

DAILY STRENGTH

A DEVOTIONAL FOR MEN

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GENERAL EDITOR

 **CROSSWAY®**

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Daily Strength: A Devotional for Men

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Dan Farrell and Jordan Singer

First printing 2022

The daily devotionals were first published as part of the *ESV Men's Devotional Bible* (Crossway, 2015) and are reprinted by permission.

Printed in China

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-7340-8

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-7342-2

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-7341-5

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-7342-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Storms, C. Samuel, 1951- editor.

Title: Daily strength : a daily devotional for men / Sam Storms, general editor.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2021. | "The daily devotionals were first published as part of the *ESV Men's Devotional Bible* (Crossway, 2015)" | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020019824 (print) | LCCN 2020019825 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433573408 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781433573415 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433573422 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433573422 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Men--Religious life. | Devotional calendars.

Classification: LCC BV4528.2 .D3435 2021 (print) | LCC BV4528.2 (ebook) | DDC 242/.642--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020019824>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020019825>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

RRDS	31	30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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priest, but also for a better king. Despite their evil scheming, God overrules Balak and Balaam to create Israel's future according to his promise: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17). This future king will put himself in harm's way to make the people secure and pure for fellowship with God in the land. This king will fulfill God's promise to the patriarchs to bless them with dominion (v. 19), just as the nation itself had fulfilled God's promise to bless them with descendants, and the gift of Canaan will fulfill his promise to bless them with land. All this will be according to grace. At every point, God will show Israel that it owes its blessedness not to its own faithfulness but to the faithfulness of others. In faith, then, they should look to the future for the coming prophet, priest, and king.

Later Scriptures encourage us as we see God fulfill Balaam's predictions, especially under David and finally under David's son, Jesus. Indeed, like David and the other kings, Jesus put himself in harm's way for God's people. As Christians, we rejoice supremely in Jesus, for he suffered even death for us and, through death, he conquered sin, surpassing not just all other kings, but all other prophets and priests as well.

FEBRUARY 5 • DEUTERONOMY 4:29-31

Marveling at Mercy

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

LIKE THE IDOLS they would someday worship (Deut. 4:28), the majority of Moses's listeners had eyes that didn't see and ears that didn't hear. They were ignorant of God's greatness, blind to his glory, and deaf to his word (29:4; cf. Ps. 115:4-8). Their rebellion and unbelief had led to four decades of discipline in the wilderness (Deut. 1:26, 32, 35), and even most of those from the new generation were stubborn, unbelieving, and rebellious (9:6-7, 23-24). Their obstinacy would lead to enactment of the covenant curses, climaxing in exile from the Promised Land (4:25-28; cf. 30:1; 31:16-17, 27-29).

How amazing, therefore, is Moses's promise of new covenant redemption (4:29–31; cf. parallel promises in 30:1–10). After experiencing curse in the latter days, the people would seek the Lord and actually find him (4:29). They would return to God and obey his voice (v. 30). Verse 31 declares the reason why: “For the LORD your God is a merciful God.” Mercy stands at the forefront of Yahweh's character (Ex. 34:6). It identifies God's deep compassion for his people and often expresses the withholding of a judgment that they deserve. Without mercy, there would be no new covenant—no victory, no hope, no life. But mercy has come, and Moses stresses in Deuteronomy 4:31 that this new covenant mercy means that God's presence as provider and protector is now sure (“He will not leave you”), that his wrath is now appeased (“[He will not] destroy you”), and that both Jews and Gentiles can rejoice in salvation. God has remembered “the covenant with your fathers” that through Abraham all the world would be blessed (i.e., justified; Gen. 12:2–3; 22:18; cf. Gal. 3:8, 14).

Like Israel of old, we begin our lives with a sensory disability: we are spiritually ignorant, blind, and deaf. We need God to overcome our illness. If you have sought the Lord and found him (Deut. 4:29), then marvel at his mercy. If, “according to his great mercy,” God has caused you “to be born again to a living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3), then make much of his mercy. If you find yourself today worshiping something worthless, then plead for more mercy, and by these same mercies present your body “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1).

The decisive cause of all new covenant relationship is blood-bought mercy. Stand in awe today of the mercy-filled *gifts* of justification (Rom. 3:24), sanctification (Rom. 6:17, 22), and eternal life (Rom. 6:23). “The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” has entered into our world in Christ (2 Cor. 1:3). May we marvel at mercy—such free, undeserved, yet costly love.

Why Must I Obey?

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

HAVE YOU EVER heard a child ask, “Why do I have to obey?” Moses expects that parents who love and obey God (Deut. 6:4–6) and are calling their children to do so as well (v. 7) will get this kind of question (v. 20). In these verses, he shows us how to reply.

First, *we should recall the context of obedience* (vv. 21–23). Specifically, we should (1) stress our desperate situation apart from God; (2) highlight God’s saving activity that freed us; and (3) emphasize that God is faithful to the end.

