

I Am Strong in Weakness

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[0 : 00] and we're going to continue our study with the Apostle Paul, I Am's, and as I know it's week by week, you can just kind of get lost and forget where what we've done and how far we've come and things we've studied, but I've looked it over, and we've covered some really, really good material.

This is no joke that we're to be followers of Paul, and that he laid down not just a doctrinal foundation, but a practical foundation for us to follow in living the Christian life, and the things that we're hitting are just very, very beneficial to you in your walk with the Lord, especially in certain areas like last week about being exceeding joyful in tribulation, and tonight we're going to hit something about weakness, and so these kind of, they may just pair up together very well back-to-back weeks.

This is a very, I think, familiar chapter here of what we're covering. I think at least this portion of it that we're going to read, verses 7 through 10, probably very familiar about this thorn in the flesh that the Apostle Paul had, and so we're going to come through this, and you're going to notice the I Am statements when we get to verse 10, but for now let's start in verse 7, where he says, And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me, and he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake.

[1 : 51] For when I am weak, then am I strong. For when I am weak, then, and only then, Paul says, am I strong.

And so I'm just going to call this as far as the I Am that Paul is telling us. He said, I am strong in weakness. Now, this is a legitimately ironic statement.

And there's several of them in Scripture. And to be it, it's not, people say irony, that's ironic all the time, and it's not ironic, it's just a coincidence. Most of the time when people say that. But true irony is when the outcome is the opposite of what the expectation is.

And meaning when you talk about weakness, you expect to be fragile, to be broken, to be low. And Paul says, no, when I'm weak, that's when things get done.

That's when I'm strong. So that is complete irony. And it doesn't make any sense unless there's something else involved, like, say, the strength or the power of Christ is resting upon him.

[2 : 59] It's a spiritual thing. And so Paul says he's weak. And as a weak man, that means his strength is exhausted. And we know from the context why, that he has this thorn in the flesh.

It sounds painful just alone, the thorn in the flesh. He calls it the messenger of Satan. There's something satanic that's being allowed in his life.

And it's buffeting him. That's not a pleasant thought, to get beaten by a messenger of Satan. I mean, when you really spell it out, instead of just reading past it because you're familiar with it, when you start to consider it and meditate on it, this is ugly.

This is actually kind of scary and horrible sounding. And so that's where I want to just beginning, just introduce this and point out to you that this is very, very real. Meaning it's not an exaggerated thing by the Apostle Paul just so that he can get to talk about the all-sufficient grace of God and to give somebody a reason to write a hymn.

For this man in the shoes he walks in, he is hurting. And he's been getting beat around for a long time. I don't think he's embellishing anything when he says that he's weak. And so, you know, if you could walk a mile in his shoes, you'd find out pretty quickly that the Apostle Paul was not a sissy.

[4 : 19] He was not a softy. I mean, he did things, more things than most men would even try or even attempt. He went. He did it. He proved it. And the previous chapter, I don't want to take you there, but the previous chapter, he gives that list of all the beatings and all the shipwrecks and all the people that wanted to kill him.

And he kept on going for Christ. So just know that this is very real when he talks about a thorn in his flesh and when he says, I'm weak. He meant it. Now, I am strong in weakness.

How can we get to this high ground? How can we get up there? Because it's high. It's way up there to where your glory and your infirmities. Take pleasure in infirmities and in reproaches so that the power of Christ can rest upon you.

How can we get to that place? How can we experience this elusive aspect of the Christian life that very few will ever know to be strong in weakness?

Well, the Apostle Paul is our example. And so we're going to cover some things in this passage. We're to strive to emulate him. And so I want to show you what I'll call three steps that we can take in following Paul.

[5 : 32] Before we do that, let's pray and ask and beg God to help us. So, Father, I want to first of all thank you for Jesus Christ. Thank you for saving my soul as we sang.

Thank you for the blood of Christ that cleanseth each one of us from all of our sin, that we can stand faultless before your throne, that we can even come before your throne. And, Lord, we need the Lord Jesus Christ now more than ever, in this day more than ever.

We need you to wash us in your blood. I pray, God, as we open up this Holy Bible, as we study and consider these statements of the Apostle Paul, that your spirit would take these words and minister them to each heart.

And, God, open our eyes to this reality. And may we not just see it as something Paul talked about, but something that you actually may and will work in our lives.

And, God, it's my prayer that we'd learn and be prepared so that we can respond correctly when the day comes. And, Lord, if somebody's already in this and they feel weak and they know what it's like to be getting buffeted around in some ways, then, God, teach them something from this and help them to receive and accept it from you.

