

Strength in Weakness

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[0 : 00] Hey, that's how the microphone works.

So good to see everybody. How are you doing, Fate family? It's wonderful to be back with you. I mean, tonight, just spending time together and hugging and talking and just even walking in this afternoon, I was so looking forward just to be in this community of Fate family that we have together.

And so really, really grateful to be back. I can't say enough just in terms of thank you to a lot of people like, I mean, Dr. Brand, who did a fantastic job kind of filling in and just really thankful for him being here for five weeks and feeding you from the word and really grateful for his ministry, the lead team and many others that have stepped up and kept things going.

I'm so grateful for you. Fate family, I'm just thankful for your faithfulness weekend and week out to be here and to be committed to this ministry the Lord has given us.

And also just for the support to be able to go away for five weeks and to be able to have a time of sabbatical. I'm really, truly grateful to you in so many ways to be able to experience what I was able to the last few weeks.

[1 : 36] Now, upon return, there's a little bit of tension in terms of like, well, what do I do? Not in terms of like, how do I preach? So that might be true too. But like, well, do I share about the trip?

Do I talk about sabbatical? Do I jump into a new series? Because we've talked about doing the book of Acts, which is what we're going to do, Lord willing, here soon.

And so I was kind of torn. I told a couple of the gentlemen earlier this evening, I said, I came in as I prepared with sharing a lot about the trip and kind of a short sermon, pause for laughter.

And the sermon kind of kept growing and the sharing about the trip kind of kept getting smaller and smaller. So I think what I want to do this evening is I just want to give a very brief overview because some of you have been asking kind of about the trip and about sabbatical.

But I don't want this to turn into, you know, that person that goes on vacation and they come back and show you like 200 photos you don't want to see. Like, I don't want it to be that.

[2 : 40] So I'm just going to share a brief overview of kind of what sabbatical and the trip was all about. And then I'm going to spend most of our time preaching the word of God because that's where my passion is anyways.

And so that's our plan for this evening. So for those of you that have no idea kind of what I'm even referring to the last five weeks, I've been on sabbatical. During those five weeks, I've been able to do several different things.

So for instance, as I've shared with some of you, I had a really wonderful time doing some counseling intensives with a ministry counselor. I've been in ministry now for, I think it'll be 26 years next month.

And in all that time, I've never really had kind of a ministry counselor, never had a sabbatical. And so I was able to kind of take some, these were several half days and just talk with somebody who specializes in pastors and ministry and be able to talk about the weight of pastoral ministry, the toll that it takes on you over the years.

And so was really blessed to be able to do that and found that to be really fruitful. Did some reading and reflecting just on life and ministry. Celebrated my son's 16th birthday.

[4 : 00] So drivers beware, all right? You have been warned. And so enjoyed that time. And while I didn't do it as much as I would have liked to, I did have a little bit of fun while I was away.

So it took a few days and caught some small mouth bass and that was enjoyable. But the main kind of focus of the sabbatical, as many of you know, was a two week tour of the footsteps of the Apostle Paul.

And it was just an incredible experience. And again, just give you a very quick overview tonight of that. I started, the trip started in Istanbul, Turkey.

And so I spent just a few days there with a guide visiting Istanbul. And we looked at a lot of historic churches or a few historic churches that are there in Istanbul.

Of course, there's also mostly mosques, which are very beautiful and was able to visit a lot of those. And I don't know how many of you, many of you, some of you do, I know, of just how much modern day Turkey is significant to early Christianity.

[5 : 10] What I mean by that is many events and things that take place in your Bible took place in what we know today as modern Turkey. For instance, the Apostle Paul was called and saved in Tarsus in southern Turkey.

His missionary journeys took him through Turkey many different times. Many of the cities that are mentioned in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost are cities that are in modern Turkey today. The seven churches of the book of Revelation are all in modern Turkey today, what we know as Asia Minor. In fact, you can do a tour just of all the seven churches, which would be fascinating, no doubt, to do.

A lot of the early ecumenical councils took place in Turkey, like the Council of Ephesus, Nicaea, Chalcedon, Constantinople. All of those took place in modern Turkey.

In 537, the big church, Hagia Sophia, which was just breathtaking walking. It's a mosque today, but there are actually still Christian symbols in that that are just covered up.

[6 : 22] And so rather than like painting over them or tiling over them, they left them there. They just covered them up. But it's an unbelievable structure and facility.