We see the first two steps in the statement, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out” (v. 21). God delivered Israel from bondage through the exodus. They were slaves; God was the Savior. Following God is a response to past grace, and heeding God’s rules is about freedom, not slavery. The same is true in a deeper way in the new covenant, as Jesus our Savior frees us from slavery to sin and God’s wrath through the cross.

Next, “He brought us out from [Egypt], that he might . . . give us the land” (v. 23). While many Israelites, by their unfaithfulness, forfeited the opportunity to enter the Promised Land (2:14–15), God himself is always faithful both to bless and to curse. With God is life and victory; apart from him is death. In Christ, all who believe find real rest now (Matt. 11:28) and have the sure hope of complete rest in eternity (Heb. 4:1–13). This fact should motivate our loyalty.

Second, *we should recall the benefits of obedience* (Deut. 6:24). Moses motivates obedience by emphasizing the blessings that it brings: “The LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day” (v. 24). Like the circle of blessing that surrounds a child who obeys and honors her parents (Eph. 6:1–3), there is a deep connection between heeding God’s word and enjoying life: “Man does not live by bread alone, but

. . . by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3; cf. Matt. 4:4; Deut. 32:47).

Jesus’s perfect obedience secures our pardon, purchases God’s promises, and provides the power to enjoy life (Rom. 8:1–4, 13; 2 Cor. 1:20). When your children ask you the point of following God, point them to God’s past grace and faithfulness and remind them of the blessings enjoyed by all who say no to sin and yes to God.

FEBRUARY 7 • DEUTERONOMY 7:17–26

Defeating Fear

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

THE LORD CALLED ISRAEL to “devote . . . to complete destruction” the nations inhabiting the Promised Land (Deut. 7:1–2; cf. 20:17). These pagans and their wares would easily become snares to Israel, turning them from God and making them his enemy (7:4, 26; cf. 8:19–20; 20:18). Failure to overcome obstacles to God-centered living is a serious and dangerous offense against the Lord, who deserves all our love (6:5).

In this passage, the new generation of Israelites is facing the same “greater and taller” people who had terrorized their parents (1:28), and Moses anticipates that some in his audience will fear defeat (7:17). Moses calls for a fearless attack (v. 18a) and clarifies the nature and reason for boldness. First, *a valiant assault starts by recalling God’s past grace and his future promises* (vv. 18–20). For Israel, this meant remembering (1) how Yahweh saved them by defeating the greatest earthly power (vv. 18b–19a) and (2) that he who freed them from both shackles and flood in Egypt would certainly secure victory for them over their present lesser foes (vv. 19b–20). The old covenant pattern of redemption and provision finds its climax in Christ, in whom every promise is now “Yes” for Christians (2 Cor. 1:20): “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

Second, *we gain confidence in battle from knowing that our God, who is with and for us, is both able and willing to fight victoriously* (Deut. 7:21–24).

Israel's present help was "a great and awesome God" (v. 21b), and he would "clear away these nations" (v. 22a). While victory would not come immediately (v. 22), it would be complete, for Yahweh would fight for them (vv. 23–24). Like Israel, Christians must believe that the great and awesome God exists and that he rewards all who earnestly seek him (Heb. 11:6). Faith in God fuels courage.

Christians stand in a different redemptive period than Moses. Physical wars are not part of the church's mission. This is because Christ's kingdom is not yet of this world (John 18:36), and it expands spiritually through suffering, not by a sword (Mark 10:45; Col. 1:24), and by preaching, not by a pistol (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:1–8). Nevertheless, Christians are engaged in a spiritual battle against the same enemy forces that derailed both the Canaanites and the Israelites (2 Cor. 10:3–6; Eph. 6:10–12; 1 Pet. 5:6–11), and we move ahead confident that Christ is greater and has already triumphed (1 John 4:4; Col. 2:15). Faith in God's faithfulness helps defeat our fears (1 Thess. 5:23–24).

FEBRUARY 8 • DEUTERONOMY 9:6

No Longer Stubborn

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

WE CAN BE slow learners. After decades of discipline, Israel should have known that God takes sin and his glory seriously and that they should too. Yahweh's "consuming fire," which either incinerates sinners or ignites holiness (see Lev. 9:23–10:3), was about to destroy the "wicked" nations of Canaan (Deut. 9:3–5). Nevertheless, Israel was ignoring the gravity of the moment, for the same "wickedness" that had been apparent in them forty years previously remained unchanged. The lack of God-dependence evident at Mount Sinai (vv. 12–21) and in the initial journey to Kadesh (vv. 22–23) continued, for they were still "stubborn" (v. 6) and "rebellious against the Lord" (vv. 7, 24).

