.

- **Deuteronomy 31:6:** "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God _____
_____; he will never leave you nor forsake you."
- **2 Chronicles 15:7:** "But as for you, _____ and do not give up, for your work will be _____."
- **Isaiah 41:10:** "_____,
for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will _____ you and help you; I will _____
you with my righteous right _____."
- **1 Thessalonians 3:13a:** "May he _____
_____ so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God."

Each of these verses contains a form of the verb "be." These "be verbs" describe an action we are to live out during tough times. Reread our four scriptures and draw a bracket ([]) around the "be" phrase that we, as followers of Christ, are responsible for carrying out.

After you place a bracket around the "be" phrases that describe what our reactions should be, go back through the same verses and draw a circle around the words in each scripture that define what God will do.

Using your markings, fill in the chart by writing the Scripture reference in the first column, our response ("be" phrase in brackets) in the second column, and God's response (words that are circled) in the third column. Deuteronomy is done for you as an example:

Scripture	Our Response	God's Response
Deuteronomy 31:6	Be strong and courageous.	He goes with you.

These scriptures provide a beautiful picture of God's constant and complete strength. He is God; he doesn't need anything, yet Scripture tells us that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. When God is our strength, we can stand strong no matter what, or who, comes against us! (See **Philippians 4:13**.)

Suffering is an all too common theme involved in living on earth. Some people who suffer the most are the ones trying to do the most good for our world. The apostle Paul was one of these people. Before Paul met God, his name was Saul. Saul hated Christians and even persecuted those who declared their love for Jesus Christ. Amidst all this hate, God still loved Saul and sought him out. When Saul met God on a dirt road (read all about it in Acts 9), his life and his name were forever changed. Saul became Paul and his life was sold out to God. He was determined to share God's love with everyone.

As a messenger of God, Paul was given the incredible responsibility to help the early church understand what it meant to be a Christian. As he traveled and spoke, he was tempted to find strength through accolades and acknowledgment. God put a "thorn in [his] flesh" to keep him humble. In 2 Corinthians Paul asked three times for this thorn to be removed. We don't know exactly what that thorn was, but we do know the Lord's response. Take a moment to read **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** and fill in the blanks below.

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is

_____, for my power is made
perfect in _____.”

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly
about my _____,

so that Christ’s _____

may rest on me. That is why, for

Christ’s sake, I _____ in

_____, in insults, in

_____, in persecutions, in

difficulties. For when I am _____, then

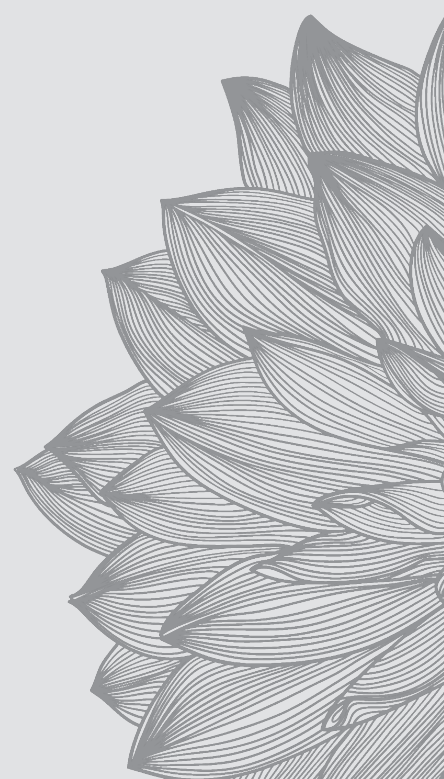
I am strong.”

A part of me wishes Paul’s prayer for God to take away whatever was causing him pain were different. Knowing Paul was suffering, God would have said, “Sure thing—consider it gone.” But then I remember the rest of this verse. If Paul never suffered, if he never had to deal with the tough things in this life, he wouldn’t have needed God’s strength. Our Creator knows us better than we know ourselves, and while I don’t believe God puts bad things in our lives just to keep us dependent upon him, I do believe God wants us to discover why a relationship with him is so essential, especially because we live in a sinful world.

