

Strength - Episode 1

Alison Mezger: [00:00:00] Hi friends. Welcome back to the women's cast. It's been a little while and we're so glad to be with you again. My name is Alison Mezger. I serve as the central women's ministry director here at the Austin Stone. I know it's July and it's approximately actually not approximately anymore, almost legitimately 115 degrees outside, but I gotta be honest.

Alison Mezger: It kind of feels like Christmas to me and the rest of the team, because we finally get to invite you into a conversation that we've been having for a while. And one that we are excited to have with you over the course of the next year. But before I say anymore, you need to know who I have the pleasure of chatting with today.

Alison Mezger: So guys, why don't you introduce yourselves, Amanda?

Amanda Brown: I'm Amanda Brown and I serve at our St. John congregation as our equipping and women's director,

Alison Mezger: Ms. Persia. Hello,

Purshia Gambles: I am Purshia gambles, and I currently serve at our south [00:01:00] congregation as the groups. And women's

Alison Mezger: direct. The ladies listening may not know this, but we've recorded a few of these little podcasts as a team.

Alison Mezger: We've typically done it in kind of a makeshift studio at our office. Um, but over the course of the summer, we moved out of that office or in temporary office space actually at St. John. So Amanda, thank you. And your team for lending us. Sure. You're a facility, uh, week to week, but something interesting happened this week and the AC went.

Alison Mezger: and the part of the building that has that studio mm-hmm . So we are in kind of the makeshift from the makeshift, from the makeshift, which happens to be my closet. it's lovely. How does it, how does it feel? It feels

Amanda Brown: cool. There's air condition here. um, I

Purshia Gambles: mean, the lighting is great. Yeah. and I see so many wardrobes that I've seen over the last two years, and it's just, it's really giving you a glimpse and the mm-hmm

Purshia Gambles: Scenes of Allison Metsker I love it. Mm-hmm

Alison Mezger: that's great. We've got camping chairs. um, some mics, we're all kind of shoved in here for those of you that are concerned at home.

[00:02:00] I do have a generously sized closet, so we're not, we're not in like three square feet, but still we're in my closet. Mm-hmm um, it feels very like podcast legit,

Amanda Brown: you know?

Amanda Brown: True. My, my head is actually resting on a, what do we call these clothing? Rods?

Alison Mezger: Yeah, clothes, rods. You, you said when you sat down that it felt scrap. Like over the course of the past few years. That's a really good word to describe how women's ministry has operated sometimes. So this feels fitting well.

Alison Mezger: I've never been so glad to sit with friends in my closet. Indeed. I'm glad you guys are here. Okay. Before we get into the real purpose of why we are sitting down today, I have a silly question for you. I want to know if you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?

Purshia Gambles: I think. It may not be a superpower, but some someone I know really well used to ask the question, what is the one thing?

Purshia Gambles: What is the one strength that God didn't give you to like, keep you humble? And mine is like the ability. To sing really [00:03:00] well. Hmm. Like if I, if I was able to like really sing really well, no, I I'd be unstoppable. like, I just feel like I there's nothing I can't do. Yeah. there you go. Like, oh my gosh. Is that Mariah?

Purshia Gambles: Carrie? No, it's per year. Oh my gosh. Yeah. That's

Alison Mezger: how I, that singing is your superpower. That's the one. That's it. Okay. All change the world through song. Yeah. .

Amanda Brown: That's the only thing

Alison Mezger: you lack. The only thing she's like flying. No big deal. Invisibility.

Purshia Gambles: That's ridiculous. Be a songbird. That's it.

Alison Mezger: That's it. Why does the cage bird sing right there?

Alison Mezger: Right there. Okay. Amanda, I don't know how you're gonna top see me. She stole the only good one. Oh,

Amanda Brown: okay. I, I genuinely think this one is a superpower to be able to. Any

Alison Mezger: language mm-hmm oh, nice. Polyglot. Is that a real word? That's what it's called. Oh my gosh. Polyglot. See, you do

Amanda Brown: lack hardly anything.

