



SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Truth in Contradiction

TITLE: The Weakness Paradox

SCRIPTURE: **2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

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Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear—either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

No one likes to feel weak—especially, feeling powerless to change something that's come into your life that you desperately would like to change. Maybe there's something you've always wanted by you're old enough now to see that you'll never have it. Or maybe something "not good" has unexpectedly come into your life and whatever it is, it's set the course for a future you just don't want. The question is—How do you handle weakness? How do you deal with the disappointment and the powerlessness you feel when you don't have what it takes to do what needs to be done?

In 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul addresses that question in a way that sounds very strange to us because he answers it paradoxically. A paradox expresses "truth in contradiction"—truth in a statement that seems to contradict itself because it combines words or ideas that are opposites. And the great paradox of the Kingdom is this—Those who are strong and right are weak and wrong. And, those who are weak and wrong are right and strong. The apostle Paul, speaking from personal experience puts it like this—*When I am weak, then I am strong*. Paul was a strong/weak man.

Even though Paul could have bragged about his successes and accomplishments like the false teachers who were criticizing him were doing, he said, *"I refuse to boast about anything except my weaknesses."* He even acknowledges in third-person-kind-of-way that he had an experience where he went to heaven and back. But, he wouldn't brag about his trip to heaven, only about his "thorn in the flesh"—a "thorn" God gave so he wouldn't get conceited because of the great revelation he had received. No one really knows what Paul's "thorn" was, but basically, a "thorn in the flesh" is something that makes you feel weak and powerless."

There are two application points from the Weakness Paradox that have the power to shape our hearts, so we learn to experience what Paul refers to as 'glad contentment.' And, we are using two OT illustrations for these two points from 2 Chronicles

1. *Beware of the weakness of strength.* Turning Paul's statement around, it's just as true to say: *When I am strong, then I am weak.* We see this illustrated in the life of King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26 (see vv.15-16).

2. *Embrace the strength of weakness—When I am weak, then I am strong.* We see this illustrated in the life of King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:12. The point is: “The weakest part of your life can become the strongest part of your faith. We tap into God’s strength by accepting our weaknesses as gifts from God. Be expectant that God will show up in the valley of your weaknesses, maybe not in the way you expect, but in ways beyond your expectations.

For Discussion:

1. How does our need to be right make us feel strong?
2. Talk about the paradox. How is it that those who are strong and right are weak and wrong. And, those who are weak and wrong are right and strong?
3. Have someone read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Why does Paul say in vv.5-6—“I will not boast expect of my weaknesses?”
4. If you took a trip to heaven and back, do you think you could keep it to yourself? How would it make you feel? Would it be something you keep to yourself?
5. Why did God give Paul a “thorn in the flesh?” In its most basic definition, what is a “thorn in the flesh?”
6. Have you ever prayed for a “thorn” to be removed and felt like God answered you in a different way than you had prayed? If God denied you of something you really wanted, could you—or how would you—adjust your heart to accept that his grace would be sufficient for you? and that his strength would be revealed through your weakness?
7. How is it possible to have the kind of “glad contentment” in the midst of weakness Paul talks about in vv. 9-10?
8. Talk about the two application points—(1) *Beware of the weakness of strength.* What is the weakness of strength? Why is it true for a Christian that: *When I am strong, then I am weak?* How does King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26:15-16 illustrate this point? (2) *Embrace the strength of weakness.* What is the strength of weakness? How was this illustrated in the life of King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20? (see v. 12)
9. What are some of the things in your life that make you feel weak and powerless
10. If God doesn’t change your circumstances, in what ways can you expect God to show up in your weaknesses?

Remember: We tap into God’s strength by embracing our weaknesses as gifts from God.

Memorize: Isaiah 40:29—*God gives strength to the weak and to those who have no power, he increases might.*