

Angela Thomas

Stronger

Finding Hope in Fragile Places



LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

Published by LifeWay Press®
© 2013 Angela Thomas

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to LifeWay Press®; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0152.

ISBN 9781415874141
Item 005513458.
Dewey decimal classification: 234.2
Subject headings: HOPE \ DISCIPLESHIP \ GOD

Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2000, 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

Scripture marked NIV is taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide. Used by permission.

Scripture marked HCSB is taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible. Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible® and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture marked NASB is taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (www.lockman.org).

To order additional copies of this resource, write to LifeWay Church Resources, Customer Service, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113; fax 615.251.5933; phone 800.458.2772; order online at www.lifeway.com or email orderentry@lifeway.com; or visit the LifeWay Christian Store serving you.

Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0152

CONTENTS

Session 1..... see Leader Guide page 168

WEEK 1

God Is Stronger than Everything..... 6

Session 2 Viewer Guide..... 36

WEEK 2

God Is Stronger than My Struggles..... 37

Session 3 Viewer Guide..... 67

WEEK 3

God Is Stronger than My Bad News..... 68

Session 4 Viewer Guide..... 91

WEEK 4

God Is Stronger than My Overwhelming Life..... 92

Session 5 Viewer Guide..... 116

WEEK 5

God Is Stronger than My Attitude..... 117

Session 6 Viewer Guide..... 142

WEEK 6

God Is Stronger than Every Broken Thing in Me..... 143

Session 7 Viewer Guide..... 165

Endnotes..... 166

Leader Guide..... 168



I love you, O LORD, my strength.

Psalm 18:1



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Dallas Theological Seminary. She is the author of 15 books, including the best-selling *52 Things Kids Need from a Mom*. She has written six video studies with LifeWay, including *Brave: Honest Questions Women Ask*. As a sought-after Bible teacher, Angela brings her passion, transparency, and storytelling gifts to women of all ages and all walks of life from all around the world.

This life journey has not been without its challenges, darkness, and pain. After divorcing, Angela spent more than seven years as a single mom to her four children. You will find the lessons of brokenness, pain, and God's redemption woven throughout her writings. Angela is humbled that God continues to use her brokenness for His glory.

Over five years ago, God sent a man named Scott to marry Angela and her children. They live in North Carolina where their family loves travel, cooking at home, having people over, and going to church. Angela especially loves everything about making a home for her family, including cooking, decorating, gardening, and organizing.

MY DEAR SWEET FRIEND, WELCOME TO STRONGER.

The study is written. The videos are filmed. Only this last personal note remains to be written to you. I'm so humbled to have you spend your precious time with these pages. The study is a responsibility I do not take lightly. I've asked Christ to be the center of this work. I pray that He will be exalted in your life. I pray His presence will be real and powerful to you.

This study was not written by a strong woman in a strong season of life. God may have chosen the weakest woman on the planet. Only now with the writing complete have I begun to understand. I blocked several months on my calendar to write, but God had something more in mind. When the month came for me to begin writing, my parents came to live with our family. My mama had been battling ovarian cancer for almost six years. Both Mama and Daddy were completely exhausted. They lived with us, and we later moved them into a house down the street. Caring for someone who is desperately ill is all-consuming.

I anticipated months of writing. God anticipated the lessons I had yet to learn. Instead of research, exegesis and theology, God asked me to pull up a chair beside the bed of His presence. Everyday, He had me look into the bluest eyes you've ever seen, searching for ways to bring a moment of joy or relief from the pain. He asked me to serve Mama and my family until I was the most physically and emotionally exhausted I have ever been.

Long before we thought we were ready, and long before we had hoped, Mama went to heaven, where in His presence, and by His grace, she was finally and fully made strong. Afterward, in the middle of my grief, exhaustion, and weakness, the Lord whispered, *It's time to write.*

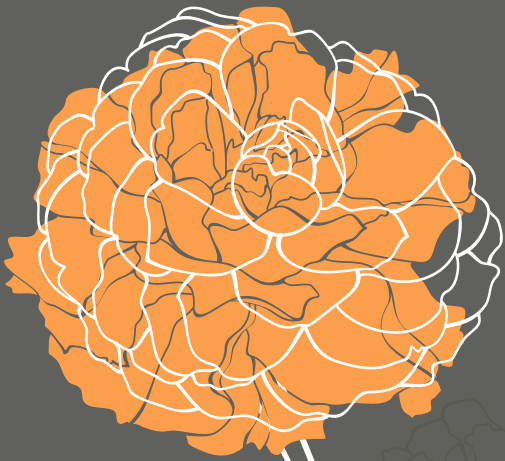
You see, God is stronger and a vital, passionate relationship with Him is the only means by which you and I will become stronger. I am absolutely sure God wanted me to write from a place of complete dependence on His truth, His Word, and His strength. He wanted you to know His strength, not mine. All those months I sat by Mama's bed and asked God to show me how He is stronger. Over and over, He did. I pray this study accurately reflects the truth of the only One who has the power make you stronger than the struggle you face today.

