

STEPS TO STRENGTH

Successful Spiritual Survival



PASTOR SHAUN HAYS

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Introduction: The Map to the Mountain

Every believer wants to be strong. We face a world that is increasingly complex, pressures that are relentless, and spiritual battles that can leave us feeling drained, defeated, and disconnected. In my years of ministry, the number one question I have been asked by well-meaning Christians is simple yet profound: *How do I find the strength to keep standing?*

The answer is not a secret, and it isn't reserved for a select few spiritual giants.

If you want to be a strong Christian, there is a clear, definitive roadmap laid out in the Word of God. This book is born out of a sermon I shared with my congregation during a season when we all desperately needed to find our footing. What God revealed to us then remains a timeless blueprint for successful spiritual survival today.

Most people look for strength in the wrong places. They look inward at their own resolve, or outward at their circumstances. But biblical strength operates on a divine chain reaction—a spiritual highway that leads us directly into the heart of God.

When you trace this roadmap backward, it looks like this:

Strength comes from **Joy**. As Nehemiah 8:10 declares, *"The joy of the Lord is your strength."* True, unshakable spiritual power is fueled by a supernatural gladness that the world cannot give and cannot take away.

Joy comes from **His Presence**. How do we access that joy? King David found the key in Psalm 16:11: *"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."*

His Presence is built on **Praise and Worship**. How do we enter that presence? God tells us exactly where He likes to live. Psalm 22:3 reveals that He is holy, *"Enthroned in the praises of Israel"* (or as older translations beautifully put it, He *inhabits* the praises of His people).

Praise must be **Sacrificial**. It is easy to praise God when the sun is shining, but the roadmap demands a deeper, unconditional posture. It is the raw, unadulterated grit of Job, who in his darkest hour declared, *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him"* (Job 13:15). It is offering a sacrifice of praise when your heart is breaking, knowing that your praise constructs the very throne room where God's presence will manifest.

Of course, this entire spiritual roadmap predicated on one absolute foundation. You cannot walk the road if you do not know the Way. This is not a self-help checklist or a cosmic life hack. This process only functions within a true, heartfelt devotion that flows from a personal relationship with the Savior of our souls: Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He is the One who took our sins to the cross, died in our place, and rose again on the third day—utterly conquering death, Hell, and the grave. Because His victory is final, our survival is guaranteed.

If you are tired of merely surviving and you are ready to start standing strong, turn the page. Let's look at the map together.

Chapter 1

The Only Starting Point

The Only Starting Point

If you were to watch me step out onto a stage to preach this message, you would see me walk up a literal set of stairs. I stack them right there in front of the congregation because I want people to see, touch, and visualize what it means to "level up" their walk with Christ. We live in a real world that works overtime to weaken us on a daily level. It saps our energy, drains our faith, and tells us that we are destined to just barely get by. But Jesus didn't save you so you could limp across the finish line of life. He saved you to live an overcoming, abundant life of faith.

So, when I stand on that very top step—the one labeled **STRENGTH**—I look out at the people and ask a hard question:

"How do we get to this point? If strength and an overcoming, abundant life in Christ is not where you are on a daily level... how does it happen? By accident?"

No! Absolutely not. You don't just stumble backward into spiritual victory. It is a daily, intentional choice. For some, that choice is temporarily made by their leadership who teach these principles. But if you really want to be in a permanent place of victory in Jesus, you have to learn the steps and put them into practice yourself every single day.

Standing right there on that top platform, I turn around and look behind me at the lower steps. Then, I do something unusual: I start walking backward.

One demonstrative step at a time, I descend the stairs to get the point across. I look down at the step right below me and ask, *"What gets us to this peak? What does scripture say about where a believer gets that heavenly strength?"*

I think of Nehemiah 8:10. And as I recite the words—*"The joy of the Lord is your strength"*—I take a very large, deliberate step down backward. My foot lands firmly on the step labeled **JOY**.

But I don't stop there. I look at the congregation from this new, lower position and ask, *"Okay, if strength requires joy, where does the joy come from?"* I think of King David in Psalm 16:11: *"In Your presence is fullness of joy."* To illustrate, I take another big step backward and down, landing squarely on the step marked **HIS PRESENCE**.

I keep going. *"How do we get into His presence? Does God just show up randomly?"* No, Psalm 22:3 says He inhabits the praises of His people. So I take another step down backward, landing on **PRAISE AND WORSHIP**.

Finally, I step all the way down to the lowest step, the place of **SACRIFICIAL PRAISE**—worshipping when it hurts, trusting God when everything is falling apart, declaring like Job, *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."*

Standing at the very bottom of the staircase, I look up at the peak.