Alison Mezger: dictionary.[00:04:00]

Alison Mezger: Indeed. That's great song. Glot and poly, no songbird and polyglot. That's right. If we need call signs right there. Those are them. There we go. That's great. Cool. Mine might be. I like that. Just being able to go somewhere instantaneously and be there. Mm-hmm uh, teleportation. That would be the word. Yes. I like that one.

Alison Mezger: I claim that one right there. That was good.

Purshia Gambles: We'd be able to do some great things for three of us. and it would sound great. That's right. In every language. Yeah, it would get there really quickly. Yeah.

Alison Mezger: That's awesome. I love incredible. Well, as silly as it is to talk about, there is a little bit more to that question.

Alison Mezger: This year is a ministry. We're gonna be talking a lot about strength. The gospel message is simple, but it's also so rich and multifaceted that we are gonna spend our whole lives, trying to understand it and believe it and live it out. So each year is a ministry. We pick a. That helps us focus on one aspect of the gospel or a way of understanding Jesus.

Alison Mezger: This helps us focus our [00:05:00] discipleship efforts for that season. Last year, we unpacked our hope in Jesus. And this year we're gonna look at our strength in Jesus. What I love about. Where we're headed and really where we've come from is that the answer to this question? What makes us strong? Just might surprise you?

Alison Mezger: I think it, the more it unfolds as we talk about it and study it, it surprises me. And I think it will certainly encourage you. But before we jump into talking about strength, I don't wanna miss a quick opportunity to look back. So I wanna hear from each of you coming out of this year, where as a ministry, we focused on the hope we find in Jesus.

Alison Mezger: What was your biggest personal takeaway from thinking about that from processing that and all the different ways and environments that we did that last year, I

Purshia Gambles: would say for me, 20, 20, 22, I, this year I hit five years in vocational ministry. Mm. Yeah. And. While I do not recommend going through that in the midst of a pandemic.

Purshia Gambles: It definitely taught me a lot about human resilience [00:06:00] in, in the wake of uncertain circumstances and hardship and death and loss and, you know, personal and professional transitions and things like that. It, it just taught me a lot about people. It was, it was literally like an active C. For two years. Yeah.

Purshia Gambles: And I can't say that I walked away unscathed, but I definitely walked away, uh, thankful for the ways that God keeps his people.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. So double click on that, just so our women kind of connect what you're saying. How does that, how does that relate to the hope ultimately in Jesus when, because it probably won't be the last time.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. That there's a really rough, you know, stretch of, of months or years for you personally and professionally. I

Purshia Gambles: mean the biggest, the biggest thing that I learned about God during that during this time, I wouldn't even say that time, but this time is that even though my life can be, my emotions can be ups and downs and lefts and rights and things like that.

Purshia Gambles: God really [00:07:00] does remain constant, you know, like his promises and things like that. Whenever I'm feeling my lowest or whenever circumstances feel like they're, they're at their lowest. It's not like Roman's eight, just like disappears outta the Bible. Mm. You know what I'm saying? It's, it's always there. Yeah.

Purshia Gambles: Concretely. And, and for that, I am so grateful. Yeah. Because. I mean, we've literally experienced things being ripped from us, you know, in, in unimaginable proportions, you know? And so that makes me just feel so comforted to know that though, my world may change though. My me, myself may change a lot. For good or bad.

Purshia Gambles: I, I, I have a, a heavenly father that doesn't. Mm.

Alison Mezger: Yeah, that's good. And, and the assurance that we get, the hope that we have in him, we probably don't see, we don't have the opportunity to see in the same way without those kinds of seasons. Indeed. All those kinds of years. Indeed. So that's great. Persia.

Alison Mezger: Thanks. [00:08:00] Good.

Amanda Brown: I think for me, I, this year has been one of the most. Revealing years of that. I can remember at least in my life of how much I put hope in people's approval of me. Mm-hmm I feel like this year has been marked with a few experiences of me disappointing people or letting people down, or just not meeting expectations and.

