

How to Develop a Mighty Spirit

INTRODUCTION

1 Timothy 4:1 says, “The Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:1-4).

It’s what the Holy Spirit told Paul expressively, or *explicitly* as it says in ones translation: that in the last days some would depart from the faith, and that they would give heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. Demonic activity and false doctrine would increase. People would pay attention, give heed, to deceitful spirits. It’s more than that. I guess this is kind of a sick way to say it, but people will actually cultivate a relationship with demons. I don’t know how else to say it: they feed the relationship. It’s not that they just hear a false prophet on television and say, “I guess that must be true.” It’s more than that. They’ll give heed to it, and they’ll drink from that spirit. They’ll feed their spirit, and they cultivate it.

“IN THE LAST DAYS PERILOUS TIMES WILL COME”

Turn to 2 Timothy 3:1; this was a burden on Paul’s heart every time he wrote to Timothy. Twice he brought up this subject about how heavy it will get in the last days. He wants Timothy to know something. He says, “I want you to be sure about this, Timothy. I want you to preach this; in the last days, perilous times are coming” (1 Tim. 3:1, paraphrased).

The Body of Christ in the Western world is so unprepared for the heightened activity of darkness as well as the heightened activity of the Holy Spirit. The Church is so unprepared for the heightened activity of light and of dark. The Church needs to be prepared. Paul told Timothy, “Know this, know this: be sure of this, that in the last days the negative is going to increase.” We know the positive is going to increase as well. He goes on and describes it in some pretty heavy ways.

PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE BRUTAL IN THE LAST DAYS

The second phrase, term, description, is that they are lovers of money. Love for money will reach another level. Love for money right now is rampant all through the Church.

Look at verse 3. All these words are very important, but there’s one word that really troubles me in verse 3. Well, they all do. It’s the word *brutal*. People are going to be brutal in the last days. They’re going to be devoid of conscience. I know that as martyrdom increases, and all kinds of bad things happen, brutality will reach levels even beyond what happened in Nazi Germany and some of the barbaric activities of the fall of the Roman Empire across Europe in what’s known as the “dark ages.”

MEN WILL BECOME TRAITORS AND BETRAY ONE ANOTHER

Verse 4. Men will become traitors and betray one another. Look at 2 Timothy 2. This is where I really want to focus, and I’m really talking about our fast coming up in the next three days. In light of the heightened activity in the realm of the spirit, beloved, even believers are paying attention to demons. Again, I don’t mean they just casually ran across a pamphlet from a cult group and read it and sell their soul. That’s not what I mean. I mean that they’re feeding their spirit on that which is energized by demons. One of the greatest ways that’s happening

is through the media, through different types of new technology. It's certainly more than that. Bitterness is a good way to feed our spirit, in league and in agreement with demons. Bitterness is a good way to destroy our souls. It's not just perversion in movies. The love of money is in agreement with demonic activity. It will pollute and shut our hearts down in the most powerful way.

WELCOME TO THE IHOP-KC FAMILY

Anyway, there are a number of ways, but look at what's happening. This is what we're about. This is why we're having three days of fasting every month, and this is why we have fasting teams. This is why we do IHOP-KC, and whether you're on the IHOP-KC staff or whether you're just a part of the IHOP-KC family, to anyone who comes around IHOP-KC we say, "Hey, you're a part of the family and we welcome you and honor you." We want you to feel apart of what the Lord is saying and doing through IHOP-KC.

Some you live in other places, and I talked to a young man today who said he drove three hours to be here. "I want to be a part of this. It's worth it to me." Welcome to the IHOP-KC family. We accept you. We love it.

"BE STRONG IN THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS"

Look at this here. Again, I'm only going to speak very briefly, because they've asked us to be out of this building by 9:00pm, and they do that with good reason, because there are cleaning teams that come in afterwards. They need everything clean before early tomorrow when school starts. I honor that request and we want to stay true to that. We're just thankful that the cleaning teams are willing to come in late.