Sin is all around us, and our weaknesses will be tested and tried more than we’d like. Do you have a “thorn in your flesh”? Perhaps it’s a co-worker, boss, child’s personality, or housing situation—whatever it might be, we have to acknowledge the real possibility that God has allowed

*I can do all this through
him who gives me
strength.*

—Philippians 4:13



that “thorn” to remain in order for our weakness to show God’s power being made perfect in us. Giving only as much detail as you feel comfortable, use the space provided to describe the current issue(s) that brings stress and anxiety into your life. What’s your “thorn”?

Look back at 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. How do these words apply to your situation? How are God’s grace and strength being worked out and seen? Are you able to delight in spite of your circumstance and give God the glory for what he is doing in your life?

Sometimes it feels like the title of “mom” brings a kind of superpower with it. We begin living for others and we will do whatever it takes to make sure the people we love are cared for. When life gets tough; when husbands leave; when jobs are lost; when children are taken to heaven too early, that’s when our superpower meets its nemesis. During these difficult times, Satan can try to lie to us and say that God has left us or is against us. But Paul tells us that God’s grace is sufficient and his power is even stronger when we feel weak.

The statements we’ve read are truth. However, it’s important to take a moment and recognize there will be times when we are so exhausted or overwhelmed that weakness will feel as though it’s winning. These are the times when we have no more tears to cry or words to say. In these moments our pain is real, but our weakness isn’t stronger than our Savior’s promise to strengthen and uphold us (see chart on page 30). When life begins to fall apart, we can surrender ourselves to our God and allow him to put us back together piece by piece.

Our family, friends, and even our fellow church members can help in this process, but we have to be willing to admit that even our mommy superpower isn’t enough. We need God’s strength.

During the spring of 2010 I discovered what it felt like to be completely broken, empty, and unable to do things on my own. One morning my eye stopped clos-

ing when I blinked. I would try to drink from a cup and the liquid would simply roll out the corner of my mouth and onto my chin. The diagnosis of Bell's palsy came as a shock, and the months that followed were filled with tears, medication, pain, and research. My mother flew in from California to take care of the boys, and thanks to her quick response I was able to rest and heal. No amount of positive thinking, striving, or effort was going to change my reality—only God's strength would suffice.

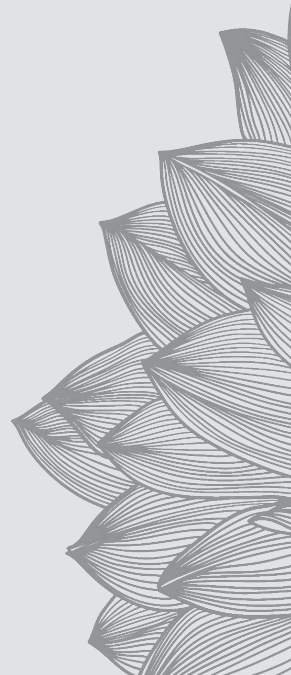
As a mother to three boys I try to emphasize table manners and good eating habits, but the left side of my mouth wouldn't respond so I had to get creative. In order to eat I had to take tiny bites, tilt my head so it touched my right shoulder, and hold a napkin over my lips on my left side. Talk about humbling! The worst part was the issue of my left eyelid never closing. My eye was the most painful part of the whole thing, and I found myself taping my eye shut and wearing a patch almost twenty-four hours a day.

We tried to find humor in the situation. Whether we were practicing pirate-speak or the boys were asking me to drink out of a cup so they could watch the liquid dribble down my chin, there were definitely times when laughter was the best medicine. The boys learned to stay away from my left side and kissing them on the cheek became awkward. . . . those were the moments when I really missed what my face used to do.

This condition has changed me forever. I now have a built-in "shut off" button. I used to be able to manage a million things at once, but not anymore. When I start to think through my to-do list I can feel my cheek starting to droop. I have to take a deep breath and refuse to let the anxiety overtake me.

My brother says I don't know when to stop, so God put a little switch in me to help me learn when to take a break

*When life
begins to fall
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piece by piece.*
#MomEssentials





NOTES

I took time to reevaluate and tweak my life, but I would have *never* made it through this time without my friends. They helped save my face too! Women from our Sunday school class brought meals, took my boys to playgroup, and offered to clean my house and do the laundry so that I could rest. Sure it was embarrassing to have to wipe the

drool from my mouth and talk with only half my lips, but nothing prepared me for how grateful and humbled I felt when friends started coming to my rescue. They were strong when I was weak. It's difficult for me to accept help, but this time I didn't have a choice.