Amanda Brown: and it has been, it's been really like crippling to me and I've, I've seen it like on just on full display more than I think I have in my life. It's shown me for sure that my flesh does not want to put my ultimate hope in Jesus. Yeah. Like I, I do feel like my flesh wants to find hope in. What people think [00:09:00] and feel about me.

Amanda Brown: And that's been, it's been super difficult. I've seen growth, but it's been really

Alison Mezger: hard. Yeah. I think Amanda, what you, part of what you described is I think where a lot of us feel in the sense that coming out of a season where. Part of what kind of shores up our hope in Jesus is seeing how often our flesh is gonna fail us in that and how much we actually need Jesus that it's ultimately about his grip on us.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. Right. And how much we need that. I think that has played into in a lot of ways kind of thinking about, well, if we are women who are, are growing in our, uh, groundedness. Right. In, in, and, and faith in ultimately placing our hope in Jesus. And that's something we have to do kind of again and again and again.

Alison Mezger: And that's what we've kind of been talking about this past year. What's the result of that for us. And I couldn't shake this picture of if hope is to some degree as kind of lifting [00:10:00] our gaze. Right to him, then there's a, there's a hopeful outcome of that, which is that we're actually able to stand taller and walk stronger, like coming from that.

Alison Mezger: So like hope is this kind of starting place of like, okay, I know what is secured in him and in my future. So what does that do in me? What does that produce in me now? And it does a number of things, but I think strength felt like a natural thing that kind of came out of that and a natural. Aspect of the gospel and of Jesus, his character, and of the thing that we want to see in our lives.

Alison Mezger: But before we get into all that good stuff, I think it's really helpful for us to go wait. Okay. How do I even process some of this before I go to what scripture says, like, what do I actually like think and feel right? What's the world telling me what's my own flesh telling me mm-hmm . So at baseline, when you kind of hear the word strength, what's the first thing that comes to mind.

Alison Mezger: It can be silly. It can be serious. When you hear strength, what is it?

Amanda Brown: I think for me, I have such a like physical [00:11:00] picture that comes, comes to mind. Yeah. Like a, a toned body, you know, some muscles perhaps. Yeah. I think physically like that's, that is what comes first to mind. When I think beyond the, the physicality of, of strength.

Amanda Brown: I think what I imagine is someone. Who is strong, does not feel wishy, washy and, um, emotional.

Alison Mezger: Hmm. Yeah. Okay. That's good. I think some of your, uh, personal athleticism and marathoning is playing into that. Some which is really fun. Yeah. That's that's great. What about you Persia?

Purshia Gambles: Uh, I , it's funny, tentative of my answer to the, the question before this, like I think of certain songs, honestly, like I think of.

Purshia Gambles: My shot. from the song, my shot from the Hamilton yeah. Soundtrack, uh, because just the way that he's [00:12:00] like, I'm not throwing away my shot, you know, it, it, it makes me feel like when I listen to him, I'm like, yeah, I could, I could overthrow the British monarchy, easy, like sure. You know, so that's my, my like, lighthearted, but then serious.

Purshia Gambles: I think of my mom. like, my mom has been through a lot of things in her life. Mm-hmm , you know, she's, she's persevered through a lot of adversity and it, and it just makes me believe in the ability to not allow hardship to harden you.

Alison Mezger: That's beautiful. That's really good. So I'm hearing some things from both of you.

Alison Mezger: One is that one of the things that might inform how we think about strength is really seeing something, whether you know, a physical representation of that, whether it's in human form or, you know, the strength of something, even in, in nature, like, you know, a hurricane or something like that is like visibly strong.

Alison Mezger: But then also we think about people in our lives who, who seem to somehow. Yeah, kind of encapsulate that for us, your mom being a good example. Perge I do feel like I have to point [00:13:00] out that if you had the gift of being that songbird, you could have actually sang that. I know that's was really

Amanda Brown: hoping you would give us a little for

Purshia Gambles: such a time as this that's right?