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). "Be strong": that's an interesting exhortation. Be strong in the grace of God. Paul is telling Timothy, this young apostle, and he's also telling us, "Be strong in the grace of God." You'd think that the strength would just flow from heaven. It seems like an odd exhortation, doesn't it? It seems like a prayer we should pray, not an exhortation someone gives us: "Well, Lord, make me strong in the grace of God."

"What do you mean, 'Be strong'? Just sit up and raise your voice at prayer meetings? What do you mean? Shout at demons? How do you be strong? What does that mean?"

It's talking about operating in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He could be saying, "Flow in the anointing of the Spirit." That kind of exhortation drives some people to frustration because they say, "I don't know how to do that!" Actually it's quite simple. It really is.

IF WE POSITION OURSELVES, GOD PROMISES US THE STRENGTH WILL FLOW

Paul isn't telling Timothy, and the Lord isn't telling us, to fabricate or produce the anointing. He's telling us to live in the anointing. He's not telling us to produce it; He's telling us to position ourselves to receive it. Because the Lord says, "From My point of view, if you position yourself I promise you that the strength will flow. I promise you it will." This exhortation, "Be strong," that Paul gave Timothy is an expression of Paul's confidence that if we do our part, God will do His part.

He doesn't say, "Timothy, do your part and I trust the Lord will help you."

No, he says, "I know that part. If you do your part, Timothy, I assure you God will do His part."

It's odd, because the church in the Western world— again, I don't want to talk about the church in some places in Asia and Africa and Latin America; some of these places are going into such a radical abandonment to God and the grace of God that I don't want to throw them in. It's odd in the Western church for a church—and what I mean by *church* is a body of believers in a city; I'm not talking about any particular congregation. I'm talking about the people of God pressing in, in a way that's unrelenting. They won't back down, they burn the bridges, they aren't taking no for an answer, there's no escape clause. They're going for this thing and they aren't looking back. Jesus said, "Put your hand to the plow and don't look back" (Lk. 9:62, paraphrased). Burn the bridges; get rid of the escape clauses.

I did something that seemed really radical six months ago. It doesn't seem so radical now, but it did the night I said it. It seems kind of—"Well, the fact that it seemed so radical, Mike, tells you where you were." I made a statement. I said, "By the grace of God, I will do this 'fasting and prayer' thing every month, at the first of the month, for three days until the second coming."

I remember saying that. I said, "Oh, man that's scary."

A few people came up and, "Oh, this is big."

But now I've been doing it a little for six months, and it's like the Lord is saying, "You should have been doing it the whole time before. That's not a big deal."

Lord, I'm a Westerner. I was raised in the Western culture, and Westerners so don't do that. New Testament believers do. It's so odd that fasting and prayer would be a normative thing for a Christian; whereas ordinarily it's heroic and "above and beyond" when a group of people try to press in. Beloved, let me tell you: this is really normal, par for the course, this "be strong in the Lord" exhortation. "Position yourself to flow in the power of God," is what He's telling them. We're so used to not doing it that when someone endeavors to do it, they look radical. Beloved, it's not radical; it's normal. The more you become familiar with church history and the places where revival broke out and some of the groups around the world right now, what we're doing isn't nearly so radical when lined up with others believers in history and in the world today. It's radical for Americans, but that's not the standard. The standard is the Word of God.

One thing I love about the young people, the people on the Night Watch, the Fire in the Night interns, and the FSOP students is that eighteen- and twenty-year olds come and see a whole company of people who think prayer and fasting is normal. What happens is that it writes it in their foundation, and they start thinking it's normal. I'm thinking of the five-, eight-, and ten-year old little boys and girls. I love little Sydney over there just dancing, just having a ball. I looked over there to look at Dwayne and say, "Dwayne what are you doing over there?" Then I saw Sydney twirling and spinning and giving him a feast. Anyway, these little ones think fasting and prayer is totally normal. They think everyone does it.

