

Weakness: Leading Through Weakness

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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I. Review

a. We declare our dependence when we acknowledge our weakness.
(Ps. 40:13-17)

*Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me!
O Lord, make haste to help me!*

—Psalm 40:13

*As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!*

—Psalm 40:17

b. A leader is anyone who influences another person toward a specific goal. (Acts 18:1-3; 18-28)

*...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of
whom I am the foremost.*

—1 Timothy 1:15b

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made
perfect in weakness.”*

—2 Corinthians 12:9a

II. The Paradox of Weakness (2 Corinthians 12:1-10)

*Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to
these super-apostles.*

—2 Corinthians 11:5

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

—2 Corinthians 11:24-27

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

—2 Corinthians 11:30

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

—2 Corinthians 12:1

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. 3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—6 though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.

—2 Corinthians 12:2-6

a. We tend to highlight our strengths and disguise our weaknesses.
(12:1-6; 11:16-31)

...so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.

—2 Corinthians 12:6b

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

—2 Corinthians 12:7

b. Deep spiritual experiences have the potential to produce dangerous spiritual pride. (12:7)

But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction.

—2 Chronicles 26:16

c. Our greatest hardships might be some of God's greatest blessings. (12:7-10; 1:8-9)

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

—2 Corinthians 12:8-9a

...Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

—2 Corinthians 12:9b

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

—2 Corinthians 12:10

...when I am weak, then I am strong.

—2 Corinthians 12:10c

"And when the Lord your God brings you into the land

that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, 11and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, 12then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt...

—Deuteronomy 6:10-12

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

—2 Corinthians 1:8-9

III. The power of the Gospel is rooted in the weakness of the cross. (Galatians 6:14)

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...

—Galatians 6:14a

Study Questions

1. When we interview for a job, we are often asked about our strengths and weaknesses. Most of us like talking about areas we're strong; however, not many of us like to talk about the areas we're weak. Why is this the case? In other words, why do we tend to highlight our strengths while disguising our weaknesses? What fears might we be trying to navigate by doing this? Explain.

2. In 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10, Paul isn't bashful about his weaknesses; in fact, he's quick to point them out. Spend some time as a group reading these verses. Discuss how Paul viewed his weaknesses (i.e. struggles, hardships, etc.) compared to how most of the world views their own. Talk about how Paul's perspective (12:10)

challenges you when it comes to your own personal weaknesses.

3. In this week's passage, Paul addresses his thorn in the flesh. From the text, discuss God's purpose of this thorn. (See 12:7-9). Is there anything about this that doesn't sit well with your soul? If so, explain. Think about your own life. Are there any accomplishments, talents, or successes that tempt you to grow prideful? Share these with your group. Also consider any potential thorn(s) God has given to you. Talk about how God has used this thorn in your life to keep you grounded (i.e. humble).

4. Spend some time praying for one another. Share any specific struggle you're having that is causing you to run to God. Talk about the opportunity this particular struggle might offer you to trust God more deeply. Also, discuss any of the ways you've seen God show up during this season? Encourage one another as you pray for God's grace to work through each member this week.