7 Days to Getting Stronger and Changing Your World

YOUR RESOLVED

ROADMAP

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INTRODUCTION

Do you ever feel like no matter how much faith you know you *should* have by now, you still catch yourself afraid at the first wave that comes your way? You know you *should* believe God more but you're constantly wondering if He'll really show up for you this time.

Yeah. I know the feeling. I've been there too many times to count, but I'm done with that. I'm ready to turn the page. I'm ready to change. I want to stand strong and unshaken, no matter what comes my way. I want to live out my God-given destiny with joy. I want to have hope no matter what.

You too? I'm so glad to hear that.

It starts with resolve. I wrote my book *Resolved* to help you get stronger. But where books can be intimidating, this roadmap for *Resolved* is meant to give you a big-picture seven-day plan to get stronger.

That's what I want for you: to get stronger in the Lord.

In the following pages, we'll walk through seven steps to get stronger. I'll lead you through some questions and then provide you with action steps to set you up for success. You might need a journal for this!

Are you ready? Let's do this!

WHY GET STRONGER?

ISAIAH 7:9

"If you're not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all."

When it comes to getting stronger, it's God's idea, not mine. In Joshua 1:6 God tells Joshua to "be strong and courageous." In Ephesians 6:10 Paul tells us to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." But my favorite verse is Romans 4:20 where Abraham, faced with an impossible situation, "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God."

Believing God when life is hard gives glory to God. Believing God in the face of the impossible is how we get stronger.

You might not feel strong enough right now. That's ok. Listen to 2 Corinthians 12:9–12:

"But he said to me 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

This is a tremendous paradox: we think we have to get stronger to get stronger. God's Word tells us that it's only when we're weak that we can really get strong. Weakness is actually God's plan for us to get strong! Huh?

It's true, but why? Why does God allow us to be weak in order to be strong?

It's not about us!

Have you ever wondered why you're here on this earth? Your life is not about you. It's all about God. We are part of His story, and that's an awesome thing! God has a purpose for the world. He wants to redeem His people, and He's designed you and me to be a part of His story of redemption. How awesome is that? The question is: Will we cooperate and do whatever is necessary to become weak enough to be strong enough? Our weakness shows the world that there is a God to be trusted. There is a God who can save us! He's worthy of our trust!

It's not up to us!

If you're like me, you like to get things done. You might think that the whole world rests on your shoulders, and that if you don't do it then it won't get done right. You're wrong! God's plan for us is to grow in dependence on Him. He wants us to seek Him for help and He's given us His Spirit to accomplish it. How good are you at asking God for help? Maybe it's time to start!

It's all about them!

If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, this is not the end of the road for you. This life is not our final destination. Yet around us people are dying. Our mission here on this earth is to rescue as many people as possible! You are a light shining in a world that is dark. The more you depend on the Lord, the more obvious His light will shine through you. Are you up for the challenge? Life is short. Don't waste it.

In summary, God does want us to get stronger. But His plan for our strength is often shocking. *He allows us to be weak enough in order to get strong enough in Him!* The same Jesus who rose from the dead is the one who promises to help us in our time of need. Will you trust Him enough to get you stronger?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Rate your happiness on a scale from 1–10.
- What are some of the areas in your life where you feel weakest and most miserable?
- Does your life and how you handle stress right now communicate that God is alive and active, or are you giving in to fear and hopelessness?
- What are some of the lies you've believed about God when facing trials?
- Who has God put in your circle of influence who might need encouragement and the light of truth?

- Come up with a mission statement for your life.
- Write a prayer of confession and dependence: ask God to forgive you for believing lies about Him and to help you live in dependence on Him.
- For each weakness you identified, jot down the truth about who God is, the truth about His character.
- Reach out with encouragement to one of the people whose name you wrote down.

STEP 2 MOVING PAST YOUR PAST

PHILIPPIANS 3:13

"But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead."

