

The Power of Weakness

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace Church located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from messages preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

*All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from
the King James Version.*

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INTRODUCTION

So many of us fight weakness. I'm not talking about falling into sin—God forbid! I am talking about the weakness that comes into our lives through trials and circumstances. When we are weak, we want to call on the angels for help; we want to seek people for counsel.

But there's a reason why God allows us to experience weakness. God is saying to us, as He did to the apostle Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul's response? "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). By the grace of God, some of us are going to be called to go through unusual periods of weakness so that we can experience the power of God resting on us.

Chapter One

THE SUFFICIENCY OF GRACE

“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: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

The apostle Paul was one of the greatest men of God who ever lived—great because of his attitude and his honesty, knowing he was nothing apart from Christ. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul called himself the chief of sinners. In Ephesians 3:8, he

said he was “less than the least of all saints.” And, in 2 Corinthians 12:7, he had this thorn in his flesh. Paul didn’t like the thorn; he didn’t want it, and he asked God to remove it.

Glorying in Infirmities

There have been many speculations among Bible scholars as to the nature of Paul’s thorn in the flesh. Some think it was a person sent to hinder him. Galatians 4:13-15 gives us a good indication that he may have had eye problems. 2 Corinthians 10:10 tells us that his speech was “contemptible.” However, 2 Corinthians 12:7 makes it crystal clear that Paul’s thorn was “the messenger of Satan”—which I believe to be a demon—sent to buffet Paul lest he be “exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations” given to him by God.

My careful study in the Greek text of 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, with Acts 14:19-20, reveals that when Paul was stoned in Lystra, he actually died and was caught up to the “third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2*b*) or, “paradise” (verse 4*a*). In heaven, Paul heard “unspeakable words,” things he could never put into human language. To keep Paul from becoming proud and arrogant over the things he saw and heard, God gave him this

thorn in the flesh.

So Paul prayed: "Lord, will you remove this thorn from my flesh?" Nothing happened, even for this man who had been used by God to raise Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9-10).

Paul prayed a second time: "Lord, please remove this thorn from me." Here he was, the apostle to the Gentiles; he had been in Arabia, where he was Spirit-taught.* He knew what it meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He had many of the gifts of the Spirit and was truly a servant of God.

Still, no answer.

So Paul prayed a third time. "Lord, will you remove this thorn? I don't want it." Finally, the Lord answered him: "No, I will not. My grace is sufficient for you, and my strength is made perfect in your weakness."

Immediately, Paul responded to God's answer: "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: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). In these great verses, we see the power of weakness.

Three times, Paul prayed. Three times! God's only answer: "Paul, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness."

Paul said, "Thank you, Lord. That settles it; that's all I need to hear." This is the key to the power of weakness.

What a beautiful response! God's answer probably wasn't what Paul wanted to hear; but he accepted it and was immediately thankful. This was the attitude that made this servant of God so different.

* *ARE YOU SPIRIT-TAUGHT*, A BOOKLET AVAILABLE FROM GRACE PUBLICATIONS, COVERS THIS SUBJECT IN DETAIL.

Chapter Two

DELIVERED FROM
THE BODY OF DEATH

Paul was weak in many other areas; The things he wanted to do, he couldn't do. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Romans 7:18-21).

Contrary to what anyone else may teach, Paul's "Romans 7" experience came *after* he had been in Arabia, *after* he had been baptized and filled with the Spirit of God. Paul understood positional truth, according to Romans 6. He knew what it meant to be resurrected and seated above with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). And yet, he

still had a “Romans 7” experience. He had been filled with the Spirit of God many times. Yet, Paul went out and fell flat on his face.

We don’t know what Paul did. We don’t know how serious it was. But, we do know that in Romans 7:24, Paul cried out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Whatever Paul did, even if it was small thing, it was still big enough that he felt he was a wretched man.

Paul was hid in the power and holiness of God, yet he asked: “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He was yearning for deliverance. Even though he was filled with the Spirit, even with his many gifts, even though he’d been Spirit-taught in Arabia—this apostle, this mighty man of God, still found himself struggling with his old sin nature.

God’s Throne Ministry

Paul discovered something through this experience: He was introduced to the throne ministry of Jesus Christ. Paul knew what it meant to be crucified with Christ; he knew what it was to be resurrected, but he did not understand the throne.