[6 : 42] And may Jesus Christ get something out of us. So, we ask this in his name. And, amen, amen, amen. So, Paul said, I am strong in weakness. I'm going to give you three steps.

The first step is that he surrendered to the weakness. He surrendered to the weakness. In verse 9, in the middle of the verse, he makes this statement, which is just, it comes off so strange to you and I, I'd say, most gladly, most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

He said it in 10, therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities. Paul surrendered to the weakness. Probably the hardest thing to do in these three steps is going to be this one, is to surrender to it.

Surrendering is hard. No matter what it is, it's hard for us to surrender because we have pride in our hearts, because we have this stubbornness to us that we don't want to give in.

Giving in is the last resort. And even as Americans, you're taught from a young age that you're proud to be and you stand tall and there's a humility that's missing in that kind of mindset.

[7 : 58] And I'm not just talking about patriotism. I'm talking about the old man. He doesn't want to show humility. And the first thing, the hardest thing to do is to surrender to the weakness.

We don't want to surrender to anything, especially if it's ugly and if it's painful and if it's going to hurt. And our first reaction is just going to be the same thing the Apostle Paul's reaction was.

I'm praying for God. Take it away. Depart from me. God, please. He besought him not once, not twice, three times. And I don't think it was just, you know, a flare prayer before he, you know, while he's thanking God for the missionaries and for his food.

I think he's going to God with everything he has and begging him and even probably knowing Paul, wordy, giving seven reasons why God should take this away from me.

And the Lord just, nope, nope, and nope. I'm not going to do it. So Paul's first reaction was he wants it gone. That's going to be your first reaction. And that's not going to get you anywhere.

[9 : 03] You need to surrender to the weakness. You must embrace it as if it's a gift from God, from God. You say, but wait a minute. We read this. We read, Paul even said it.

It was a messenger of Satan. And so people get this idea and they like to say this. Well, the devil's really beaten me up today. Oh, Satan's really after me today. Preacher, pray for me.

Paul had the messenger of Satan, but you don't, you're not seeing it the way reality is and the way Paul even states it. Look in verse seven again. He says, lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh.

Who gave it to him? You say, well, it's Satan. There's a messenger of Satan. No, who does Satan give people a thorn in the flesh so that they aren't exalted above measure?

Because he says it two times in the verse, lest I should be exalted above measure. Who's interested in keeping Paul from being exalted above measure? It's not Satan. If there's anything Satan's doing here, it's just he's been given permission by God to go ahead and do it.

[10 : 13] Another Job situation going on. He's sent from, this thing is sent from God to keep Paul humble and keep him from being exalted. Now, I want you to consider this because I'm telling you to surrender to the weakness.

No matter how hard that sounds, embrace it as if it's a gift from God to you. And I know that goes against everything in your body and in your flesh to surrender to a weakness or to an infirmity or to a reproach.

But consider this, if you resist it, if you fight against it and push back, number one, you'll never experience the grace that God has for you in that situation.

You'll never experience the strength of Christ in that situation. But you say, but I don't want the grace and I don't want his strength. I just want it to be better. I want it to be comfortable. I want to be well. That may be.

But if God gives it to you, he's not taking it away. He's going to give it to you. So in that position, in the position of you have this infirmity, this thorn in the flesh, what is the most logical, reasonable thing for you to do?

[11 : 23] Resist? Fight? You're going to run out of strength fighting against it. You're not going to win. Paul didn't, he prayed and it didn't go anywhere.

So should he just fight? Should he just dig his heels in deeper and get a little more resolve? That I'm going to get, I'm going to whip this thing? If you refuse to embrace what God allows in your life, when it's unpleasant, you never receive the grace or the strength that he offers.

But you're only left then to deal with that infirmity in your own strength. And that's the problem because you will fail. Your strength will fail.

It will not continue. And here's the thought I'm trying to get out of you is you're not going to overcome it. If God gave you that and placed that, you're not going to whip it.

Likely then, it'll whip you because you'll run out of strength. you'll fail. So the right thing to do, although it's the hardest thing to do, the right thing is to surrender to the weakness and to receive it as a gift from God.

[12 : 39] It might be hard to humble yourself and to submit to something you don't like, but it is, in this case, as we're studying, it's reasonable. Spiritually, it's logical because the alternative is you fight against it by yourself and you're going to lose.

