

Boasting In Weakness

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[0 : 00] So today I want to see if I can translate the best I can this topic of boasting in weakness. Now this topic is one that I got to choose, but it's something that I am working on personally, have been for a little while.

And so we'll unpack it a little bit, but I want to translate to you what I have understood in this passage of 2 Corinthians chapter 12. So if you have your Bible, if you would turn there, 2 Corinthians chapter 12, we'll start with verse 7.

But we'll look at some other verses as well. Monday, so this we're studying here, boasting in weakness.

Monday at man camp, we learned that a man is not weak. Now these two things are not opposed to one another. What Josh taught on Monday was being weak in character, weak in faith, that kind of weakness.

This is a weakness that Paul describes. And Paul was not a weak man. Matter of fact, he told us to act like men in 1 Corinthians 16.

[1 : 21] So this type of weakness through humility, through God-given humility, we find ourselves in a state of inadequacy, a state of need.

As human beings, we are needful people. And when we recognize that and accept that, then there's optimal ground for the Lord to work in our life, for him to be powerful in a life that is needful and not powerful.

So that's the type of weakness that we want to talk about today. Okay. And so a little bit of context. Let me get my...

A little bit of context I want to go through. So going up to, in 2 Corinthians, before this, Paul talks a lot about weakness throughout the book. In different contextual settings, but also in some of the verses, he just flat out talks about boasting in weakness.

There's a couple I want to bring to your attention. In the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 30, Paul says, If I must boast, I will boast in the things that show my weakness.

[2 : 45] Chapter 11, 23 through 33. Basically, Paul catalogs all these different sufferings and perils and hardships that he endured in his weakness.

2 Corinthians 12, 5. He says, On my own behalf, I will not boast except of my weaknesses. So this was important to Paul. There's also, in chapter 4, verse 7, he talks about ministers that are earthen vessels or jars of clay.

For any of you 90s fans. Yeah, there we are. Jars of clay. So it's the power that's being carried. It's not the container that's powerful.

It's what's inside. Chapter 10, verse 10. Paul himself had a weak bodily appearance, he says. And he wasn't a man of great speech, per se.

So he just continues to put himself in that weak position. And to share that. So 2 Corinthians 12, 7, though, is what we'll read here.

[3 : 58] 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.

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

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 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. Well, the first thing I want to do is answer this. This is sort of the order that I went in to studying this passage.

The first thing is, what is weakness? What is it that he's talking about here in this space? So the first thing is, weakness is not sin. Weakness is not sin.

[5 : 06] Paul uses different Greek words, very different words. They're not even adjoined for weakness and for sin. So it's two different areas.

And if weakness was synonymous with sin, Paul would not boast in it, would he? He wouldn't boast in his own sinfulness. That's not good.

In chapter 6, he speaks to that. We don't sin all the more, right? So it's not interchangeable. But sin can lead to weakness and vice versa.

Weakness can lead to sin. So the first one, sin can lead to weakness. Look at 1 Corinthians 11, 27 through 30. And I don't think they're real quick.

1 Corinthians 11. And we know this to be the scripture, one of the main scriptures regarding the Lord's Supper. And so what does he say?

[6 : 06] 1 Corinthians 11, 27. Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

That is why many of you are weak and ill. And some have died. But if we judge ourselves truly, we would not be judged. This is a case of the sin leading to weakness.

Which here was the sin of unworthily taking the cup and the bread. And then the sickness was a result. And we'll talk about it in a moment. But weakness is an asset.

Weakness is something that God uses. It's a good thing in our life. It's not a negative thing.

Sometimes we look at it negatively. But it's actually a good thing. The other flip side of that is weakness can lead to sin though.

[7 : 15] And Matthew 26, 41. Jesus says, Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

So that would be a case of weakness. If you're not watching and praying, then you fall into sin through the weakness of the flesh.

So pay attention to your weaknesses. And acknowledge them. Rely on God. That's sort of the crux of this concept.

