

Find your strong in weakness \* 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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I've noticed lately that a lot of people have latched onto the saying 'Find your strong.' The idea here is that you need to go out and find your 'strong' – that thing that motivates you and empowers you and gives you the strength you need to achieve your goals. 'Your strong' then could be working out and feeling fit or a community to support you or a sense inner confidence that you can do it.

Now those are all good and inherently valuable things, but invite Paul to the conversation, and he would say there's another place, a better place to find your strong. Paul would invite you to find your strength in weakness. That's sort of paradoxical, isn't it?

Look at 2 Corinthians 12 and I'll show you why I say that.

Now in 2 Corinthians 11 & 12, Paul's having to defend himself against other preachers who have come in and made Paul less in the Corinthians' eyes. They've told the Corinthian church all about their accomplishments and exploits and all of a sudden stodgy old Paul doesn't seem so impressive any more.

And so even though he doesn't really want to, Paul says 'ok, you want achievements? Fine. I'll give you achievements.' And so he's about to launch into an awesome story, but even then can't bring himself to boast in his achievements. So he says -

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. This man was caught up to paradise.

This man is Paul - he's talking about himself. Paul was caught up to meet with God and to hear things that were so incredible that he was not permitted to share them.

And yet, he says, impressive as that was, I will boast in nothing but my weakness.

Hmmm... If you got taken up into heaven, wouldn't you want to tell everyone you know? And wouldn't you take just a little bit of pride in having had such an awesome experience? I know that there are a lot of people making a lot of money by making these very claims.

And yet Paul says – 'It's nothing. I'd rather boast in my weakness than in that.'

Paul explains why in verse 7 and on. Verse 7 he says - 7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations (the man taken up to heaven was Paul), there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

This is a very important moment in Paul's life. He has these incredible visions, these wonderful insights into the things of God and yet to keep him from becoming conceited, God gave him this 'thorn' in his flesh. We don't know exactly what it was but a lot of people suspect it had something to do with his eyes, or maybe a speech impediment of some sort, because he talks about not being really impressive as a speaker.

Whatever it was, Paul asked God time and again to take it away and God said to him “No. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Sometimes we expect God to answer our prayers and to answer them exactly the way we want, but we can't see the whole playing field, can we? Only God can, and sometimes, in His sovereign wisdom, He says 'no' to our prayers, because He knows that there's a better outcome than what we've prayed for. And so in that case, He says to us, just as He said to Paul – 'my grace is enough.'

We might want less of some *thing* but what we really need is more of God. His grace is enough.

And His power is made perfect in weakness. If God had taken the thorn away from Paul, maybe Paul's head would have gotten a little too big, and maybe Paul would have started to act as though HE was the impressive one, rather than God, and the incredible ministry that God had for him would have been lost, because Paul was relying on his own limited strength, rather than on God's omnipotence. How does one man survive forty lashes minus one, three shipwrecks, a day and a night in open water but by the supernatural power of God?

And so the thorn remained as a reminder to lean on God, to trust in His omnipotent goodness, because His power works in our weakness and there is grace in the meantime.

And so Paul says – verse 9 - Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

That's why Paul would say 'find your strong' in weakness – because it's in our weakness that we are willing to leaning on God's limitless power. There is no question about it in Paul's mind – anything that Paul can do, God can do infinitely better – so what's the reasonable thing to do? Lean on human strength? Or lean on God's? Obviously, it's boast in weakness so that the limitless power of God can work through you.

10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I like the way the Living Bible puts it – when I am weak, then I am strong – the less I have, the more I depend on Him.

That's the point of this passage – God's strength works through our weakness and in our weakness, we depend on Him.

See, the point is not weakness per say, but the willingness to rely on the God who is all the more powerful. Not just weakness, but reliance. There's no doubt about it; we are very capable people, but as capable as we are, God is even more capabler, and so we choose to depend on Him. We choose to surrender our attempts at control, to the God who IS in control, and in our weakness, He is stronger.

I'll tell you, sometimes there are Sunday mornings when I come to church and I have nothing left to give. Sometimes I'm not satisfied with my message, sometimes I'm feeling sick or unwell, sometimes something's happened that's just well beyond my ability to deal. And you know what's going through my head? In my weakness, He is stronger. His grace is enough. And in those moments, I have to surrender my own expectations, my own strivings, my own pride and trust that God is going to do more

and better with these loaves and fishes than I could do at the height of my power. God's strength works through our weakness when we depend on Him.

So listen, whatever you're going through, wherever you're at in life, I want you to know this. In your weakness, He is stronger. That's a truth to plant deep in your soul and let it blossom into whole hearted faith. In your weakness, God is stronger.

Find your strong in weakness as you rely on God.