So it's a no-win situation unless you just surrender to it. The new man, he sees it as the only option. He just understands this is from God and my father loves me and I'm going to just obey and walk with him and surrender to it.

The old man says, never. We are going to fight this to the death. We're going to hold fast in pride. We'll get over this thing. We'll deal with it in my own way. Just leave me alone.

You don't know what I'm going through and you're going to fail. Your strength is going to fail and it's the wrong outlook. God gave it for a reason, so embrace it.

The Lord Jesus Christ prayed in the garden, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Was he surrendered to it or was he praying to get out of it?

[13 : 52] Was he praying like Paul for it to depart? He was praying. He was actually asking the Father if it be possible. But then, he surrendered to it.

Nevertheless, not as I will because I want to get out of this but not as I will, not my will that I be done. His first instinct is just like ours is to get rid of it, get around it, depart from me, but the right answer is to surrender to it.

The apostle Paul prayed for it to depart. God didn't take it away, so he surrendered to it. Step one, it sounds easy. It's not. It is the hardest thing to do. If you could surrender to it, if you could see it as a gift from God and fighting this is pointless, it's only going to hurt me more and my strength will fail.

I need his strength or I'm not going to get through this at all, then we can go to step two. And step two is to exercise faith. And I know that sounds simple too, but I think this is more essential than you realize, to exercise faith.

That's what we do. We walk by faith. We were justified by faith. We received Christ Jesus the Lord by faith. And so this is what we do.

[15 : 05] It comes natural to the new man. It's a fruit of the Spirit. It's faith. And so exercise faith. The Bible says, through faith we understand. So without faith, it doesn't make any sense to us why this is happening and why we have to go through this.

Why would God ever do that to anybody? It doesn't make any sense unless you have faith. So exercise faith. God gave you a measure of faith. It exists in your new man.

Use that. Walk by that. Employ that. So you can understand what's going on. Now, in these verses we read, in verses 9 and 10, Paul used the word therefore two times.

In verse 9, he said, most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities. He said it again in verse 10. Therefore, the power of Christ is going to rest upon me?

Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities. So when Paul understood, because he had the understanding, he exercised faith. When he understood why God was, that God wasn't going to take this away, but that he was going to supply him grace and supply him strength, Paul, through faith, received it and embraced it.

[16 : 24] And exercising faith is just believing that this weakness is from God and that God has a purpose for it and that he is righteous and he knows more than I do.

And his ways, they're higher than my ways. My ways are, I want it to be God. I want to feel better. But his ways are higher. And faith can see that.

And faith learns to trust God. It's easy for us to just say, well, just, you know, it's God's will. And we can say that, but it's easy to say that.

Okay, I can't, sir. It's God's will. A tragedy, it's God's will. And we just don't understand it, though. But listen, the Bible says, to be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

And so just saying it's God's will is one thing, but it's so much better when you can understand what that will is. And each situation may be different and each person in relationship with your father may be different and he trying to get different things out of you or from you or whatever the case.

[17 : 33] But I think there are some things that I can point out to you from the Bible that can help you to understand what God's will is in certain situations. Before we get to that, before we get that far, in the Apostle Paul's situation, he understood that God doesn't want him to be exalted above measure.

He says that twice in verse 7. He even understood in verse 6 that he doesn't want men to think above him that which they seeth me to be or heareth of me. And so he realized, I need to be humble.

God's going to do this to keep me down and that's his will and he's right and so he embraced it. That was the Apostle Paul. That was maybe the purpose for God giving him this.

But why is it that God gives things to you or allows these things in your life? Is it only to keep you humble? Well, maybe there's more to it for you. When Paul referred to the power of Christ resting on him at the end of verse 9, this wasn't revealed in his back or in a strong back or in his biceps.

This wasn't revealed in mental capacity or in miracle working. But the power of Christ rested upon him in the way of the new man by spiritual strength realized in the new man.

[18 : 50] As I said, it's a fruit of the spirit. Paul now has the option to endure this weakness by walking in the spirit by faith. The new man's created by God unto good works.

The new man's going to need some strength to do those good works. And that new man naturally believes God. He exercises faith. So Paul exercised faith.

And like I said, we walk by faith, not by sight. Paul said, the life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God. But I want to point out that there's a purpose and even a product maybe that God's trying to get out of you.

And so I want to turn you to two places. We're coming back here, but go to Colossians 1 and James 1. If you could find both of those references, we're going to be in Colossians first, and then we'll go back to James.

there's a purpose and there's a product that can come from the infirmity.