Weakness is a state. Sin is an action. Weakness is a result of any number of things in our lives. It could be from things that are from birth. Physical problems that are picked up along the way. Previous sin that has left you in a needful position.

[8 : 15] But when we look at sin and we look at weakness, weakness being a state of where we're at. Whatever it is that led us to that point, whatever got us to that.

If we look at today and we say, Okay, I am needful. I am weak. Lord, when I get out of the way, then you can work.

And you can show your power. And maybe that begins with confession and repentance. If sin is what brought you to that spot. But there's a lot of different ways that weakness shows up.

Basically, weakness is inadequacy. J.I. Packer says, The idea from first to last in regards to weakness is of inadequacy.

We talk about physical weakness, including sickness and disability. Intellectual weakness. Personal weakness. A weak position when a person lacks needed resources and cannot move situations forward or influence events as desired.

[9 : 22] Relational weakness when persons who should be leading and guiding fail to do so. Weak parents. Weak pastors. And so on.

Some specific weaknesses would be things like a physical illness or a condition. And it brings us to that point of realizing, I can't fix this.

I can't get beyond this. It's something that we learn is out of our control. Weak. That brings us to that weakness spot.

Maybe a learning disability. Cognitive boundaries. Even in aging. As we age. More and more, I'm noticing the senior moment like coming up. You know, they kind of grow as you go.

So these kind of things. We recognize our own pains and hurts and things as we even age. And those weaknesses. There's knowledge deficiencies or lack of ability.

[10 : 23] There's the types of weaknesses that sort of happen to us or come upon us. But there's also, and it's important to recognize, that there are weaknesses where things in life, specifically sin, have led to a weak position.

In high school, I never really did my math homework. And what I understand is math sort of builds on itself, you know, as you go. And so if you don't understand the early ones, you're not going to get the later subjects.

So basically, I didn't do my homework. I did very poorly, got bad grades, those kind of things. But luckily, when I was a senior, they had a thing called senior math, which kind of went back to like addition and subtraction and those kind of things.

I passed that one. I was very happy. I had to, actually, to get through. But what that did was it left me with a deficit in math.

And I didn't understand. And there was a lot of things I didn't know. Well, then I joined the Navy. They put me in electronics. And with electronics, there's a lot of math that goes with that, unfortunately for me.

[11 : 38] But there was a change in my thinking. And I realized that I needed to submit to learning and that that was a godly thing to do.

And so I ended up diving in. I learned. And I was the top of my class. Math. In math, I was the top of my class, which was pretty great. But what that does is that's a simple illustration.

That's just a simple illustration of how I, through my sin, led to a place of being deficit. And then I had to come to a place where I confessed that, repented of that, and then let the Lord work in it. That's how sin can lead us into a place of weakness. But the Lord's power can be shown in that spot. Paul Tripp says, Again, it's a tool.

And we'll talk about this. But weakness is something that is good. Matter of fact, Paul boasts gladly in his weakness. And we should, too. We'll get into that.

[12 : 59] This idea that being a tool in God's hand, it's to be brought to Jesus. It could be given to you by him for your benefit.

The weaknesses in your life. The things that you struggle with. The places that you find yourself in. It could be given to you by him for your benefit. And it's useful in his hands.

The first time that we recognize this. The first time that we recognize this. Is the first time that you confess your sins. And hear the gospel.

And understand the grace that's offered to you. Because the thing that we find ourselves in, in order to believe the gospel, is that I have need.

If I don't believe I'm weak and have no need, the gospel does not make sense. There's no reason for it. You're not being saved from anything. You've already got it all together.

[14 : 03] You already think that you know all the answers. But when you come to a place, as I did in 1981, December, where I realize that I don't have the answers.

That there's no way that I can take care of the break between a holy God and myself. Because I've transgressed.

Because I've gone against him. And I find myself in a place that is incredibly weak. And with no hope. Once you go there. And then you confess.