If you're like me, you've been there and done that. You've tried and it hasn't worked. You wanted to change but you failed, and today you feel even worse than when you started. Whether you have failed your weight loss plan or your Bible reading plan, all you feel is defeated.

Listen up: I'm about to tell you one of the most important points in this series:

Just because you've failed in the past doesn't mean you're doomed to fail forever.

Failure is our Achilles' heel. We said we'd be stronger but we failed. We promised we wouldn't do it but we did. We started but never finished. If any of these scenarios sound familiar, it's going to be all right. The Bible is full of examples of men and women who failed, and God still used them! Think about Peter, who denied Christ, or Abraham, who had a son with his maid, or David, or Samson. The list goes on and on. God redeems people. That's the good news of the gospel.

If you feel buried beneath the weight of your past, here is what you need to remember:

God has forgiven you your past!

God loves you despite all the sins and failures of your past! In Psalm 103:11–12 we're told that "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." Wow. That's great news for anyone who is weighed down by sin! Let's embrace the truth of God's Word where we feel defeated.

God will redeem your past!

God is not mad at you. He loves you. You might count yourself out because of your past with its sins and failures, but God promises to redeem the years of the locust (Joel 2:25). It's time to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). Aren't you excited to see how God will use your past to impact your future? Trust Him with it. He's the only one who can make something beautiful out of your ashes!

God has a plan for your future!

You are not condemned! Satan wants nothing more than for us to live in persistent defeat. Where he wants to accuse us, God has given us freedom. He's already overcome Satan. That makes us untouchable. We can live victoriously. It's time to move past our past with its fears and failures and embrace our destiny in Christ!

ONE MORE THING

The hardest places for me to trust God are the areas where I thought I did trust Him but His answer wasn't what I expected. In those instances, I've felt like God didn't come through for me. Let me give you an example. When it comes to my life in ministry, I've had some pretty big dreams. At first it was easy for me to pray through them. But slowly, many of my goals failed. I hate failure more than anything. I noticed that, over time, my prayers became weak and superficial. I was afraid to pray. How could I be sure God would come through for me when I felt so disappointed with what He'd already done?

Here's a truth I'm learning: faith is believing in advance what only makes sense in reverse. When it comes to believing God when your life doesn't make sense, we all judge our past way too soon. We reach wrong conclusions because we don't know the future.

Part of living by resolve is to resolve not to put a period where God has placed only a comma. We will never fully understand all God is doing here on this earth. Only heaven will give us answers to some of the questions that loom in our minds. But until then we can choose to believe God is good even when our past is marred. We can choose to rest in hope that God has a perfect plan for us and will accomplish it in His perfect timing.

You in?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are some of the things you hate about your past?
- Think about a situation in your life where you prayed and trusted God in an area that ended in pain. How did that make you feel?
- Where do you turn when trying to explain the difficult questions in your life? What are some of the habits you lean on to get through the pain?

- List one area where you've tried to change before and failed. Write down the lies you've believed about yourself and the Lord in that area. For example, expressions like "I'm a loser," "I'll never change," "I'm just born this way," or "God will never use me again."
- Now write a Bible verse beside each lie that counteracts it with the truth.
- Make a gratitude list: write down at least three specific ways God has shown you His love despite your past, and three answers to prayer where God just baffled you with His grace.
 Can't think of three? Ok, write down five!
- Pick a worship song to celebrate God's grace and put it on repeat today. Mine is "He's a Good, Good Father." What's yours? Email it to me!

STEP 3 MIND YOUR MIND

COLOSSIANS 3:2

"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

There is an awesome scene in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* where Rey and Ren go face-to-face. It's a battle of the minds. Ren tries to influence Rey toward the dark side, but she resists magnificently. It's the most inspiring scene in the whole movie. It made me cry. Rey looks like she's a prisoner, but she's free because she's won the battle in the mind.

The battle always begins and ends in our minds! Every day is a battle for control of our thoughts. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 10:3–4 that "though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." He goes on to urge us to take every thought captive to obey Christ.