[19 : 55] And I want to cover what that is. And it's going to take the eyes of faith to see this. You're going to have to exercise faith in the Word of God and in your Father to understand what He's attempting to do.

So let's start in Colossians 1. And I'm going to begin in verse 9 down to verse 11. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will and all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Now here comes the strength in verse 11. Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, as He said earlier, the power of Christ, rest on me.

Now notice these next couple words carefully. Unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness. Paul's prayer is for them to be strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, so it's coming from God.

He wants God to give them strength unto victory, unto healing, unto what? To overcome the infirmity?

[21 : 22] No, it's to strengthen unto patience. He wants you to be strengthened unto long suffering. What in the world?

Nobody in here woke up this morning and said, God, just put something on me that's going to teach me to be patient and more long suffering with the world, with things in my life, with the hardships I have to deal with.

Yet that's what Paul's praying for the converts to have, is the spiritual strength of Jesus Christ that will strengthen them unto patience and strengthen them unto something.

Now flip back to James chapter 1. And these two passages go very well together. James 1, 2 through 4. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have her perfect work that you may be perfect and entire wanting nothing.

So there's a trial going on here in verse 3. They're in a trial. It's called a trying of your faith. And what does that do? That works patience.

[22 : 40] Now the strength that comes from God is there to strengthen you unto patience and unto long suffering. The product of the trial is patience.

And that, according to James, brings about perfection or spiritual growth and maturity. So exercising faith is what the second step is.

Understand that God is using this thorn or infirmity or trial or whatever the diverse temptation is in your life, that God is using it to grow you in ways that you cannot grow.

on your own or you cannot grow apart from the weakness. Now listen to this. It is God's will to get out of your life some precious fruit that will never grow without the weakness, without the trial or the thorn.

And so he gives it as a gift because he's trying to grow something else out of you that will never grow if you don't have your heart in that soil.

[23 : 58] Exercise faith. Understand what God's doing, whether you can put your finger on the end of it, you can still trust him throughout. Surrender to the weakness.

Exercise faith in your father and his word. And then step number three, and back in 2 Corinthians 12 again, is in verse number nine, where Paul's reply to God's God's reply to his prayer, my grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Then Paul's reaction to that is, most gladly therefore, will I, next word, rather glory in my infirmity. I'd rather glory in my infirmity.

And so step three, I'm going to say, is to desire the strength of Christ above your own. I'd rather glory in my infirmity, why?

That the power of Christ may rest upon me. If that's what it takes to get the power of Christ in my life, then I'd rather have it that way, than what? Than to have my first prayer get answered, that's what?

[25 : 11] Than to have this thing depart from me, I'd rather glory in the thing now, because I understand what it's going to bring out of my life, and the fruit that it's going to bear for Jesus Christ. So Paul would rather, rather than have his prayer answered, and have the thorn depart, he would rather have the infirmity, so that he's not, if the infirmity gets removed, and he gets restored to his own strength and ability, and now he can go and do and serve Jesus Christ, and just work and serve, in his own strength.

Rather than be restored to full health or full strength, Paul desired the power of Christ rest upon me. And so step three is to desire the strength of Christ above your own.

So that means you're just going to have to bear the infirmity. You're just going to have to deal with it longer. But when you resist that thorn, like we said earlier, you're doing it in your own power, and it's your will, it's your strength, resisting that thing in your life, it's your stubbornness, it's your own determination, you're clinging to your own power.

And when the thorn doesn't go anywhere, because God sent it and he's going to keep it there until it does the work in you, well then your power gives way and it lets you down. Remember the apostle Paul before, he was a very active man, a very aggressive man, before he was converted.

converted, and then he's converted, and he hasn't slowed down at all. I mean, his life story, he's living that life, and it looks like God is slowing him down and just removing Paul's strength by way of a weakness, and forcing the apostle Paul to find a new source of strength.

[26 : 58] And so when the apostle Paul surrenders, and when he believes and understands as a result, then he desires, I want the power of Christ. if that's what it takes, that's what it takes, because that's what I want.

I want the power of Christ in my life, and it's not my own power. Now many people, myself included, I'd say probably most or all of us here, have to one degree or another an independent spirit.

Meaning you want to be an individual. You want to be independent. When you do something, you want recognition, oh no, I did that, or I said that, or that was my idea. You want to be known, you want to have some attention.

I don't mean it's all vanity and pride, but somewhat just individuality. We have that in us. And that independent spirit, though, it's not going to work in this.