And you repent. And you give that to Christ. Let his power then make you new. And bring you to life. From a place of 100% weakness.

To a place of power in life. That's the first time that you'll run across this. And if you don't ever actually acknowledge that. If you don't ever actually acknowledge that.

[15 : 06] In fact, I am so weak that I have to be saved. I am so weak that I can't do it on my own. Then salvation will always be something that you may know about.

But if you don't actually believe, it will never be profitable for you. The power will never be on your life. Our ongoing sanctification also relies on our ongoing.

So there's that initial time that we understand our weakness for salvation. But then it does not stop. It doesn't stop. Does he want to keep changing you?

Does the Lord want to continue to grow you into looking more like Christ all the time? Absolutely. How does he do that? Well, you've got to stop trying to take control.

You have to say, I am weak in this. I'm going to boast in this weakness. Because that's where Jesus steps in. Not me. The more I think I know it, the more I think I've got it, the less he can even do in my life.

[16:20] Because I'm trying to run the show. And I'm trying to make that happen. If you look back at our verses now. Verse 27.

Whoever therefore... Oops. I'm way off. I'm still back on now. Let me get to 2 Corinthians 12. What he first starts talking about.

Look at what Paul is concerned about. In verse 7. 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. What is Paul's concern? Conceited. Becoming conceited. That ongoing sanctification.

The need to continually be offering my weakness to Christ. He's concerned here. He's concerned. Paul was doing some great things.

[17:24] God was really using him in magnificent ways. In planting churches. And obviously writing scripture. And lots of ministry victories.

A lot of troubles that he expresses as well. And he specifically says the surpassing greatness. Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations.

Well, interesting. Right before that. He talks sort of third person. About a guy 14 years ago who went up to the third heaven. Well, that's commonly understood to have been Paul.

And he's speaking from the third person there. But it's that kind of thing that can make a person conceited. When God uses somebody that way.

When the Lord does something in your life. And maybe you want to grab credit or grab glory somehow. That's being conceited.

[18:25] That's trying to be something that you're not. Paul didn't want to do that. He didn't want to fall into that. Certainly there was temptation.

He gets a thorn in the flesh. There was temptation for Paul to fall into that. The flesh is weak. Conceit itself.

If we think about conceit. I would say it probably is the opposite of weakness. If you look at that. Why would he attack conceit?

Well, conceit says, I know. I already know it. I'm good. I've got it all together. That's what conceit would say. I'm squared away.

Right? Weakness says, I need. I need. I need. So it's probably two different ends of the spectrum right there.

[19:27] Paul doesn't want to fall into a place of saying, I know. Or I'm squared away. Or I've got this. He doesn't want to fall into that. He wants to remain in the place of need.

I need. I'm inadequate. So Satan sends this messenger. This thorn in the flesh, he says. To harass him. There's lots of thoughts on what that thorn is.

You know, if you study, you know. A lot of different ideas. It is in the flesh. Which is important. Is what he says. But we do know it was from Satan. So God allowed it.

God allowed that to happen. And not only that, but God used it. For Paul's sanctification, God used Satan intervening.

Piper, he said, he's considering what God might have said here. You know, just in a writing. God might have said something like, I want a humble apostle with no conceit.

[20:32] My solution? Use Satan to take away your braggadocio. So, very interesting. The messenger of Satan was used by God for Paul's sanctification.

So, if we sort of translate that to our own life. Can things happen in our life? Do people say things or situations enter? Or health issues or whatever that God can use for our sanctification?

For our growth and staying away from conceit? Absolutely. Even in pleading for it to be removed, the answer was still no to Paul.

He went to God three times. Will you take it away? And God said no. He had a purpose in it. He had a purpose in keeping Paul in the weakness mentality in that space.

What is your thorn? What is your weakness? As I was studying for this, I prayed about that. And I was like, Lord, what is the...

