

Small Group 2021 Fall Session

Overcoming Obstacles

*"If you want God to use you, you must know **who God is** and know **who you are.**"*

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren,

*"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."*

2 Corinthians 12:9

Part 1: God's Power Being Manifested in Man's Weakness

Read the below excerpt from The Treasure in Earthen Vessels, by Watchman Nee

The apostle said that he had a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7). I do not know what this thorn was, but I know this thorn made Paul weak. He prayed to the Lord about the matter three times, hoping the Lord would remove the thorn. However, the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (vv. 8-9). The Lord said even though the thorn in his flesh made Paul weak, His power was perfected in this weakness. How is the Lord's power perfected in human weakness? He said, "My power will tabernacle over your weakness," which means "My power will overshadow or cover your weakness." This is Christianity. Christianity does not eliminate weaknesses, nor does it only look to the Lord's power. Christianity means that the Lord's power is manifested in man's weakness. Christianity does not mean that a new race of strange angels is created on the earth. Christianity means that man's weaknesses can manifest God's power.

Let me give an example. Once I had a very serious illness. I was x-rayed three times in two months, and each time the report was very grave. I prayed, I believed, and I hoped that God would cure my illness. At times my strength was greater than normal. Before God, I confessed that I had been empowered, but I was angry because I did not know the reason God was treating me this way. At certain times I would be well and full of strength, but I would relapse without warning. What was the use of God giving me this temporary strength? I was very sick at heart. One day as I was reading the Bible, I came across 2 Corinthians 12. Paul prayed to God three times about that thorn, but the Lord was not willing to do anything. Instead, He said, "My grace is sufficient for you." The Lord increased His grace because of the thorn. The Lord increased His power because of the weakness. I saw what Christianity was. As I lay in bed, I asked the Lord to show me more clearly what this was all about. Inwardly, I had the impression of a boat in a river. The boat required ten feet of water for navigation. In the river, however, a submerged rock rose five feet from the bottom of the river. If the Lord so desired, He could remove the boulder to let the boat pass, but within there was a question: "Would it be better for Me to remove the rock or to increase the water level by five feet?" God asked me if it would be better to remove the boulder or to increase the water level by five feet. I told the Lord that it would be better to increase the water level by five feet.

From that day onward many of my difficulties were gone. I dare not say that I was never tempted again, but praise God, from that matter I discovered God has other ways to meet our needs. This is Christianity. I repeat, Christianity does not remove the boulder; it increases the water level by five feet. This is Christianity. Are there difficulties? Yes, we all have difficulties. Are there trials? Yes, we all are tried. Are

there weaknesses? Yes, we all have weaknesses. Please remember one thing, however, that the Lord does not eliminate our weaknesses on the negative side nor give us unwarranted power on the positive side. God's power is manifested in weakness, just as our treasure is in earthen vessels.

The Paradoxical Spiritual Life

Today I would like to say that no Christian has an earthen vessel that is earthy enough to prohibit the Lord's treasure from being manifested. No matter how weak we are, remember that the Lord's treasure is manifested in it. Therefore, we see a spiritual paradox in Paul and in us. Do we know what people said about Paul? They said that his speech was contemptible (10:10b), that he took them by guile (12:16), and that he was fickle and said "Yes, yes" and "No, no" (1:17). They said his letters were weighty and strong enough to terrify people (10:9-10). But paradoxically, God's treasure looks very good in such an earthen vessel. God's treasure would not look so nice without the earthen vessel. I am saying that Paul was a genuine man. Thank God that the Lord shined out, or broke out, from within him. He was not a man without feelings. But in his sorrow, he said, "I always rejoice." He was not rejoicing constantly or in sorrow constantly; rather, he constantly rejoiced in his sorrow.

Let me tell you that this is the special characteristic of Christianity. There is a smile while tears are flowing. Many Christians act better than Paul, but they do not live like a Christian. They only can praise the Lord; they are not like a Christian. Many Christians think they can attain a state of never being sorrowful or troubled. There are others who are continually sorrowful and troubled. This means that the treasure has not been expressed in them. But here we have a man through whom the Lord Jesus could pass. I have seen some of the Lord's most outstanding children. When I saw them, I immediately knew who they were and what kind of persons they were. But at the same time I knew what kind of persons they were before the Lord. Today we do not want to see any trace of the earthen vessel when we look at people. Sometimes, however, our eyes only see the earthen vessel. Those who know God, however, are able to see the treasure in earthen vessels when they look at God's children.

Note: Watchman Nee was a Chinese church leader and Christian teacher who worked in China during the 20th century. In 1922, he initiated church meetings in Fuzhou that may be considered the beginning of local churches there. During his thirty years of ministry, Nee published many books and established churches throughout China. Following the Communist Revolution, Nee was persecuted and imprisoned for his faith and spent the last twenty years of his life in prison.

Part 2: Reflection Questions

- According to the Apostle Paul, God's power is made perfect in our weakness. The Bible is filled with individuals who appear to have character issues but are ultimately considered heroes of the faith (see Hebrews chapter 11). Why do you think God uses flawed people?
- Watchman Nee states that "*Christianity does not remove the boulder; it increases the water level by five feet.*" What do you think increasing the water level means in this analogy?
- Think back on some of the "boulders" in your own life. These may be related to your health, personality quirks, temperament, or something you consider a weakness or "thorn." Do you believe it's possible for God to be most glorified through these weaknesses?

Part 3: Prayer Requests

Close the meeting with any prayer requests.