





# HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR STRENGTHS

## INTRODUCTION

The truth of our life is that God knows us. We were created uniquely and intentionally, with talents and strengths that can empower us to faithfully live out our purpose. By understanding and developing our personal strengths, we can actually be the kind of people we are meant to be - people who serve others and who act on the God-given opportunities around us every day.

All too often, it seems our emotions revolve around feeling not “good enough,” or feeling that we don’t have what it takes to . . . (you fill in the rest of this sentence). We may become defeated by our situations, the criticisms of others, and by life in general. We are expected to lead, and yet, we feel inadequate, perhaps thinking that we need to follow someone else’s model of exactly how we should lead. In short, we do not recognize and use the unique talents that enable each of us to serve God and others with joy and peace.

The truth is that we are specifically created with certain talents, abilities, and strengths. The way we live out our strengths allows us to fully participate in the kingdom of God and fulfill the purpose He has for our lives. The apostle Paul reminds us of our unique contributions in his letters to the Corinthians.

### **Read I Corinthians 12:14-20**

This enrichment guide will help you identify, reframe, develop, and live out your personal strengths in ways that help you be an effective leader.

In this guide, we will explore:

- a biblical perspective on using strengths in leadership
- understanding and developing your unique strengths
- recognizing strengths in others
- leading with your strengths



## 01 A BIBILICAL PERSPECTIVE ON USING STRENGTHS IN LEADERSHIP

Recognizing, developing, and using personal strengths is not a new concept. Throughout virtually every book in the Bible, God provides us with an abundance of examples and experiences in which people used their strengths. But, if all we do is focus on individual strengths, we miss the reason for their inclusions in Scripture. The personal strengths of people like Joseph, Deborah, Moses, Ruth, David, and Hannah invite us to be part of a bigger story—to use our strengths in ways that align us with God’s redemptive purpose in this world.

By recognizing the personal strengths that help us stay alert to God, that lead us in loving God and loving others, we can become more aware of His guiding voice as it echoes throughout Scripture, our lives, and into the lives of those we have opportunity to serve.

### Read Psalms 139:13-14

Let’s think about the strengths of a few women in Scripture for a moment. The story of Ruth gives us some interesting clues into her strengths. From what we can surmise, here was a woman of strong belief and responsibility, and a woman whose positive attitude kept her going regardless of her circumstances. We might also consider the story of Mary, mother of Jesus. In Luke (chapter 1), we learn that Mary was contemplative, trusting, insightful, and peaceful. The beauty of how these women lived out their strengths is inspiring. They can remind us that God gives each of us certain attributes and strengths that enable us to be effective. We are not called to be someone else, but to be true to what God created in us!

The incredible message of these stories lies in how these two women’s individual strengths fit into the larger story of God’s redemptive will. Had Ruth not lived out her strengths, she would not have given birth to her son, which was vital in continuing the lineage of Abraham. When the story comes to Mary, we can see how her contemplative and trusting strengths led her to obedience. These women were true to who they were created to be. They honored the lives that God designed for them and aligned their lives with Him. Ruth and Mary could not see the bird’s-eye view or the timeline of humanity. They could only live in the present and be faithful to live out the life to which God called them. They became part of something much bigger than themselves; they became part of God’s redemptive plan.

### Reflection Questions

*Consider your favorite biblical character. What strengths do you notice in his or her life? How do these strengths fit into God’s bigger picture?*

*Do you recognize some personal strengths that seem to be a part of the fabric of your life? How do these strengths help you serve God and others?*



## 02 UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOPING YOUR UNIQUE STRENGTHS

Adopting a strengths-based perspective allows us to recognize and appreciate who we really are. In essence, it offers a practical way for us to look at ourselves through the eyes of Jesus and see the beauty He created within us.

While you do not need to use an assessment in order to think about and develop your personal strengths, it does provide an excellent avenue for common language from which to build. The books, *Strengths Based Leadership* (by Rath and Barry Conchie) or *Living Your Strengths* (by Albert Winseman). Each book also contains a unique access code for you to take the online StrengthsFinder assessment if you wish.

A strengths-based development model created by the Gallup Organization researchers provides us with insight into how we can nurture our talents to intentionally develop individual strengths. In other words, our focus changes from obsessing about what is wrong with us to recognizing what is right with us!

We begin with identifying our talents, those “naturally, recurring patterns of thought, feeling or behavior that can be productively applied.”<sup>2</sup> Our talents are specific and typically work in combination with other talents. These diamonds in the rough are the keys to unlocking our personal strengths. They are like the threads that weave through every meaningful thing we do—our motivations, drives, and passions. We may not even recognize our talents because we think that everyone has this gift or that it is not that special. Then, even when we begin to recognize our talents, we may negate them, seeing only the weaknesses that may accompany them (the things that make us ineffective in living out our strengths). Before we know it, we revert to our old patterns of obsessing about what is wrong with us!

Our raw talents from God can be fragile and need nurturing. For example, perhaps you have a natural talent of caring for people. They seem to seek you out, and you find great fulfillment when they confide in you. Left unnurtured, this gift of empathic caring can become overwhelming. You may smother yourself in the problems of others and find yourself worn out and burned by the experiences. As another example, maybe you have a natural talent of talking. You are energized by meeting people and learning about them! However, maybe you had a teacher who told your parents you talked too much! From that day forward, you have tried not to speak unless spoken to, but you find it difficult and frustrating. The words just need to come out!

