

Paul and Weakness – “When I am weak, then I am strong.”

Why weakness?

- “We form part of a generation that worships power – military, intellectual, economic, scientific. The concept of power is worked into the warp and woof of our daily living. Our entire world is divided into power blocs. Men everywhere are striving for power in various realms, often with questionable motives. On the subject of power there is a stark and startling contrast between God’s outlook and our own. His words through Isaiah in his day are no less appropriate in our own: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Isaiah 55:8). Unlike every worldly philosophy, the gospel seeks out the weak and the poor.” (*Dynamic Spiritual Leadership*, Oswald Sanders, p. 203)
- God wants us to have a clear understanding of our weakness so that the focus is on his power
 - 1Cor 1:27-31
 - 1Cor 2:1-5
- God wants us to have a clear understand of our weakness to drive us to dependence
 - 2Cor 12:5, 9-10
 - 2Cor 4:7-12
 - Phil 3:4-8

God’s Paths to Weakness

As a result of circumstance

“Leaders face unexpected situations involving sickness, crises, and conflict. Few see these as part of necessary training for effective ministry.... If a leader refuses to see the hand of God in this intense processing, but instead blames circumstances or people, or rationalizes away the processing, then [maturity] may not develop.” (*The Making of a Leader*, Clinton, p154, 156)

- Limiting Circumstances

- “A year of being set aside from ministry can be a painful thing, especially if your reputation is at stake. But what is a year compared to release for a more effective mature ministry in the future for as long as the Lord allows me to minister?” (*The Making of a Leader*, Clinton, p173)
- Struggles in Ministry

As a result of character

- Character weaknesses (Sanders pg 173-174) (2)
 - “The celebrated Scottish preacher James S. Stewart made a statement that is both revolutionary and challenging, because it strikes such a shrewd blow at our human pride and self-sufficiency:
 - ‘It is always upon human weakness and humiliation, not human strength and confidence, that God chooses to build His Kingdom; and that he can use us not merely in spite of our ordinariness and helplessness and disqualifying infirmities, but precisely because of them. It is a thrilling discovery to make, and it can revolutionize our missionary outlook.’” (*Dynamic Spiritual Leadership*, Sanders, p. 204)
- Insecurities
 - “Even while Paul was making use of his gifts and qualifications, he was inwardly renouncing dependence on them to achieve spiritual results, relying instead on the ungrieved Holy Spirit to supply the power. He welcomed the weakness that made his dependence on God more complete.

Dwight L. Moody, the Billy Graham of his day, learned to exploit the power of weakness as Paul did. He was innocent of education, his physical appearance was unattractive, and his voice was high-pitched and nasal. But his conscious weakness did not prevent God from shaking the world through him.

On one occasion, a press reporter was assigned to cover his campaigns in order to discover the secret of his extraordinary power and influence over people of all social strata. After he returned from his assignment, he wrote, ‘I can see nothing whatever in Moody to account for his marvelous work.’

When Moody was told this, he chuckled, 'Of course not, because the word was God's, not mine.' Moody's weakness was God's weapon." (*Dynamic Spiritual Leadership*, Sanders, p. 207)

As a result of failure

Wrong Ways to Respond to Weakness

God's Desired Outcomes

- Weakness drives us to dependence
 - "The ministry is so challenging that when we think of it, the primary focus always needs to be on what God does for us. Otherwise when problems come and we are faced with our own inadequacy, we could react in harmful ways." (*Jesus-Driven Ministry*, Fernando, p. 47)
 - Leading others to dependence
 - Sanders p177 – "It is unlikely that Paul relished his weakness from the very beginning of his ministry. Like us, he was disposed to protest, and so it was a gradual learning process. He said, '*I have learned* to be content in whatever the circumstances (Philippians 4:11). But as he mastered the divine law of compensation, he ultimately reached the high ground of being able to say in sincerity, '*I delight* in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12:10).
One great secret of Paul's success as a leader was that he set a glowing example for his followers, for he extracted power from his weaknesses. He wrested their secrets from them, and through the Spirit's ministry discovered

that they could be an asset, rather than a liability.” (*Dynamic Spiritual Leadership*, Sanders, p. 208)

- Weakness makes us tough

- Weakness qualifies us to serve
 - Heb 2:17-18

 - “Peter does not approach his readers from on high, as a virtuoso apostle. Rather, he takes the position of fellow elder, coming alongside the others, and bearing similar burdens. He also writes as a witness to the suffering of Christ, one whose heart has been humbled by failure, broken and conquered by Calvary’s love. He is a leader who looks across to others but not down. A shepherd’s work requires a shepherd’s heart.” (*Spiritual Leadership*, Sanders, p48)
 - “Those who have a firm grasp of their exalted identity in Christ do not need to put on airs or act superior or look down on others. They are thrilled with the amazing status that has been conferred on them even though they do not deserve it. They are madly in love with the Christ who gave them this status. Now they want to spend the rest of their lives trying to lift up others, and they do so in the strength of what God has done to them. People are not a threat to them because the eternal God has given them eternal significance. They are freed to be servants! (*Jesus-Driven Ministry*, Fernando, p59-60)

- Weakness gets us focused on eternity
 - 2 Cor 4