But it was a church in 537, the Church of Holy Wisdom. And so Istanbul was kind of the first stop. Then staying in Turkey, next I went to the old Roman city of Ephesus, which was probably one of the highlights for me.

Because as you can kind of see from these pictures, a lot of the remains are still in place. In fact, I think they mentioned like 60% of the remains are still there, which are, it's a lot more than a lot of other places you would visit.

Paul obviously spent a lot of time in ministry in Ephesus. The book of Ephesians, we'll discover in the book of Acts how the gospel kind of impacted the trade of the city there in Ephesus.

And so in Acts 19. Also located there is the Temple of Artemis. This is really just kind of a replica, not the original thing.

[7 : 34] But the Temple of Artemis was there in Ephesus, which at one time was one of the seven wonders of the world. And so it was pretty awesome to be able to visit that. And again, a lot of these places, as you know, if you've ever traveled like this, it just gives you context that, you know, sometimes you're just reading your Bible and it's words on the page.

But when you're standing in Ephesus reading Ephesians, there's just something different about that that's really beautiful and really impactful.

And so that was awesome. Now, one interesting thing, speaking of idol worship in Artemis, one of the things that I discovered in Ephesus was that the ancient Ephesians worshipped demons.

I don't know if you know that, but the reason why I know they worship demons is as I was going through the city, I saw this statue. And so now I know that the ancient Ephesians were demon worshipers and was clearly a very pagan city.

I'm just making sure you're still awake. Don't send me hate mail. All right. I figured you'd get a kick out of that. Also in Ephesus, we visited a church that's dedicated to the apostle John.

[8 : 49] And so it was pretty cool to kind of go through that church. Then after Ephesus, we boarded a ship and spent a few days visiting different places in Greece. The first stop, which was really awesome for me, was the island of Patmos.

Which is a really simple island. This is a kind of an inscription here where John receives the vision, the revelation of the book of Revelation.

I got to go inside the cave where it's believed that John received the revelation, which again, you stand in these places and it's just, it's breathtaking.

I mean, for me, I've taught the book of Revelation. I've studied the book of Revelation. So to be in that place where the vision was given to the apostle John, it really, really is, it's hard to even put into words.

And so enjoyed that. After the island of Patmos, we also spent some time in ancient Corinth. Now ancient Corinth, you'll kind of notice from this picture, is not as preserved as Ephesus.

[9 : 54] That's kind of why Ephesus stuck out to me a little more. But it was still great to be in Corinth. Again, another place where the apostle Paul spent a significant amount of ministry.

You remember that he comes to Corinth, which we'll see this in the book of Acts. He comes to Corinth after he's discouraged in Athens. And it's in Corinth that God tells him, don't be afraid. Don't fear. There are people of this city that are mine. And Paul stays and does ministry for many years, several years in Corinth. And many are one to faith.

And so, in fact, tonight we'll be in the book of 2 Corinthians. Then went to Athens. And I had been to Athens before, but it was still great to go back. We visited the Parthenon, which is always awesome to see.

But right next to that is the Areopagus. Again, this is Acts chapter 17, or what we know as Mars Hill. This is where the apostle Paul would have debated the philosophers and acknowledged the statue of the unknown God.

[10 : 59] And then proclaimed Christ risen to them. And so, awesome to be at that place. And then finally, because I don't want to draw this out, the trip kind of ended in Rome.

And of the few days in Rome, and this is kind of the case with any of it. I told some of you, like, some of these things exceeded expectation.

Some of them met expectation. And some of them were kind of like, eh, I could have skipped that, you know. Well, Rome, like, we spent one day in Vatican City, which I'm not Catholic, so that doesn't surprise you.

But I was neat, but I wasn't like, oh, wow, I'm finally getting to meet the Pope. Like, that wasn't anything for me. But it was still enjoyable. There were some Roman sites, like the Roman Colosseum and places like that.

What really impacted me the most was we spent the final day touring what would have been the final hours of the Apostle Paul's life. And so, we went to where it's believed he was imprisoned, kind of the prison that he was held in there in Rome.

[12 : 07] What we know as the Romans Road, which is the road that Paul would have likely walked to his execution. The place where Paul was beheaded.

And you'll remember, Paul wasn't crucified. He was beheaded because Paul was a Roman citizen. And so, Rome wouldn't do a death that was prolonged and a tremendous suffering.