[21:42] I mean, I have plenty. Believe me. Many things came to mind, you know, very quickly. But I think that there are certain things that the Lord is where the pedal is up, so to speak.

And God's working on it. And working in your life and in your heart. We'll talk more about that in a second. But maybe you've prayed and asked God to remove that thorn or that trouble.

Or that, you know, maybe it was a health issue or financial. Whatever. Whatever it is that is creating that space.

But think about it. He may be using that very thing for your benefit and your growth. How is he doing that? It's not going away.

Maybe you've prayed those three times. Maybe you've fasted. And just really, really ask God to take that away. And the answer is still no.

[22 : 40] What is he doing in your life in that? How is he using that? In verse 9, Jesus responds to Paul.

So Paul talks about in verse 8, I've pleaded with him the three times. And verse 9, probably one of the most famous verses we know. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

So Jesus' power works in my weakness. Well, if that's the case, let me be weak. Let me be weak. Let me talk about it. Let me boast in it.

Let me share that. If that's where he works. If that's where the Lord is going to get into your life and his power is shown, then we want to be there.

We want that. From the very beginning, from salvation. I want to see him work in me. I want to see that power. I want to go from death to life.

[23 : 44] And it's his power that does it. All I offer is my weakness. Therefore, Paul says, I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness.

And this will allow the power of Christ to rest upon him. Not my feeble attempts. Not my worries about life or health.

Not my inadequate abilities in every situation. But his power. His power. And there's a key here. And it's what Jesus said to Paul.

He said, it's my grace that's sufficient. He is enough. Now, I want to think about this.

We may hear this and say, okay, there's this place in my life that I've isolated. I understand is a weakness. And I can see what Jesus says there.

[24 : 46] My grace is sufficient for you. And I can acquiesce to that. Yes, I understand that. I believe that. And then still go about doing it my own way. And ignoring what he's actually telling us there.

Maybe I said about behavior modification. Just changing, pretending in my own mind and in my own heart.

Pretending that I'm actually trusting in him. But am I? Am I truly acknowledging my weakness and standing in that space?

Or am I still trying to take what I can and make it happen on my own? Seeing the emptiness in our abilities and actually filling that space with grace.

I've been making espresso lately. Because I got a Breville for Christmas, you know, like where you make your own espresso. So I'm learning this.

[25 : 48] I'm still trying to dial it in. And actually, on a side note, my worst fear came true. Zimir was at the house and he asked for just a plain espresso. And I gave it to him very trepidatiously.

And he said it was no good. But I was like, I need to dial it in more. Give me another chance. Give me another chance. But one thing that I did try was, you know, you use milk to like for cappuccinos or lattes.

You use regular milk because it froths up really nice. It's got fat in it. It's got the things that you need. And, but I'm like, okay, well, how can I, you know, with keto, milk isn't so good.

So I'm trying to get rid of that. And so I tried almond milk. I frothed it up and everything. And it came out like when, you know, it looked just right.

That cappuccino, the, the, now I don't do art yet. I'm still working on the art. But everything else, like just right. It looked just like a cappuccino. And I tried it and it was almond milk.

[26 : 50] Like it was yucky. It didn't do right. But what's interesting, just in that, like that little illustration, like we, we can look a lot and I'm talking about in our own hearts, right?

We, we can fool each other all day long. We can fool each other all day long. There's some things that we can maybe see with discernment, God giving things like that. But, but we can actually come to our gatherings and, and hang out and fool one another into thinking that we don't have weaknesses, but we do.

We do have these. This is why I have been working on this topic. It's something that I, I want to be diving into this in my own life and, and be ready to share these things.

Be ready to walk in these things and, and give God glory for how he operates in it. When I get out of the way and let him take over. But the worst case scenario is people thinking from the very beginning that they are trusting in Christ, but they actually are just saying this and they never really believe that they need to be saved.

