

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

I don't know about you, but this summer seems to be taking it all out of me. The heat, having a summer cold, not having the will to do much of anything... I've got to admit, I'm feeling alone, empty, like I'm getting nowhere. So the passage from 2nd Corinthians was just what I needed to hear!

Paul, the writer of 2nd Corinthians, was not completely accepted by everyone in Corinth, there were many critics of his words and deeds. He is continuing to try to defend his ministry by putting himself down in verses 5&6 "On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me," and again in verses 9&10 "but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. This is not something we would expect to hear from someone in today's world." In our culture, and most likely in Paul's time as well, a person would speak highly of themselves in order to defend themselves, but that isn't what Paul did. Paul pointed to his weaknesses so that Christ may be lifted up as the power behind his works. Does this mean we too should get weak in order to make our faith stronger?

Let's start to answer that by looking at the comfort that is found in this passage. When we feel despair and hopelessness, feeling like we're all alone and getting nowhere, feelings of weakness and burnout, there is no need to feel guilty. Think about the times you have felt guilty because you just didn't have the energy to do another thing, or the times you felt that there was no use in doing something because it wasn't going to make a difference. The good news is that none of this is bad for your relationship with God. God can still use you. It doesn't matter how low you feel, how much energy you have in the moment, how very weak you may feel, God can still use you. In fact, we are all weak. It's not helpful when we try to hide our weaknesses from God.

A helpful first step when we are feeling weak, worn out, hopeless, is to open our heart to God and evaluate the condition of our soul. Prayerfully invite God to help us examine the spiritual condition of our hearts. Ask God to reveal to us where we truly are missing the mark, accept God's evaluation and repent, then we are to be more careful about what we allow our minds to dwell upon. When we are feeling weak, we can be uplifted by the fact that God is still working for the good of those who love God. God is right there along side us, bringing us through. That's what Paul meant in verse 9 when he said, speaking for God, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Unless we admit to having a weakness, God is not able to work in us.

Paul, in this passage of his letter to the Corinthians, says that in his weakness Christ is more present to him, and Christ is in him. God's glory is seen more clearly in our weakness. John Wesley said in one of his sermons, "Accordingly, He chooses the weak to confound the mighty; the foolish to confound the wise; for this plain reason, that He may secure the glory to Himself..." (*The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 5, pp. 483-484). In our weakness, the strength and power of God shines all the brighter, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Our strength grows out of our weakness."

So, what about those who do not feel weakness right now? What about those who aren't feeling depleted or worn out? Are you out of the loop, did you miss the boat? Actually, we are all weak. Not something we expect to hear is it? We, as Americans, are supposed to be strong, to push through anything, to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and keep on going. So, what do I mean when I say we are all weak? I mean it in the sense of being sinners. In our lesson Paul did not want anyone to see him as a great preacher without any flaws. And, in the sense of sin, we all are flawed.

I can remember as a child hearing that we all sin, and I thought, "I'm not a sinner. I haven't broken any of the commandments. I'm a good girl. Why do I have to keep confessing my sins?" As an adult looking back on this, no, I wasn't really the good girl I had made myself out to be... it's a good thing I confessed my sins at worship each week! Martin Luther said we should sin bravely... When I first heard that it reminded me of my ex brother-in-law when he jokingly said that we are loved even when we sin so we should sin more to be loved more. That's not what Martin Luther meant by sinning bravely. What he said is, "Therefore see to it... that you be not a false but a real sinner; not only in words but in reality and from the heart acknowledge yourself worthy before God of His wrath and eternal punishment, and bring before Him in truth these words, 'me a poor sinner'; but in the same flight lay hold of the other words: 'Be Thou merciful to me...'" (*Complete Sermons*, Vol. 2/2, p. 367).

Accept that in fact we are sinners, confess to God the sins we know we have done and those we are not aware of doing; those we have done as an individual and those we have done as part of the society we live in. When we ask God for mercy and forgiveness, when we realize our full dependence upon God, we then draw closer to God and God is more real in our lives.

This God-centered way of life leads to a joyful sense of well-being. Forgetting your own agendas in favor of God's bigger projects, seems to create healthy brain dynamics, and a healthier, happier way of life (Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*). By renouncing the sin of our own agendas focusing on the biggest of all agendas, God's, Christians like us come to experience an amphetamine-like brain chemical called dopamine, that feels much better than feeling low and left out.

It feels so good to be wrapped up in God. Paul really was right: When we are weak, we are strong and filled with a lot of good brain chemicals. When God sinks low to be with us in our despair and depression, it feels good. May you find joy with the forgiving, loving God who lifts us up out of the doldrums and keeps us in his loving care.

Let me end with a prayer of Augustine: Lord Jesus, our Savior, let us now come to you; our hearts are cold; Lord, warm them with selfless love. Our hearts are sinful; cleanse them with your precious blood. Our hearts are weak; strengthen them with your joyous Spirit. Our hearts are empty; fill them with your divine presence. Lord Jesus, our hearts are yours, possess them always, and only for yourself. Amen.
All glory be to God.