May the Lord be glorified in the lessons of my weakness. May His strength be evident to all. May He use these pages to transform our lives. Oh, how I pray that you see Him. Know Him. Love Him. Worship Him. I wish you could know how much I love you and pray for you all. I am honored to study the Scriptures alongside you.

By His strength, for His glory,
Angela

WEEK 1

GOD IS STRONGER THAN EVERYTHING





Welcome, sweet friend. I am both humbled and honored to begin this first week of study with you. After months of research and more than a year of prayer for this message, it is with great joy that I share this profoundly simple truth: God is stronger than everything.

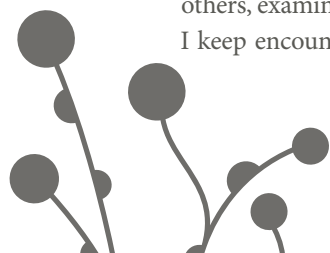
I have no idea what struggles you are bringing to our weeks of study, but I do know one powerful thing: whatever you are facing, the Bible promises our God is stronger.

stronger than your greatest weakness
stronger than your deepest need
stronger than your past mistakes
stronger than your present stumblings
stronger than sickness, physical sufferings, and death
stronger than your doubts
stronger than your bad attitude
stronger than broken relationships
stronger than leaders, authorities, kings, and nations
stronger than loneliness and depression
stronger than anxiety and worry
stronger than sin
stronger than unforgiveness
stronger than anger, bitterness, and rage

God is stronger than everything. And everybody. And every circumstance. Oh hallelujah!

Well, shoot. I have already started to cry. Right here on the first page, with these first words, But there is no sadness in my tears; these are tears of comfort and hope. God is stronger than everything that concerns me and I am emotional because I'm so grateful. Grateful to belong to the One called Almighty. Strong Tower. Refuge. Protector. Redeemer. Grateful that no matter what else happens today, I belong to Him. He is stronger. I am safe in His care. And because of His enduring love, He keeps making me stronger for each new day.

Longing to know more about the strength of God, I have been studying His Word, observing others, examining my own heart, and seeking the wisdom of greater scholars. An observation I keep encountering among Christ followers is this: many followers of Jesus face the same



struggles and trials as everyone—their bodies and minds grow weary—yet God is making them stronger on their journey.

Other followers of Jesus know about the strength of God, yet they do not live in His power. They make their journey without power, marked by long stays in miserable places.

Even though you and I may believe in the same God and trust the same Jesus as Savior, we are not all receiving the same fresh strength God offers for the soul. Too many of us are living powerless lives, feeling overcome, defeated, weary, and even downright mad.

Some Christ followers have never understood the great mercy and grace of God for His people and try to make life's journey without His presence or strength for their souls.

For each of us, the same truth applies: a biblical relationship with the God of Glory is the only way we will ever walk in strength on this earth.

So welcome, my friends, new and old. It's good to circle our chairs and pursue God together. Move toward Him. Lean in closer to His love and His Word and His strength. This week we begin with searching questions to build a beautiful, biblical foundation for our study together.

We will ask the Scriptures:

How do we know God is stronger than everything?

We will ask of the theological study:

How does an Almighty God make His people stronger?

How does the Bible instruct us to receive God's promised strength?

We will ask of ourselves:

What needs to change in me so that I live in the strength God promises to provide?

God is stronger than everything. And He can make you stronger.

Oh, let it be for all of us! Amen and amen.



DAY 1

GOD ALMIGHTY

In my travels, I've met many women who tell me, "Your Bible study was the first I ever did." Every time I hear those sweet words, I'm deeply humbled, and I whisper thanks to God for trusting me with her precious time. I've also learned through those meetings that I can't assume we all begin a study with the same understanding of the Bible or the same basic assumptions about faith.

We are a beautiful variety of women at different places and ages and with different needs and struggles. So I'm praying these weeks together will become spiritual food for each of us, from the first-time Bible study girls to those of you who do your daily Bible reading in the Hebrew and Greek. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God through His Word is able to make each one of us stronger.

In today's study we begin with the source of all strength—God Almighty. Some of you know Him well. His presence is as familiar to you as the shape of your hand. For others, today it's my privilege to introduce you to the Maker of heaven and earth. He is the One who has always loved you. Sees you. Smiles that you are here.

Let's start today in prayer.

God, I want to know You more. I want to learn and grow and understand Your powerful words. In so many ways, I desperately need to become stronger, so teach me about who You are and the strength You give. Bring Your light into my dark places. For these next pages, help me to focus on You. Just You, Lord. Amen.