Purshia Gambles: Yeah. We're so

Alison Mezger: good. The Lord didn't give it. That's so close. So if that's where you're each kind of starting from, just like the first thing that comes to mind, how does that play into, is it similar or different? What do you think? What are some of the messages that culture tells us about what strength is and how do you think that impacts your own definition or understanding of it?

Alison Mezger: If

Purshia Gambles: I'm, if I'm honest, I think. I immediately think of the, the like strong black woman trope for those who don't know me, I'm I am black, but I think there's this expectation, this cultural expectation for black women to be strong, no matter what, oftentimes to the detriment of their own health, of their own margin of their own.

Purshia Gambles: Limits like good God lit God given limits. And [00:14:00] I've definitely felt the pressure of that myself. One of the freeing things is just that I I've over time come to terms with that expectation. So I know how to deal with it better than I did in previous seasons of my life.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. But that's something that.

Alison Mezger: Our culture is specifically telling you as a black woman. Hey, this is what strength like should look like in your life. Oh yeah. And the expectation of you. Yeah, indeed. That's helpful. Thanks for sharing that Persia. Mm-hmm Amanda be about you?

Amanda Brown: When I think about what culture tells me about what strength looks like, I think of like, This message of, we don't need, I'm not, I'm not trying to over spiritualize this, but we don't need a savior.

Amanda Brown: Mm. Like we, we should, we can progress. We can be successful. We should be able to progress or be successful without the help of people, community, family, those types of things. I think. The church has a different [00:15:00] message from the Bible. But my, I think the message that I've heard from my family has felt more culture driven, and that has been hard for me to navigate from knowing what I do actually believe about being in community and yet feeling like I'm hearing messages from people that are very important for me, that feel different has been tough.

Alison Mezger: yeah. Mm-hmm yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think with that's a good point, just with a lot of things about yeah. What our faith, how it sets, sets us apart. But this is definitely one where we are likely going to find ourselves at odds. Yeah. With what the culture says, whether that's like Western America, whether that's something, you know, Austin, whether that's even something kind of pervasive in the church.

Alison Mezger: Mm-hmm right. Mm-hmm , there are all sorts of, of those different kind of paradigms that could be at. So flip the idea of talking about strength on its head. And we, we can't ignore the idea of like, what does weakness look like? [00:16:00] Right. And so I think a lot of what I know in my

mind, when I think about. What strength is or how I envision wanting to be strong.

Alison Mezger: I have to start with kind of the opposite of what is it, what actually makes me feel weak. Like, what am I trying to counteract in my own weakness? So I'd love for you guys to just give us a glimpse into, you know, what personally makes you feel weak. and, and what is your tendency when that happens? Right.

Alison Mezger: So we're, we're all gonna feel that there's something uncomfortable about feeling weak. And so we run to fill in the blank. Mm-hmm um, and there's a myriad ways that that can look for people, but give us some, give us some examples from your life of what makes you feel weak and what weak and what you might run to from that.

Purshia Gambles: Um, the biggest thing that makes me feel weak is probably when I don't know something mm-hmm, , I'm a pretty, uh, learned person. And I, I think one of my strengths is the ability to, [00:17:00] to take in information and keep it, you know, sometimes useful sometimes not a lot of times, not , but, um, but when I really just like come to a point of like intellectual ineptitude, where, where I just.

Purshia Gambles: I don't know mm-hmm that, that makes me feel unstable. It makes me feel, uh, stupid. Mm-hmm it makes me feel vulnerable in a way that I, my flesh, like man said, like my flesh doesn't enjoy mm-hmm and so when not, you know, checked by community or, or submission to the holy spirit. That can just lead me to, to try and take control of those types of situations and just, you know, pull myself up by my bootstraps and try and learn what I can and like grapple for information in a way that is more control and comfort driven than spirit.

Purshia Gambles: Driven mm-hmm,

Alison Mezger: probably no surprise if we actually kind of think about it, but the weakness you just talked about is very directly related to a strength of yours. Mm-hmm [00:18:00] right. Mm-hmm which I think if we kind of really were each to dig in here, there's probably, that's interesting. That probably happens a lot, which is there's a shadow side.