Paul told Timothy, "Be strong. Position yourself, put yourself into a lifestyle where you're drinking deeply of the Spirit instead of drinking deeply of demons. You're not heeding demons; you're heeding the Holy Spirit."

TAKE YOUR WEAK HUMAN HEART AND FEED ON THE EMOTIONS OF GOD

He goes on to talk about this in verses 3 and 4. He gives three different metaphors, three different picture of what it means to be strong in the spirit. Beloved, there's not mystery of how to be strong in the spirit. So many

people want the secrets. There really isn't any big deal. There's no secret about it; it's just doing it. Take a weak human heart, a weak human spirit, and feed your mind on the emotions of God—the Father heart of God and the Bridegroom. Feed your mind on the burning desire of God's heart, the passions of God's heart. Do that. Then, when you feed your spirit on those things, respond back with, "I love You, I want You." That's called *prayer*, when you feed yourself on the Word of God and you respond back with, "I want You, I love You, and I want more of this. I've got to have more." That's called *prayer*. That's all that is.

The sixth chapter of Matthew gives us three very simple things: prayer, fasting, and giving. Right at the centerpiece of the Sermon on the Mount is prayer, fasting, and giving. The Sermon on the Mount is really the main deal of the kingdom of God. It's the main and plain of the kingdom of God, the Sermon on the Mount. You don't get any more fundamental than the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Right in the center Jesus is speaking, foundation 101. This is how the kingdom works: prayer, fasting, and giving.

There's something powerful about prayer, fasting, and giving. Because we don't understand it on the front end; we don't understand its impact. We see the exhortation and we say, "Well, whatever." More often than not we just sidestep it. Or we do a little here, a little there, but mostly sidestep it as a lifestyle. When fifty years have come and gone most Christians did a little of those three things, a little. Never something—well not *never*, but as a rule, it's not something that they locked in and did for twenty, or forty, or fifty years. They give a little extra on the money; they give a little. They pray here and there, a little on the run, and every now and then at a conference. They fast in a one-off kind of way.

Jesus was saying, "No, no, no, I want you to live a lifestyle like this. It's not to prove your dedication." Beloved, it's not about proving your dedication. Jesus could have said, "These are the human things you do to position yourself to receive strength in your spirit."

GIVING, FASTING, AND PRAYING DISCOMBOBULATES OUR EMOTIONAL CHEMISTRY

There's an emotional chemistry change that happens related to prayer, fasting, and giving. It's nothing to do with earning. It's not like, if we give this much, God says, "Well..." if we give this much, God goes, "Hmm... getting there..." If we give that one little, extra bit the Lord says, "OK, you've got Me now." Then He releases blessing.

No, it's not about earning; it's a very different thing. It's about positioning our life in the grace of God to become mighty in our spirit. Those three things are indispensable. They aren't negotiable; they're lifestyle realities that we live in for decades. Not for four months or for one lively season where everyone got together and did it. When we give—and I don't mean just a little out of our surplus—when we give it totally, and I'm going to make up a word here—it will *discombobulate* our emotions. When we give, we take money out of our pocket and give it. It affects every range of emotion. If the money is really small, it doesn't matter, but if it's at the other level, the thought of it causes sweat, hands in the pocket, panic, and domestic strife. The giving of it produces fear and terror, and the watching of it, anxiety and strife. "What do they do with it?" It calls out so many emotions. It's like when we give money it takes a knife and cuts us wide open and we're just raw.

The Lord says, "I know, that's the point: that I am the point." It's not that you give and if you give enough you finally get God's attention. It's not like that. It's a jolt and a discombobulating of your emotional chemistry. I'm just making up the number, but there are ten or fifteen totally different emotions that linger for long periods

over the same thousand-dollar gift that you gave. It's amazing! It's not like it's a one-time deal; even months and a year or two later you're still thinking about it and it's still kind of working on you a little.

The Lord says, "I know the design of the human spirit and I've made it in such a way as this, that when you give there's such a disruption up and down your being, and when you do it in faith in the grace of God, it jerks you around a hundred different ways." It changes you drastically and it makes you strong. It opens you up to receive. When you give money, and I don't mean your surplus; when you give money in a way that's a lifestyle and it touches you, then the fears, the future, the plans, your image, your power, your everything is lined up with this.