They would do a quick death for Roman citizens. And that's why Paul was beheaded. And so, we went to the place where that likely took place. And then the place of his grave, where we have a lot of historical accuracy that this is the place of the Apostle Paul.

And so, to kind of have all that together. And I'm going to share more of this in the next coming weeks. Tonight is not to just dump all this information on you.

I'll share more in the weeks to come. But that day really impacted me in a way that I'm going to preach a sermon about it. And it's not tonight's sermon. But I hope you'll come back for that.

[13 : 10] Because as I really reflected on the Apostle Paul's life, the way he lived, and the way he died, I think it has tremendous implications for how we live our life.

All right? So, that's a brief overview. For some of you, that was too much. For some of you, that was not enough. But that's what you're getting tonight. All right? It's just kind of a brief overview of the footsteps of Paul.

Again, we didn't cover everything on the journey. But we started where Paul was born. Hit some of the most significant spots where he did his ministry. Ephesus, Corinth, Athens, Rome.

And then ended up in the place of his arrest and execution. Now, some of you, I'm just curious, show of hands, how many of you would like to do a trip like this at some point?

Almost every hand is up. And so, I've thought about that. I've got two hands back there in the foyer. I've thought about like this, of this being even something that we could do as a faith family.

[14 : 07] And I think having gone on this, like now I kind of even understand more of what could be brought to the table to really make it a trip that would make the scripture come alive.

And so, maybe this is something we consider even as a faith family for those that would be able to do it to go and to explore some of this and do kind of a New Testament study on site.

How cool would that be? So, I'm the spy you sent to the land to check it out. And I bring back a good report to you. So, now, so all that aside now, I mean, I'm hard pressed to know what do I do

when I come back to preach.

And so, here's basically what we're going to do for the rest of tonight and the next couple of weeks is we're not going to jump right into the book of Acts.

We will do that, Lord willing, here in just a couple of weeks. And that's going to be our, that may take us to Christmas. That's going to be a big, long study through the book of Acts.

[15:14] What I want to do tonight and over the next couple of weeks is that there were some things impressed upon me about the Apostle Paul's life that I want us to consider.

And not only the Apostle Paul's life, but these were things that really made me stop and think about my own. Like, what are you living for?

And how committed to the call are you? And how do you define ministry success and what the Christian life is actually supposed to be about?

And I don't know if you're like me, but there were some things that God impressed upon me, and I hope you're listening, where I said to the Lord, why am I just now learning this? Why am I just now 25, 26 years into the ministry, and maybe I've learned it, but it's taken me this long to finally get it? And tonight is one of those things that I want to share with you. There's parts of it that really aren't that new, but man, I really want to just share my heart. Like, there's some things God impressed upon me from this passage in reflecting on the Apostle Paul's life that I think I've missed a lot of the time in my Christian life.

[16:41] And I think I've missed it a lot in pastoring. And the kind of culture we have as a local congregation. So would you let me share my heart tonight as we turn our attention to 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

2 Corinthians chapter 12 is where we're going to be this evening for our sermon. And I just want to share with you how the Apostle Paul approached his life in ministry, and hope that it will do for you just a little bit of what it did for me.

Are we ready? All right, I need you with me. If you've zoned out, zone back in. And I bet Dr. Brand didn't say that, right? So I know you've missed that for a few weeks. If you've zoned out, zone back in.

2 Corinthians chapter 12. And if you're able to stand, please do so as we honor the reading of God's Word. Lord, help me tonight. Just teach your Word, and I pray edify your people.

2 Corinthians 12 verse 1. 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.

[17:49] I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up to the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body. I do not know. God knows. 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. And he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man, I will boast. But on my own behalf, I will not boast except of my weaknesses. 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.

So to keep me from boasting, 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.

[19:07] 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 weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. Would you pray with me? God, help us understand this. Help us see this. I pray that there would be things that would just click, maybe for the first time, in how we understand the Christian life and the way we think about even relating to one another.

I pray for those in this room, because I'm sure there are, that have already come to really understand this, that you would affirm through your word what is true, and that you would encourage all of us tonight as we worship through the study of your inspired word.

[20:20] I pray it in Jesus' name. And God's people said, amen. Amen. You can be seated. In his book, Where Is God When It Hurts? Phil Yancey gives a story about an NBA basketball player by

the name of Bob Gross.