Alison Mezger: Yeah, indeed. And, and so when there's an aspect of an area that I typically feel strong in Hm. And when there is a felt deficit in that it's way more jarring than me being confronted with something that I know that I can't

do. Yeah. Or that I know that I'm not good at, like that's not unsettling in the same way that like a strength kind of being like torn down a little bit.

Alison Mezger: Can do I feel, I feel the same way. Mm-hmm yeah. Mean

Amanda Brown: what you that's that's so that's so helpful. Even as I'm processing. Cuz when you said Persia. You feel weak when you don't know something? Right. When I was thinking about this question, it was more, I feel weak when I can't do something. Mm. So I mean, it, it, there's lots of those things, but you're right.

Amanda Brown: That there are some things that I resigned to. Like, I'm just not built that way. And I don't, I, I don't [00:19:00] get hung up about those things, but there are, but there are things that I do feel like if I'm naturally. Shown a history or a trajectory of strength in an area. And suddenly I can't do it. Then I feel maybe that's where that rub is more for me.

Amanda Brown: And so what I run to, I think when I have those moments is, is achieving. Like I, well, I will say, I think there are times that. if, if I can't do it, I, I don't wanna touch it. Mm. Yeah. Nope. Not gonna, not even gonna mess with that. If I can't be strong here, I'm not even gonna dabble in it. Mm-hmm or on the other hand, I can, so maybe it's an extreme it's either that, or I will, you know, work myself to the ground to be good at something.

Amanda Brown: Yeah. Or to produce something achieve at something.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. So, I mean, in a similar way, knowing you, because you are such a doer. There's a same, same kind of connection. Right, right. That Persia was talking about, [00:20:00] which that's almost directly connected to some of your strengths. Yeah. And so then we either avoid or kind of double down.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. Right. Where it's like, I am, I refuse to, to let this be a weakness. And so in my control, comfort, achieving, like there's a lot of idolatry that plays into that and it's like, That's good. Yeah. Yeah. I will make myself crazy and everyone around me. Yeah. in order to not feel weak in this way. Yeah. Yeah.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. That's good. That's good. Um, so we, we've kind of teased this a little bit, but ultimately like how do you see this breakdown in your lives? Like when, when that feeling of, okay, I'm not, I'm not strong here. I

don't, or I'm, I don't feel strong just generally. Right. I feel I'm feeling my weakness and right.

Alison Mezger: And we can understand that in a lot of ways it can just be our, it could be physical frailty. Mm-hmm it could be just our, our, you know, confronted with our mortality. Yeah. It can be just our, our general, um, lack of like, none of us can. all the [00:21:00] things or know all the things and be all the things to people in our lives.

Alison Mezger: So at some point we will reach whatever those limits are, right. Whatever those limits of, of up against the, the gifts and circumstances that God has given us. Mm-hmm . And so thinking about what our flesh does, which you guys have just outlined for us. So like vulnerably, you know what, which is we, we, we run from it, we double down on it.

Alison Mezger: Where, where does that leave? You?

Amanda Brown: well, I think, I mean, I think you kind of, you, you hit it right there. Like we're, we will always be in that spot. Right. Because it's only an illusion for us to think that the only thing we're lacking is a singing voice. Mm-hmm right. Mm-hmm like, we're always going to be lacking on this side of eternity.

Amanda Brown: Mm-hmm and so we'll always be in this, this spot and any time that we're, we're not in that spot. It's only just that an [00:22:00] illusion that, and, or maybe like a self ation of, of what reality is, I think the wanting and, and that lacking is what our souls need. Right? Yeah. That's good. Um,

Alison Mezger: Yeah, that that's the like maybe neutral playing ground we need to have, or even in a negative way, like before we can really look at totally.

