

What is the key to being strong in the Lord?

Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

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I read a sign on a church board the other day. It read like this "Enjoy life; God invented it." I have thought about the meaning of life as we know it and have pondered about the ways that we can enjoy life in the manner that God intended it to be lived and yet be on guard for Satan who is full of darkness but who presents himself as an angel of light. In Psalms 28, the Psalmist begins his writing with acknowledging that God is his rock. He continues by showing the contrast between the way that God protects and shields his children from harm while at the same time, those who refuse to regard the works of the Lord will be destroyed.

In Psalms 27, David calls God his "Light". He desires to live in the house of the Lord every day of his life so that he can *see* how wonderful the Lord is and to be able to pray in the Lord's temple. He looks to the Lord for protection in times of trouble. He has faith that God will hide him in the Lord's tent and keep him safe on top of a mighty rock. He pleads with the Lord to answer his prayers for his heart tells him to pray and he looks only to God for safety and security. In verse 10, it reads, "When my father and my mother forsake me, the LORD will lift me up." Psalms 23 begins with calling God the shepherd who provides all our needs.

David had a close relationship with the Lord and he was called "a man after God's own heart". He held the highest position in the land, he had wealth and strength, he had God's blessing on his kingdom, and God protected him from his enemies. What hinders a person's relationship with his creator? When the truth of the word of God is not continually welcomed and nurtured in the heart of men, other things will crowd in and replace the joy that once reigned there.

Look at Luke 8:5-15 as it speaks about the types of heart that God's word has been sown into. The seed (the word of God) was sown into a thorny heart and the thorns grew up and choked out the word so it couldn't bear fruit.

The Bible explains the meaning of this parable as one who hears the word of God and they go forth but are overtaken with cares and riches and pleasures of this life and they bring no fruit to perfection. God has given each of us time and a gift of life and we will give account to Him one day when we stand before God. The Bible tells us that "By their fruit you will know them." See Matthew 7:16-20. Believers who are careless about studying and obeying God's word, slack in their prayer life, and uncritical about the things of God, opens the

door for Satan to slip in with deception and take advantage of the weakness in their lives. They are in danger of being led from truth so they will believe the deceiver especially if the person has a pleasant demeanor, carries a positive message and is permissive. Matthew 7:22 is a warning to every person who claims to know Jesus Christ. In that day many will say to me, "LORD, LORD, have we not prophesied in your name and in your name have cast out devils and in your name done many wonderful works?"

Then I will profess unto them, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you that work iniquity." CEV translation states it this way: Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. On the Day of Judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, "We preached in your name and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles." But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people."

In 1 John 4 it starts by exhorting believers "Don't believe everyone who claims to have the Spirit of God." Believers are commanded to "test the spirit" to see if it is authentic and is in line with the pure teaching of Scripture. The Bible states that there are those who have a form of godliness but deny the power of God. See 2 Timothy 3:5. We are admonished to turn away from these false teachers, for the power of God will deliver a person from sin and its bondage, rather than sear their conscience so they don't feel the guilt of their wicked ways. False teachers are dangerous to those who are listening for they cause them to feel secure and heaven bound regardless of the choices they are making to fulfill the desires of the flesh. 1 John 2:16 warns us to not love the world neither the things of this world that are connected to it. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. Our foolish pride comes from this world and so do our selfish desires and our desire to have everything we see. None of this comes from the Father. The world and the desires it causes will disappear, but if we obey God, we will live forever.

How do we find the narrow path that leads to eternal life? Matthew 7:14. The Bible tells us to watch out for false prophets for we will know them by their deeds. In verse 7, it tells us to ask and you will receive; search and you will find; knock and the door will open for you. Treat others as you want them to treat you. When your heart's desire is to know truth, to imitate Jesus Christ in your life's choices, to be obedient to God and walk in humility, you will be on the right path. By studying the word and learning to rightly divide it, you will protect your mind from deception. Those who refuse to hear the truth and who cover their motives with lies, will never see the kingdom of God. The truth sets you free. Confession of sins releases the burden of guilt that weighs down the soul. King David asked God to look deep into his heart and find out everything that he was thinking. He asked God not to allow him to follow evil ways, but to lead him in the way that time has

proven true. Do you want God to search your heart and to reveal to you what he finds? In John chapter 4, Jesus needed to go to Samaria. There he met a woman who came to Jacob's well to draw water in the evening hour. He asked the woman for a drink of water and she questioned him because it was not common for a Jew to ask a Samaritan for anything for they had no dealings with them. Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God and who is asking you for a drink of water, you would ask Him and He would give you living water." She responded by saying that he didn't have anything to draw water from this deep well and where would he get living water?" Jesus explained the difference between the natural thirst for water and the spiritual source of living water that satisfies the thirsting of the soul and springs forth into everlasting life. She immediately responded by asking for the living water thinking that she would never have to come to the well to draw water ever again. Then Jesus told her to go get her husband and bring him to the well. She answered, "I have no husband." She had lived a sinful life and had covered her guilt and shame with half truths, and had come to the well to draw water when others would not be around. Thus she didn't have to deal with the stares and judgments of those who would berate her lifestyle. Now Jesus spoke the truth and told her the facts of her life, the failures and sins that had weighed her down for years and He offered her freedom from the guilt, the shame and humiliation of a lifetime of sin.

In these verses, the woman speaks about looking for the Messiah for when He comes, he will tell them all things. Jesus replied, "I that speak unto you am HE".

The woman left her water pots and went into the city rejoicing and gave her testimony, "Come see a man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?"

Come to Jesus, be honest with God about your life and the sins of your past, the regrets of your wrong decisions, taking responsibility for your own choices. He will have compassion and will lift the burden from your heart, forgive your sins and give you victory over the sins that have shackled you and kept you bound. Excuses, lies, half-truths won't give you victory. You must look in the mirror of God's word, admit what you see and change your way of thinking and the way you conduct your life. See Galatians 5:22. It reads: God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled. Back up a few verses and read Galatians 5:16 -22. It tells us that if we are guided by the Holy Spirit, we will not obey our selfish desires. Carnal desires are expressed in behavior that is immoral, shameful and thoughts that are filthy. Idol worship, witchcraft practice, hating others and being difficult to get along with are all manifestations of the sinful nature of mankind. People become jealous, angry and selfish. They argue, cause trouble and are envious. They get drunk, carry on at wild parties, and do other evil things as well. Paul said, " I told you before and I am telling you again; no

one who does these things will share in the blessings of God's kingdom". Those who have joined the family of God have killed those selfish feelings and desires. God's Spirit gives life and we need to follow the Spirit. Refrain from becoming conceited or thinking you are better than others. In chapter 6, he tells those who are spiritual, if they see that someone is trapped in sin, they should gently lead that person back to the right path realizing that they could also be tempted. You obey the law of Christ when you lend a helping hand to those who are in. need. Allowing the Holy Spirit to control your life will bring joy, peace, and gladness to your soul. Those who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ will desire to live a life pleasing to God and will be a testimony to those who are in bondage to sin. They will be a light to those walking in darkness, giving them hope that there is a Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord, who has power to free them from the bondage of sin.