If only I could remember to do that! If only I could take *every* fearful thought captive, and *every* sinful thought captive, and *every* defeating thought captive. But we must! If we want to be strong and unshaken, we've got to resolve to be strong in this battle in our minds. God has given us everything we need for life and victory. We have the mind of Christ. We just need to recognize it. We are not our own. We are His. Our bodies and our minds are His. This is all about yielding our minds to the Lord Jesus Christ, moment by moment and day by day!

When it comes to change, fear is our greatest enemy. Specifically, these three questions are hugely common fears that will destroy us if we're not careful:

• What if I can't change?

You can blame your DNA or your parents, but for too long we've been told that there are some things in our life we can't change. We're just wired that way. Whoever said that didn't know Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength." Or Romans 6:16–18, where Paul explains that in Christ we are no longer slaves to sin. We are now slaves of righteousness. We are changed, completely and utterly transformed by the Holy Spirit of God the minute we put our trust in Him. So not only can we change but God will spend the rest of our lives transforming us into His likeness. It's called the sanctification process!

What will people think?

One of the greatest hindrances to change is the fear of people: What will others think if I change too drastically, or if I try to change but end up the same mess I've always been? In Galatians 1:10, Paul asks a great question. He says, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." It turns out that people will always have an opinion, but what they say and what they think has little effect on our change process. It's time to stop letting other people control us and let God's Spirit take over, don't you think?

What if I do change and I'm not happy?

Change involves risk. Getting stronger will cost us something—sometimes our pride, sometimes our temporary pleasures, sometimes our comfort—but it will always be worth the cost. Christians like to say that God doesn't want us to be happy; He wants us to be holy. I think God wants both. See, God knows that when we choose Him and His ways, we'll find compete satisfaction. So go ahead and step out in faith. It will feel scary at first, but eventually you'll see. Happiness is inevitable when you land in the arms of Jesus.

Taking your thoughts captive and winning the battle of the mind will take time and practice. The surest way to get strong in your mind is to start filling your mind with God's Word. Read the Bible daily. Preach the Word to yourself. Memorize Scripture. Pray the Word out loud. It might sound old-fashioned, but it's God's plan for you to get stronger. Would you at least think about it?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are greatest two or three fears in your life?
- When do you feel the most weighed down by your fears?
- Who are the people in your life whom you feel pressured to please the most? Why?
- What are you currently doing to get your mind stronger in the Lord? Be specific: How much time are you spending with God and His Word each day? Do you have a Bible memory plan? Do you pray?

- Memorize 2 Corinthians 10:3-4
- Spend five minutes daily praying out loud this week
- Write down your life's worst-case scenarios, then burn the paper in a fire!

STEP 4 PLAN FOR IT

EPHESIANS 5:16

"Making the best use of the time because the days are evil."

I am the queen of planning. I plan my day every morning. I plan my travel: where I'm going to go, what I want to see. I plan my grocery list, and I plan where I want to go out to eat. I plan where I might live ten years down the road, and which house I will buy. If there's an app for it I've likely planned for it. I'm pretty OCD that way, and I'm ok with that.

It's funny how we can all understand our obsession with planning when it comes to our house designs and Netflix queues, but have absolutely no idea how to go about planning to get stronger in the Lord!

The reality is that if we want to get stronger, we're going to have to make a plan and make the time for it. It's not going to magically happen. There are far too many distractions that will keep us from God-honoring change.

So where do we start? There's no time like right now to start planning for change. Here are some practical steps to take:

Set your goal.

Make sure your goals line up with God's goals for your life. As you consider what needs to change in your life, ask God to show you. In my book *Resolved* I cover ten ways to get stronger and live what you believe. Every one of those ways is a biblically centered, Christ-honoring, gospel-driven area in our lives where God wants us to be different. I talk about joy and hope and giving and yielding. I talk about love when it's inconvenient and community when we'd rather be alone. Start slowly. Pick one area in your life where God has been pressing on you to change. I find that the easiest way to tell where we need to change is in the areas in our lives where it hurts the most. Go ahead, ask God to show you, and then write down your goal.

