

# **GOD Strong:** **A Military Wife's Spiritual** **Survival Guide**

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## **Group Guide**

# Welcome...

Thank you for your interest in leading or taking part in a GOD Strong study group! This study, designed to be used with my book, *GOD Strong: A Military Wife's Spiritual Survival Guide*, has been written to help military wives go even deeper into what it means to truly be GOD Strong – taking the spiritual truths we've discussed in the book and figuring out how to apply those truths to our everyday lives.

Application can only go so far without accountability, and for this reason I think it's great to go through *GOD Strong* with a group of other military wives. So grab some ladies from your Wives of Faith or PWOC or MOPS groups, some friends from your FRG or spouse club, and make plans to study this book together.

This guide should be printed out for both the group leader *and* those participating in the group.

**To group leaders:** If you find yourself a little nervous about leading a group, let me assure you: you do not have to be a theologian to lead this study! You are a facilitator, leading other ladies in discussion, and everything you need is in this guide, including questions to ask and points to make. If you have a heart to see military wives grow in God's strength and not their own, then you can lead.

We have two objectives we want to see achieved through this study: 1) women spending time and heart with God's Holy Scripture and 2) those same women sharing their thoughts and experiences with one another as God's Word works through their minds, their lives, impacting them, their families and everyone around them.

I am praying for you as you lead your group, that God will give you confidence, wisdom and compassion to serve those who come. Expect God to use you and your group in a powerful way these next 10 weeks and be open to what He has planned.

**To military wives:** This Group Guide is to be used for each weekly session. If you would like to have additional study time between sessions, please visit [godstrongbook.com](http://godstrongbook.com) and download the *GOD Strong Study Guide for Military Wives*.

May God bless your time together each week as together, you begin to learn that we don't have to be Armies of One when we are GOD Strong!

***Sara Horn***

# Before We Start...

This group study is designed for new material to be presented at each weekly meeting for the group with reading and follow up study to be done by the individual at home afterwards.

Plan for a 90-minute session each week: a 15-minute warm-up, a 60-minute session, and a 15-minute "post stretch".

Things you will need to think about before your group can start: Your location, day and time, and childcare needs. If you decide to do it at your church, consider scheduling your group meetings when other church activities are already going on. This may make childcare options a little easier.

If you choose to hold the group at your home or at a friend's, consider asking everyone to contribute to hire a babysitter and keep the children either in another part of the house or at another friend's house so your time together isn't disturbed, or perhaps there is a church or military base childcare program where the children can be dropped off. Babies have a great way of pulling the attention of any woman who is a mother and we want women to have this time to focus specifically on God and what He is trying to teach them.

Each member of the group will need a copy of *God Strong* and a printout of this group guide (see my website, [godstrongbook.com](http://godstrongbook.com) to download). I would also suggest a binder with extra paper for journaling and notes. As noted on the previous page, those ladies wishing for extra study during the week may access the *GOD Strong Guide for Military Wives* at [godstrongbook.com](http://godstrongbook.com).

Don't forget to prepare a sign-up sheet for the first meeting so women can write down their names, email and phone numbers for you to follow up with during the week.

It's okay if wives have already read the book or if they choose to read just a chapter at a time to go with the study or if they read ahead some weeks. This guide is meant to offer additional discussion and material that is not included in the book.

Small groups work best when you have 6 to 8 people. If you have more than this in your group, consider dividing into smaller groups when it's time to answer discussion questions; then bring everyone back and have each group appoint a spokesperson to share a summary of what they thought about each question.

# Session 1 – Are You God Strong?

**As military wives, our strength can only go so far. But God's strength has an endless supply. We can experience His strength when we accept that it has absolutely nothing to do with us but everything to do with God.**

Becca Swanson wears the title of "World's Strongest Woman." She certainly has the stats to prove it! Becca can

- Squat lift 843 lbs
- Bench press 501 lbs
- Deadlift 650 pounds
- Weighs 240 pounds (think most of that is muscle?!)

As military wives, we have our own special stats. We can

- Keep house and home going for 12 to 18 months by ourselves
- Move our families across country, with or without our husbands by our sides
- Juggle kids, jobs, community service and church activities
- Be our husbands biggest cheerleaders and our children's best teachers

Physical strength eventually wears out. Bodies get tired and no matter how much muscle we have, eventually we will tire. Physically, emotionally, and even spiritually.

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



1. Each military wife should introduce herself to the rest of the group. Share your name, military branch, whether you're going through a deployment or you've been through one in the past and in two minutes or less, how you and your husband met.
2. Share with the group one thing you enjoy about being a military wife and one thing you struggle with as a military wife.
3. All of us need outlets for dealing with stress and finding ways to relax. What's your favorite thing to do that's fun and something you enjoy doing?

## Strength Training

60 minutes



The Old Testament mentions the Hebrew word for “strength” more than 264 times. We often think of strength in terms of physical ability but in most of the cases mentioned in the OT, spiritual strength is what is being referred to.

When we think about the challenges we face as military wives, many times we convince ourselves that we just need to be stronger. That we’re too weak emotionally and we just need to pull on our Big Girl Panties (the feminine equivalent of “picking up our boot straps”) and forge ahead.

### Core Test

Kelly’s husband, a Marine reservist, recently deployed for his first deployment. She’s read as much information as she can find online and on military wife message boards, though she doesn’t know one other military spouse in person.

Lots of her civilian friends and family have offered their own thoughts about her situation. “You are so strong, Kelly,” they tell her. To which she automatically thinks... *do I really have a choice?*

Still, she knows strength is important. She knows she’ll need to be strong for her husband, that it’s important to keep everything running smoothly while he’s gone, though she worries for his safety and that he will continue to be the same sweet man she married when he returns. She knows she has to be strong for her two small children, keeping them connected with their daddy as much as possible. And then there’s the house and the cars and church... she’s starting to wonder how long her strength can hold out.

1. Kelly is focused on being strong during her husband’s deployment. What does being strong look like?
2. What are some of the challenges Kelly may encounter as she starts living through this deployment? What advice would you give her about being strong?

Habakkuk is one of the minor prophets we read from in the Old Testament. He writes only three short chapters. We don’t know a lot about Habakkuk except that he lived sometime around 612 BC. In the first two chapters of his book, he asks two main questions of God: how could God let evil spread so far throughout the land, and how could God use such godless people as the Babylonians to give judgment? The prophet does not get all of his questions answered, but he does manage to bring together two very important concepts by the time he writes Chapter 3: faith and strength.

Read Habakkuk 3:17-19 (NIV) –

- <sup>17</sup> **Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,**
- <sup>18</sup> **yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.**
- <sup>19</sup> **The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to go on the heights.**

Even as he dealt with the fact that God didn't seem to be doing what Habakkuk wanted Him to, the prophet confidently continued to wait on God, living by faith and rejoicing in his Lord and Savior because God was his strength.

But sometimes as military wives, we convince ourselves that it isn't God's strength, but our own that we really need and it becomes easy for misperceptions to raise their sneaky heads.

