

Perfect Weakness 2 Corinthians 12

Introduction

- What is your greatest weakness?
 - I know it's not a positive way to start a sermon, but maybe today it will have a happy ending!
 - For now, just pick one!
- Example of learning how to dribble a basketball with my left hand
 - Learning to dribble with my right hand came natural
 - Basketball is a sport that you have to be equally as comfortable using both hands.
 - Learning to dribble with my left hand took more concentration and effort
 - Even though I learned how to do it, my left hand is still my weakest
- Opponents look for weaknesses or imperfections to attack
 - Satan does this as well
 - Tempts us with our weaknesses
 - Makes us feel bad for our imperfections
 - All the more to make us push ourselves toward perfection
- Sermon Series: "What is Perfection?"
 - We were created in perfection
 - Sin destroyed perfection
 - Yet God's expectation has never changed
 - Meeting this expectation becomes difficult when we think about our weaknesses
- Is it possible to find perfection through our weaknesses?
 - **2 Corinthians 12**
 - Context that the Apostle Paul is speaking is related to "false prophets" who are influencing the Corinthians by boasting of their accomplishments and experiences.
 - Side-note: Makes you think about the T.V. pastors and authors that influence us and even our community pastors that sometimes we become disciples of rather than examining everything in the context of who Jesus is.
 - Go back to main question: Is it possible to find perfection through our weaknesses?
 - For Paul, he asks his audience to consider what is the test of a valid messenger of God?
 - It is how dramatic their experiences are, or how strong their credentials are?
 - OR does God validate us as he works his power through our weaknesses?
- Think back to your greatest weakness, what if that weakness became an opportunity for God to show his strength in your life?

Boast of my weakness

- **2 Corinthians 12:5-6**
 - In contrast to the false prophets, Paul chose to boast of his weaknesses
 - The truth is Paul had a great list of credentials
 - Jewish upbringing
 - Pharisee
 - Spiritual transformation
 - Calling
 - Paul didn't need all of that to validate his faith.
 - What he needed was the humility to acknowledge his weaknesses so that God's power could shine through his life.
 - Paul saw weakness as an opportunity to testify to the power of God
- How many of us would gladly boast of our weaknesses?
 - It's usually something we try and hide; especially if we are perfectionists!
 - The times our weakness is revealed are the times we are careless and let it out!
- A lesson in perfection
 - None of us are perfect!
 - And God knows it!
 - Acknowledging our weaknesses are the first step toward perfection
 - Self awareness to know our limitations
 - Opportunity to allow God's power to be unleashed in our lives.

To keep me from being conceited

- **2 Corinthians 12:7**
 - A thorn in the flesh?
 - Has become a phrase to describe a persistent nagging
 - Similar to Paul's case
 - It could have been a physical element
 - It could have been a circumstance of persecution
 - It could have been a spiritual ailment
 - Whatever it was, it had a purpose. "To keep me from becoming conceited"
 - God doesn't necessarily inflict us with weaknesses.
 - Weaknesses or imperfections are a reflection of our broken humanity
 - Adam and Eve had limited knowledge for a reason:
 - Protect their innocence; a lack of knowledge of what sin was
 - Create a dependence on God
 - However, they allowed their limitations to keep them from God rather than draw them closer to God.
 - Could that be the case with us? We not only try to hide our weaknesses from others, but we try to hide our weaknesses from God.
 - We want to stand approved
 - Worthy

- Yet, one of the great advantages to our faith, is that God invites us to give him our weaknesses so that he can provide his strength in our lives
- Your greatest weaknesses can be an opportunity for God
 - Acknowledging our weaknesses requires humility.

Requested 3 times and denied

- **2 Corinthians 12:8**
 - Persistent in prayer, and yet God denied Paul's request
 - How many pastors would preach that?!
 - Further more, why would Paul be an appealing teacher and leader when God doesn't answer Paul's prayers?
 - There was a purpose for the thorn in Paul's flesh.
 - He needed something to keep him humble.
 - He needed a reminder to depend upon God.
 - Life didn't work out perfectly as Paul might have intended, and yet *it was the imperfections in Paul's life that allowed God to work his perfect will in Paul's life.*
- There are reasons that God doesn't answer our prayers, or respond to our prayers in the way we request
 - It isn't always a result of sin
 - It isn't because we aren't good enough
 - Or haven't prayed hard enough
 - Sometimes, it's because God has a greater purpose that he wants us to see
 - This is the reason why our prayer life should not only be about us making requests, but also consist of us listening to God.
- Humility provided the opportunity for Paul to not only acknowledge his weaknesses, but to also listen to God's will for his life.
 - Remember the moment that Adam and Eve were tempted with the forbidden fruit
 - "God told us not to eat of it. Oh, but it looks so good, and we can be just like God."
 - Instead of listening to God, they wanted more. Instead of allowing their limitations to draw them closer to God, they allowed them to push them away from God.
- Your greatest weakness can be an opportunity for God

My grace is sufficient

- **2 Corinthians 12:9**
 - God didn't respond the way that Paul requested, but God didn't stop at "No"
 - Paul's weakness made him aware of his need for God. He had to lean or depend upon God in order to deal with the weakness in his life.
 - Grace was God's answer to Paul's request.

- When we acknowledge our weakness, see it as an opportunity, God supplies his power through grace
- *Perfection is allowing God's grace to work in our lives*
- Think back to last week as we talked about the perfect sacrifice
 - The perfect sacrifice is offering God our imperfection
 - It's at the point of surrender that God can work his perfect will in our lives
 - All Paul needed, and all you and I need, is the grace of God
 - Isn't it good to know that our greatest weakness is something that we can acknowledge and not hide from God because his grace is sufficient
 - His power is made perfect in our weakness
- Reflection on recent events
 - Shootings in El Paso, TX and Dayton, OH
 - Political Issues
 - Social Issues
 - In no way am I suggesting that God caused these occurrences to happen. They are a result of sin that can only be healed and prevented by the grace of God.
 - It's more than an issue of who is right and who is wrong, republican or democratic, or whatever else we might argue— we've got to acknowledge our weaknesses in not only the world, but in the church to experience the power of God.
- Your greatest weakness can be an opportunity for God

Content

- **2 Corinthians 12:10**
 - Paul's attitude is not giving up and living with his weakness. Instead he has acknowledged his weakness and given it to God so that the power of God might be perfected through his weakness
 - Paul is content with not being perfect because his imperfection is an opportunity for God to be glorified through him.
- I'm going to take a moment to boast
 - 2 Corinthians 12 is one of those passages that is easy to preach, because the testimony of Paul preaches itself
 - I think there is a part within us that desires to rest in the same peace and contentment that Paul found has he considered his weaknesses
 - Perfection is so allusive
 - We try to hide our imperfections, when God desires us to acknowledge them
 - Notice though that Paul is not leaving his weaknesses where they are at, but instead living in the strength of God to overcome his limitations
 - God's desire is for us to be humble and honest about our weaknesses, so that he can sufficiently supply his power in our lives to overcome what holds us back.

Conclusion

- Is your weakness an opportunity or a limitation?
 - Know your weaknesses and acknowledge them so that you can allow God the opportunity to be glorified through his power working in you.
 - Our weaknesses are an opportunity for God's perfection
 - Be content in God's perfection
 - "For when I am weak, then I am strong."