Bob was actually played for the Portland Trailblazers back in the 70s and 80s. He was one of their star players. In fact, he was the starting small forward on their only championship year of 76 to 77. What was unfortunate about Bob is how his career came to an end. He had suffered a serious ankle injury, and he needed to rest.

He needed to take a few weeks off. In fact, some thought he might even need to have surgery in order for it to truly heal, but he refused to do any of that.

I want you to listen. Instead of acknowledging that he couldn't play, instead, Gross, with the encouragement of the team doctors, decided to ignore the pain, ignore the injury, and act like everything was fine.

[21 : 31] The team doctor injected his ankle with Marcane, a serious painkiller. He gave him three different shots in three different places in his foot.

He started the next game. The first few minutes into the game, everything looked fine. But then, as he was battling for a rebound, he heard a loud pop.

In fact, it was so loud that even those that were close to him heard the pop as well. But he continued to run up and down the court. He continued to act like everything was fine until eventually he had fallen on the floor.

Even though he was in insignificant pain because the shots had made his ankle so numb, Gross had completely shattered his ankle.

And it would be the end of his basketball career. You know, faith family, one of the things that we in our culture, in American culture that we value, is the idea of being strong.

[22 : 41] Amen? Like, we don't want anybody to know that we're weak. We don't want anybody to know that we struggle. And there's so many examples of how we do this. For instance, we don't want people to see us cry.

Are you crying? No. Are you crying? Are you crying? There's no crying.

There's no crying in baseball. Or you have that conversation at the grocery store where somebody asks, How are you doing? And you lie and say, What?

I'm fine. Everything's fine. Or that tough athlete is the athlete that plays through pain. We develop leaders and organizations by leveraging our strengths.

Sometimes even as parents, we try to keep it all together because we don't want our kids to see us as weak. I mean, if we're really honest tonight, most of us have the ongoing fight of trying to keep it all together.

[23 : 45] Be strong. That's the fight that many of us have every day. I got to be strong. I got to keep it together. I got to continue to run up and down the court of life and make sure the fans don't think there's anything wrong.

And this is certainly true when it comes to our Christian walk, is it not? I mean, how many of us feel guilty because it doesn't feel like our faith is as strong as somebody else's.

Our gifts are not as strong as other leaders. We don't seem to be as strong when it comes to discipline as somebody else. Our church isn't as strong financially or programmatically or in attendance as another down the street.

And there are some of you, if you would be honest, and I hope that you'll be honest with me tonight, that if you are honest, you feel almost like a second-class citizen in your walk with God most days because most days you feel anything but strong.

And yet, we continue to try to do our best to give the appearance that we're strong, that we're okay.

[25 : 02] And I got to tell you, Faith Family, as I reflected on this in my sabbatical, I came to realize, and I hope that you'll lean in here, I came to realize that most of my Christian life personally and most of my 25 years of ministry pastorally and most of the churches that I've pastored and most of the Christians I've spent most of my time around are doing their very best to be strong for God.

And in those moments when we know we aren't, listen, we've learned how to take enough shots of painkillers, spiritually speaking, to keep up the appearances for everybody else in the stands.

That's where much of my Christian life, and I bet you I'm not alone, has been lived. Be strong for God. Have a strong church for God.

Leverage your strengths for God. And you know what that's called? Slavery. It's called slavery. And if you find yourself in it, like I often find myself in it, and I think 99% of churches often produce, the Apostle Paul has good news for you.

In fact, the gospel has good news for you. It's just the Apostle Paul who articulates it here. And Paul learns in a valuable lesson about the Christian life.

[26 : 43] A lesson I need to learn, a lesson I trust you need to learn, and it is a lesson that is the defining culture of Faith Family Church. Are you with me? Here it is on the screen.

Real strength isn't found in being strong. Real strength is found in admitting you're weak. Real strength isn't found in being strong for God.

Hey, let's be strong Christians, and let's have it all together. No, actually, real strength is found in admitting that you're weak. And I know that sounds good, but I'm telling you, many of us will amen that.

I would amen that. I would say, yes, I believe that. But have I embraced that? Have I embraced that weakness is actually where strength is found?

That strength isn't found in strength, at least not yours. But real strength is found in your weakness.

[27 : 45] That is what the Apostle Paul articulates here in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Let me just unpack it here briefly this evening. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul shows us the exact opposite of the way most people approach the Christian life, which is, I've got to have a strong faith, and I've got to have a strong life, and I've got to have it all together, and I've got to make sure that people think I'm okay.