If you're anything like me, you know how tempting it is to begin this study by talking about myself. My needs. My stumbles. My struggles. All the places I want to be stronger. Need to be stronger.

But if we start by talking about ourselves, we will quickly lose heart, giving up the hope of ever becoming stronger. We have to start with God, because it's His strength we need, not a million more hours to focus on ourselves.

And so, my sisters, I give you the Lord God Almighty. He is stronger than everything.



THE OMNI-NESS OF GOD

The enormity of God's strength is a concept that will not fit inside my head. Nowhere is my smallness more evident than when I try to consider the attributes of God and how great they are.

Take a minute to remember some of the characteristics you know about God. I'll get you started. Finish the sentence, God is . . .

Faithful, Loving

I bet you've written amazing words about the character of God like "powerful, compassionate, merciful, forgiving." Now go back and before each of your words, add the word *omni-*. That's our God. In all His attributes, He is *omni*.

OMNI is a Latin word that means "all," "in all ways," "in all things," "every," or "everywhere." When *omni* is added to the start of a word, then "all" modifies the word and expands the meaning.

The Bible doesn't use the prefix *omni* to describe God. Theologians constructed the expanded *omni*-words to help convey the vastness of God's attributes from the Bible. Let's take a look at three of these expanded words: omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence.

GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

God is present at all times and in all places. Perhaps one of the most beautiful passages regarding God's omnipresence is found in Psalm 139.

Read those 24 verses and use this space to write the key phrases that describe where God is.

UBIQUITOUS means existing or being everywhere at the same time.

Now look at these next passages. See how God fills the heavens and no one can hide from Him?

Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 23:23-24

This question is too easy, but humor me. Where can you go to get away from God's presence?

The Bible says people worship other gods that don't even exist, but our God is near when we pray.

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?

Deuteronomy 4:7

See how the theology of God as omnipresent unfolds when we study the Scriptures? A.W. Tozer says that few truths are so clearly taught in the Scripture as "the doctrine of divine omnipresence." He continues: "God is everywhere here, close to everything, next to everyone."¹

Don't you love that? God is here with me this morning and with you as you read these words. No matter how you feel or even if you can't feel anything, God is not far. You are in the same room with God. His character and this truth will never change. Which reminds me, God's unchanging character is called His immutability.

Which is your first reaction to God's ubiquity?

- Oh no, I can never escape Him.*
- Oh yes, He'll never leave me.*

Whichever answer you chose, why might others choose the opposite answer?

IMMUTABILITY means God changes not in His essence. He changes not in His attributes. God changes not in His plans. God is unchanging in His promises.²

God said these words concerning His immutability:

*I the LORD do not change.
Malachi 3:6*

Draw something here on earth that seems unchangeable.

So what does the immutability and omnipresence of God mean for you today? What does God's omnipresence have to do with His strength or you becoming stronger?

Well, hang on, friend, because each of God's attributes has everything to do with His strength for us and to us.

I just have to stop for one second to tell you, I LOVE this! I love that God reveals big, OMNI, mind-boggling, glorifying truths about Himself in the Bible and then reaches down into our lives to graciously provide that same greatness to change us and our circumstances and prove to us over and over that He loves us.

God's omnipresence is part of His strength. Look at these amazing passages and see for yourself:

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
Psalm 46:1 (NIV)*

*The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.
Psalm 145:18 (NIV)*

*(Jesus said) "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Matthew 28:20 (NIV)*

God is ever-present, near, with us always. Does that truth give you comfort? A deeper peace? Think about this for a minute: God is stronger than everything and He is here. Wherever you are, He is too. He promises to be with you always.

How has God been present in unexpected places in your life?

How can God's omnipresence settle your heart today? Quiet your fears? Restore your trust?

As we end our first day of study about one amazingly big truth, will you close your eyes, focus your mind on the Lord, and let your soul rest in the presence of God? He is stronger than everything. And you don't have to be. Hallelujah and amen.

Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.³ —C. H. Spurgeon

A LITTLE STRONGER—God is always with me.
His strength is ever-present, in every place, for every circumstance I face.

DAY 2

GOD ALL-KNOWING AND ALL-POWERFUL

Last night I slept the sweetest sleep. Most of the day had been spent writing and praying through our lesson about God's presence. Before I turned off the light, I studied today's topic for a while then closed my eyes with God's words on my heart.

When I lay my head on my pillow and snuggled under the covers, it truly felt like I was tucking my physical body and all the worries of my day underneath the wings of God. The Almighty One. Our God who is *omni* in all His ways. Our refuge and strength and hope.

With one day focused entirely on the truth of God's presence, I slept like a baby without a care in the world. My soul had been reminded that God is standing guard. He is stronger than everything. And when your heart trusts God's truth, He gives a peace that replaces fears and worries with rest.