All of a sudden, Paul came to a new under-

standing, and he declared, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:25a). Here, in Paul’s heart, was the birth of the throne ministry he had never understood before this time. Then, in Romans 8:1, he shouted two words in an exclamation of victory: “...*no condemnation*”!

Chapter Three

LOOKING TO THE CROSS

As Jesus Christ suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane, drops of blood came through His pores. Eventually, He would be nailed to the cross in excruciating pain and agony. By sight, every single thing seemed to go wrong as He suffered a shameful death for each of us. It appeared as if He were helpless and that the situation was hopeless. But if you look closer, you will see the power in His weakness.

In Matthew 26:53-54, Jesus said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Jesus was saying, "The angels are with me. Don't you know they could deliver me if I called to the Father for them? But," He said, "I'm *not* going to call on the angels and I *don't* want to be delivered. If I were, the Scriptures could not be fulfilled."

Jesus' Willingness to be Weak

Jesus demonstrated the connection between weakness and power. In 2 Corinthians 13:4a, He was crucified in weakness: "For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God." He didn't have to be weak, but He was willing to be weak, because there was a purpose which motivated Him and it had to be manifested.

The Lord Jesus Christ is saying that there can be a wonderful reason for weakness. If Jesus had not suffered, bled, and died on the Cross, then, needless to say, every one of us would go to hell. Had Jesus called upon the twelve legions of angels, every one of us would be lost and on our way to a Christ-less eternity. But He was willing to suffer as a weakling. He was willing to be crucified and die in weakness.

You and I are going to be called to go through times of weakness. Why? So that we can manifest the power of God in those moments.

Hundreds of Christians do not want the Cross, and they fight situations that would drive them to it. But the old rugged cross is the only instrument God has to manifest the resurrected Christ and to show people that He has victory

over death. It's the only instrument He has to reveal supernatural love, power, and peace.

Victory at Calvary

The first thing Jesus said from the cross was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34a). That was supernatural love. The last thing He said was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46a). That was supernatural faith. Jesus is saying to us, "When I start nailing you to the Cross in different situations, I want you to take on *my* character and *my* power. I want you to offer yourself through the eternal Spirit."

Jesus Christ offered Himself without spot to God through the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14). How else could Satan be defeated? How else could sin be judged, condemned, and paid for? Only through the cross could the justice of God be met and the grace of God be manifested in its supremacy. Only through the cross could divine love, patience, and long-suffering be expressed. Only through the cross, where He died, could His divine ministry of joy be revealed.

This was an unusual cross. It was a cross where an innocent Man identified Himself as guilty to display God's attitude toward the

guilty as He bore their sin.

“So then death worketh in us, but life in you” (2 Corinthians 4:12). This was the purpose of the Cross. He died that others might live. He died so that God would be revealed in utter suffering. He died in weakness that real strength might be displayed and real power would be manifested—the power to stay on the cross, power not to complain, power not to rebuke us, power to love us and identify with us, power to give His life for us—even when we were guilty.

Jesus showed us a power beyond reacting, a power beyond natural temperament—that so-called power to fight back. He showed us *real* power. He showed us God in action. He revealed what a suffering God would do for mankind, even when mankind put Him on the Tree. “Kill me? I’ll still love you,” Jesus was saying to us through this scene at the cross. “Destroy me? I will save you.”

Chapter Four

REVEALING CHRIST
IN WEAKNESS

I once visited an eighty-one-year-old lady, in the hospital, who was suffering from cancer of the intestines. The doctors said her body had built up an immunity toward the medication she was taking. Her pain must have been unbearable. But, I will never forget her face for one reason—she was completely filled with God’s glory.

“I don’t see how she can stand the pain,” the doctor told me. “There’s something about her. How do you explain it? She’s the best patient we’ve ever had in the history of our hospital. She’s a happy sick person! When I know the pain is literally cutting her to pieces, she looks up to God and says, ‘Thank you, Jesus.’ She praises God, sweetly and softly, not with a tormented voice, but with a beautiful voice.” He was overwhelmed by her testimony of the

power of weakness.