Say why.

In Step 1 we talked about why God wants us to be strong. As you write down your goal, remember why you're doing it. Why do you want to get stronger in the Lord? As long as you keep His vision alive in your heart, you will find the stamina to keep going. The "why" is your motivation to do this!

Schedule it.

Anything worthwhile in your life will require time and commitment. It will not be easy. If you want to love people more, you will need to spend time with people who need to be loved. This won't be easy, and it will require you to reprioritize your life. Some things will need to go. You might need to forget about bingeing on your favorite HGTV episodes as you juggle your life around to put Jesus at the center of it all.

Sacrifice for it.

It's time to unplug. Yes, I said unplug. Our culture is facing a silent killer—well, not always so silent, but it is always insidious. The greatest killer of our soul today is our gadgets. I'm not joking when I say that the only way to hear God more clearly in your life is to shut that phone off right now. Make a plan to shut it off for at least an hour a day. Can't do that? All right: try ten minutes and work your way up. There's no easy way to do this. It's like taking off a Band-Aid. It hurts at first, but then everything will be ok.

• Surrender the process.

Whether you're a planner or not, getting stronger is a process we cannot control. All we can do is cooperate with the Spirit of God and humbly surrender the outcome to Him. He changes us in His timing and in His methods. His strategy sometimes frustrates us with its wilderness wanderings. His timing often lead us to question Him. But as we surrender the change process to God, we will find the peace we need to make it to the other side!

I keep a note in my Bible that reads, "The amount of power you experience to live a victorious, triumphant Christian life is directly proportional to the freedom you give the Spirit to be Lord of your life."

The greatest thing you will plan for in your life is to plan to surrender everything to Jesus. So, what do you still need to let go?

- lot down the areas in your life you still won't let go to the Lord.
- Now pick one area in your life God is trying to change you in. Look at my book *Resolved* for ideas as you pray through this.
- Apply the steps outlined in this chapter one by one to reach your goal.

STEP 5 BUILD YOUR VILLAGE

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

You can't do this alone. You need community. You need the church.

There's no other way to say this: God's plan for your growth and sanctification involves other people. Other people will challenge us, press us, encourage us, edify us, correct us, and be there for us when we need them. Sometimes they will frustrate us, and other times they will cheer us on. Regardless of whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, God made you part of His body, the body of Christ. You're a member of the body. You're part of a bigger story. You are not on your own anymore.

I like people from afar. I like people when they like me. I like people when they fit into my idea of what should be. But the minute people don't cooperate, I lose it. Sound familiar? See, people help us see where we need to change. With time, as we follow God's ways, He will use other people to help us get stronger. It's crazy how it all works out. And somehow, when all is said and done, God takes us from a place where we want to manage and manipulate people to fit our desires to a place where we love them and serve them no matter what. And that's when we know that we're getting stronger!

What kind of village do I need?

Here's what I'm learning: the village we need is the village God has already placed in our life. It will usually include some people we like and others we don't. It will include some who don't like us. It will include friends, family, foes, and bosses. It will include people who think like us and some who won't. The disciples were an odd and ornery bunch with only one thing in common: Jesus Christ. Your people and your village may not end up looking like the folks on *Friends*, but they are a gift from God. Learn to love and appreciate them, even if you don't understand them very well yet!

Where do I find my village?

Start in your local church. Don't have one? You're not alone. Most people today church hop or have been hurt by the church. Given the choice to go to church online, many are using that option. But if you're looking to get stronger, it won't happen virtually. It only happens when you roll up your sleeves and are willing to get dirty! Find a church that preaches the gospel and studies the Word, and keep going. Even if you don't always feel like you're fitting in. Now expand your village by adding folks at the places you frequent most like the local Starbucks or your favorite grocery store or restaurant. Throw in a few Facebook friends who keep popping up in your stream. There you go. You've got your village.