This obstinacy revealed the people's unrighteousness: "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to pos-

ness because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people” (9:6). Righteousness is about keeping everything in its right order, which means putting God above everything else. Fearing, following, loving, and serving the Lord (10:12–13) would have proven Israel’s righteousness (6:25; cf. 24:13), but their failure to do so revealed a heart problem requiring surgery: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (10:16).

The internal nature of stubbornness and ignorance makes it impossible for us to perform the necessary operation on our own hearts. So without the divine Surgeon mercifully healing (29:4), Israel’s fate would be the same as that of their pagan enemies (see 31:27–29).

Amazingly, God promised that, on the other side of judgment, he would accomplish for his people what they could not do on their own. He would remove their callousness, empower their love, and bring them new life: “When all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, . . . the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (30:1, 6; cf. 4:30–31). Moses had equated Israel’s stubbornness with ignorance, unrighteousness, and uncircumcised hearts (9:3, 6; 10:16); now, he says, with God’s new covenant heart surgery, they will enjoy knowledge, righteousness, and healing.

Let us rejoice today, for the great Healer of all spiritual disability has come in the person of Jesus. By his Spirit, he circumcises our hearts (Rom. 2:29; Col. 2:11), helps us to know him (John 17:3; Heb. 8:11), declares us righteous (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 3:9), and empowers us to live righteously (Rom. 8:4; 1 John 3:7). “Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28–29).

Love God and Live

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

DEUTERONOMY PORTRAYS life and blessing as being conditional: “the blessing, if you obey . . . and the curse, if you do not obey” (Deut. 11:27–28; cf. ch. 28; 30:15). Moses says that God “keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments . . . and repays to their face those who hate him” (7:9–10; cf. 5:9–10). How should Christians think about God’s conditional love?

First, we must distinguish God’s *unconditional elective* love from his *conditional covenant* love. God sets his elective love on certain individuals before they are even born or do anything good or bad (Rom. 9:11–13, 16). He also chose and set his affection on Israel, not because of anything about them but only because he loved them and was remaining true to his promises to the patriarchs (Deut. 7:7–10). In contrast, God’s conditional covenant love assumes that a relationship exists that requires sustained loyalty in order to enjoy the covenant Father’s kindness instead of his severity (Rom. 11:22; cf. Rom. 8:28).

Second, Jesus underscores the priority of love by describing Moses’s call to “love the Lord” (Deut. 6:5) as “the great and first commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38). Jesus also stresses that those who love him will follow him (John 14:15, 21); and, like Moses, he emphasizes, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10). As such, Jude urges, “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21), while also stressing that God keeps every individual he electively loves (Jude 1).

Third, while the nation of Israel’s hard-heartedness doomed them to destruction (Deut. 31:27, 29), God promised a day when he would generate in his people the love he commanded (30:6). This happens through Jesus, whose perfect obedience fulfills for us the law’s demands (Rom. 5:18–19; Col. 2:14) and thus secures for us every spiritual blessing as we await our full inheritance (Eph. 1:3, 13–14). God justifies us in Christ (Rom. 3:24;

8:1–3) in order to give us his Spirit, by whom we are enabled to fulfill the law of love (Rom. 8:4; 13:8–10), putting “to death the deeds of the body” and meeting the covenant conditions for life (8:13; cf. 6:22). While “the Lord [still] disciplines the one he loves” (Heb. 12:6), we rest in the certainty that every promise of blessing is already “Yes” for us in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20), and we now know that *nothing* in all creation “will be able to separate us from the [covenant] love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).

FEBRUARY 10 • DEUTERONOMY 26:16–19

Fickle Promises and a Faithful God

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

EARLIER IN DEUTERONOMY, Moses declared that loving God (Deut. 6:4–5; 10:12) and their neighbors (10:16–19) was *what* God called Israel to do. Now in chapters 12–26 the various “statutes and rules” clarify *how* they are to do that (12:1; 26:16). The central thrust of this unit is captured in 16:20: “Righteousness, and only righteousness, you shall follow, that you may live” (author’s translation). Our God, who is passionate about right order, wants his people to display righteousness in three spheres: righteousness in community worship (12:1–16:17), righteousness in community oversight (16:18–18:22), and righteousness in daily community life (19:1–26:15). By keeping the “statutes and rules” with all their heart and soul (26:16), Israel will show that they love God with all their heart and soul (6:5).

Drawing his second sermon to an end, Moses now details in 26:16–19 the formalizing of the Moab covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Verse 17 describes the people’s declaration, and verses 18–19 describe Yahweh’s response. The people first assert their allegiance to Yahweh as their God, and then they spell out the implications of their commitment: to follow his ways, to remain faithful to his instruction, and to heed his voice (v. 17). Yahweh in turn expresses his expectation that they should live as his treasured possession and follow his commands, and then he promises that such living will result in their being elevated in the eyes of the nations and set apart as a holy people (vv. 18–19).