It's going to repel the spirit of God. It's going to clash with the goal of glorifying Christ, saying, oh that was me. Because it is no more I, or rather, I quoted Romans 7, I want Galatians 2, not I, but Christ liveth in me.

[28 : 16] That's the one I want. And so rather than being independent and able to do things on your own, Paul teaches us to desire the strength of Christ and desire that it would rest upon you to quote a few other verses with this, to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man.

So when God gives you a thorn, you don't muster up the strength to fight against it and overcome with it and to just deal with it every day, but you rather desire the strength of Christ.

And that forces you to go to him. And it forces you to get on your face and be reliant upon him and walk daily with him. And then, and then, when you desire the strength of Christ, then you understand the words that he spoke back there in John 15, for without me, ye can do nothing.

And you get it. And then you remember what Paul said in Philippians chapter 4, I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.

And for the apostle Paul, when he said that he wanted that. He wanted Christ to strengthen him to be able to do the things God had him to do. More than removing the thorn, more than removing the weakness, he wanted the power of Christ.

[29 : 45] So the I am tonight is I am strong in weakness. Now, early on I said this, that it's an elusive aspect of the Christian life.

Weakness is undesirable to all of us. It is an undesirable means to becoming a stronger Christian.

To get beat up. To have to be drugged through the mud. And to have to deal with heartache and pain and relationship issues and family issues and health issues and work issues and financial issues and just to have hard thing after hard thing.

When it rains, it pours. And it just, for that to bring out something in your Christian life, nobody wants that. Nobody wants to go that route. To have to grow.

And so what we try to do is avoid what Paul said that he gloried in the persecution. Or that he took pleasure in. Reproaches. We try to avoid all that stuff at all costs.

[30 : 50] When you hear yourself crying and pleading with God for deliverance, for relief, when you hear yourself talking like that, realize that God may not send the relief, that he may not give you deliverance that you're asking for.

But he will send grace and he will give strength to help. To help you endure it. And then understand this, on top of it all, is that God desires to grow you and to assist you into bringing forth a precious, precious fruit that can only come from suffering.

And very, very few people will ever offer it to him. Very few. It's an elusive aspect of the Christian life. So let's close and consider like this.

Therefore, that it is a privilege to be called of God into weakness. It is a privilege to suffer for Jesus Christ.

It is a gift from God. So embrace it. And believe it. And desire it. Because we know that all things work together for good.

[32 : 29] To them who love God. To them who are the called according to his purpose. It's going to go against your flesh.

But the Apostle Paul is showing us here something. Follow me. I'm strong. I'm real strong. Oh, it's not I.

It's Christ that lives in me. It's the power of Christ in me. His working which worketh in me mightily. Well, how'd you get that, Paul?

Oh. Weakness. Infirmities. Sufferings. Tribulations. And it's a fruit that if God calls you into it.

And gives you the grace and strength to endure to go through it. There can be a fruit. But what you're going to want to do is fight it. And beg God to take it away. And so I'm advising you to embrace it.

[33 : 33] To receive it as a gift from God. And to consider that God's going to do something with this. And he's going to get pleasure from this. And I'm going to get stronger because of this. And in the end, it's going to be worth it.

It doesn't make sense. So you have to exercise faith. That's an important step. All right. So I hope that helps you. I hope you got something there. And I hope you can take that with you and remember that when you start crying.

Because I'll do it too. That's my go-to. That was Paul's. That's yours. That was Christ's. So let's remember these things. Lord, we thank you for this example.

We thank you for this teaching. And God, if you call us into suffering, it could be for days or years of our life, whatever the call is. Help us to respond and to be faithful to you and to trust you and to receive it.

To not rebel. Lord, humble us. And in the end, Lord, when we're with you in eternity, we're going to, I know I'm going to desire that I had more fruit.

[34 : 37] And if this is a way to get some precious fruit that you enjoy, then to God be the glory. So Lord, give us strength. Give us willing hearts to endure all hardship and to whatever you bring our way, to receive it and to be a pleasure to you throughout it.

We rely completely upon you and upon your wisdom and upon your counsel, upon your word, upon the promises in your word. Lord, thank you for your word.

Lord, go with us as we depart. I ask for your hand upon each one. And I pray for healing for those that are for out and about with other things.

And Lord, just resolve that so they could get back here in church and give us a good weekend this coming Sunday. And please also bless the ladies' activities on Saturday. Just draw them closer together.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. You're dismissed.