This is where we start. This is where we choose our path every single day. Intentionality is absolutely everything in this journey. You don't need to start strong. You don't even need to start sinless—though let me tell you, personal holiness is like a nitrous boost in your gas tank for Christians who already get these steps and put them into practice! No, you just need to acknowledge your need for Him in your life every single day.

The Foundation of the Climb

Before we can even talk about the daily mechanics of taking that first step of praise, we have to talk about the ground the staircase is built upon. This entire process predicates on one absolute foundation: **a true, heartfelt devotion that comes from a personal relationship with the Savior of our souls, Jesus Christ.**

You cannot level up a walk that hasn't actually started. This isn't a cosmic ladder for self-improvement; it is a response to a Savior. Jesus, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose again on the 3rd day, completely conquering death, Hell, and the grave. When you belong to Him, the DNA of an overcomer is already placed inside of you.

When you wake up in the morning, the world immediately tries to pull you down. But the moment your feet hit the floor, you have a choice to make. You can let your feelings dictate your day, or you can look at that first step and say, *“Lord, I don’t feel strong today. My circumstances look messy. But I choose right now to open my mouth and praise You anyway.”*

When you make that choice, you hit the first step. And once your foot is on that first step, the divine chain reaction begins.

Chapter 2:

Midnight Melodies

Chapter 2: Midnight Melodies

To understand the mechanics of the first step on our staircase, we have to look at a concept that goes entirely against human nature. It is the concept of **Sacrificial Praise**.

When I am standing on that very bottom step in front of my congregation, I tell them flat out: *"This is where your victory is decided."* It isn't decided on the top step when you already feel powerful. It is decided right here at the bottom, in the trenches of everyday life, when you feel absolutely nothing but the weight of your circumstances.

The enemy wants you to believe that worship is a reaction to good times. He wants you to think that you can only praise God when the bank account is full, the family is healthy, and the sun is shining on your horizon. If he can lock your mouth shut during the dark seasons of life, he can effectively keep you from ever moving up the stairs toward God's strength.

But true, biblical praise is not a reaction to your circumstances; it is a **response to God's character**.

Worshipping When It Hurts

Look at the word itself: *sacrifice*. By definition, a sacrifice costs you something. It hurts. It requires you to give up something you would rather keep—in this case, your right to complain, your right to feel sorry for yourself, and your right to let your emotions dictate your posture before an Almighty God.

The Old Testament hero Job understood this on a level few of us ever will. In a single day, he lost his children, his wealth, and his health. He was sitting in the ashes of his life, scraping sores from his body, when he uttered one of the heaviest doctrinal declarations in the entire Bible:

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15)

Job didn't look at his circumstances to decide if God was worthy. He looked at who God was. That is the raw, unadulterated grit of sacrificial praise. It is looking at a broken situation and saying, *"My world is falling apart, but my God is still on the throne. Therefore, I will open my mouth and declare His goodness anyway."*

The author of Hebrews carries this exact principle right into the New Testament church:

"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." (Hebrews 13:15)

Notice the word **continually**. That means when you are up, when you are down, when you are winning, and when you are weeping. It is easy to sing when the music is good and the atmosphere is emotional. But when you are bleeding in the dark, that song becomes a sacrifice. And let me tell you, God smells that sacrifice from heaven, and it moves Him to action.

Actively Inviting the King

When we lift up praise and sing worship songs, we aren't just letting off emotional steam or ticking a religious box. We are sending an official, royal invitation to the Creator of the universe.

We will deep-dive into the incredible ministry of the Holy Spirit's presence in a later chapter, but right here on this first step, you need to understand the spiritual gravity of singing praise. Your voice is a homing beacon for the Almighty. When we sing, we are actively shifting our environment and pulling His manifest presence right into our immediate space.

Now, when I say "praise," some people automatically picture a professional church choir, a perfectly tuned acoustic guitar, or someone with a voice so flawless it makes angels jealous. But God didn't limit worship to vocal cords. He handed out a massive toolkit of unique gifts, talents, and abilities to His body, and *all* of them are designed to express worship.

If you can paint, paint for His glory. If you can build, build with a heart of gratitude. If you have the gift of administration, filing those spreadsheets with excellence is a sweet-smelling aroma to the Lord. Worship is the intentional activation of whatever gift God put inside you, redirected back to the One who gave it.

The Sacred Art of the Toilet Brush

This means worship isn't confined to a church sanctuary on Sunday morning. True intentionality means bringing a spirit of worship into the most mundane, unglamorous moments of your week.

Let's get real. Can you be intentionally in a spirit of worship while cleaning a toilet?

