

Strength Made Perfect In Weakness

Elder Ricardo "Rick" Pina
Faith Outreach Christian Life Center
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Introduction:

- ❖ Bishop Peoples has been teaching us about identifying and overcoming our areas of weakness.
- ❖ If we don't handle our weaknesses, then they will eventually handle us!
- ❖ **We can never fully develop into the mature believers God desires for us to be, if we fail to acknowledge, expose, and deal with our weaknesses.**
- ❖ Webster's definitions
 1. **Weakness:** The quality or state of being weak; a fault; a defect.
 2. **Weak:** Lacking strength; feeble; debilitated.
 3. **Defect:** An imperfection; something lacking for completeness.

Foundational Scripture: (2nd Corinthians 12:7-10 NASB) **Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!**

Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- ❖ **What do we know about Paul?**
 - He wrote have the New Testament.
 - He had a great conversion experience.
 - He suffered greatly for the furtherance of the Gospel.
 - He was a mighty man of God.
 - **But did Paul have weaknesses?**
 - **Did God had to deal with Paul in his area of weakness?**
 - What can we learn about Paul and his weakness?

(v.7) Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself!

- ❖ **Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations:** This is a reference to verses 1-6.
 - In these verses Paul talks about his awesome experience with God.
 - He was caught up into the 3rd heaven.
 - He saw things humans don't normally get to see.
 - He heard things humans don't normally get to hear.
 - It was a wonderful experience with God.
- ❖ **For this reason, to keep me from exalting myself:**
 - **However, this experience exposed an area of weakness for Paul - PRIDE!**
 - **Paul was vulnerable to pride and this experience exposed his vulnerability.**
 - It was probably hard for Paul to see others dealing with lowly earthly affairs, after experiencing such a powerful move of God.
 - God had exalted Paul into the 3rd heaven, but the experienced open Paul up to the reality of him exalting himself.
 - **Pride has been called the silent killer of the church.**

- Pride is not as easily identifiable to man, but it is clearly identifiable to God.
- **Pride is a weakness, because it exalts one's ability over God's ability.**
- Pride is putting yourself above God.
- Paul must have showed God that he was capable of exalting himself.

- ❖ **There was given me a thorn in the flesh:**
 - God permitted something to be given to Paul that buffeted his flesh.
 - God can both prevent and permit. This is plainly seen in the story of Job and the hedge that God had around Job. Satan could not penetrate the hedge. God can prevent satan from touching us, but He will pull back His protection if it serves a purpose.
 - In this case it was serving a purpose – keeping His servant from operating in Pride and self exaltation.
 - The thorn was permitted to prevent undue exaltation, hence must have been humiliating – promoting humility.

- ❖ **A messenger of Satan to torment me-- to keep me from exalting myself:** Many have speculated on what the thorn was. Some say it was a physical illness. Some say it was poor eyesight. But I say what the Bible says; it was a messenger from satan that was permitted to bother Paul and keep him from exalting himself.
 - **This tells me that God will go to great lengths to help us develop in our areas of weaknesses.**
 - If we are weak in the area of patience, then He will permit the very people that we cannot stand to have their way in our lives. Why? To develop us in our area of weakness.
 - If we are weak in the area of love, then He will permit the very people that we say are “hard to love” to continually come around us. Why? To develop us in our area of weakness.
 - **The point is that if we can do it, then we should do it; but if we say we are weak in an area then God will help us. However, God can't help us in that area if the circumstances that generate our weakness are not exposed to us.**
 - So God will allow the circumstances that expose our weakness to be exposed to us, continually, until we are developed – BY HIM – in that area.
 - The Greek connotation here expresses the present, as well as the past, time. This was something that the messenger of satan was doing and he had been doing for quite some time. Why? Because Paul was not yet fully developed in this area.
 - **He knew why it was happening and he was not upset about it.**
 - **He knew that he needed this process to take place in his life if he was to be complete.**
 - He was willing to deal with the messenger of satan, if it would help him deal with his weakness.

(v.8) Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

- ❖ God had answered Paul's prayer on numerous occasions.
- ❖ Paul went on four (4) missionary journeys.
- ❖ He preached the Gospel everywhere he went.
- ❖ He laid hands, he ministered, he was used of God mightily.
- ❖ Paul was undoubtedly a Man of God.
- ❖ But Paul sincerely petitioned the Lord 3 times for Him to remove the messenger of satan – the thorn in the flesh!
- ❖ But God refused to answer Paul's prayer.

- ❖ **When you make a demand on God for something that you are not supposed to have - in this case it was relief from the messenger of satan - then God is not obligated to provide!**
 - God is more concerned with your divine development than your temporary pleasure.
 - God could have answered Paul's request, but God knew that Paul's assignment was great in the earth.
 - If Paul was allowed to delve into sin, then he might have missed the completion of his purpose.
 - Paul was able to say, **"I have fought a good fight, I have finished [my] course, I have kept the faith;"** only because God allowed him to endure the process of perfecting his area of weakness.