How do I start if I don't have a village?

Start small and start now. But most importantly, start on your knees. Ask God to open your eyes to see who is your village. Ask Him to nudge your heart to talk to the faces you see day by day and hardly notice. Ask God to send you a friend if you're too scared and wounded to step out on your own. God is the God of the impossible. If He planned for us to find community in fellowship with other believers, then He'll help us accomplish His will as we ask for His help.

What if they laugh?

One of the greatest fears I have is the fear of rejection. What if they don't like me? What if they laugh at me? What if I'm always on the outside looking in? But the older I get, the more I'm starting to see that love is hard to resist. Even the hardest hearts will melt as we continue to love them. We can't change people. Some will laugh at us, but as we love others the way that Christ loves us, we will see miracles happen in our neighborhoods and communities.

Don't be fooled. Your village is not the list of two thousand Facebook friends or the number of likes on your best insta. No. Your village is your place of transformation. It's the environment God has chosen for you to get stronger. It won't always look flashy. It won't always feel comfortable. But when Christ is at the center of your life, even the most remote villages in the world will start to feel like home to you!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Describe your current village.
- How do you feel about the village God has placed you in?
- Do you wish that you had someone else's village instead of being stuck with yours?
- How much time do you spend checking out other people's villages, and how does that make you feel?
- How is your relationship with your local church? Why?

- Starting with your closest relationships and moving outward, write down the names of the people God has put in your village right now.
- Get a prayer journal and start a page for each layer in your village: one for family, one for friends, one for your small group, one for folks you haven't met yet.
- Resolve to cut out comparisons. Do whatever it takes to kill the green monster: unfollow someone or get rid of Twitter if needed.
- Did you know I'm part of your village now? Send me an email and tell me some of the areas you're resolving to get stronger in, or tag me on your social media along with #iamresolved.

STEP 6 IN IT TO WIN IT

1 PETER 5:10

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

I once had a job at Starbucks for exactly two months. People at the ER where I was working had bets over how long I'd last. I surprised some of them. One Saturday night I didn't feel like doing it. I was tired. I was burnt out. And the ridiculousness of a pediatric ER doctor working at Starbucks hit me. So I quit. It was the first time in my life I'd ever really quit anything, if you don't count ballet. Although one could argue that the dancing world sighed in relief when I made that move at age fourteen.

Look, we all want to quit when the going gets tough. It's why most of us have a hard time buying into the concept of *Resolved*. We know we've been down that road before and we don't want to be hypocrites. We are too old and too jaded to lie to ourselves and try to convince the world that we have the energy to do it again.

We have taken God and His plans completely out of the equation. Our problem is that when we hit a wall, we don't bother to climb it God's way. It's time to change. Here are three common walls that make us want to quit:

• The wall of fatigue.

If you're tired right now, give yourself a break. That's how God handles fatigue in His Word. He did it for Elijah when He baked him cake and let him rest for forty days (1 Kings 19). He did it for Jonah with three days in the belly of the whale. He's a God who recognizes when we're tired and is ready to restore us. Instead of plowing through and working harder, read Psalm 23 and spend time letting God's Spirit replenish you. "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," Jesus invites us (Matt. 11:28). Let's take Him up on it.

The wall of self.

Self-dependence, self-pity, self-promotion, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-love, and on and on. We spend so much time thinking about our self that we have no energy left to get stronger. Christ called us to deny our self. That's the only thing we can do with our self. We must stop comparing our self with others and trying so hard to make a way for our self in the world, and step aside for a minute. Let Christ be the focus. The only way to finish well is to take the load of self off our backs!

The wall of disillusionment.