They never really believe that they need to be forgiven of this debt. They never really believe that their sin is against a holy God who will not stand for it.

[28 : 19] They've heard the gospel. They say they believe this is worst case scenario. These are the ones that, that one day Jesus says, I never knew you.

I never knew you. Our weakness is something that we've got to acknowledge that we have to gladly boast in, because if we don't, then it's all, it'll always be us.

It'll always be what we can do or what we think we can handle or what, who we think we can please on our own. And we can't, we can't do that.

But I want to talk about weakness in the body. So in, in the body of believers and in our church, what makes our church strong?

What, what would strengthen our church? Look at verse 10. He says, for the sake of Christ, then I, then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for when I am weak, then I am strong.

[29 : 30] A body of believers that's strong is weak. When I am weak, I am strong. When we are weak, then we are strong.

That's how a body becomes strong. When we are content with weaknesses. Paul talks about those being insults, hardships, persecutions, distresses, calamities.

I want to read this same verse from the Amplified Bible, sparingly. I'd be careful with this, you know, because you, but sometimes it really opens up things well. And here it did. Verse 10.

So I am well pleased with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, and with difficulties for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak in human strength, then I am strong, truly able, truly powerful, truly drawing from God's strength.

And they really opened that up well and added good points. So operating together to get to that place of strength as people who acknowledge our weaknesses.

[30 : 38] First, we have to speak of them. We have to talk about them. We have to share them. We have to be clear with one another. And the weaknesses really are across the board.

I was talking with Judah just before even preaching this. How ironic, you know. I have to step up here and make sure that I'm walking in weakness because this is God's word that I'm sharing with you.

And it's important. It's important to live that way. Now, what about responding to others? So as we all talk, as we share our weaknesses with one another, well, there's the person who is in humility, is sharing that weakness, and they're talking to somebody else.

Now, how does that somebody else respond? Number one, it's not a place for judgment. Because remember, weakness is a good thing.

And sharing the weakness and walking in the weakness, it's a good thing. This is something Paul says, do this. Not hide this. Do this. So, no judgment.

[31 : 47] If you're cognizant in your own weakness, judgment won't happen. You won't judge somebody else if you're walking in your own weaknesses. John Newton had a phrase, habitual tenderness.

And he wrote about it. He says, in describing the believer's life, John Newton, he's the one who wrote Amazing Grace. Yes, yes, yes. He says, about a believer's life, he believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord.

This gives him a habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit. I love it. Because that's exactly how we would communicate with one another.

You don't beat somebody up because they share a weakness. You don't look down on them. I think that there's an underlying fear sometimes to share the weaknesses.

I know I've had it. Because I think, what will I receive? What will somebody say to me? How will they look at me after that? That's not habitual tenderness of someone else who's walking in their weakness as judgment.

[33 : 04] Like Paul, we should encourage voicing the weakness and trust in sufficient grace and encourage each other. To do the same. If you're walking in your own strength, if you're walking in your own strength, your actions will give you away.

The things that you say, the ways that you respond and talk to one another. Your actions will give you away if you are disregarding your weaknesses and walking in your own strength.

Judgment, slander, gossip, division, anger, lack of patience. All these things will show up. And people who are humbly walking in their weaknesses don't have a purpose to tear somebody else down.

Because they're already in their weakness. And they don't look at somebody else and try to tear them down in some way. There's no purpose to that. But if you are the one who has it all together, what you'll try to do is try to get everybody else up to speed with you.

All those sinful ways of trying to get somebody else to do what you want them to do.

[34 : 23] It goes back to judgment. It goes back to those areas that are not tender. That are not loving. So we encourage the practice of boasting and weakness.

We encourage one another to do that. And then when somebody does, pray for them. Lift them up.

Encourage them. Take joy in the fact that you're doing gladly exactly what Paul said to do.

Was to boast in the weakness. And then let Jesus work. And let his power flourish. And be perfected. So, identifying my own weakness.