(v.9) And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

- ❖ God's answer for Paul was, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."**
 - God's grace = His ability; His empowerment.
 - Instead of relieving Paul of the thorn, He gave him the ability to deal with it.
 - In other words, Paul did not receive relief, but he did receive empowerment (grace).
 - Once again, why did God not just remove the thorn? It was there because of a weakness that Paul that was being dealt with.
- ❖ **For power is perfected in weakness:**
 - God will not compete with you.
 - If you are actively operating under your power, then you are NOT using His.
 - **3 Key Phases:**
 - **In the World:**
 1. **Totally Dependent:** When we are born we are totally dependent on our parents for everything. We can do nothing on our own.
 2. **Co-Dependency:** As we grow up we graduate to the point where we can make SOME decisions on our own. Our parents are still involved, but we take charge of SOME areas of our lives.
 3. **Totally Independent:** For the most part, by this stage in our lives we have taken charge of our lives and we make our own decisions and reap our own harvests from the decisions we choose to make.
 - **In the Kingdom of God**
 1. **Totally Independent:** We mostly come to God as independent individuals. We are running our own lives when we encounter God.
 2. **Totally Dependent:** We are taught that we should no longer depend on ourselves, on our OLD system of beliefs, traits, and worldly ideas, and we learn - AS BABES - to be totally dependent on God.
 3. **Co-Dependency:** There comes a point where - if we mature enough - God expects us to make SOME decisions on our own.

Why? Because by this point our desires are desires that are pleasing to Him.

- **The goal should be Co-Dependency with God, but God cannot trust you with Co-Dependency when you are full of weaknesses!**
- **(John 15:7 NASB) If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**
- This is the goal.
- This is why God wants us to be mature.
- The word “perfected” here means mature.
- **God deals with mature children (Sons) differently than immature ones (children).**
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- ❖ **Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.**
 - This is an awesome statement.
 - Paul was saying that he would much rather IDENTIFY, EXPOSE, and DEAL WITH his weaknesses, then to act like he doesn't have any.
 - Paul teaches us that IF we are willing to deal with our weaknesses, the power of Christ is able to dwell in us.
 - In other words, if we are able to deal with our weaknesses, we can mature in Christ.
 - **What is the other option?**
 - **(James 1:23,24 NASB) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.**
 - **The mirror does not generate weaknesses, but it does help you identify them.**
 - Once the weakness is identified, it should be dealt with.
 - If not dealt with, then you are a hearer and not a doer of the Word.
 - If dealt with, you will COOPERATE with God to eliminate the weaknesses in your life.
 - **You will graduate from Dependency of God to Co-Dependency WITH GOD!**
 - **So how will the true power of Christ dwell IN US, in the fullness? By enduring the process of identifying and eliminating our weaknesses!**

(v.10) Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- ❖ The Greek word here for “content” is also translated “Pleasure.”
 - **This word literally means:**
 - As it seems good to one
 - To think it good
 - To do willingly
- ❖ This is what I used to call “**The Pleasure IN the Pain.**”
- ❖ Now I call it “**The Pleasure IN the Process!**”
- ❖ I am not taking pleasure in the pain per say, but I am taking pleasure in the process that is taking place that is maturing me!
- ❖ Paul could take pleasure in the fact that the process he was enduring was helping to fully develop him.
- ❖ Paul welcomed any challenges that came FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST!

- There is a big difference between reaping what you have sown and enduring hardship for Christ's sake.
- Paul welcomed the challenges, the insults, the distresses, the persecutions, and the difficulties – FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!
- He knew that if he was enduring these things for Christ's sake, that they would eventually WORK for HIS GOOD!

In Conclusion: What can we learn from Paul?

1. **Evaluate.** Whenever we encounter challenges we need to evaluate the cause. Hint: Never blame God!

- a. Is this happening because of a negative seed that I have sown? If so, quickly repent and ask God to cancel out that harvest.
- b. Is this happening because I have a weakness that opened the door to it? If so, identify the weakness and embrace the process.

2. **Experience.** Be willing to experience the circumstances that will enable you to overcome the weakness.

- a. Thank God for opportunity to deal with the weakness.
- b. See it as a good thing.
- c. Approach it as an attempt from satan that will FAIL!

3. **Invoke.** Invoke God's ability (His strength) to be made perfect in your weakness.

- a. Expose your vulnerability to God and ask Him to empower you with His ability.
- b. Embrace His ability – His anointing – as your source.

4. **Develop.** Learn from what God enables you to do, with His ability, and then help it to develop your own.

- a. The goal is to go from total dependence on God in this area to Co-Dependency WITH GOD in this area.
- b. That way God knows you are developed in that area and He can trust you to withstand the temptation to fall to it again.

Closing Confession: Father God, Your strength, Your ability, is made perfect in my weakness, my inability. I thank You for allowing me to face the circumstances necessary to expose my weaknesses to me. I declare, by faith, that I will identify my areas of weakness, I will allow Your ability to be placed upon my ability to overcome them, and I declare that I will develop to the point where my weakness is eliminated. I came to You as totally independent. I was Born-Again and I became totally dependent. I now mature in Christ and I will get to the point where You and I are Co-Dependent on each other. I can trust You and You can trust me. I believe, I speak, and I receive. You back my words, because You know that they are words that are aligned with Your Word, Your Love, and Your Heart! I am growing to full maturity in this Year of the Fullness of the Blessing! In Jesus' name. Amen!