WHEN YOU GIVE YOUR MONEY, YOU GIVE YOUR POWER

I've done this over the years and taught on it. And I've done more than taught on it: I did it to whatever degree, and I looked up to heaven a thousand times and said, "Wait a second, Lord..."

He says, "Ah, it's getting you, isn't it?" It really rearranges you. When you give money, you're giving power—tremendous power, because money is power. It's financial power, it's the power of circumstances, it's power over people. It's power to form the future, and it's power to influence. It's power in so many ways. We could talk for an hour about the different details of how powerful money is. When you give it, you don't even have to understand it. The Lord says, "Just do it. Just do it. Just do it."

WHEN YOU FAST, YOU GIVE YOUR PHYSICAL STRENGTH

When you fast, you give physical strength. Fasting isn't about hunger; it really isn't. It's for a few hours. Fasting is about physical strength. If you fast as a lifestyle, the hunger isn't even the point. I don't mean you get used to feeling pain; that's not what I mean. Your body adjusts to where hunger isn't even the point. Hunger never was the point. Hunger is the point at the beginning of a lifestyle of fasting—maybe for the first three months or a year. Eventually you acclimate in your being. It's a fact—just like how you acclimate to different foods if you go to another culture. If you ate another food for three months you would be doing all kinds of funny things, but after three months or six months you acclimate. That's a whole different thing. You actually start liking it, they say. Fasting isn't really about hunger. People think it's about hunger and sacrifice, but it really isn't. That's only fasting 101, on the front end. Once you do it as a lifestyle, you acclimate. The fear of fasting is gone. The hunger actually adjusts, because that was never the point. It's about physical strength. That's what fasting is about as a lifestyle. We lose so much ability to do things by fasting. I've been in a handful of situations where I said, "Lord, this isn't a good time. I'm just in that funk. I can't do it right now but it won't go away."

The Lord says, "There you have it." This is about strength.

WHEN YOU PRAY, YOU GIVE UP OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Fasting is about physical strength, while money is about economic strength. Prayer—I know that on the front end God seems boring. It's not really about God being boring, because you acclimate to that and it becomes exciting. Prayer is about time, and that's power, too. It's about power. The whole thing is about your power. It really is. The Lord says, "You sow your financial power, you sow your time." What's more important than your time? That's prayer, and prayer takes time.

It's not just that it creates communion with God. It's also costly to pray. When you pray you miss so many opportunities to do things. You're giving your strength away. When you give money you're giving your strength away economically. When you pray you give your time away, and that's also strength. When you fast you give your physical strength away. And in all three cases, your emotions go up and down the scale fifty times. When you do it as a lifestyle—I don't mean just for a month; it's year one, year ten, year fifteen, and you've done it as a lifestyle, and your inner man is being rearranged by wrestling with those incremental, little fear issues related to giving up strength. If you do that, the Lord says, "It opens your spirit wide to receive strength." If you do it you'll receive divine light, and even the very act of doing those things moves you around so much internally you open yourself up—even if you don't know that you are.

Here's how you open yourself up; you have to answer the question a thousand times, "Why am I still doing this?" On all three of those issues you ask: "Why am I doing this?" That's what opens your spirit up. The whole dialogue is redemptive. The whole dialogue positions you. Then we have this zealous Holy Spirit hovering over you, living inside of you, and when you open that door, light breaks in. I don't mean for a day or a week, but when it's a lifestyle and you've opened your inner man to God at that level, beloved, you're not paying heed to demons, you're paying heed to the Holy Spirit. You're positioning yourself for strength.

Look at what he says here in verse four. He gives three analogies. Then we'll have to pray and leave here because we're running out of time. We have three full days, and if that's not enough you can go right down to IHOP-KC in just a moment, because we're going there in about five minutes.