Alison Mezger: Yeah. The, the kind of like gospel answer to this. Yeah. Right. Persia. Anything to add on

Purshia Gambles: that? One of the questions. The in this is like, how is it working out for you when these things break down? Yeah, I would answer poorly, poorly. That's

Alison Mezger: right. Um, I, and yet I will keep doing them. Yes.

Purshia Gambles: I will continue this path.

Purshia Gambles: I, what comes to my mind is like someone, someone one time said, uh, just because I can carry it. Whatever the burden or the, the struggle or the, the hurdle is [00:23:00] just because I can get through it just because I can carry it doesn't mean it's not heavy and doesn't mean I don't need help. Mm. And so I think there's a.

Purshia Gambles: There's an isolating proponent to trying to carry things in your own strength that I, I don't think we, as humans are meant to function with. That's why we need food. That's why we need water. That's why we need to go to the bathroom. That's why, you know, like we have all these needs of outside sources to keep ourselves going because we're, we're, we're created to be dependent.

Purshia Gambles: Mm-hmm that's good.

Alison Mezger: Well, you've teed us up. Well, to not exactly answer the question, but what I hope is that ladies we're gonna essentially take a break and record the second part of this podcast with a couple other crowds from our team. And it's in that point that we'll get to talk really more specifically about what does the gospel have to say about all this mm-hmm um, so we're intentionally leaving you hanging.

Alison Mezger: We know that we're doing that we haven't really given you [00:24:00] a great definition of what is biblical strength. Mm-hmm like, what does that even look like? What should that look like in the life of a believer? And that is something that we're gonna be unpacking, not, we can't do that fully in, in one little podcast episode, but that's something that we're gonna be talking about really over the course of the next year and, and our hope.

Alison Mezger: And our goal is always to let the scriptures inform that mm-hmm . So you're gonna see this theme run through our study of second Corinthians this fall. If, if you're familiar with some of the most kind of standalone, the verses that get put on coffee, mugs and pillows, a lot of them about strength. Uh, those are all in second Corinthians.

Alison Mezger: So there's a lot in that. In that letter to inform our understanding of this. And then in the spring, we're gonna study the narrative of Joshua and the old Testament, which man, we just got finished working on some of that. And it really is, uh, an overwhelming. An awesome story of God being strong for his people and faithful to his people when they are not.

Alison Mezger: So I'm [00:25:00] encouraged to see how our understanding of this facet of the gospel is gonna play out over the next year and in some other environments as well. So one encouraged ladies to be looking out for signups in particular for second Corinthians. Since we are kind of leaving you hanging at least a couple of days before we wrap this conversation up, I would love, you know, Persia kind of picked out the, the final question and I think it's a good one.

Alison Mezger: Um, kind of, how is this working for you? Um, that actually comes from a mentor of mine who years ago would tell stories of being on airplane. She traveled a lot for work and she would sit with people and get their story. And regardless of what they kind of had going on in their life, she would just say, how's that working out for you?

Alison Mezger: so good. And it was a way to, in a really like gentle and gracious way, kind of operate out of the truth that outside of the gospel, like things don't work. Certainly the gospel doesn't promise us in easy life mm-hmm, but it, it does meet all of our like ultimate needs. And [00:26:00] it was, it was her way of kind of getting the person she was sitting next to, to process.

Alison Mezger: What are the things they clinging to. And how's that working out for them. And most of the time, their answer was just like you said, Persia, not very well. Yeah. Um, and then she had an opportunity to, to minister to them in that moment. And honestly, that's the question that we all want to be asking of ourselves.

Alison Mezger: So when I honestly sit back and think about what makes me feel strong, what makes me feel weak? Um, what am I cling to, to define those things in my own life? How is that working out for me? Okay, guys. Thank you so much for joining me in my closet. pleasure. What a pleasure truly it is. never had so much fun with friends in my closet.

Alison Mezger: That's a true statement, really thankful for both of you guys and, uh, look forward to doing lots of ministry with you guys this year. Um, ladies stay tuned for kind of the part two of this conversation. In just a couple of days.[00:27:00]