### **Misperception #1: God doesn't give me more than I can handle so it's up to me to handle it!**

When we buy into the belief that God won't give us more than we can deal with, we convince ourselves that everything *is* up to *us*.

3. First Corinthians 10:13 tells us:

**<sup>13</sup>The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.**

This verse is often the source for the phrase "God won't give me more than I can handle" but it's talking about temptation – nowhere in this scripture does it say God won't let us experience great stress or hard challenges.

What happens when our strength *doesn't* work? How do we feel? How do we act? How do we react?

4. Is it hard to change our thinking from being strong for ourselves to relying on God's strength? Why or why not?

## Misperception #2: God helps those who help themselves so I should do as much of it as I can!

“God helps those who help themselves” is a quote from Benjamin Franklin. Though many of us have said this to ourselves and to others, if we look closely, we realize that the Bible actually teaches the opposite. God loves to help the helpless. He delights in being our strength.

Look what Romans 5:6-8 says (NLT):

**<sup>6</sup> When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. <sup>7</sup> Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. <sup>8</sup> But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.**

The Message version phrases that last part as “while we were of no use whatever to him.”

Let's read some more.

<sup>1-2</sup> **I look up to the mountains;  
does my strength come from mountains?  
No, my strength comes from GOD,  
who made heaven, and earth, and mountains.  
- Psalm 121:1-2 (The Message)**

*God does the most when we can do only the very least.*

5. Do you agree with the above statement? Why or why not? What does God's strength look like?

6. Go back to Kelly's story. What are some ways she can make God the source of her strength?

7. Read Deuteronomy 31:6 from The Message.

**<sup>6</sup> “Be strong. Take courage. Don't be intimidated. Don't give them a second thought because GOD, your God, is striding ahead of you. He's right there with you. He won't let you down; he won't leave you.”**

What does the verse above mean to you? How can you apply it to your life right now?

8. In Deut. 31:6, “them” refers to the enemy nations of the Israelites. Name some of the enemies you face today. Is it fear of the unknown? Is it the unrealistic expectations you place on yourself? What areas of your life feel like the weakest? Share only what you feel comfortable in sharing with the group.

9. What's hard about being GOD Strong?

10. What changes do you need to make in order to rely more on God's strength and less of your own?



Are you starting to see what being God Strong really means? It doesn't take much as we live the military spouse life to fall into the trap of believing we must take care of everyone and everything around us, but that isn't what God wants for us. He truly desires for us to lean on Him. Yes, we have responsibilities and yes, people who depend on us, but it is a different perspective God wants for us. Instead of asking "How am I going to do this?" let's ask "How is God going to help me do this?" or even better, "How is God going to do this?"

He doesn't mind our repeated prayers. He doesn't frown when we get something wrong. He wants to help us and carry us and most of all, He wants to love us.

Next week we will talk more about the difference between "ME Strength" and being GOD Strong, but for now, let's close this session by looking at one last verse, this one in the words of Jesus Himself.

**28-30 "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." – Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message).**

Jesus wants so much to carry your burdens and hold your hurts. What would it look like to "recover your life"? What would a "real rest" look like? No, we're not talking about a vacation with palm trees and sand, we're talking about something more, something deeper and longer lasting. A relationship with God that leaves you feeling light in your spirit and in your heart. Peace. Joy. Love.

1. Name one thing you're going to do this week to make a step toward being more GOD Strong.

2. Deployments and PCS moves are two of the toughest seasons a military wife experiences. Take a moment to think about and compare a deployment that's GOD Strong to a deployment that's not. What differences do you see?

# Session 2 – Our Source for strength

**We know we should rely on God's strength but often knowing and doing are two different things. We must practice on a daily basis what it means to be GOD Strong.**

A retired Air Force member and his wife were enjoying their twilight years together when the wife became seriously ill. With great love, her husband waited on her and never offered a complaint, picking her up and carrying her onto the porch on sunny days, or into the garden where she could feel the warm breeze. He did everything for her.

But one day, her doctor told him that if he continued to wait on her, she would never walk again. "She likes being carried, and if you continue to do it, she'll never even try to walk."

The husband understood what the doctor was saying and after going home that night, he told his wife he could no longer carry her.

She sobbed. "But how can I do this by myself? I can't make it on my own."

The husband gently took her hand and helped her to a standing position. "Lean on me," he said softly. The wife, still quietly crying, took one trembling and painful step and then another, slowly, depending on her husband's strength to keep her from falling, but moving forward just the same.

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



1. What were some things that you took away from the reading this week? Share something God showed you and if there was a specific scripture that spoke to you.
2. If you are going through a deployment right now, what are some special things you are looking forward to doing when your husband returns home?
3. Think for a moment about the story we just read. How hard do you think it was for the wife to walk on her own power? Was it a comfort to her to have her husband to lean on?

Why or why not? How does it feel when we have someone else to lean on during a hard or really difficult time?

## Strength Training

60 minutes



Our military values strength. The strength of the unit, the physical strength of the soldier... even a recent ad campaign has touted the importance of strength (does Army Strong come to mind?). As military spouses, we too feel the need to be strong. But our strength is more emotional than physical; the strength we require is less about picking up our battle buddy than for keeping ourselves going.

Instead of “ME Strength”, however, we need to depend on God’s strength. This week we’re going to go deeper into what it means to be God Strong and some specific things we can do and think about to make certain that our strength is coming from the right source.

### Core Test

Stacy sighs as she slips into the back pew on Sunday morning. As she tries to focus on the words displaying on the big screen, her eyes fill with tears. Her husband is on his second deployment in four years and she’s realized that previous experience in the case of deployment doesn’t mean it gets easier. A wave of everything she’s dealt with through the week hits her – the late nights, the early mornings, the loneliness, the chores, the errands, the decisions she’s had to make by herself and she quickly feels herself start to wilt.

She thinks about all of the other wives she knew in her husband’s unit. *I bet none of them are blubbing like a baby today...* Silently, she prays, as the congregation sings through a worship chorus. *God, why can’t I do this? What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I be better? Why can’t I be stronger?*

1. Have you ever found yourself trying to be one of the following during a deployment or other challenging season of your life?

- Great Communicator
- Great Organizer
- Great Cheerleader
- Great Health Nut

If you checked one or more of the choices above, what were some of the things you did to earn that title? Why did you feel it was important to do those things?

2. During deployment or other challenges, did you ever feel like the impossible was expected of you? How did you get through it?

3. What would you say to Stacy about what she's feeling? Can you relate? Why or why not?

To be God Strong, we can't run ahead of God but we can't run behind Him either. Experiencing God's strength isn't a one-time fix; it's a choice – from the heart and from the mind – to choose God's thoughts over our own. It's a daily commitment, a necessary habit, a decision that changes a life from the inside out. But it's a marathon and not a sprint. Just as a deployment doesn't start and end overnight, neither does learning to be strong in God's strength. That's why it's so important for us to PACE ourselves. I know we're all familiar with acronyms so let's learn a new one that's going to help us in every area of our lives! PACE – Pursue, Act, Concentrate and Encourage.