ENDURING THE HARDSHIPS OF THE FAITH LIKE A GOOD SOLDIER

He looks at the soldier in verses 3 and 4. He says, "You have to endure hardship like a good soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3, paraphrased). Then in verse 5 he talks about the athlete, the athlete who keeps the rules. Then in verse 6 he talks about the hardworking farmer. These are three very important metaphors. They are very important pictures of making yourself strong in the Lord. Let's take the soldier. We sign up. The soldier has the adrenaline. You can die as a soldier but you can also take the victory and put the flag on the hill. For the soldier there are risks, but there are victories, there are breakthroughs, there are comrades. Soldiers endure hardship; that's one kind of person in the Body of Christ, and this whole group is of that sort. The soldier says, "I'll do the hardship"; "I want the breakthrough"; "I want to go for it, and I'll endure the struggle."

Paul says, "Don't entangle yourselves in the affairs of everyday life" (2 Tim. 2:4, paraphrased). Live a different lifestyle and take on the risks of a soldier.

The risks aren't a problem for this crowd. For another crowd, the risks are what trip them up. This crowd, man, if it was in the natural you would be adrenaline addicts. Let me think of a good, way to say it in the spirit. "You love the anointing!" That's it! You just love the flow of the Spirit! That's what I'm trying to say. You love that dynamic and you're willing to take that risk. You're willing to lose your life because you don't just want to live a boring life; you want the breakthrough. There's nothing boring about being a soldier. You may lose your life but you're going to take the hill in the process. You're going to have the victory.

KEEPING THE RULES LIKE A GOOD ATHLETE

Number two. Paul said it's not enough to be the risk-taking, fasting and praying, storming the mountain, burning the bride, giving-it-all kind of soldier. It's more than that. In verse 5 he says, "I want you to be the law-abiding athlete. I want you to be the athlete that keeps the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5, paraphrased).

This passage has meant a lot to me. I preached on it several times years ago, on this issue of the law-abiding athlete—not about being an athlete, but about keeping the law. I made a commitment to the Lord. I said, “Lord, when I say yes to being a soldier, I’ll take the hill and go forward in the anointing, and I’ll do it according to the written Word of God. I’ll do it Your way.”

Because a lot of times when people say yes to the risk of the soldier in verses 3 and 4, they downplay the part about doing it God’s way, according to the Word. They say, “Well, I don’t know about all that. The Word is kind of legalistic and I don’t want to have to do it according to the rules in the Book.”

I really care that we approach this thing in the way where when you win the prize you do it according to the Book. It’s not enough to have a thousand people praying and fasting up on a mountaintop. I want us doing it according to the Book. Some groups that are into the flow and anointing, some groups that love the prophetic ministry, don’t really care about the details of the rules. We do care about that a whole lot. That’s part of growing strong in the Lord.

IF YOU LOSE YOUR WAY IN THE MUNDANE, YOU’LL LOSE YOUR WAY IN THE REVIVAL

Verse 6 is the one I wanted to really point out. There’s not a whole lot to say about it right now, so I can say it quickly. It’s the hardworking farmer, the mundanity of the farmer who works the crops. Whatever month it is, the farmer is out there. It’s April and they’re planting seeds, or it’s June—whatever crop you’re talking about and whatever part of the world—and the sun is hot and they’re planting. They go out the next day and there’s nothing and it’s hot. They come out the next day and there’s nothing and it’s still hot. It’s the mundanity, the routine of the farmer.

This group is so willing to be the soldier. But this thing about keeping the rules, really doing it God’s way, paying attention to the details of God’s Word in the way that we do it... “OK, that sounds fair. That sounds safe. Probably when we get caught up in the Spirit it won’t matter anyway.” Yes, it will; it really will! Here’s the thing, in verse 6: the mundanity and routine of the farmer.

