

STRENGTH WITHIN POWERLESSNESS

2 Corinthians 12:6-10

We slid right through our gate and down the hill onto the highway!" Those were our friends' first words when they arrived at church. At the time of year we usually have snow, instead there had been a night of freezing rain. Roads, driveways, sidewalks, and the church parking lot were slick with ice.

Unexpected difficulties can make us feel like we're skidding on ice. Brakes are useless; the steering wheel has no effect; our confident sense of control is lost and we are powerless to save ourselves.

The apostle Paul desperately pleaded with the Lord to save him from a bad situation and received a surprising answer.

Group Discussion. Do you think most people in your society feel they have significant control over their lives, or not? Why do you answer as you do?

Personal Reflection. How well do you deal with situations in which you feel powerless?

Along with several fellow workers, Paul had established a Christian fellowship in the Greek city of Corinth (Acts 18). He wrote at least two and probably more letters to the Corinthian Christians. There were conflicts; some in the church were questioning his authority. In 2 Corinthians Paul defends his position as an apostle and asserts that God has entrusted him with the message of the gospel. While admitting his weaknesses, he refers to "a man in Christ" (apparently himself) who was caught up to heaven and had inexpressible visions. Then his tone changes. *Read 2 Corinthians 12:6-10.*

1. What attitude had Paul developed toward his weaknesses?
2. What danger did Paul see in the unique spiritual blessings he had been given?
3. Paul says that he was given “a thorn in my flesh” by God. What good could such a “thorn” accomplish?
4. Possible explanations for Paul’s “thorn” are physical illness or disability, temptations to sin, and opposition to the gospel. For you, what sort of hardships would most quickly put a damper on your pride?
5. Consider Paul’s repeated pleas in verse 8. What do you think they indicate about Paul and his relationship with Christ?

6. For you, what is the most powerful part of Christ's response to Paul (v. 9)?

7. When have you witnessed the power of Christ in weakness—your own or someone else's?

8. How did Christ's answer transform Paul's attitude toward his thorn (vv. 9-10)?

9. Christ's assurance to Paul in verse 9 is also timeless for all Christians. How can Christ's words transform your attitude toward the problem you identified in question 2?

10. Paul's list of difficulties in verse 10 is enough to discourage anyone. How could Paul "delight" in these?

11. What does it mean that Paul delighted in these weaknesses and difficulties "for Christ's sake" (v. 10)?

12. Maybe you long to say, with Paul, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (v. 10). To say that means to acknowledge your own weakness and accept the sufficiency of Christ’s strength. In what situations or areas of life do you long to be able to do that?

13. What would you have to give up in order to find the strength of Christ that Paul found even in his weakness?



Paul came to prefer seeing Christ at work in him over being relieved of the thorn in his flesh. Pray that you will find increasing joy and satisfaction in seeing the power of Christ at work in and through your own weaknesses.

NOW OR LATER

Study Matthew 26:36-46. In Gethsemane Jesus prays three times for the cup to be taken from him, yet he yields to the Father’s will.

Think of someone you have seen Christ working in even as the person goes through difficulties. Send a message or call that person simply to say how he or she has encouraged you.