## PURSUE

Read Matthew 24:13 (The Message) –

**Staying with it—that's what God requires. Stay with it to the end. You won't be sorry, and you'll be saved.**

Experiencing God's strength is not like stopping through a drive-thru and getting it to go. God wants a relationship with us; He's given us free will to run *from* Him, as well as free will to run *to* Him. We must pursue God in body, mind and soul – He wants us to follow after Him and to actively search for Him. When we pursue God with everything we have, we accept what He is ready to give us – peace, love, hope. When we pursue God, regardless of our circumstances, regardless of how we are feeling, our spiritual foundations are fortified.

4. What does it look like to pursue God?

## ACT

As a writer and published author, I have been contacted by many people over the years who also wish to write. They've thought about writing, they've dreamed about writing, some may read everything they can find about writing, but I still hear from those who are missing one very important step: they aren't writing!

We can want to pursue a relationship with God, but until we also take action and use the tools God's given us to grow closer to Him, we might as well try to ride tricycles and attempt to race the Tour de France – we won't see much result!

There are three actions we need to incorporate in our PACE:

- Reading God's Word
- Praying daily
- Connecting with other believers

It almost sounds too simple, doesn't it? Some say that about the act of salvation. But God's intent is not to make a relationship with Him difficult. We are usually the ones who do that to ourselves.

5. How easy or difficult is it to do the above? Why do you think this is? What would make it better?

## **CONCENTRATE**

Galatians 6:14 (NIV) exhorts us to "never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Oswald Chambers once wrote that we "lose power if we do not concentrate on the right thing..."

It's easy to focus on everything but Christ. We can monitor our church attendance, sing in the choir, even teach a Sunday school class, but that doesn't make us God Strong. We can also be distracted by comparing ourselves to others.

Only by concentrating on Christ and what He did for us on the Cross and ultimately His resurrection can we truly start to see His strength.

6. How can we concentrate on Christ and eliminate distractions that would cause that focus to lessen?

7. Is it harder to concentrate when going through a deployment? Why or why not? What are some ways we can keep our focus on Christ, even during deployment?

## **ENCOURAGE**

The final way we can keep PACE is by encouraging ourselves and each other.

Read Lamentations 3:22-23 –

<sup>22</sup> **Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.**

<sup>23</sup> **They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.**

8. What are some ways you can encourage yourself to stay strong in your relationship with God?

9. What are some ways you can encourage others to do the same?

10. What is the difference between "Me Strength" and being "God Strong"?



To rely on God's strength means to accept that our own strength isn't enough. It was never intended to be enough. God wants us to lean on Him. Trust Him to hold you up.

1. If you want God to be a priority in your life, what are some things you need to do or change for that to be possible?
2. What must you do to remain God Strong during a deployment?

# Session 3 – Facing Our Fears

**When we allow fear to invade our minds and our hearts, our focus on God becomes much harder to keep. We must learn to face our fears with God's help so we can keep our focus on Him.**

A couple drove 100 miles from South Africa's famous Kruger National Park with a highly venomous spitting cobra in their car.

Gordon Parratt, 69, felt the 33-inch long snake wind itself around his leg while he was driving.

At first he thought an insect had brushed his leg and swiped it away, but when he looked down he saw the snake next to his left foot.

"Fortunately I'm not the panicky type. My wife immediately put her feet up on the dashboard," said Parratt, when he was interviewed by a newspaper later that day.

The Pretoria couple made several stops to remove the snake but could not find it, until it wrapped itself around Parratt's leg.

"Its head came up to my knee," he said.

Finally the couple managed to call a snake expert to remove the cobra.

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



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1. Get to Know Each Other Better Time: All of us have funny or sweet stories from our early days of being married. Share a brief story with the rest of the group that happened on your honeymoon or the first month after you were married.
  2. What was one thing you took away from the reading this past week? Did you have an opportunity to lean on God's strength? If you're comfortable, share it with the group.
  3. Have you ever experienced an irrational fear? Some people have a fear of riding in elevators or of a certain color, like orange. Share one of your fears with the group.

## Strength Training

60 minutes



The Bible holds many examples of situations where fear is present. The disciples experienced fear as they sat in a boat in the midst of a stormy sea. A father felt fear as he confronted the possibility his child was gone for good. The Israelites felt fear as Pharaoh's army chased after them.

But God proclaims over and over again to His people to "fear not." We can learn to use those moments of fear not as reasons to avoid doing what God is asking us to do, but as opportunities to deepen our faith in Him.

### Core Test

Julie is a Navy wife whose husband is away for a 7-month cruise out at sea. Though she lives in a safe neighborhood, she struggles with the fear that someone may try to break into her house while she's alone. Despite checking the locks at least three times at night, turning on the alarm and keeping her dog in the room with her, she still continues to have difficulties falling asleep. Instead, she jumps at every sound the house makes and her anxiety only seems to grow the less sleep she gets. Her lack of sleep through the night is causing her to struggle at work during the day and she wonders how long she can go on like this. She knows she must somehow resolve her fear.

1. Trouble sleeping is a common problem for many military spouses and fear can often play a part in it. Has this ever been a problem for you? What advice would you offer Julie?
2. What does it look like to fear something? What does it look like to *not* be afraid?
3. What are other fears that you deal with? How often do you allow fear to keep you from doing something?

### Trading Fear for Faith

Faith is the opposite of fear. We trust in God and His plan for our lives through faith or we don't trust through fear. When we trust – when we hold onto our faith in God, we believe that He will do what He says He will.

4. Read Isaiah 41:10 –

<sup>10</sup> **So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**

What does this verse mean to you?

We must learn to trade our fears for faith.

- We can trade our fear of failure for faith that God will help us to succeed (Joshua 1:7).
- We can trade our fear of the unknown for faith that God is in control (Deut. 4:39).
- We can trade our fear of financial struggle for the faith that God will provide (Psalm 140:12).

5. Look back at Julie's story. What can she trade her fear for? Can you find a scripture that supports her trade?

6. What are some other common fears for military wives that we can trade instead for faith?

Some of the more serious fears we face as military wives are the potential deaths of our husbands or the detrimental affects of war that can impact our husbands after they come home through PTSD or other emotional trauma.

We need to rely on the words of Joshua 1:9 – "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (NIV).

When we believe and trust in God's strength and provision, any fear that is lying around must leave. We can trust His Scripture to tell us why.

7. Look up the following verses and match with the statements provided:

Isaiah 41:10                      Because God uses the ordinary to create the extraordinary

John 12:24-25                      Because we can see the testimonies of those who traded their fears for faith

John 14:11-14                      Because God doesn't leave

Hebrews 11                      Because we can't see our fears but we can see God's love in the handiwork of everywhere we look

8. How does fear impact your relationship with God?

9. Why do you think we struggle so much with fear?

10. What do you think of the statement, "I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear...?"



When we replace our fears with faith that God is in control, we underscore our trust and our belief in God's power and His strength. We can be like Abraham: when we feel like everything is hopeless, we can believe anyway, living not on the basis of what we can't do but on the basis of God says He will do.

