

God Is Still in Charge
Five Devotionals for When You Feel
Powerless in Tough Times
By Sharon Stults

Strategy One: When unrighteous anger bubbles up, ask God to turn mind, will and emotions back into righteous paths.

Scripture: *Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Anger gurgled up in me. Another round of closures and restrictions announced in a press conference. Others were angry because they wanted *more* closures. What prompts our anger is not as important as what many of us do with it. We brum on social media. We complain to those around us. We allow unrighteous anger to control our mind, will and emotions instead of the Holy Spirit.

After a couple of months of swinging between peace and crazy, I felt Holy Spirit say, “Enough. Why do you allow your soul to be controlled by anyone but me?” I realized that COVID caught me flat footed. I allowed the choices of authorities, for good or bad, to set my mood each day. I needed to get back to basics.

God reminded me of some old song lyrics. “Take my heart and form it. Take my mind, transform it. Take my will, conform it, to yours, to yours oh Lord.” That’s exactly what I needed him to do!

I asked God to wrap his hands around my heart and cause it to beat in sync with his.

I asked God to wash my mind with his Word and then read it so he could.

I asked God to realign my will with his purposes and design for this season.

Finally, I asked God to turn me away from re-hashing decisions I didn’t agree with and turn my thoughts towards the good and the beautiful instead. (Philippians 4:8-9) My job is to *choose* to redirect my soul towards those things and hand over the decision-makers and their shenanigans to God. It will always be our choice how we respond to frustrating situations. We will find ourselves repeatedly inside circumstances where we feel powerless. Holy Spirit is rooting for me and you to choose him and his ways during those times.

Prayer: God forgive me for sinful thoughts, actions and speech prompted by unrighteous anger. Heal my soul with the medicine of Philippians 4:8-9 and develop that thinking style as a discipline in me.

Strategy Two: Declaring Jesus' lordship and rule over positions of power and authority, when we believe they are being misused.

Verses: Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. Daniel 4:31-32.

We can easily fall into the mindset of focusing on trouble causers in our lives more than worshipping the One who grants them their power. Read the full story of Nebuchadnezzar to see the extent of his arrogance. Judging by the size of his ego and the wealth he accumulated, I'll bet his people were heavily taxed and neighboring nations were pillaged. Arrogance in authority is never pretty. Even with the warning dream and interpretation God sent, the king did not change his ways and acknowledge who was really Lord of the universe. And who was not. God allowed him time to repent and when that did not happen, he stepped in directly. The mighty King Nebuchadnezzar lived like an animal for seven years. Punishment for forgetting who placed him on his throne.

God places people in authority over us and he removes them. He does this on his timetable, not ours. When we forget that, we can become discouraged and angry about a poor leader. Instead of dwelling continuously on all the ways they are messing up our lives, we need to put our thoughts and words into agreement with heaven. Everything is under the rule and Lordship of Jesus. Your boss may sign your paychecks, but Jesus is Lord over that company, whether the owners know it or not. Politicians may make unjust laws and raise your taxes but only because God has given them that temporary authority. God owns every seat of power.

Frustrated under an authority? Start declaring the lordship of Jesus Christ over that position and area of influence. Understand God positions people but never relinquishes his divine authority. Ask him to change wicked people, bring them to repentance, or to remove them. Most days, I declare Jesus as Lord over my city, my state and my country, out loud. Then I specifically declare his lordship over places where God or current events direct my thoughts. Understand that many times, people in authority, especially God-haters, can be influenced by demonic spirits who've been welcomed into their lives and places of work. When believers speak out loud of the lordship and authority of Christ over a specific seat of power, demons are put on notice and environments change. God will deal with unjust or wicked authorities in his way and according to his schedule. While we wait, we can be pro-active in praying his kingdom and authority into difficult situations.

Prayer: God, you are Lord of Heaven and earth. I declare you as Lord over _____. Bring your kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy into that place of power. Change or remove anyone opposed to your kingdom. Please keep me in peace while you work on all that.

Strategy Three: Recognizing God repurposes the most painful, challenging circumstances into something useful and beautiful for his kingdom.

Verse: *And we know that God causes everything to work together [for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them, Romans 8:28.*

How many awful things did Joseph go through before he ascended to prime minister of Egypt? First, his brothers sold him into slavery. Second, his new Egyptian boss' wife lied about him and sent him to prison. Third, he helped others get out of that prison, but they forgot about him. Think of all those years of pain and disappointment for Joseph. That's our human perspective, right? Were those things terrible? Yes, but God's perspective about them is different. Each heartbreaking event, each treacherous person, God used as steppingstones to lead Joseph to his incredible destiny. The bonus is that he developed godly character in him on the journey. A character that didn't execute his brothers when he had the law on his side and the chance to do it.

When we struggle under the pressure of bad people in influential places, one of the best things we can do is flip our viewpoint from earth to heaven. We can say the same thing that Joseph said to his brothers, "What you meant for evil, God meant for good," when we understand the full meaning of Romans 8:28. In the Greek, the phrase "causes everything to work together for the good," describes circumstances as employees of God. As his employees, God then makes all circumstances work for him to produce good things in our lives. The circumstances are workers in God's "Good Things" factory.