We start with our talents, but that doesn't mean we will always effectively use them. By applying knowledge and skill, we can learn to appropriately use our strengths (as well as understand inappropriate uses of our raw talents). Through prayer and study, we can develop knowledge and skill.



A **strength** is defined as: “a specific quality that enables a person to do certain things very well.”<sup>3</sup> We use our strengths when we are at our best, when we are most productive, or when we feel most fulfilled. For instance, from the example above, we can learn how to care for people, where to set boundaries, and when to refer to others for help. In the second example, we may learn about effective communication skills, study when we are at our best, and recognize the influence we have. Once learning takes place, we should find situations that use our strengths—places of service. In this way, the raw talents become refined strengths!

### **Reflection Questions**

*Prayerfully ask God to reveal your talents to you. Think about your life. What are the areas in which you find yourself particularly productive?*

*What do you love to do?*

*What motivates you to act?*



### **03 RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS IN OTHERS**

Think about this for a moment: How often do we view people negatively more than positively? We focus on what they can't do rather than on what they can do. We focus on what they don't do rather than on what they do. We focus on their defects and deficits rather than their gifts and talents. In short, we focus on their weaknesses rather than their strengths! Then, we get frustrated with them because of who they are not, and we get even more frustrated because we can't get them to be more like us!

#### **Read Matthew 7:1-2**

A friend once explained how he began seeing people through “strengths-colored” glasses:

- Each person has been uniquely created by God.
- Each person has been specifically and intentionally gifted by God to accomplish some important purpose.
- Each person I met has been strategically placed by God in my sphere of influence for some important reason.
- Each person already has the natural talents she needs to achieve the purpose God has set out for her to accomplish.

These revelations serve to remind us that just as God created us with unique strengths. He created others with specific strengths as well. In the practical sense, this means that person next to you wasn't put on earth simply to annoy you! As we begin to recognize the unique contribution that each person brings, we become more aware of his or her raw talents. We have the opportunity, then, to speak words of genuine encouragement and hope into their lives, to help them develop their talents into strengths. In the words of my friend, we become “talent spotters”—people who recognize and grow the talents of others!

#### **Reflection Questions**

*Who were talent spotters in your life?*

*Are you a talent spotter in other people's lives? If so, who? If not, how would you begin?*



## 04 LEADING WITH YOUR STRENGTHS

Leadership generally has a lot to do with the quality of the relationship. To the extent that we can form relationships and engage in people's lives, we can lead. A strengths-based approach to leadership complements this relational style, as it focuses on people and the strengths they bring to the process. Remember that both leaders and followers have strengths that are vital in the relationship, since no one person has all of the strengths needed to make a vision become a reality!

Strengths-based leaders consciously work from their strengths rather than trying to be an imitation of someone else. In addition, they partner with others who have different talents and strengths. This complementary partnership makes the team much more productive than any single member.

A strengths-based approach to leadership invests in people and the strengths they bring to the process of leadership. Here are steps that can assist you in becoming a person who leads through strengths:

1. Realize that you do not need to be in a formal leadership role to provide valuable leadership.
2. Lead with your strengths as you work in groups to help them accomplish their goals and your goals.
3. Identify your specific strengths in leadership.
4. Assume leadership roles that use your strengths or the talents you want to develop into strengths.
5. Encourage others in the organization by helping them to see the positive contributions they are making as they use their strengths productively.
6. Create opportunities for others to develop and apply strengths.

Think about the example Moses gives us in the Book of Exodus. God called Moses to lead the Israelite people out of Egypt. One of Moses' strengths was that he was adept at recognizing potential challenges in a situation. He questioned things, and he seemed to have a great ability to think about what might go wrong. He was very caring and responsible, primarily committed to God! Moses was also self-aware enough to know that he did not have the gift of speaking under pressure. God, understanding Moses' leadership strengths, brought Moses' brother Aaron into the team. Aaron, who was "good with words," was able to step up and be the front person, while Moses was able to tell him what to say. God also used Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, to provide counsel and guidance. Together, this team served God in ways that far surpassed the capabilities of any one person.

### Reflection Questions

*What are your most effective strengths in leading others?*

*What are the strengths of your team members?*

*Are there any people in your team whose natural talents can be developed into strengths?*



## CONCLUSION

**Acknowledge that your strengths come from God** (Psalms 18:32). Your strengths are gifts to us from God. As we offer them back to Him in service and in love, we honor His plans and purpose for our lives.

**Understand and value your God-given strengths** (1 Kings 2:1-4). We are each created uniquely and intentionally. Through using our strengths, we become part of a bigger story. We align ourselves with God's redemptive purpose in this world.

**Intentionally develop and apply your strengths to serve Him and others** (2 Samuel 7:21). Our raw talents need to be nurtured through prayer, knowledge, skill, and service in order to develop into refined strengths. A strengths-based approach to leadership invests in people and the strengths each person brings to the process of leadership.

**Examine motivations, desires, and goal-setting practices in light of Kingdom living** (Romans 12:1). Strengths-based leaders consciously work from their strengths rather than trying to be an imitation of someone else. As women of faith, we must constantly remember to align ourselves and our motives with God's will.

It is God Himself whom we serve and whom we follow. We do not rely on our own power, or knowledge, or wisdom alone to provide leadership. As we listen to God through the promptings of His Holy Spirit, we can acknowledge, appreciate, and develop the God-given strengths that enable us to live and serve effectively.

**As you reflect on this guide:**

*What are your God given strengths?*

*What experiences have reinforced your development of strengths?*

*How can you place your strengths under the lordship of Christ?*