**<sup>18</sup> Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."<sup>d</sup> <sup>19</sup> Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. <sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. – Romans 4:18-21**

1. Choose one fear that you have that you will work on trading for faith this week. Share your fear with one other person and ask her to pray for you between now and the next meeting.
2. Why is it important to rid your life of fear?

# Session 4 – Dealing With Loneliness

**Loneliness is an emotion that can paralyze our souls and add lead weight to our feet. Loneliness is not God's plan or His will for our lives.**

Melissa is an Army wife whose husband is in Special Forces and has frequent deployments. When I first met her, she struck me as very confident and a strong, self-reliant military wife, someone who is used to the ups and downs of deployments. But she too struggles with loneliness. As she was preparing for her husband to leave on another deployment, she emailed me and told me how she dreads those lonely nights: "I think what has helped me the most is finding others in the same situation. We have had Bible studies in our homes, met for coffee, or spent hours on the phone at night, drinking herbal tea and chatting about life and kids. (After our children are in bed, of course!) It's hard to explain loneliness to those who have never experienced it."

- From *GOD Strong*, p. 80.

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



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1. Getting to Know Each Other: How many places have you lived? Have you grown up and lived in the same place all your life? Or have you traveled all over, perhaps courtesy of the military?
  2. What's one favorite activity you like to do with friends? Exercising? Scrapbooking? Shopping? Eating? Share your favorite with the group.
  3. What's one thing God taught you this week since our last discussion?

## Strength Training

60 minutes



There is a difference in being alone and feeling lonely. We make the choice to be alone when we pick up a book and sit for an hour in quiet, or go for a run to clear our heads. But loneliness is painful. It's a feeling of being empty – that can happen whether we have people around us or not.

As wives, we can experience loneliness when our husbands are gone, especially if we consider them to be our best friends and the ones we confide the most to and spend the most time with. But we can also feel loneliness when we move to a new place, or when we've been in one place for a while, but for whatever reason, we just haven't been able to find other friends with whom we click. You can be in a crowd and still feel lonely.

### Core Test

Andrea is an Army wife whose husband has served for almost twelve years. They've moved every three years and this last move took them to the other side of the country, far away from family and friends. Her husband has seemed to enjoy the transition, working with people he's known at other duty stations, and he has quickly fallen into the routine the Army has set up for him. But Andrea feels lost. Jobs are scarce and the spouse club meeting she attended made her feel even more of an outsider since the ladies who were there didn't seem too open to talking with new people like herself. Visiting churches in the area feels the same way. She wonders, *I feel like I'm on a deserted island; is this really how it's going to be for the next three years?*

Experts who specialize in treating people with depression, which 30% of all women experience (according to the National Institute of Mental Health) report that human beings are the only species who cannot survive alone. An occasional hello, a brief visit or a quick phone call can be more effective than twenty-four hours of nursing care. One doctor said, "You can buy nursing care. You can't buy love."

1. Have you known anyone like Andrea who has felt lonely? What does loneliness feel like? What does it feel like to not be lonely?
2. What does loneliness do to us? What does it cause us to do? What does it cause us to not do?

### What Causes Loneliness?

When basic needs go unsatisfied. A pastor recently pointed out that we have three basic needs as human beings:

- We have a need for a relationship with God, or our creator.
- We have a need to love and be loved. God created us as social creatures. In order for us to be fulfilled, we need to be involved in an intimate personal way with other people.
- We need to be worthwhile to ourselves and to others. We need to have a purpose to our lives, something that gives us the sense that our existence is meaningful and significant.

When the needs above go unmet, there is a greater chance that loneliness will be felt.

3. When loneliness is experienced, is it easier to focus on self or on God? Why?

### God Cares for Our Needs

From the beginning of human existence, God has shown He cares about our feelings.

Read Genesis 2:18 (NIV) –

**<sup>18</sup>The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”**

God knew early on that He did not form us to be on our own, but that we would need others in our lives for support and friendship. This obviously can apply to our spouses but it can also refer to friends.

4. What does it do for our emotions and our well-being to have friendship and fellowship with others?

Read the first part of Psalm 68:6 (NIV) –

**<sup>6</sup> God sets the lonely in families...**

Many translations also add a subscript to this phrase so you could read it as “God sets the desolate in homelands.”

All of us need a place to feel at home. To feel we belong. Psalm 68:6 reminds us that God does not forget us when we are lonely, but seeks to place us with others with whom we can have fellowship, or *koinonia* with. *Koinonia* was a Greek word that Paul loved to use to describe a believer's relationship with God, but he also used it to describe the special bond between believers of sharing in the grace only Christ can give.

(\*Please note that as we talk about loneliness in this session, we are not talking about more serious issues such as depression. Depression is a physical and emotional condition that can be treated; if you find yourself struggling for long periods of time, if you're unable to sleep or all you want to do is sleep, if you're

5. List some of the "families" you have an opportunity to be "set" in (other than your immediate or blood-related family) where you can receive ministry from as well as offer it.
6. Think about Andrea's situation again for a moment. Where can she look for fellowship?

### **Start with God**

When we experience loneliness, our reaction can be to close up and shut off. We may avoid reaching out to others because we fear rejection and that our feeling of loneliness will only increase.

Or we can take the opposite approach. We can try to fill that lonely ache with other things: compulsive eating, excessive shopping, alcohol, pornography or other unhealthy habits or distractions.

When we become so swept up with ourselves and *our* needs and *our* problems, we've taken our focus from where it should be. We start trying to "fix" things on our own, and instead of seeing things get better, they usually get worse.

Read what Romans 8:5-8 (Message version) has to say about this:

**<sup>5-8</sup> Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.**

God wants to use our seasons of loneliness to look to Him. When we take ourselves out of the way and ask God to work in our lives despite our feelings of emptiness or isolation, that's when the Holy Spirit can do the most good. Romans 8:6 says "the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

7. What are some of the dangers of shutting ourselves away from everyone else?
8. What are some ways we can keep our focus on God and not on ourselves when we experience loneliness?

**You are not alone**

One of the greatest weapons the Enemy has at his disposal is loneliness. If he can convince us that we are all alone, that no one cares and all hope is gone, he has succeeded. Don't let him succeed! We need to build our own arsenal up against this weapon and that is relying on God's word when life feels bleak. Take turns looking up and reading the following scriptures.

Psalm 145:18

Psalm 62:1-2

Isaiah 54:10

Psalm 9:10

Hebrews 13:5b-6

Matthew 28:20b

Isaiah 43:2

Deuteronomy 31:8

9. Which of these scriptures speak to you the most and why?

10. Let's talk practically for a moment. Discuss with your group ways you can encourage and support each other in the coming week.



