

Men's Sunday Night
The Book of 2 Corinthians
"Finding Strength in Weakness"
Lesson 11 – 2 Corinthians 12
"Power Through Weakness"

While we often extract parts of this chapter for devotional purposes, we must keep in mind Paul's part in answering his critics and proving his apostolic calling. In the previous chapter, he had decided to recount those things that showed his infirmities, that Christ might receive the glory. We find in this chapter four proofs of Paul's apostleship.

The "man" Paul is talking about here is, of course, himself. Imagine being able to keep a thrilling experience like this secret for fourteen years. He was God's chosen instrument to reveal to the world the greatness of God's grace. What Paul heard from God, we do not know. Paul himself said nothing about this experience lest any Christian start honoring him more than he deserved. What humility.

Paul mentions in verse 7 "*that a thorn in the flesh was given to me.*" We do not know what this thorn was, but the best suggestion is an eye ailment. Paul was supernaturally blinded when converted, and it is possible that some weakness remained even in later years. Galatians 4:15 and 6:11 "*with what large letters*" suggests eye trouble. This would have been a trial to Paul both physically and emotionally, and could honestly be called a thorn in the flesh. Whatever the thorn was, it was a burden to him, and it brought pain. He asked to have it removed.

In this next section, Paul is not exalting himself when he claims to be second to none of the apostles; he is simply defending his office. Note that Paul lists several "signs" that proved his apostleship, starting with patience! We expect him to mention miracles and wonders, but not patience. Yet it was Paul's steadfast endurance under trial that gave evidence that he was divinely called and commissioned.

Paul now shows his courage in dealing with sin "*When I come to you, you will see how weak I am!*" writes Paul. "I would rather you start cleaning up the church now," he advises. "If you wait for me to do it, you'll see how humble I can be in the hands of the Lord." When the hireling sees the wolf coming, he runs away, but the true shepherd stays and protects the sheep. Paul was not about to run away. He even went so far as to name the sins that were rampant in the church. "*A little leaven*" had indeed leavened the whole lump.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul has warned the Corinthians against deceitful leaders who have come to the church claiming to be apostle's superior to him. In loving concern for the church, Paul validates himself by a description of his suffering in the ministry of Christ. In this study, Paul exercises great restraint in responding to the false apostle's accusations. He gives us a glimpse into his struggles with weakness, God's unexpected answer to his prayers, and the secret to his strength.

1. Paul describes his experience of being caught up to paradise by referring to "*a man in Christ*." Though Paul considers it unprofitable to boast about it, what experience does he describe to the Corinthians?

2. What are some weaknesses or afflictions that you find difficult to live with?

3. What can we learn from Paul's example about dealing with physical discomfort or hardship?

4. How should we be accountable to one another? Why?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-11. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul had experienced the spiritual power of Christ. God had given him deep and intimate spiritual experiences. There was the danger that he might begin to think too highly of himself; therefore, God gave Paul a "*thorn in the flesh*."

Paul needed a “*thorn*” to keep him ever mindful that he was no better than other men. He was totally dependent upon God despite many unbelievable spiritual experiences.

5. Why did Paul have a “thorn”?

6. Who was responsible for giving Paul a “thorn in the flesh”?

7. What was Paul’s response to his “thorn”? What purpose can suffering serve?

8. How does Paul’s third plea for the removal of his “thorn” speak to our own unanswered prayers, and how can it encourage us to continue trusting in God’s grace?

9. How does the Christian perspective on power and weakness differ from that of the world?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:12-21. Pray and answer the following questions:

Our world prizes strength, the physical strength of athletes, the financial strength of companies, the political strength of office-holders, and the military strength of armies. But Paul put a new twist on the notion of strength: weakness can make a person strong.

10. What role do you think signs, wonders, and miracles should play in the church today?
11. In what ways does this chapter deepen your understanding of God's grace and power?
12. What does Paul's relationship with the Corinthians reveal about the type of friendships God wants for you?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. Write your insights down for review and group discussion.