Four decades earlier at Mount Sinai, Yahweh made a comparable commitment (Ex. 19:4–6) and the people a similar promise: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). But while Yahweh is “a God of faithfulness and without iniquity” (Deut. 32:4), history had proven Israel’s faithlessness, and it would do so again (31:27, 29; 2 Kings 17:13–15; Rom. 11:7–8). How fickle human promises can be, and how much we need God’s grace in order to live out our commitment to love and righteousness (Deut. 29:4)! Apart from such grace, right order in corporate worship, in the public square, and in our daily lives is impossible.

We should celebrate that Christ has secured our pardon and that his Spirit bears the fruit of love and faithfulness in us, helping us by faith to become who we could not be on our own (Gal. 2:20; 5:22–23). The Lord promises that he will complete the work that he has begun in us (Phil. 1:6), and we can rest today, trusting a faithful God who has committed to sanctify us completely, readying us for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23–24).

FEBRUARY 11 • DEUTERONOMY 30:19–20

God Is Your Life

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

“I HAVE SET BEFORE you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life . . . for [God] is your life” (Deut. 30:19–20). Moses’s logic here is breathtaking. May the Lord help us feel and respond appropriately to these truths.

First, spiritual life does not happen on its own (see John 3:36; Eph. 2:1–3). We must *choose* life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus notes, “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13–14). Impurity, dishonesty, selfishness, arrogance, laziness, rash responses, and the like—these characterize the natural, easy way, but they lead to death. In contrast, purity, honesty, service, humility, discipline, and self-control distinguish

the more difficult way that leads to life, and such traits are realized only when God by his Spirit creates new desires (Gal. 5:16–17).

Second, the choices we make reveal our deepest longings and wants. Desires drive action, for our highest motivations always move us one way or another. Sin results when temporary, empty pleasures become more desirable than pleasing God. With this in mind, notice how, in Deuteronomy 30:19–20, Moses does more than call for a decision. He also motivates people to choose life by grounding his charge in the most awe-inspiring truth: to choose life is to gain God, “*for he is your life.*” “The Rock, his work is perfect. . . . A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (32:4). This one who stands distinct above all else (4:35; 33:26) and who controls all things (4:39; 10:14)—this one becomes ours. Supreme power and worth wrapped in tender care . . . only for those who choose life.

Third, Moses clearly believes that the quest for joy, life, and blessing is itself not sin (see Rom. 2:7). The sin comes when we settle too quickly for fleeting, empty pleasures instead of embracing lasting pleasures of substance, all of which are found only in relation to God (see 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 2:16–17). “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11). Paul stresses his conviction that he will glorify Christ most when Christ is his deepest satisfaction, both in life and in death (Phil. 1:20–21). As such, he declares, “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). I exhort you today, *choose life and gain God.*

FEBRUARY 12 • DEUTERONOMY 32:39

The Hope of Resurrection

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

MOSES’S SONG in Deuteronomy 32:1–47 captures in poetic verse what the rest of the book declares: Israel had “dealt corruptly” with God (32:4–6), making him jealous by idolatry, arousing his anger and the promise of destruction (vv. 21–22). Nevertheless, for the sake of his reputation (vv. 26–27),

God “will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone” (v. 36). Yahweh said the song itself was to stand as a lasting “witness for me against the people” (31:19). In it Moses proclaims “the name of the LORD” (32:3), describing Yahweh’s character as it will show itself in the people’s history of sin, destruction, and restoration (see Rev. 15:3–4).

In Deuteronomy, the Old Testament’s most common terms for exile are remarkably scarce. Instead, the terms used relate to extermination and death. For example, God warns Israel that he will “destroy [them] from off the face of the earth” (Deut. 6:14–15) and that they will “perish” (8:19–20; 11:16–17; 30:17–18) if they persist in idolatry. While passages like 4:29–31 and 30:1–10 underscore that a remnant will continue to exist physically in exile, the people as a national entity and the old covenant they embody will die. Anything that continues will be substantially discontinuous with the past.

Yahweh declares in 32:39,

See now that I, even I, am he,
and there is no god beside me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

The Lord’s use of the word “heal” after “wound” highlights that the ordering of elements within the pairs is significant. God portrays his curse as death and injury, whereas the restoration blessing that follows is nothing less than resurrection and healing. Deuteronomy 32:39 marks Scripture’s first clear witness to the new covenant as rebirth, inaugurated by resurrection from the dead.

Because only “in [Abraham’s] offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:18), the world’s hopes rested on God’s willingness to “make alive” after Israel’s death-judgment. Christ’s resurrection marks him as “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18), “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). New creation dawns in Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17), and we who were “dead in our trespasses” are “made alive” together with him (Eph. 2:5; cf. 1 Cor. 15:22). Thank God for such great love.