Here’s where so many people lose their strength. You know what defeats them? The mundanity of life is what defeats them. They’re willing to die; they’re willing to take a risk and go to prison. They’ll do any of that for God. They’ll even do it in the details of the Word. They’ll even keep the rules of the Word. The thing that trips them, the Goliath that takes them out, is the mundanity, the routine of the farmer. If revival breaks out, they’re ready. What I’m saying is that you’re not really as ready as you think, because if you lose your way in the mundanity, you’ll lose your way when the revival breaks out. It’s the mundanity, the staying steady with no one watching you, staying steady when there’s no feeling.

Staying steady is a critical part of becoming strong in your spirit. That’s super-important, because the emotions and all the inward activity that happens between you and God to stay steady open your spirit. You stay steady in the money department; you stay steady in the fasting department; you stay steady in the prayer department—not when the conference comes, the big meeting, and everyone is there and the music is hot. It’s that thing that this group does at 6:00am every morning. And it’s not even that; it’s more than that. It’s the ability to lock into the audience of one, to where if the money never returns, the revival never happens, the feelings never come, “I know what it means,” the believer says in the grace of God; “I know what it means to be the hardworking farmer when the sun is hot and the ground is hard. I just stay steady.”

Beloved, that makes your spirit strong. The Lord says, “You have to do the farmer thing to be strong.”

“No, I’ll do the soldier thing. I’ll even do the rule thing of verse 5.”

“The rules” is a biblical phrase.

“Eww! That sounds like legalism!”

Paul said it: “Rules!” Say it: “Rules, rules, rules!”

“Ah... someone told me to do something I didn’t want to do! Ah, horrible!” Rules! Rules! Rules!

I’m just having fun with you, because in our culture it’s anathema for someone to tell us to do it one way instead of another. “Who are you to tell me?”

“SEE HOW THE FARMER WAITS FOR THE PRECIOUS FRUIT OF THE EARTH”

Even more important than that is the crop of the hardworking farmer. The Lord is looking down at IHOP-KC and saying, “IHOP-KC, you’re soldiers. You’re even law-abiding athletes. You’re doing it according to the Book; you really are.” I want your spirit to go through the exercise over and over of doing the Sermon on the Mount when no one is around in the hot sun. Why? Why, I’ve heard it and I just don’t believe it, that if you pay the price you deserve it. No, it’s not about paying the price. It reworks your internal chemistry. It’s not that if I do it God finally breaks in because I’m so dedicated that even He can’t withstand me. It’s not about that. It’s really not about how finally someone in the earth rose up and took it. God says, “Even one has ascended.”

It’s not really like that. I hear this preaching all around, all the time. That’s not the real paradigm of Scripture. The Lord says, “If you do this, son, it will so rearrange your emotional chemistry. You’ll have to rework that muscle a thousand times; you’ll have to ask yourself when no one is there, when there’s no anointing, when nothing is happening, when no one is watching, ‘Why are you still doing this?’”

I say, “Why *am* I still doing this?” but I work it through and the Spirit is touching me every time—even though He’s doing it in incremental amounts, just a little here and a little there. You’re alone, you’re far away, no eye can see you, and you’re being faithful in the realm of money, you’re being faithful in the realm of fasting, and you’re being faithful in the realm of prayer. No one is checking your charts to see if you did it.

You know what happens? It makes you mighty in your spirit; not in a week, not even in a year, but you become mighty in your spirit.

Amen. Let’s stand.

MINISTRY TIME

Lord, we want to go before You as a team, as an IHOP-KC family, whether staff or not. Lord, we want to enter into this these next three days. Lord, we want to say yes. Again here we are before an audience of One. Lord, we want to do it Jesus-style: fasting, prayer, and giving. We want to do it Jesus-style. We want to hold our spirit in power and might. Lord, if we don’t feel anything, if nothing happens this week or next year, even then, Lord,

we're in this thing for the long haul. Because we're in it for You and we're putting ourselves in a place to receive strength from on high.

We want a mighty spirit. Lord, we want the anointing to heal the sick but I want a mighty spirit. I want a spirit filled with might, where I can stand steady with might before the onslaught of the evil one in the name of Jesus. Amen and amen.