I praise God every day for these women, and I hope one day I'll be able to return the favor in their time of need. This experience taught me to set limits, and I've learned how to ask for help. All of us come to a place when we can no longer manage on our own. It's a crazy place of humility, honesty, and a dose of reality. Remember to rest, renew, and relax this week—take a deep breath. God is our source of strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46), and he knows exactly what we need and when we need it.

I pray you have a group of women available to help renew your strength and be strong for you when life gets to be too much. My diagnosis has changed me, and I'm still dealing with the physical effects that accompany this condition. The issue isn't going away, but my response to it is finally starting to resemble more of Paul's approach. I remind myself that even when I'm weak, my God is strong and therefore so am I.

Take a moment to claim God's strength for yourself. Let it become a reality and an attainable strength source. Illness, bills piling up faster than your income, loneliness, a child's disabilities—the list of issues, or thorns, can go on and on, but the items on our list will lose their power over us when we claim the promises from the chart we created about God's strength and our responses.

Referencing our chart of four scriptures, I've started four phrases and I would like you to finish them. Complete each statement with something from your own life that needs God's strength infused into it. Perhaps you are already sensing his presence in your situation. If that's the case, to God be the glory! If you'd like to write your own statements, please feel free to do so. The prompts I've provided are simply a starting place and aren't meant to stifle or inhibit your thoughts and experiences.

I need God to go with me as I _____.

I need God to uphold me when _____.

I need God's strength to _____.

I sense God's reward even now when _____.

We'll be tempted to rely on our own strength, but we have to make a conscious choice to rely on God and allow his strength to shine through our weakness. We've spent time discovering some of the scriptures describing God's strength and its availability to us. To review, see if you can remember one of the verses we looked at, Isaiah 41:10, and fill in the missing words below.

"So do not fear, for I am _____; do not be
dismayed, for I am your God; I will _____ you and
help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear moms quote this verse to each other? All of us have either lived through or will someday experience really tough times. I pray we can say with confidence that God held us in his hand. When our strength was gone, he was with us, helping us as we relied on his strength and not our own.

I would love to report that the bookmark I brought home after our field trip was the only time I believed the world's lie that I could do things on my own and in my own strength. If I'm being honest, it was not and probably won't be the last time a selfish ambition will find its way into my spirit, but I'm working hard to identify and limit those occasions. When I'm tempted to rely on my own strength, I remind myself how strong and capable God is.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for being strong enough to help me every day. Please open my eyes to the true strength sources you've provided in my life. Right now I claim your strength for myself. I will lean on you and go with confidence knowing you are with me. I know I can make it through today and tomorrow because you are with me. Help me to glorify you in the small and big moments so that others can discover your strength at work in my life. Lord, help my children see how you are helping me so they too may draw on your strength when they grow tired and weary. I know you are doing amazing things through me each day, and I give you the glory for helping me accomplish so much when I feel like I have so little to give. I pray for my community of moms, that we will feel your strength and in turn be strong for each other. Lord, let others see your strength through my weakness and help me to feel your strength in every situation I face. Amen.



“*Mom Essentials* not only inspires moms to think through the stumbling blocks to a fulfilling life, it offers the space to work through the details.”

—Alexandra Kuykendall
Leader and Mom Content Editor, MOPS International



10 words.

10 essentials.

10 opportunities to understand God’s call on your life as a mother.

Whether we’re new moms or grandmas, we all need some help navigating this lifelong journey of motherhood.

Get ready to discover how aligning your daily routine with Scripture doesn’t just help you “get through” your busy days; it helps you fill those days with purpose—and it helps you fulfill your purpose as a mother, a woman, and a follower of Christ.

Whether you complete this study as an individual or with a small group, you’ll discover something new about yourself, your friends, and your Savior.

So grab your Bible and a cup of tea, and escape from this noisy, busy world into the ever-perfect, always-applicable truths found in Scripture.



KASEY JOHNSON is learning daily how to ignore the extras in life and focus on the essentials. As an educator, author, speaker, blogger, wife, and mother, Kasey understands the balancing act we sustain as mothers. Visit her blog to learn more about Kasey’s ministry, and access the leader’s guide available to groups completing this study at www.smarter-moms.com.

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