1. Share any prayer requests you have you would like others to pray for.

2. Is there someone you know who could use some encouragement this week? Write that person's name down and how and when you will be an encourager to them.

Break up into groups of two or three and take a moment to pray together before you leave today.

# Session 5 – The Military Super Wife

**It's easy to get sucked into the super military wife syndrome, trying to do all and be all for everyone around us. But God wants more for us. It comes through His gift of grace.**

Heard of Super Military Wife Syndrome? It generally kicks in when deployments start out. It's a sudden need to have everything organized and not just orderly, but pristine. Your house looks like a picture out of an interior design magazine. You handle running your children here and there with the ease of a flight controller and you volunteer at your church, in your community, and with the FRG like a pro. You love hearing people say "I don't know how she does it all," but inside you secretly wonder what will happen when you can't.

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



1. Share one good thing that happened this week for you.
2. What is one product or service you love that saves you time or money? Share with the rest of the group.
3. Who is one woman you look up to the most? Why?

## Strength Training

60 minutes



Most of us can probably say we live with pressure these days to be better. Better organized, better attitude, better at planning, cooking, cleaning... If you're an active military wife, living on a base or post, you know the pressure that comes with OMWC (Other Military Wife Comparison). Are you doing as much as she is? Do you look as pretty as she does? Are your kids as well-behaved as hers? If you're a Guard or Reserve wife, you still know that pressure, only you experience it with civilian wives as well as probably a few military wives. Of course, you don't always account for the fact that your civilian friends have husbands who return home at 5 p.m. – and not in 5 months!

## Core Test

Leslie always prides herself on keeping everything together for her family. She's done it during deployments; she's done it when her husband is home. But recent new responsibilities for her husband's military job now require more of Leslie too. Time has been stretched thin with military, church and family commitments and she's found herself snapping at her husband and grumpy with her kids. Two nights ago, she started crying uncontrollably when she discovered her 5-year-old spilled hot chocolate mix on the carpet, leaving an obvious chocolate stain no matter how much she scrubbed. After running into her friend Kim at the PX, who always looks like she's stepped out of a copy of Vogue with a Real Simple house to match, Leslie can't wait to escape to her car. *I'm a failure*, she thinks as the tears come. *I will never be able to measure up.*

1. What does a Super Military Wife look like?
2. If you were Leslie's friend, what advice would you give her?
3. Have you ever felt the way she's feeling right now? Describe a situation where you were a Super Military Wife or you felt you were competing with Super Military Wives.

## It's All Up to Me – or Is It?

We often fall into the Super Military Wife role when we perceive everything being up to us. We convince ourselves that we are responsible for it all and that success or failure rests completely with us. And then when we fail – when we grow too exhausted to keep up the pace or something falls apart or a mistake is made or a date forgotten, we can become completely undone.

I love what the Message translation says in Galatians 3:2-4 –

**<sup>2-4</sup> Let me put this question to you: How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God's Message to you? Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it? Did you go through this whole painful learning process for nothing? It is not yet a total loss, but it certainly will be if you keep this up!**

“Only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God.” The NIV puts it another way: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” Ouch. Paul was writing to the church in Galatia but we can apply this to our own lives as well.

4. Do you ever find yourself starting a week out with prayer, trusting God to lead and by the end of the week, you're wondering what happened? Why do you think this happens?

5. Do you think as a whole, military wives expect too much from themselves, or do they expect the wrong things and invariably set themselves up to fail? Why?

### **The Proverbs 31 Woman's Best Example**

6. Take a moment to read Proverbs 31:10-31, a familiar passage to many. Or, if you have a copy of *GOD Strong* with you, read the paraphrase that starts on p. 109.

What's your feeling of the woman described in this passage? Is she someone to aspire to? Someone to hate? Someone to ignore? Why?

For many women, the Proverbs 31 woman offers the best and worst of a woman's world. The best is the standard of excellence she sets in everything she does; the worst is the reality of how often the rest of us struggle with meeting that standard.

But if there is one example the Proverbs 31 woman sets that we can certainly follow, it's found in verse 30.

**<sup>30</sup> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.**

The word "fear" in this case means to revere or to hold in respectful awe. We can almost miss this verse after hearing about her endless success as a seamstress, a business owner, a wife, a mom. We can get so caught up in the *what* that we can miss how we're supposed to *be*.

7. What does it mean to fear the Lord? What does it *look* like?

### **Grace, grace and more grace**

God doesn't ask for our perfection, He only asks for our hearts; for our hands to hold as He guides us through the storms life brings.

8. Read Ephesians 2:8 –

**<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God**

God offers us grace; He doesn't ask for payment – He's already paid the price for us through His Son. Grace is a gift, and nothing we do can earn God's favor.

We don't need to aspire to be super wives or super moms or super women. There is only one thing we need aspire to, and that's as a child of God, accepting His love that He is so ready to give.

The Proverbs 31 wife understood that. Maybe she was able to do all of those other things because she put God first. It doesn't mean that He's calling us to do all of those things. But He is calling us to follow Him. Not to *do*, but to *be*.

9. What does God's grace mean to you?

10. How often do you rely on God's grace in your life? When are you most likely to forget?



1. What are some ways you can reduce your quest to be superwoman? What are some things you need to say no to?

2. What has Jesus done for you through the gift of His grace? Write down a list and keep it where you can see it this week so you can be reminded each time you're tempted to go into "super" mode.

# Session 6 – Letting Go

**As military wives, there are many things not in our control. Schedules, vacations, moves and even dinner time or weekend plans revolve around the military. Life can feel uncertain at best, out of control at the worst. But God has ultimate control over everything.**

God is in control. We know it, we say it, but do we always believe it? We may not, if our actions are ever an indication of those deeply held beliefs. Because, don't we like to fix things? Don't we get upset when things don't go the way we want? When deployments happen sooner or later or when PCS moves are on the opposite end of the country we were hoping for?

Believing God to be in control does not mean that we still get to be in control. And if we really pause and think about it, we don't want to be in control. Do we?

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



1. One of the things we don't always get to control is who holds the remote, especially if your husband is home or you have kids! So let's pretend for a moment that you get to control the remote – what's your favorite show to watch?
2. Just for Fun: What's your favorite place to eat?
3. If you could pick one thing that someone else could be in charge of instead of you, what would it be, and why?

## Strength Training

60 minutes



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This week we're talking about giving God control in every area of our life. It's not always easy to do. Sure, most of us, especially if we already have a personal relationship with Him, can acknowledge that God is in charge. The question – and the challenge – is this: are we following Him, or are we trying to lead?

## **Core Test**

Stacy, an Army National Guard wife, likes routine. She likes order and regular schedules and easy planning. But since her husband's deployment has started, things feel completely out of control. Nothing feels the same. Now that it's just she and the kids, church isn't the same. Dinner times are different. Bedtimes can vary, as hard as she tries to keep it at the same time. Her husband calls at odd times and never consistently. It seems the harder she tries to establish control, the harder it is to do.