From heaven's perspective, all those betrayals in Joseph's life were used by God like employees. God wanted Joseph in Egypt. He used the wickedness in the hearts of his brothers to get him over there. God did not *cause* this wickedness, but he knew their hearts were hardened by jealousy, so he decided to use that for his advantage. It didn't feel advantageous to Joseph in that horrible moment, though. Corrupt authorities messing in our lives doesn't feel good within the moment either. This is why we need to step outside the earthly view and ask God for his perspective. We also need to change our speech. During the last year I started saying things like this out loud when I was tempted to complain or brum about something.

"Satan, I know you're trying to discourage and anger me with this, but I know God is using this to accomplish great things in my life and my home," (or church, or state, or business or whatever).

"God, I know you'll bring good fruit out of this bad situation."

"God, I thank you that you are the boss of my circumstances."

Get the idea?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, fix my eyes and mind on you and not on my circumstances. Change my perspective so that I'm hunting for the good instead of rehearsing the bad. Sanctify my tongue so that I speak words that bring life and hope to my situation.

Strategy Four: Pray for the repentance and/or salvation of ungodly authorities as if your life depended on it, because it just might.

Verse: *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 1 Timothy 2:1-3 NIV.*

When your daily life is consistently affected by the decisions of an ungodly authority it's tempting to cast them in a one-dimensional villain's role. We forget they are an eternal, human soul, whom God loves, not just a cardboard cutout of their sinful choices. I get that temptation, though. My governor had bright pink ball caps made last year with the slogan, "Planned Parenthood Makes America Great Again." She has openly celebrated abortion rights publicly on numerous occasions. I confess that for a while, my only prayers about her were "God stop her or remove her." I didn't think about her eternal soul.

I'm writing this during the week of Passover and Easter. Christ's suffering and sacrifice is much on my mind. Recall how he prayed from the cross for his torturers, mockers and executioners. "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." I'm convinced that most wicked authorities are so deceived by Satan, they do not understand what they are doing at all. They don't understand they are often being directed by demon spirits. They don't understand there is a room in hell with their name on the door. No one in their right mind would knowingly choose all that. And that's the thing, they aren't in their right mind.

Anyone in authority over you making evil choices, is operating under a false paradigm. In their twisted thinking, they believe they are doing the right things for whatever causes and ideologies frame their belief system. This is why the wise God-follower will pray for their repentance and salvation. Wise people see the greater picture and they balance a desire for justice with concern for individual souls. This includes the souls of those under an ungodly leader. A poor leader can make life miserable for the folks under them.

Here's some suggestions of ways you can pray for unrighteous authorities:

Ask God to confound and confuse any of their plans that promote sin.

Ask God to send other on fire Christians into their inner circle, like Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar.

Ask God to send signs, wonders, dreams and visions that will open their eyes to the true state of their soul.

Ask God to turn up the hard ground in their hearts so they can receive the gospel.

Prayer: God forgive me for making people so one-dimensional in my thoughts and prayers sometimes. Help me to pray effectively for authorities in my life who are making poor decisions. Move your hand over their lives. Help me to remember that your love for them is as great as your love for me.

Strategy Five: When nothing makes sense, and much is going sideways, reaffirm absolute, unwavering trust in God through prayer and worship.

Verse: *The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him, Psalm 28:7 NIV.*

During the months of 2020 when my husband Ken, and I were housebound, due to Covid, we developed a habit of worshipping and praying together in the mornings. During normal times, our schedules don't allow this, and we see this as one of the good fruits God produced in a dark time. Our hearts were heavy with stories and prayer requests about failing small businesses, millions of unemployed workers and the troubles that were arising from the loneliness and isolation of the shutdowns. Depression, suicide and domestic abuse skyrocketed in my state.

Ken is the frontline pastor for our church's congregational needs, financially and emotionally. Requests for financial aid and counseling filled his days including his day off. He would say, "How can I take a day off when a mother doesn't know how she's going to feed her children." Hard to argue with that. Additionally, Ken experienced two knee surgeries and a shingles outbreak during that same time period. The pile on felt overwhelming at times. I believe our experience could be retold in many households with varying details, concerning 2020. My faith became a bit wobbly at times as all normal life rhythms and routines were tossed and not many things made sense anymore.

Starting our mornings with worship and prayer together prepared us for all the twists, turns and disappointments each day brought. It changed our environment. It declared to the spirit world that we didn't care if we could sort this out and make sense, we were still going to worship God loudly. And it changed us. It reminded our souls that circumstances were not in control of our lives, ever. God was and is always in control, no matter what.

Whatever is shaking your world right now, it's not shaking God. Whatever tyrant looms over your life, they are bush league compared to God's authority and power. Worship him now and remind your soul of that.

Prayer: God, you are great and mighty in the middle of stormy, confusing, frustrating circumstances. You are unchanging, unmovable, and unstoppable in your purposes and plans. Help me to spend a lot less time trying to figure things out and much more time worshipping you.