

## At Our Weakest Point

*By Linda Rex*

**July 7, 2024, Proper 9 / After Pentecost**—Are you in one of those seasons when it seems that the Spirit is constantly showing you ways in which you need to grow up in Christ? Or perhaps, events in your life keep occurring which cause you to feel powerless, weak, and afflicted? In times like this, we can allow ourselves to lose our vision of the truth that is ours in Jesus.

In our New Testament reading for this Sunday, 2 Corinthians 12:2–10, the apostle Paul goes back to an event which took place early in his walk with Christ. God gave him a vision of glory which was so sublime that Paul himself could not and would not put it into words. Paul had a genuine experience by the Spirit, which in comparison with his critics, was a real revelation of the Lord. Even though Paul could have bragged about it and impressed everybody with his spiritual prowess, he refused to do so. Paul found no pleasure in elevating himself in this way.

Rather, what Paul wanted to draw attention to were his weaknesses. In this sense, the apostle was focused on those areas in his life where he was most in need of Jesus. Indeed, when his life was filled with circumstances in which he faced insults, needs, persecution and struggle, Paul joyfully embraced these situations. It was at these weakest points that Paul most vividly experienced the presence and power of God. And this was what he preferred to experience and boast about. He had no desire to glory in himself or his own spiritual prowess. What he wanted to glory in was Jesus Christ living his life in and through him by the heavenly Spirit.

Many times, as we live the Christian life or follow Christ, we easily slip into the mode of rule keeping and trying to do the right thing. We get so obsessed about being good people that we don't even realize that we have lost our sense of the most essential thing—the abiding presence and power of God at work in us and in our lives. We can be so intent on doing the ministry or mission we feel called to, and be using every technique and best practice we know of to try and do it well and get it right, and never realize that all we are doing is a self-directed, self-empowered effort we are able to take the full credit for. Yes, we may even give credit to God, but in reality, we are in full control of what is being done in the name of Jesus.

What we may forget is that in those times when life seems most out of our control, when our ministry efforts seem most futile and filled with opposition, that this is when we are in the best place we could possibly be. It is in this place where God can enter in and work most powerfully, bringing about the impossible and redeeming the unforgiveable. When we embrace our weaknesses, our frailty, and our limitations, and place them into the hands of our loving God, here is where he can and will go to work in a powerful way to bring about what we are unable to do on our own.

Indeed, God is always at work in this world, sharing the good news of his love and grace, and caring for all he has made. And he includes us in what he is doing. For that reason, we need to remember that all of life, and especially anything we may do in his name, is a participation in Christ, in his own life with his Father in the Spirit. How can we possibly take the glory for doing or accomplishing what first was done and is being done and will be done by Jesus in the Spirit, long before we were ever in the picture? And it is better this way, for our genuine life in Christ becomes so much more joyful and blessed when it is all up to him and not left all up to us. Jesus lives out our true response to God in the Spirit, and we join in.

So weakness, frailty, suffering, struggle—all these things we prefer to be without—become the very things which bind us firmly to the One who has made us his very own. At the moment of Jesus' greatest human weakness, suffering, and loss he was actually at his most powerful

position as the Lord of all—he died that we might live. Jesus entered into our depths to bring us up into the heights of glory. Now this is something to boast about!

*Our dear Father, Jesus, and heavenly Spirit, thank you for including us in your life and love. Forgive our blindness to the spiritual realities. Awaken us to the truth of our participation in you, Jesus, by your Spirit. May we draw upon your presence and power, and ever give you, our Triune God, the glory. Amen.*

*“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me. Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:2–10 NASB*

*“I know of an encounter in Christ fourteen years ago, where a person was translated into the third heaven. Only God knows whether it was in or out of the body; it does not really matter to me! This person was caught up into paradise! There he heard words that could not be articulated into language; he understood a conversation that did not originate in human thought! Of this encounter I will confidently boast because it has nothing to do with anything that I did to promote myself! I would rather glory in that which emphasizes my failure to get it right by myself! Divine revelation is a gift, not a reward! Even though I have legitimate reasons to boast, I prefer not to. My life speaks for itself and I have nothing to hide! In sharp contrast to these spiritual revelations, the physical pain that I suffered and my severe discomfort momentarily distracted me. I was as if the old mindset of accusation (Satan) persuaded me that this affliction was actually God’s way of keeping me humble. I almost believed this lie and even implored the Lord three times to remove the thorn from my flesh. Finally it dawned on me that grace is God’s language; he doesn’t speak ‘thorn-language’! He said to me, ‘My grace elevates you, to be fully content.’ And now, instead of being overwhelmed with a sense of my own weakness, he overwhelms me with an awareness of his strength! Oh what bliss to rejoice in the fact that in the midst of my frailties I encounter the dynamic of the grace of God to be my habitation! I now enjoy a delightfully different frame of mind when I encounter things that would normally make me feel frail, whether it be from insults or when I am in situations where I’m forced to do things with my arms twisted behind my back; whether I am persecuted or feel squeezed into claustrophobic spaces. Because of Christ, every time that I encounter weakness I escape into the strength of my I am-ness!” 2 Corinthians 12:2–10 Mirror Bible*