1. Stacy feels like many military wives do, that life is out of her control. As her friend, what advice might you give?
2. What are some areas of your own life that you try to control? Is it easy or hard to do? Why?

## **Is God in Control?**

Before we can determine whether we're following God's lead or trying to take charge of everything ourselves, we need to first make sure we do believe God is in control. So much of our culture today tries to convince us otherwise. "Take charge of your future." "Be all you can be." Even the advance of technology pushes us toward believing we can control it all, with cell phones that can reach anywhere in the world at our whim and home appliances that can turn on and off when we tell them. We like to be in control.

But God is sovereign. He has the highest authority over everything. He works according to His purpose and we know this from Scripture.

3. Take a moment to look up and take turns reading the following scriptures: Genesis 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17, Proverbs 16:9, Proverbs 16:33, Romans 8:28.

Is it harder to believe that God is in control when good things happen or when bad things happen? Why?

Some of us can struggle with the thought that God allows bad things to happen as well as good. How could He willingly let my husband be separated from us for so long; how could He allow wars to happen and death to occur? The Bible doesn't tell us why this is so, but it does explain that God doesn't do evil nor does He approve of it (James 1:13). He will also use it for His good.

4. Read Gen. 50:20 –

**<sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**

Have you ever had something happen in your life that you were disappointed about, or struggled with, only to later see how much better things were because of it? Share your story with the group.

## **What it Means to Follow God**

Following God and accepting His control in my life requires more than just an awareness of what He wants to do. It means agreeing to His will over my own. It means obeying His Word. It can mean waiting when we want to run, or moving forward when we'd much rather stay in one place.

There is no special formula when it comes to following God's will. But it does require knowledge. How would you ever know what was important to your spouse if you never talked to him? If you never read his notes or emails? If you never sat with him? God's Word is like a GPS for our lives. We have the navigation tool right in front of us! But we have to use it.

5. Read John 15:4-5 –

**<sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.**

What is Jesus saying in this verse? How can we apply this to our lives as military wives?

## **When Giving Up Control is Scary**

Think back to Stacy's situation we discussed earlier. It isn't easy to give up what we've been able to control. When change confronts us, it's natural for us to want to hold onto whatever we can – we try to keep as much as possible the same.

But change happens in the military life. Whether you're active, National Guard or Reserve, change happens. Uncertainty and the unknown can be scary. But there is one thing we can know.

God doesn't change. And God is in control.

6. What are some of the changes we experience as military families?

7. Read Malachi 3:6-7 from The Message –

**<sup>6-7</sup> “I am GOD—yes, I AM. I haven't changed. And because I haven't changed, you, the descendants of Jacob, haven't been destroyed. You have a long history of ignoring my commands. You haven't done a thing I've told you. Return to me so I can return to you...”**

What does it mean to know that God doesn't change, when so much of what we experience in life does?

## God is in Control

We can be grateful that God is in control when so much of our lives feel out of control sometimes.

8. How can you experience more of God's control in your life?
9. What are some ways you can remind yourself when things aren't going according to plan that God is still in control?
10. Read Isaiah 40:28-31—

<sup>28</sup> **Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.**

<sup>29</sup> **He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.**

<sup>30</sup> **Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;**

<sup>31</sup> **but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.**

Where does our focus need to be when we feel out of control?



1. Share any prayer requests you have you would like others to pray for.
2. What is one way you will try to wait on God this week and let Him lead while you follow? Break up into groups of two or three and take a moment to pray together before you leave today.

# Session 7 – God Knows Our Hurts

**It's natural to want to avoid hurting as we go through life. When we do experience hurt, we want to ask "Why?" and "Where has God gone?" But God hasn't gone anywhere.**

Hurt is a part of life, and in the military life as a spouse, hurt can happen often. Stress can make a couple say things to each other they later regret; spiteful gossip and snippy comments from others can also wound and wear us down. From experiencing the every day problems to dealing with extreme crisis, hurts can stop us cold and make us wonder where God went. But God knows our hurts. He has not abandoned us.

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



1. For Fun: What is your favorite thing to do for date night with your husband?
2. Share how this past week went – did you look for ways God was in control?
3. What's the best piece of advice you've ever received on being a military wife?

## Strength Training

60 minutes



Many people join the military out of a sense of duty, a desire to serve, a hope to be part of something bigger themselves. But there are also many, especially in today's economic struggles, who join because they're looking to improve their own situations while helping their country. Maybe they're interested in a secure income or the educational benefits that come with military service. Whatever the reason, they join with a hope for something better. But they can be unpleasantly surprised when deployments happen or when moves to places they don't want to go are ordered.

We can experience the same thing with Christianity. If we're not careful, we can ask Christ to come into our lives with the expectation that life will be much better, that everything will go right from now on and we'll be happy for always. But it doesn't work that way. Hurts still happen.

## Core Test

Jennifer sits on her bed, her phone still in her hand. She can't believe what has happened. Her Air Force husband just called to let her know his deployment has been moved up by three months and he'll be leaving in three days. *Why is God doing this to us?* she thinks. He'll miss their little girl's birthday and his parents 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The special trip they were planning before he left won't happen now. The ache in her chest explodes and she buries her head in her pillow and lets the tears flow. She prays. *God, where are you?*

1. Jennifer is obviously hurting from a lot of disappointment. As her friend, how would you comfort her? How would you assure her God has not abandoned her?
2. What are some of the other hurts military wives can experience?

## God Knows Our Hurts

1. Read 1 Peter 4:12 -13. I like how the Message words it:

**<sup>12-13</sup> Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner.**

When we experience struggles and problems and hurts and harm in our lives, we can become convinced that God is out to get us – that He doesn't love us, that He's left us on our own, that He isn't hearing our prayers.

Christ was perfect but His life wasn't. He felt the same hurts we experience today. Let's look at some of what He experienced during His brief time here on Earth.

2. Look at what Hebrews 2:14-18 says:

**<sup>14</sup> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—<sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. <sup>16</sup> For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. <sup>17</sup> For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.**

**<sup>18</sup> Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**

What does the scripture above say about Christ?

3. Read all or a few of the following scriptures. Divide them up individually or if you have a large group, you may want to take a few moments to divide into smaller groups and assign a scripture or two for each group to discuss.

Matthew 2:13  
Matthew 13:54-57  
Matthew 8:20

Mark 14:1  
Mark 3:21  
Mark 14:18

John 11:32-37  
John 19:16

4. What do these verses prove? How can these scriptures help us during our own times of sorrow, disappointment, frustration, anger or hopelessness?

### **The Blessings in Our Brokenness**

It's hard to admit our struggles to others. It can sometimes even be hard to admit it to God. But God already knows when we're experiencing hurt and He wants to use that hurt to draw us to Himself.

We don't have to be perfect before we can come to God. God wants every part of us and our troubled lives – our tear-stained faces, unwashed hair, messy houses AND our piled up laundry. When we have nowhere else to go, God is still there. Waiting for us with open arms.