Paul, look at what he says. He says, first of all, main point here, is that weakness was actually Paul's grounds for boasting. Paul came to the point in his life where the thing he boasted in the most was that he was weak, not that he was strong, not that he was the kind of Apostle that had it all together, but actually an Apostle that dealt with suffering and calamity and difficulty all the time. And in his ministry to the Corinthians, Paul was always fighting the facade. Are you listening to me tonight, faith family? Always fighting the facade.

First, the Corinthian culture was obsessed with the external. Paul will even say this in 1 Corinthians. The Jews want signs. The Greeks want wisdom.

They want eloquent speech, and they want fancy words, and they want a good debate. And Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 2 about himself.

[29 : 14] Notice it on the screen. But when I came to you, brothers, I didn't come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. In fact, I decided to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified.

And I was with you in, say it, weakness and in fear and much trembling.

and you almost want to say, but you're the apostle Paul. You're not afraid of anything. You don't tremble. You're not, and Paul says, no, when I was with you, I wasn't with you in lofty speech.

No, our community, our togetherness was a togetherness and weakness and fear and trembling. And my speech and my message were not plausible words of wisdom.

It was a demonstration of the spirit and of power. And here's why. So that your faith wouldn't rest on the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

[30 : 27] And I thought about this and I thought, is that us? Are we the kind of Christians, are we the kind of church that's just trying our best with whatever we got to look strong?

Or if we wrote a letter to one another, would we write it and it would sound something like this, when we were together, we were together in weakness and fear and trembling because we didn't base anything we did on the wisdom of man but the power of God.

So there wasn't anything in our lives or in our lives together that was boast! Worthy! It was a big pile of weakness.

But God did a work in Corinth even in our weakness and even in our fear and trembling. Are you with me? So the Corinthians are being bombarded with the Corinthian culture of everything is external.

Everything's got to be a facade and look good and as if that wasn't enough outside the culture, Paul has to fight the same facade within the church. There was a group known as the Super Apostles.

[31 : 46] Okay, just say that out loud. Super Apostles. This was not like they came out of a Marvel movie, like they've got superhuman powers or anything like that. They were called the Super Apostles because it was basically about how good their life looked.

They were super, maybe I could describe it this way, they were super the Apostles in the sense that everything had to be extraordinary. And they would, they were all about eloquent speech and giving really fine talks and one of the things they emphasized big time was lofty revelations and experiencing visions unlike anybody else had experienced.

In that sense, they were Super Apostles. They had experienced something far greater than anybody else had experienced. They were living a life of luxury far greater than anybody else was living.

They were super in that regard. In fact, it was the very grounds by which the Super Apostles would try to discredit the Apostle Paul.

Look at him. Life never really goes his way. I mean, he's always dealing with persecution. He's always getting in trouble. Bad things are always happening to him.

[33 : 08] Don't you realize that if you're really of God, you're experiencing the good life? In fact, you get a taste of this in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 1.

Look at what Paul says here. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again or do we need as some do, the Super Apostles, letters of recommendation to you?

Do I have to make valid my ministry? Do I have to certify who I am with you, Corinthians? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation written on our hearts to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God. Not on tablets of stone but on the tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God.

Not that we're sufficient in ourselves to claim anything coming from us but our sufficiency is from God. Now, you're tracking with me.

[34 : 13] Put all this background together and this is what you get. Whether it's the outside culture of Corinth that loved the external and the spectacular or it was within the church the influence of these super apostles that I've had a revelation better than you've had.

I had a vision greater than yours. I have a gifting that's far more impressive than yours. And so, it's easy to dismiss somebody like the Apostle Paul because his words really aren't all that impressive. I mean, he says so himself. He doesn't even come to you with lofty speech. I mean, how boring is that? You're jiving with me here.

You put it all together and here's the point, faith family. You have a faith, God help us, and a ministry with the appearance of strength.

As long as you can run up and down the court of faith and look good for everybody else in the stands, you'll be okay. If you've got a good speaking ability, if you've got a strong, richly blessed life, if you've had a strong experience with visions and revelations that others have not, and on and on their boasting would go.

[35 : 30] And I don't like much more in the sermon, I'm serious, but listen to me tonight. Listen, I'm more convinced today than I have ever been before that this is what most churches are built on.

