

2 Corinthians 12 (9-10) – I'm Better when I'm Broken

People, whether they are Christians or not, spend their lives trying to grow stronger. We want to go from struggling, to stable, to successful, to significant. We want to be blessed, and we want to be a blessing. And we figure that to be a blessing we have to have certain things in place to be able to do that. After all, you can't give what you don't have, right?

Well, that is understandable. And I am not saying it's wrong. It's not wrong to be strong. But what God says is strong may not be how you think it is. What I am saying is that God has a plan to help you process his power in your life in a way that isn't like the world's wisdom. And when you consider the people in the Bible who manifested God's power in their lives, you find that these men and women of God were often not dealing from a position of strength, but from a position of weakness. They were broken. But strong.

I saw a sign that asked, what works better when it's broken? The answer was a horse. A broken horse can be ridden and do work. An unbroken horse never works, or wins a race. An unbroken horse is never even in a race.

And then I thought about that some more. What works better when it's broken? A Christian. Someone who is trusting Jesus. And someone who is learning, through suffering, to biblically process the pain and problems of this life in order to be an obedient, submissive servant of Christ.

Then they understand what Jesus told the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 – *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.* And then they can truly reply like Paul did in vs.10 – *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.*

Those verses are easy to read, but that truth is hard to live. But if God is going to use you, he is going to break you, in order to make you. You see, God only uses broken vessels. You're better when you're broken.

Now this doesn't mean you're no good, that you're not useful, that you have to stay weak, or you're no good to God. No, it means that in your weakness you realize the source of your true strength. And so, you realize that you're always vulnerable, yet always victorious. Because God was won over you.

This is so powerful, so needed, yet so misunderstood. So much of the church mimics the world when it comes to worshiping strength. And so, they lose the proper focus. They may be strong in the world's measure. They may feel blessed, and bless others, but they are actually weak in God. Yet those who know the true God in the true way may look weak to the world, but they can be strong in God. The way of God's word is not the way of this world.

When I am weak, then I am strong. In order to see this, we are going to take a short tour through the book of 2 Corinthians. Then you will see how Paul came to this conclusion, what he did about it, and how you can do this, too.

1:8-11 – learning to lean on God and other people

2:12-14 – always in triumph no matter the hard decisions and providences

4:7-10, 16-18 – God uses broken vessels, this is proof of God in your life

5:5-12 – courage from the Holy Spirit

6:4-10 – great endurance because of great grace

7:4-7 – learning to live for other people

11:24-30 – the badge of honor

Faith is about the power to withstand the storm, not the power to withdraw the storm. His grace is sufficient for me to give him glory with my life.

You can learn how Paul did what he did despite all that he had to go through. You can be better as a minister, better as a witness, grow deeper in your discipleship with Jesus, and stronger in your relationship with God.

It doesn't mean that you won't cry. It means your tears will carry a new, deeper meaning. It doesn't mean wearing a false mask of all is well. It means you know that all is well in the kingdom. And you are a part of it.

Now, let's return to chapter 12, and look at vs.1-8. Here was the Apostle Paul, living full out for God, yet he had to deal with all the problems we already looked at. And now this ongoing problem. It doesn't matter if his "thorn in the flesh" was a physical ailment, a personal temptation to a particular sin, or perhaps the groups of people who were after him, to shut his ministry down, and some were trying to kill him. Whatever his thorn was, and whatever your issue is, the point remains the same. Paul prayed for the problem to go away, but it never did. And he wasn't just saying a few simple prayers, he was pleading. Paul might have stopped asking for the problem to go away, but he didn't stop praying altogether.

Does this show that Paul lacked faith? No, it demonstrated that he had faith. The trials that Paul went through strengthened his faith.

Now I am not saying that three times is the limit in praying for your problem to go away. I am saying that faith isn't always about changing your situation; it is about sanctifying your situation. You are faithful despite your situation, the light shines through the darkness, the strength is manifested through weakness, the broken jar of clay reveals the soul saving power of God.

Sometimes God takes pain and problems away almost immediately. Sometimes it takes a longer process. Sometimes they never fully go away. You may have a measure of victory, but you still have to struggle. You are seeking God to remove it, and when that isn't happening, you keep seeking God to give you strength to endure it and courage to face it, to make your way godly as you continue to struggle through it. You stay close to God, and so sometimes he doesn't remove the temptation so as to keep you tenaciously trusting him. It is an intimate and intense relationship.

Your cross to carry means you give up sinful coping mechanisms and you have to feel the pain. Repentance and submission hurt, but it's the only way to be happy in God. Otherwise, all you'll keep doing is trying to please God in the flesh and be miserable. He knows what you need, and his grace is sufficient. If you were to get all you wanted, and to be rid of all temptations,

it might not lead you closer to dependent trust in God, it might actually lead you away (Exodus 23:29-30). God doesn't take that particular temptation away because then you would be tempted to drift away.

This teaches you holiness and keeps you humble. Paul learned this, and he didn't say the thorn came because he was conceited, it says in order to keep him from being conceited. God's strength is made perfect, in other words it is matured in you, not through your personal power but in your weakness. Many things are not what they seem, and your trials are often wrapped around your triumphs.

Your victory is manifest through your weakness, your struggle, your dependence on God. You might think dependence means you just rely on Jesus and he will make all your problems go away. The truth is that you rely on him and you make it through the storm, but you still have to go through the storm. Matthew 7:24-27 – both houses had a storm. Yet one served to destroy the house and the other pointed out how secure the foundation was. Friends, faith is about the power to *withstand* the storm, not the power to *withdraw* the storm.

You learn of God as he reveals himself through your journey. Joni Eareckson Tada said – The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God.

In your weakness, when you mortify sin, you magnify God. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit to your soul. It's that unshakable feeling that no matter what happens you are his. It is an experiential knowledge, an experiential strength and understanding. The really comforting thing is that God is with me – he knows me, he knows what's going on in my life, he cares, and he is doing something about it. Although I may not always realize it in those painful moments, he is fully invested in me, and he will see me through. God's grace is sufficient for me to give him glory with my life.

Why won't God help me with this? He is helping you. He is sanctifying you, helping you to stay repentant, and helping you to stay humble. He is keeping you dependent and trusting. He is building patience and perseverance in you. He is making you an example of his power which is demonstrated through your weakness, your worship, and your witness.

Jesus told Paul that his grace was sufficient for Paul. So, what did Paul do with that truth? How did Paul use that truth to get the power of Christ to rest upon him? How did Paul become strong in his weakness? Did Paul resort to some sinful coping mechanism? No. Then what did he do?

What does the text say?

Look at vs.9 – *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* There is the answer – I will boast, meaning he will rejoice, he will worship God because of his weaknesses. Now, what does that mean? It means that Paul will recognize that his weakness is the key to being covered by the power of Christ.

And he follows it up with vs.10 – *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.* Paul says he is content, that is to say he approves of God's plan, and he is willing to endure these things for the sake of Christ, who manifests his strength through our weakness. It is a matter of faith.

When you are a Christian, and you are going through hard times, and you pray and plead and suffer, you may wonder, "Why doesn't God do something?" He has. He has given you Christ; for now, and forever. His grace is sufficient for you. You're better when you're broken. Amen.