5. Is it easier to spend time with God when life is good or life is hard? Why?

6. Why might it be harder to turn to God when things aren't going well?

Read what James 1:2-4 (The Message) has to say:

**<sup>2-4</sup> Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.**

7. What happens when you lift weights or work out in the gym with a trainer? Is it easier or harder than, say, simply walking around the neighborhood? What are the results?

8. How do we deal with the hurts that come into our lives?

### **Ask God for Help**

In Luke 11:10, Jesus tells us to "be direct. Ask for what you need." We aren't supposed to have all the answers and we aren't expected to do everything on our own. Make the time to pray and seek God's help during hard times.

9. Is it hard to ask God for help? Why or why not?

10. How can we overcome the hurts we face?



1. Share with the group one thing this lesson has made you think about.
2. One of the benefits of studying God's Word together is having other women around us who can pray for us and encourage us. Take this time to share any hurts you're going through right now. Share with the entire group or break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3. Take time to pray for one another before you leave.

# Session 8 – There is Joy

**Experiencing joy is a choice we must make each and every day.**

Somewhere along our spiritual journey, we have allowed others to convince us that there is no joy in Christianity. And so when hardships come, there is no grinning and bearing it; there's just bearing it. But God wants us to be joyful! Because our **joy** is not based on our **circumstances**. It is based on the love He has for us *regardless of the circumstances*. – *GOD Strong*, p. 172

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



1. Name one thing you get joy from.
2. Share with the group one of your favorite moments from your wedding day.
3. Share one good thing that happened this past week.

## Strength Training 60 minutes



If you pay any attention at all to the news stories on television and online, there is very little joy among military families today. Media report study after study that points out the pain, loneliness and frustrations of military service members and their families – marriages, children, spouses, and the service members themselves are at the breaking point.

Yes, in this current climate of multi-deployments and the uncertainty of when wars will end and peacetime will return, life can look pretty bleak. Families are tired. Discouraged. Frustrated. And now we're going to talk about joy?

Joy is a choice, and it's a choice we can grab onto when we know Jesus.

## Core Test

Beckie and her friend Lori are driving home from a get-together with ladies from their Wives of Faith group. "Tonight was fun, wasn't it?" Beckie asks as she turns onto Lori's street. "Yeah, it was really great to get together with everyone," said Lori. "I have to say, though, Rachel really amazes me."

"Yeah," Beckie nodded. "I know what you mean."

"I mean, she's going through a deployment just like me, but she doesn't seem to let it get her down," said Lori. "Sure, I think she misses her husband and gets tired, but she doesn't seem to let it get to her. I wish I could be more like her."

"I think Rachel has figured out what her priorities are and she's made a conscious choice to put God first, no matter what," said Beckie. "Because of that, she has joy, and it definitely shows."

1. Have you ever known someone like Rachel who seems to be joyful even when things aren't going well? What other qualities does that person have that you wish you could emulate?
2. How hard is it to feel joy when you're going through hard times?

Joy is not an emotion that comes and goes like happiness. Joy is a quality that comes from God and is meant to be a substantive portion of a Christian's walk here on Earth. First Peter 1:8 tells us that though we haven't seen Christ, we love Him, and though we don't see him right now, we believe in Him and "are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."

3. What does it look like to be joyful?

There are three walls we talk about in *GOD Strong* that can prevent our joy. The Wall of Apathy, the Wall of Discord, and the Wall of Defeat.

**Apathy.** When we allow apathy into our life, we become indifferent. We convince ourselves we don't care, and even though that may not be true deep down inside, little by little, our minds and hearts start to buy into it. But joy is not indifferent, it's intense! As Christians, we should always have an interest in what God brings into our lives, whether it's for good or bad, easy or difficult. (Isaiah 42:20)

**Discord.** Have you found yourself at odds with another military wife? Or with a group of wives? With your husband or other family members or a friend? It's hard to be joyful

when we're angry or resentful or spiteful towards someone else. As a Christ-follower, we're called to be peace-makers (Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14).

**Defeat.** The Wall of Defeat can hit us before we know it. Especially when we're dealing with deployments and we're already living life minus half our support. It can cause us to give up, to curl up or refuse to try. But just like the other two walls already mentioned, we can choose to knock this one down as well, by keeping our focus and our trust in God. (Psalm 71:1-3)

4. Are there any other walls in life that can keep us from experiencing joy?
5. Share with the group a time in your life when you dealt with one of these walls that kept you from joy and how you were able to overcome it.

## **Joseph's Joy**

Joseph had a lot of reasons to be joyless. Life started out pretty well for him as the favorite son of his father, Jacob, but quickly spiraled out of control when that favorite status went to his head and his brothers threw him into a hole in the ground and later sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:12-28)

Divide up the following events of Joseph's life either by individuals or by small groups to read and answer the following questions. Then come back as a group to discuss.

6. Questions to answer as you read:

- What was Joseph's role or responsibility in the section you read?
- What happened in this passage?
- What was Joseph's reason in this situation to be joyless?
- What was the end result?

**Passage 1** – Genesis 39:1-23

**Passage 2** – Genesis 40: 1-23

**Passage 3** – Genesis 41: 1-40

Throughout Joseph's life, he experienced one setback after another. But each setback propelled him forward and we ultimately see God's plan come to fruition: He placed Joseph exactly where he needed to be to save not only his own family from starvation but all of Egypt and the surrounding areas.

And through it all, God was there. (Look up these scriptures: Gen. 39:2, Gen. 39:20-21, Gen. 39:23. )

### **Why do we lose our joy?**

- We lose our joy when we try too hard on our own.
- We lose our joy when life becomes work.
- We lose our joy when we see all of our inadequacies.

7. Do you agree with the statements above? Why or why not?

### **Living with joy**

- I can have joy by being content in my walk with God, knowing it is not about the destination but the journey.
- I can have joy when I look for my blessings instead of my curses.
- I can have joy because God does not just restore us; he retools us through every experience we go through, good or bad.

8. Do you agree with the statements above? Why or why not?

9. What's one challenge to having more joy in your life?

We can have joy despite our circumstances when we trust God to use those circumstances to bring us closer to Him and to make us better today than we were yesterday.

10. If you're currently going through a deployment, what's one way you can find joy in it? If you're currently not going through a deployment, what's one way you can find joy in whatever circumstances you're in today?



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1. What opportunities can you look for this week to have more joy in your life?

2. What do we need to remember when it comes to keeping our joy active and full?

# Session 9 – Worship Over Worry

**Worship and worry cannot co-exist. When we worry, we can't truly experience the heart of worship. And when we worship, we can't feel the fear of worry.**

There's plenty we can worry about. War, the economy, our personal financial situations. A loved one's health, a child's education, a friendship or relationship that seems to be on the verge of ending. A husband's absence, a husband's return. All of these things can keep us busy in the worry department if we let them.

But God doesn't want us to worry. Instead, He wants us to worship Him.