The strength of giving, the strength of planning, the strength of technology, none of which of those things are bad things at all. The strength of programming. We want strong churches, churches that you can walk into and say, wow, these people must really give.

Boy, these people really thought through all the technology. And again, none of that stuff is bad. My point is that Paul understands that that's not actually where strength is found.

You, just say preach preacher so I have permission to say what I'm about to say. You can have a strong church and a weak ministry. You can have a strong building, but I mean, you can have strong programs and you can have a strong giving and be so weak.

Why? Because that's not where strength is found. It's not where strength is found, not in the church and not in the Christian life. Because in the face of the Corinthian culture on the outside and to the influence of the super apostles on the inside, look again what Paul says here in chapter 12, verse 2.

[37 : 01] I know a man, and by the way, Paul is likely, most commentators think that Paul is referring to himself here. I'm not going to take time to argue that, but likely Paul is referring to himself in the third person.

I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up in the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, but God knows. And I know that this man was caught up in paradise, whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, but God knows.

And he heard things that can't be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I may boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast except of my weaknesses.

Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. I have grounds to boast on the big stuff.

Do you see what God has done through my life? Do you realize how I've been used? Do you have any idea the revelations I've seen? Could I just tell you about the visions I've had?

[38 : 04] But I'm not boasting on any of that because that doesn't have anything to do with the heart of ministry. It's not what I'm about telling you how great my vision was.

No, no, no, no, no. Though if I wish to boast, I would be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth, but I refrain from it. And here's why you're not going to find me boasting about my visions or boasting about my giftedness.

It's so that no one may think of me more than he sees in me or hears from me. I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I'm not going to boast on the success of ministry because I don't want you to get the wrong idea about me.

And all of a sudden, for a moment, you'd think I'm strong. Are you tracking with me, faith family? My heart is all out before you in this moment.

Paul says, I'm not going to boast in the things I'd have grounds to boast in. Instead, I will boast in my weakness, lest you think I'm stronger than I am.

[39 : 15] I don't want anybody getting the wrong idea about me. Paul could boast in many things. He chose not to boast in his strengths, his miraculous experiences.

Instead, he chose to boast in his weakness. He would not let the experiences God had given him by his grace to make him feel like he was something special. Not visions, not sermons, not growing churches.

Paul knew that none of that had to do with him. Because listen, are you listening? On Paul's best day, he was a weak man.

On his best day, he was a weak man. And why would Paul be so transparent about his weakness? Why would he be so upfront about this?

Because Paul knew brokenness. Hang with me for just a couple. I got plenty of time. It's like, it's just 5.30 and service goes to 7.30, right? That's what I remember.

[40 : 20] That's what I remember. I'm not sure if it's what you remember. How could Paul be so transparent about his weakness? It's because Paul knew brokenness. Let me show you how he says it in verse 7.

So to keep me from being conceited, that is boasting in my strengths, because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, which is why I think he's referring to himself earlier, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

And three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said, in essence, no. I'm not going to take it away. I'm not going to remove it for you.

Here's why. My grace is sufficient for you. My power is actually made perfect in your weakness. So here's point number two. Weakness was realized through Paul's brokenness.

Paul knew this. Preach, preacher. And Lord, if nothing else, I'm the one that needs this. Regardless of how amazing the visions, or supernatural the experience, or eloquent the sermon, or unexplainable the growth, at the end of the day, Paul was not a man strong enough to overcome his own struggle.

[41 : 42] Think about that. Think about that, faith family. Regardless of how amazing the vision, would you like to be caught up in the third heaven, whatever that is, and receive these kinds of visions?

Every hand would go up. I would love to have that kind of experience, but Paul knows no matter how amazing that is, or supernatural it may be, or eloquent the sermon, or unexplainable the growth.

At the end of the day, I can't even remove my own thorn. I'm not strong enough to overcome my own struggle. It's why I had to plead with God multiple times for Him to remove it, because I couldn't get out of my own weakness.

Why would I boast in my strength when I know good and well how weak I am? I can't even get out of my own struggle.

God would have to get me out of this thorn in the flesh, whatever, and you know there's been much debate on what the thorn in Paul's flesh was, but whatever it was, he couldn't get out of it, and so he pleaded for the Lord to take it from him, and God said no, because I want to keep reminding you how weak you are, lest you or anybody else thinks more highly of you than they should, because this isn't about your strength, Paul.

