

This Is Where Your Real Strength Comes From

Remember when Popeye the Sailor Man would pop open a can of spinach, guzzle down the green goop and bam!, his biceps would bulge? Then, he wielded extra power, speed, wit and energy to foil Bluto's chaotic plans to steal the spindly love interest Olive Oyl.

Ever feel like you could use a super-sized helping of strength? Not strength from curling barbells, but real strength: strength of character, perseverance and wisdom; strength that comes from confidence, peace and faith.

Spinach worked great for Popeye, but in real life, real strength comes from joy.

“... the joy of the Lord is your strength”(Neh. 8:10d).

Notice it doesn't say “happiness.” Being happy is a feeling, an expression that requires joy. Joy comes from an inner sense of well-being. Maybe instead of writing “Happy,” Pharrell Williams should have come up with a song about joy.

So where's your source of real strength? How do you develop joy?

The key is to take your eyes off yourself, your circumstances, your ups and downs. Regardless of the situation, turn your eyes to Jesus and thank Him. Worship Him. Acknowledge God for who He is—the creator of everything, author of life, savior of our soul, Lord of life. He is worthy to be praised.

I know this next part may be hard for many men, but open your mouth and sing.

“Sing aloud unto God our strength”(Ps. 81:1a).

God returns adoration by filling you with joy. And joy gives you strength. At a glance, it doesn't seem to add up, but the biblical math for real strength looks like this:

Rejoice in the Lord + Sing = Joy = Strength

It may be paradigm-shifting, but to be able to rejoice in the Lord, you can't be self-absorbed. Being self-absorbed is a form of worship and prohibits you from serving and loving others. Even in sadness, facing dire straits, the Bible says to:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).

Joy also comes from healthy relationships. That's why God's motto is to love God and love people. If you invest in God, you get joy back. Love what God loves; you will know joy.

Just like Bluto trying to ruin Popeye's day, our archenemy is trying to rob us of our joy. He knows if you are unhappy, your real strength diminishes. Are you robbed of strength? That means your joy has been stolen.

The message of the world is drive, determination, desire—that's strength. The cultural math to get joy looks like:

Work + diligence = joy

Most guys are grinding away, thinking they are reaching true joy. But it's a manipulation. A trick. A ploy. The enemy is after your joy. He goes for your joy so you feel bad, which makes you want to look for anything to appease your pain. Remember the enemy's No. 1 mission is to steal, kill and destroy you.

"The thief does not come, except to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Jesus came so you could live and love abundantly. He loves you. You were created so he could love you. If you let the paint dry on that thought alone, you will experience joy.

Maybe Popeye should have tattooed “joy” on his bicep. Because with joy, you can do anything.

“I can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). {eoa}

Kenny Luck is an ECPA Platinum award-winning author, who has authored and co-authored 20 books for men. Kenny is the president and founder of Every Man Ministries. As the former men’s pastor at Saddleback Church in California and current leadership pastor at Crossline Community Church, Kenny has found the proven way to improve men’s ministries around the world. *Sleeping Giant* is this blueprint and gives men the tools they need to lead and understand their own men’s ministry. Watch Kenny’s teachings at [www.kennyluck.com](#) and start your men’s group today.

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