I didn't think it would be so hard. I didn't think it would take this long. I didn't think it would hurt so much. I didn't think they would be so hateful. I didn't think it would be this lonely. The process of getting stronger is hard. The more stubborn you are and the stronger your will is, the harder the process of change will be for you. God promises us in Isaiah 41:15 to make us into a threshing sledge, new and sharp. Listen to this illustration from Streams in the Desert: "Around the turn of the twentieth century a bar of steel was worth \$5. Yet when forged into horseshoes, it was worth \$10; when made into needles, its value was \$350; when used to make small pocketknife blades, its worth was \$32,000; when made into springs for watches, its value increased to \$250,000. What a pounding the steel bar had to endure to be worth this much! But the more it was shaped, hammered, put through fire, beaten, pounded, and polished, the greater its value."

Wow! God's plan to get us stronger will take time and we will have to endure pain. But hang in there, because "after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Pet. 5:10).

Are you willing to endure? Don't be a quitter. God has great plans for your life. Who knows what will come around the bend if you'll only keep on going!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What makes you want to quit? Are there seasons in your life when quitting seems easier?
- What is one thing you have quit and regretted quitting?
- Can you think of a situation in your life where you wanted to quit but didn't, and lived to see the outcome? How did that feel?
- Is there an area in your life right now that is very hard and you wish you could quit? Think about a circumstance, job, relationship, or prayer request.

- Resolve to be in it to win it. I'm talking about that thing in your life you really want to quit. Share your resolve with at least two people.
- Spend one minute daily asking God to give you whatever it takes to be in it to win it.
- Thank God for the work He's doing in your life, however painful it is. Thank Him for loving you enough to perfect you.

STEP 7 ODDS AND ENDS

I have a daily devotional that provides a reflection page every seventh day, and I've grown to love it. It's like a freebie, a day to catch up and process. Today is that day. We started our journey trying to figure out why God wants us to change. We then handled our past, and I mean handled it! Then we changed our minds on some important things. After that came creating a plan, and putting some steps into action. We then moved on to recruit our village, and ended with a call to endure.

Now I want to address two final, big obstacles that we will run into as we resolve to get stronger.

· FOMO.

The fear of missing out, or FOMO, is a new epidemic in our world. Because we have a glimpse into other people's lives through social media, we're constantly worried that others are ahead of us and have it better, and that somehow if we stay right here and do what's before us, we're missing out. We're missing all the fun over there. We're missing influencing more people and building bigger platforms and changing the world.

The truth is that God has you right where you are for a reason. You're not missing out. God wants you to be a light in your neighborhood and your community and your world. He has a purpose for your life and your future. FOMO and God's plan for your life are mutually exclusive. They cannot coexist. What a relief!

Meh mentality.

I'm talking about apathy here. Somewhere along the process we stop caring. Maybe it's because we didn't see change fast enough. Or maybe we got sidetracked by a great Netflix series. Whatever the cause, we become *meh* people filled with complacency. Proverbs 1:32 says this about the *meh* mentality: "For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them."

Our world is desperate for the light of Christ. If you're in a meh place, repent. Ask God to revive you. He will.

As we finish this roadmap to getting stronger, let's summarize some of the things we've resolved to do and be. I'll help you with these questions:

- Why do you want to get stronger?
- Where are you the weakest?
- What is it about your past that God is redeeming?
- What lies about yourself and about God do you need to discard?
- How is the Lord teaching you to trust Him right now?
- What promises of Scripture that we went over stand out in your mind?
- What's the current state of your village?
- What do you need to do to build your village?
- What are you willing to do to make it to the end?
- What is it about God that gives you the confidence to go on?

Life is never going to be easy. But we can get stronger—stronger in the Lord and unshaken by our circumstances.

Let me ask you a final question: If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, can you afford not to get stronger in faith and give glory to God? No matter what you're up against, no matter what's happened up to now in your life, resolve to turn the page and start fresh. Resolve to believe God.

Now, let's go do it.



LINA ABUJAMRA is a pediatric ER doctor, author, Bible teacher, and a woman who loves Jesus. Her mission is to urge people to put their hope in God by providing Biblical truth for every day life.

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