[43 : 16] It never has been, and it never will be, and so Paul pleaded with God to remove it, and he wouldn't take it away. Why? Notice it on the screen, because the goal is not freedom from struggle.

The goal is freedom from self. Preach, preacher. The goal is not, and if you just want to amen that that's about me, I'll take it, right?

Just shout amens. That's true for you, right? It's not about freedom from struggle, though there's a sense in which it's not that we love struggle, it's not that we love hardship, it's not that we want pain, but what Paul learned is it's not about getting over the struggle, it's about getting over myself.

God gave me this thorn, God gave me this thing that broke me. I pleaded with God. I mean, it broke me, and he wouldn't take it from me because he wanted me to get over me, that I would be reminded that my strength is not found in my strength.

My strength is found in the power of God. Do you see this, faith family? when brokenness awakens you, I want you to be woke.

[44 : 42] That woke you up, right? What did he say? I want you to be woke. And here's what I mean that I want you to be woke. I want you to awaken to the reality of your weakness to the point that you'll stop trying to be strong because then you'll be free.

Say it again. I want you to be awakened, and I want to be awakened, and I feel like the Lord is awakening me to the reality of your weakness so that you'll stop trying to be strong, and then you can be free as the Apostle Paul is here.

So some of you today, you've prayed for a suffering to end, and God has not sent relief. He's not answered your prayer, at least not in the way that you wanted him to answer it. And it may very well be that he's trying to teach you something about him and something about yourself, and that is just how weak you really are.

You can't get out of your own weakness. You're not strong enough. So why would you ever think this life or the Christian life or our church life together would be based on human strength?

Are you with me? There's an old country poem that goes like this. The proper way for a man to pray, said Deacon Samuel Keyes, and the only proper attitude is down upon his knees.

[46 : 08] No, I should say the way to pray, said Reverend Dr. Wise, is standing straight with outstretched arms and wrapped in upturned eyes. Oh, no, oh, no, said Elder Slow.

Such posture is too proud. A man should pray with eyes fast closed and head contritely bowed. It seems to me his hands should be austerely clasped in front with both thumbs pointing toward the ground, said Reverend Dr. Blunt.

Last year I fell in Hodgkin's well, head first, said Cyrus Brown, with both knees a-sticking up and my head a-pointing down. And I made a prayer right then and there, best prayer I ever said, the prayingest prayer I ever prayed.

I was standing on my head. And I bet you that's true for some of you. Brokenness has a way of making us realize just how weak we are, how we can't get out of the well on our own, that we're not strong enough.

Well, what was the freedom, last point, what was the freedom that Paul received by approaching life this way and approaching ministry with the Corinthians this way?

[47 : 30] Here it is, verse 9 and 10, and we're done. 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. Why? So that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then I am content with weakness, God may it be.

Insults and hardships and persecutions and calamities for when I'm weak, I am strong. The last point is this, weakness became the path to Paul's blessedness.

It became the path to his blessedness. Notice in these verses what Paul says, two important things as to why Paul boasted in weakness and why I think that in our Christian life and at Faith Family Church, we need to be more about our weaknesses than our strength.

Number one is this, it was through his weakness that Paul experienced the power of God. Notice again what he says, I will boast all the more in my weakness so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

[48 : 46] Paul understood the key to the Christian life and here's what it is. Notice it on the screen. The Christian life is not meant to display your strength. It is meant to display the power of Christ in your weakness.

And of course, why is that the case? So he gets all the glory. There shouldn't be anything done at Faith Family Church that says, you know, that happened because you've got that preacher. Or you know, that happened because you have that really organized building team. You know, that happened because y'all really leveraged technology. Again, all of those things are good except for maybe the first one.

rewind and you'll get the joke, right? What should be said is that was a congregation that came together in weakness and the power of God showed up.

And they started and they continued and they ran their race not because of their strength but because of their weakness. There was strength there.

[49 : 56] It's the power of Christ. The goal is not to be strong for God. That's freedom. It's not to have strong churches for God.

It's not to live out a strong faith for God because at no point, I hope you're listening, at no point in your Christian experience does your strength have anything to do with anything.

At no point in your Christian experience does your strength have anything to do with anything. The Christian life is as simple as this. Here it is on the screen. You provide the weakness and God will provide the strength.