Perhaps you are asking, “How could this lady be filled with God’s glory and still have cancer?” That’s God’s business, not ours. But she had power in her weakness. Her mind was on Jesus Christ. She was so occupied with the Throne of God that she experienced fantastic victory. She was so close to God, so occupied with Him, that she hardly sensed her pain. She testified of heaven while she was still on the earth.

I also saw a sixty-nine-year-old pastor in the hospital; he was suffering with kidney cancer. Nothing could be done. The pain must have been overwhelming because the cancer was slowly eating his body. He was in and out of consciousness. I stayed with him one Saturday evening as he regained consciousness. I watched his face as he kept saying, “Glory, glory, glory!” Then, he would go back into unconsciousness and his body would twitch in terrible agony. When a person learns how to believe and walk by faith, he has tremendous power in his weakness.

Don’t Fight Weakness

Christians spend hours fighting their weaknesses and the weaknesses of other people. Jesus

Christ wants them to be crucified in weakness. And He wants that weakness to be brought into death, even the death of the cross.

Picture that old, rugged cross and you will get to know God. You will get to know His character and attitude toward you. Get to know all about Him as you listen to Him and watch Him on the cross. Then, see Jesus Christ as He's placed in the tomb. Watch as He is resurrected and see Him as He visits the disciples in the upper room, announcing "Peace" to them as they were hiding in fear of the Jews (John 20:20). See His resurrected attitude borne from the Cross now born into our human nature through regeneration of the heart.

There are three things the cross revealed: God's grace, sufficient in all situations; God's strength; and God's eternal life, given to everyone who receives Him.

God may say, "Over the next three or four weeks, I am going to allow some people to go through times of personal weakness." If you are one of these people, don't fight that weakness. Let His grace come through you; let His strength be manifested. As a result, someone will live because of seeing God in you during unbelievable situations. Out of you will come God's charac-

ter, God's life, and God's attributes. People will see it right in front of their eyes. They will sense it and watch it, becoming hungry and thirsty through the Holy Spirit.

Don't let people see you fall, backslide, and murmur like the children of Israel. Let them see Jesus Christ come out of you, through the Spirit.

Being Found Faithful

There is one thing I'm praying in these last days—that God would keep me faithful. A great Russian believer, who was in prison, constantly prayed: "God, keep me faithful unto death. Keep me faithful! Don't let me be anything but faithful." Every child of God must know the importance of being faithful from day to day.

Be faithful to let the grace and strength of God come through you. Oh, how important it is to just be faithful! Be faithful in letting the Cross work its way into your life.

The sentence of death is upon us (2 Corinthians 1:9). We are always being delivered unto death so that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal bodies (2 Corinthians 4:10).

It is God's plan that we represent the Cross. Many times, we are going to represent weak-

ness. In the midst of a tremendous demonic attack in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” His heart was perfect and His attitude was submissive to the Father’s plan. But, it was impossible for the cup to be removed, and Jesus Christ manifested the power of God in the weakness of His humanity at the moment.

Sometimes in our weakness we may pray, “Lord, is there another way?” No. There isn’t. We must die. We must go all the way, because there’s no way apart from the Cross. There’s no other way but through death—death to ourselves and to our privileges—and out of this death will come God’s grace and strength. Out of this death will come resurrection life. Out of our weakness will come life to people who are living in sin so they can be forgiven and saved. Out of our Cross experiences will come rivers of living water, the flow of God’s character, because we denied ourselves and took up our cross. There’s power in weakness: the power of Jesus Christ in action.

CONCLUSION

If you're born again, you have the eternal Spirit of Hebrews 9:14. God is saying to each of us, "I want you to offer yourself through the eternal Spirit. I want you to take on My character and My power as you are nailed to different situations just as Jesus was nailed to the Cross."

By the grace of God, I can go through trials in the power of the eternal Spirit. I can be nailed to circumstances and situations without whining, murmuring, reacting, or being disgusted in any way. In these last days, I *know*, what's more, I am *convinced* that I am crucified with Christ. Yet, at the same time, I must take up my cross and follow Jesus Christ (Luke 9:23). I can say, there's power in weakness.

Let's not spend our time fighting the Cross. Let's deny ourselves and take up our cross, so that through our bodies will come the manifestation of His life.