And this is what I was talking about a little bit earlier. Just the idea of, okay, we walk away and we say, Lord, where am I weak? Where is it that you're working in me?

What is it that you want to teach me? Through whatever it might be that's going on in my life. First thing in identifying our own weakness.

[35 : 33] First thing is it's a flesh problem. And so if I find myself saying, I want to be strong or I need to be strong.

That's a good flag. That I'm the one who's trying to do it. That I'm the one who is resting on my own thoughts and ideas and strength.

The problem is with the flesh is the culture tells me I should operate that way. This whole where we live, how we grow up, all these things. The culture keeps telling you to pick up your bootstraps.

To not look weak. To not have this space where we admit that I can't and I need. Unfortunately, the kids when they were little, they watched a lot of Disney.

Well, maybe they haven't stopped. I don't know. But they watched a lot of Disney and I would watch the shows and it would just bug me so much. Because all they ever talked about was how it's within you.

[36 : 45] The humanism of it. It's just humanism from the very beginning. On repeat. Teaching young people. Us. If you watched a lot of that stuff.

How to be our own person. And do things our own way. Second thing of identifying my own weakness is Jesus is the one who should get the glory.

Even in my pain. Even in my hardships. Even when things just all fall apart. He alone is worthy. And his glory is not for me to take.

Like, you know, if he demonstrates power through me, that's not something that I can take. That's not something I should boast in.

As if I didn't. Boast in Christ. Boast in the fact that I was in that place, that weakness place, to let him work. And just get out of the way.

[37 : 48] So, to continue identifying weaknesses. Where do you think that you have it all together? Where are you prideful of what, maybe you're saying, what I have done?

Where do you think, man, I'm something? That's a good place. That's a good place to start. Start looking in that. Where do you think you have it all together? Second thing is, where are you fearful? Fear is a pride that underlying says, I can take care of this somehow, someway. There's an inadequate feeling in fear.

And you can't take care of it. You can't take care of it. Jesus said, my grace is sufficient. My grace is sufficient. I am tempted to fear.

This is one of the areas that, as I was preparing, that I want to share in this. I'm tempted to fear. And sometimes it pushes me to try harder.

[39 : 03] Or to prevent. Or to be careful. Or things like that. And step up somehow. One area in particular is as a missional community leader.

There are times that I take on to myself, I look specifically at outcomes. Outcomes are not ours to monitor in terms of how I can make for a good outcome.
That's the Lord's work. Outcomes are the Lord's work. But sometimes I can find myself measuring in myself. Am I good? Am I doing okay?
Should I even be doing this? You know, like all these questions. These are things that come to mind in fear. In measuring myself.
And I forget that it's boasting in weakness. Because I can't affect outcomes.
[40 : 07] That Jesus' grace is sufficient. Sufficient to do whatever it is that he wants us to do. And whatever he gives in that. He's leading. And doing that work through us.
Third thing. Where are you frustrated? Where are you frustrated in life? What's your roadblock? Maybe it's health, relationship, parenting.
Where are you frustrated? If you're frustrated, whose power are you working in? Your own. Instead of acknowledging the weakness that I can't fix this.
I can't make this better. I get mad. And then I try to force things myself. Are there thorns that are being used to draw you closer to him?
Some of those frustrations. Some of those fears. Some of the things where you think that you have it all together. Actually, if you turn to the weakness, you'll realize the thorn in that.
[41 : 14] Where he wants to teach you. Where he wants to grow you and sanctify you. But you have to identify. And gladly boast in those weaknesses.
And not pretend like they don't exist. And not keep trying on your own. Not keep operating in your own power. Not a, you need to fix this.
This whole idea is not a, you need to fix this idea. It's a, you need to let go idea. You need to let go. Embrace the weakness.
Let's embrace the weakness together. Let's boast in it together. And then see what God does. See what Jesus does. When he can operate in power in your life.