That I can do, right? There's not much I can do that I can do, right? You bring the weakness to the table and the power of Christ will take it from there.

That's the key Paul understood and it set him free. I pray it sets us free. I hope it continues to radically change the way we approach the Christian life together and the way we do church together.

[51 : 04] Last point is why does he emphasize his weakness? It's not just the power of God. This is last sub point for those of you that were paying attention is that it was actually this that led Paul to contentment.

Let me show you again in verse 10. For the sake of Christ then I am content with weakness. I mean that's just wow.

It's unbelievable. Here's what Paul is saying. Okay if you've zoned out zoned back in based on my notes I have like three minutes left. You can endure that. But this is important.

Listen Paul is saying my suffering my struggle my calamities don't define me. I'm content with them. I'm content with my weakness. Then you say well what's so impactful about that? Listen you need to keep in mind that these were the very things the super apostles used to disqualify Paul.

[52 : 07] Their argument was he's not a real apostle because look at all the calamity he's been through. Look at all the hardship look at all the persecution everywhere he goes he causes problems and Paul is actually saying those things you use to disqualify me I'm actually content in.

I'm okay with the weakness. I'm okay with the calamity and hardship and that's what led Paul to contentment because I ain't trying to please any of y'all in the stands and what you think about my life.

I've learned the key is when I'm weak I'm strong. Notice this on the screen notice this on the screen when you become content with the very weakness others use to criticize when you become content in the very weakness others use to criticize then you're living in the freedom of the gospel.

When you become content in the very weakness others use to criticize you I can't believe you went through that divorce. I can't believe your business went bankrupt.

I can't believe that you have to deal with that kind of persecution. I can't when you become content with the hardship others use to criticize you then you'll experience the freedom of the gospel that it's not about you and in that weakness you'll find strength.

[53 : 55] Are you with me? If we can get this it will set us free. Paul got it. Paul got it. I pray that we would get it.

Faith family during my sabbatical as I studied Paul's life and reflected on my own I came to realize that too much of my ministry the past 25 years has been built on my strength.

The gift of preaching the strength of leadership and while those gifts are from God and these are gifts I want to continue to use for the edification of God's people here at Faith Family I know this my power doesn't come from them.

It doesn't come from them. His power is made perfect in my weakness. So let me as I close be as clear as I can.

God doesn't give a rip if you have it all together. He doesn't give a rip if you have your life all together. It may very well be that he has you standing on your head so that your weakness in your weakness you will find the power of God.

[55 : 05] It's time for me. It's time for you. It's time for us to stop shooting ourselves with spiritual painkillers so we can look good for the Pharisees in the stands.

Playing that religious game usually lands you face down on the floor anyway. So instead let's be the kind of people who find strength and weakness that the power of Christ might be manifest in us. And if you because of American culture find it hard to identify with weakness then maybe I should remind you that the cross was anything but a symbol of strength.

In fact Paul said in the eyes of the world it was weak and foolish. But through the weakness of the cross came the power of an empty grave.

So let us not boast in our strength faith that the power of Christ might rest on us. And God's people said I mean God's people really said amen.

[56 : 13] Pray with me. Pray with me. Lord help us really get this. I feel like I'm just on the journey of really unpacking what this means for my life, for the Christian life, for our culture here at Faith Family Church.

Some of these are things that we've known, that we've taught. Blessed are the poor in spirit. They get the kingdom of heaven. But there really is a difference in understanding the freedom when we don't have to be strong.

When Paul can write to the Corinthian church and say you know when I was with you, I wasn't with you in grand visions. I wasn't with you in the most amazing Bible study anybody had ever been a part of.

No, I was with you in weakness. I remember when I was with you, I was trembling in fear. And you were too. But there was something beautiful in that because it meant that our togetherness had nothing to do with the wisdom of man but everything to do with the power of God.

And so, God, I guess my prayer really is from me to everybody in this room, help us get over ourselves and stop living like this Christian life has anything to do with our strength at all.

[57 : 43] And really begin to understand that maybe it will be a process to really begin to understand that when we're weak, we're actually strong. so help us even these next few weeks as we reflect on the Apostle Paul's life and the things that he understood about the gospel that we need to understand as well.

And I thank you for meeting us here tonight and teaching us these things and what you will do with them in our life and in this church. Lord, I believe it will be a beautiful thing.

And so I praise you in Jesus' name. And God's people said, Amen.