Absolutely. Now, I'll admit, scrubbing the porcelain throne doesn't exactly *feel* like a mountaintop spiritual experience. When you are down on your knees wrestling with a stubborn ring of lime buildup, your flesh isn't naturally shouting, "*Hallelujah!*" In fact, if you happen to live with teenagers, cleaning the bathroom can feel a whole lot more like a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness.

But right there, with the blue disinfectant swirling and the rubber gloves on, you can make a quality choice to level up. You look at that toilet bowl and say, "*Lord, I am cleaning this house with excellence because You blessed me with a roof over my head. I am serving my family right now just like Jesus served His disciples.*"

You start humming a worship anthem. You weaponize that toilet brush. Suddenly, you aren't just cleaning a bathroom anymore; you are pulling the presence of God right into the hallway. If you can learn to invite His presence while scrubbing a toilet, the devil won't have a single inch of ground left to mock you on!

The Midnight Breakthrough

If you want a modern, real-world picture of how this works to level up your life, look at Paul and Silas in the city of Philippi. The Bible tells us they were severely beaten with rods, thrown into the deepest, darkest dungeon, and had their feet locked into wooden stocks.

They were physically bleeding. They were in intense pain. They had every right to complain, to question God, or to simply nurse their wounds until morning. But look at what happens at the lowest point of their night:

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” (Acts 16:25)

They didn't wait for the jail doors to open before they started praising. They started praising while they were still in chains! They chose to weaponize their worship at the exact moment the enemy thought he had them defeated.

And look at the divine chain reaction that followed in verse 26: *“Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.”*

Your sacrificial praise is a spiritual weapon. It doesn't just change your internal perspective; it shakes the very foundations of the spiritual forces working against you. When you choose to step onto this first stair and sing your midnight melody—whether it's in a prison cell, an office cubicle, or a messy bathroom—you are shifting the atmosphere from a victim mentality to an overcomer reality.

Putting the Step into Practice

So, how do we put this into practice tomorrow morning?

When you wake up and the worries of life immediately try to anchor you to the floor, you don't wait until you "feel" spiritual. Remember, personal holiness and intentional obedience act like a nitrous boost in your gas tank—it propels you forward faster than your emotions ever could.

You open your mouth and you make a quality choice. You say, *"Lord, the crops might be failing in my life right now, just like the prophet Habakkuk said. There might be no fruit on the vines. But yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation."* (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

The moment you make that declaration, your foot has successfully cleared the floor and landed on the first step of the staircase. You have chosen intentionality over passivity. And now that you are standing on **Sacrificial Praise**, you are perfectly positioned to take the next step upward into the very room where God sets up His throne.

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Media Kit Version 2026 – Shaun Hays

(*This segment will be placed at the end of my books as a universal salvation message.*)

The Road Home: Your Steps to Salvation

If you have read through this book and realized that you don't have a firm foundation to stand on, or if you realize you've been trying to climb the stairs of life in your own strength, I want to show you the most important roadmap in the entire universe. It is a path found right in the New Testament, often called the "**Romans Road.**" It maps out exactly how to move from separation from God into a real, life-changing, eternal relationship with Him.

Let's look at the steps together:

- **Step 1: Acknowledge the Problem.** The Bible is incredibly honest about the human condition. **Romans 3:23** says, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Sin is anything we think, say, or do that breaks God's perfect law. It is the barrier that keeps us from His presence.
- **Step 2: Recognize the Consequences.** Sin isn't just a mistake; it carries a spiritual cost. **Romans 6:23** tells us, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Left unresolved, our sin earns us eternal separation from a holy God. But notice the pivot in that verse—God has a gift for you.
- **Step 3: See the Provision.** You couldn't fix the sin problem on your own, so God did it for you. **Romans 5:8** declares, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Jesus paid your wages on the cross.
- **Step 4: Respond with Faith.** Salvation isn't automatic; it requires a personal, heartfelt response. **Romans 10:9–10** promises, *"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* Finally, **Romans 10:13** seals it: *"For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"*

If you want to step onto the bedrock foundation of Jesus Christ today, you can pray a simple prayer from your heart right now:

"Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and I need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and rose again from the grave on the third day, conquering death and Hell. I turn from my sin and invite You to be the Savior and Lord of my life. Thank You for saving me, forgiving me, and giving me the strength to live for You. Amen."

(followed by a call to join a group of believers in a Biblically Sound Church or an in-person Bible Study and begin to ask questions about Baptism: your personal public declaration of faith in Christ Jesus. Using scripture)

(Also practical - how to find a local church that will help you grow)