GOD IS OMNISCIENT

God knows everything. He is perfect in knowledge. His understanding is infinite. With all my heart, I hope and pray the truths of this study will give your soul rest.

We are going to spend one more day focused on the great strength of God. Goodness, we could spend years and maybe we should, but for now, let's jump into the next *omni* attribute of our Lord.

Father, focus my thoughts again today, so I can take in as much understanding as I am able. Increase my knowledge of You. Show me according to Your Word how strong and mighty You are. Amen.

With each of God's attributes, we encounter another great, big, *omni*-sized trait and this characteristic is no different. To consider God's vast, all-encompassing knowledge is once again more truth than our minds can conceive. But we are not alone; when the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he echoed something similar:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
Romans 11:33

The knowledge of God is too much for us to fathom, yet it's important for us to examine. God's knowledge is one more facet of His strength.

The Bible is full of verses that refer to God's infinite knowledge. Let's read a few of these together (see sidebar).

How often have you wondered if God knows what's going on in your life? Your heart? Does He see what happens in your family? Can He have any idea about the struggles you face? Tell me your thoughts.

He does. The Bible affirms over and over that God knows everything.

Theologian Wayne Grudem defines God's omniscience like this: "God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and external act."⁴ That means He knows Himself and each one of us perfectly. He knows everything about you and me. All things—past, present, and future—and our secrets and our potential.

I love A.W. Tozer's writings so much. He wanted to make sure we did not have any questions left about the scope of God's knowledge when he wrote this:

God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.⁵

Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed.
1 Samuel 2:3

For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.
Job 28:24

Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?
Job 37:16

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.
Psalm 147:5

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
Isaiah 55:9

For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.
1 John 3:20

Take a few minutes to look up some of these verses. It's so much better when we see God's truth for ourselves. Beside each passage, jot down what the verse says God knows.

Bible Passage	<i>God Knows</i>
Exodus 3:7	
1 Chronicles 28:9	
Proverbs 5:21	
Proverbs 15:3	
Matthew 6:30-32	
Matthew 10:30	

Based on everything we just read about the knowledge of God, answer these two questions:

How does the omniscience of God give you comfort?

How does that truth make you tremble?

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God has infinite power. He is Almighty. God can do everything.

This afternoon I think I have read every Bible verse that mentions the power of God. I wish we had time to read all those passages because it'll do something for you. My soul is full. My mind is excited. I just want to grab the next person down my street and sit her down to hear all the power verses. I want to holler from my front door, "Hey, buddy! The God you have been ignoring, well, He really is almighty. And here's the kicker—the Almighty still loves you."

*It is a mighty conception that we form of a power from which all other power is derived . . . which nothing can oppose. . . . The omnipotence of God is inconceivable and boundless. It arises from the infinite perfection of God, that his power can never be actually exhausted.*⁶ —Richard Watson

I'm praying these three verses will give you the big idea about God's power:

*I know that You can do anything
and no plan of Yours can be thwarted.*
Job 42:2 (HCSB)

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
Matthew 19:26

For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.
Romans 1:20 (HCSB)

These never-changing, glorious characteristics of God's nature—one on top of the other, all woven together—become proof that God is stronger than everything. He is stronger than any battle you will ever face. He is the source of all the strength you will ever need. From His never-changing *omni*-strength, God promises to be our strength, to give His strength to us, and—oh, thank goodness—to never tire of making us stronger. Not only is God omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent, the Bible goes on to say He is

invisible	personal	living	self-existent	eternal
unchanging	faithful	wise	loving	long-suffering
compassionate	free	sovereign	incomprehensible	holy
righteous	true	good	merciful	forgiving

Look at the list of characteristics and use these words to write a note for someone who comes to mind. What would you remind him or her about the nature of God?

My mama went to heaven two weeks ago today, so I'm writing my note to my daddy:

Sweet Daddy, God is wise. He is compassionate and merciful. He is unchanging and good. He loves you and will be faithful to you. He is with you now and is powerful enough to heal your heart. I trust Him for us all. I love you so much, but even better, God loves you perfectly.

To whom will you write a note about the truths of God?

To someone who's been praying for a great need?

To someone whose life is full of responsibilities and worries?

To someone who doesn't know Christ?

To yourself?

Well may the saint trust such a God! He is worthy of implicit confidence. Nothing is too hard for Him. If God were stunted in might and had a limit to His strength we might well despair. But seeing that He is clothed with omnipotence, no prayer is too hard for Him to answer, no need too great for Him to supply, no passion too strong for Him to subdue; no temptation too powerful for Him to deliver from, no misery too deep for Him to relieve.⁷ —Arthur Pink

A LITTLE STRONGER—My God is almighty, all-knowing, and unchanging. He knows what I need even before I ask. Nothing is impossible for Him.