## Warm-Up 15 minutes



1. Random Fun: If you could be any animal for a day, what would you be and why?
2. What's your favorite kind of book to read (fiction, nonfiction, history, romance, mystery...)? What's the most recent book you've read you really enjoyed?
3. We're talking about worry this week. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being really often and 1 being none at all, how often do you worry on a weekly basis?

## Strength Training

60 minutes



Worship is a human response to what God does for us. It isn't about what we do for God; rather, it's reacting and responding to all of the wonderful things God does for us. It's giving Him thanks and giving Him the glory and the credit for it all.

Worry interferes with this response. When we let anxiety and uneasiness and fretting override everything else, it's hard to worship. Because worship is a response to what God does for us, and if we are worrying, then we aren't focused on what God is doing for us – we have forgotten.

## Core Test

Shanna could feel the anxiety rising in her chest. Her husband was in Iraq and her little boy sat quietly playing with some toys in the corner of her living room. Andy was a sweet little boy but he was almost 2 and was still not communicating much with her. He resisted listening to her, got frustrated and threw terrible temper tantrums and it was all Shanna could do some days not to just curl up in bed and cry the day away herself. She was already taking him to a speech therapist; tomorrow they would be going to see another doctor, this time to determine if there was something more serious happening to her precious son. Shanna believed in God but she couldn't help wonder where He was right now. Her friends told her not to worry but it was easy for them to say – it wasn't their child in trouble.

1. What are some of the things we worry about?
2. What advice would you give Shanna and her worry?
3. Read the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28 (NIV) –

<sup>28</sup> **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**

When we're burdened with something (or multiple things), we often start collecting those burdens or worries. In other words, like French fries, you can't just have one! Worries have a way of snowballing and before we know it, we're buried in them.

### **What Causes Worry**

When we worry, we're actively accepting that we lack confidence in God to handle what our concerns are.

Imagine sleeping in a large snowball. Yes, this thought might seem a bit impossible, but so is trying to sleep when worries are filling your mind. That's why Jesus wants us to take our worries to Him.

Look at what Matthew 6:26-32 says:

<sup>26</sup> **Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?** <sup>27</sup> **Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life<sup>a</sup>?**

<sup>28</sup> **“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

4. Is it harder to worry when we're seeking after God? Why?
5. Does it help to worry? Why or why not?

### **What is Worship?**

6. What do you think worship is?

Read Luke 4:8 –

**Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"**

The Greek word for worship in the verse above is *proskynō*, which means to bow down; essentially, "to serve."

Worship is not about what we can do for God, it's about what God has already done for us. It's our response to God's love (Exodus 4:31).

When we focus on God's love for us, His provision in times of need, His help in times of challenge, our worries dissipate. No, the problems don't necessarily go away, but our anxiety does. When we spend time in worship, thanking God for who He is and what He is doing in our lives, our confidence is restored because we are reminded of how special God is and what He means to us.

7. Read 1 Peter 5:7 –

**<sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**

How does the verse above encourage us to rid ourselves of our worries but also serve as a cue for our worship?

### **Ways to Worship**

Personal Worship -

- Spend time in God's Word
- Keep a praise and worship journal
- Read the Bible for enjoyment, not for a schedule
- Don't give up

Corporate Worship –

- With other believers
- Through music, Bible study, service to others

8. Discuss the ways that are listed above. What are some other ways we can worship God?
9. Is there anything difficult about personal or corporate worship? What might be some hindrances for people? How can these be overcome?
10. Read John 4:23-24 (The Message) –

<sup>23-24</sup> **“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly *themselves* before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”**

How do you think this verse applies to us and our worries when we bring them to God? Is it possible to worship and give God our worries? Do you believe God can take those worries away?



1. What does it mean to choose worship over worry?
2. Before you leave, write down a worry you have and write a short prayer to God. Worship Him as you give your worry over to Him. Reread this several times this week, or any time this worry comes up.

# Session 10 – Our Greatest Hope

**When we know Christ, we know hope.**

The world watched in horror as the country of Haiti experienced a life-shattering earthquake which officials have estimated left anywhere from 50,000 to 500,000 dead and millions more desperately seeking food, water and stable shelter. As groups from the United States and around the world quickly tried to come together to bring aid and supplies to the hurting people, others could only watch their television screens and feel helpless, unsure of what they could do. Hope, from the other side of the world, seemed very far away.

As military spouses, we can also feel hopeless. Saying goodbye to our husbands for long periods of time, not knowing what the military will ask of us next, or simply feeling the weight of the world is on our shoulders can all bring on feelings that there is nothing good to look forward to.

But our greatest hope is the one truth that is the basis for everything else we've talked about leading up to this week: the hope we have in Jesus Christ. He is our hope! He is what keeps us strong and keeps us moving. He brings us happiness, and he is the one who keeps us going when we're not so sure we can.

## Warm-Up

15 minutes



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1. For Fun: You win a million dollars! What do you spend it on?
  2. What's your greatest hope for yourself?
  3. What's your greatest hope for your marriage and/or family?

**Strength  
Training**  
60 minutes



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We've covered a lot in the last ten weeks as we've applied God's biblical truths to what it means to be God Strong. Now let's discuss the one truth that is the basis for all of the others. Hope. Hope in Christ. You cannot overcome fear or loneliness or hurt without hope. And hope is the natural basis for strength, for grace, for joy, for worship.

Our hope is Christ.

There are two ways to look at the word "hope."

Hope is a verb. When we hope for something, we look forward to it.

1. What are some things you "hope" will happen?

Hope is also a noun. Someone we put our expectations on. Jesus is our hope.

### **The Hope We Have in Christ**

There are four different hopes for you to review before we end this study. Please divide up in small groups and assign each hope to a group to read the respective section of scripture and answer the questions that follow. Then, come back together as a group to discuss.

### **The Hope of Promises Kept**

Read Luke 2:36-38 and the story of Anna.

2. What had Anna done during her lifetime?
3. What was the hope Christ gave to Anna, even as a baby?

### **The Hope of No More Suffering**

Read Mark 5:25-34 and the story of the woman with the blood disease.

4. What had the woman been waiting for?
5. What was the hope Christ gave to her?

### The Hope of New Beginnings

Read John 4:4-26 and the story of the woman at the well.

6. What was the woman searching for?
7. What was the hope Christ gave to her?

### The Hope of Eternity

Read John 20:1-18 and the story of Mary Magdalene.

8. What had Mary been looking for?
9. What was the hope Christ gave to her?

Read Hebrews 12:2-3 (The Message) –

Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's *there*, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

10. How does the hope we have in Christ make you GOD Strong?



1. This is the final week of our study! Share one thing you've learned during the 10 weeks we've been together.
2. Do you view strength differently now? Why or why not?

Thank you for participating in this GOD Strong Group Guide!  
I would love to hear about your group's experience.  
Please contact me at [sara@sarahorn.com](mailto:sara@sarahorn.com) with your thoughts and stories.