

When I am Weak

3 September 2001

Weakness is not hailed as the most popular, sought-after attribute, and weaklings are usually mocked or looked down upon. The ugly or puny ones are not normally used for advertising - which means that it is only a small minority who make it to the big screens. Most of us are really only mediocre - that is of course from the world's point of view. Paul, the apostle, writes often about his own weakness.

1Cor 2:3 "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling."

In 1Corinthians 4:9-13 he speaks about being *"fools for Christ's sake, being weak ... without honour ... hungry and thirsty ... poorly clothed ... roughly treated and homeless ... reviled ... persecuted ... the scum of the world, the dregs of all things."* Wow! Not the kind of things to get all excited about.

He further writes that Christ was *"crucified because of weakness"* (2Corinthians 13:4) and then goes on to say that *"we rejoice when we are weak, but you are strong ..."* (verse 9).

I shall leave the theologians to argue about what exactly he meant by weakness, but I do know that Paul makes this profound statement:

2Cor 12:10 "Therefore I am well contented with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with

persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

This statement follows immediately after his request to the Lord to take away the thorn in his flesh - this weakness - to which God replied, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."* Notice Paul's immediate reaction to God's answer, *"Most gladly, therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."* Paul is content. He accepts his situation and lives with it.

What is weakness?

What is weakness? In Paul's situation, amongst other possible weaknesses, it was most certain that he was hated by many who did their utmost to kill him. Imagine the emotional stress if nothing else, of being hated and persecuted wherever you went. But let's look at other areas of weakness.

I stopped by a service station to fill my car with fuel (gas). As I was sitting in the car, a beggar dressed in rags came up to me and asked me for money for bread. He was not arrogant. His whole demeanour was one of abject humility. Here was a thin sickly-looking man. He could not demand; he could only beg. He had nothing, and he was nothing. That is weakness!

I have stood beside beds of sickness many times, seeing people suffering, and there was nothing I, or medical science could do for them. That is weakness. I have often been asked to pray for barren women who so desperately wanted children. They had tried everything, but nothing

was working. When I looked into their eyes, I saw weak, desperate women crying out to me.

Then there is financial weakness - *"We just can't make ends meet,"* the worker tells me. He is desperate and weak. And so, the list goes on and on. Broken homes, people struggling with temptation, etc. I hear the cries of so many people and in utter weakness I call out to the Lord, *"How can I help them, what can I do? The harvest is so large, but the labourers are so few."*

The heroes of faith

Then I am reminded of that passage in Hebrews 11 - you know the one - all those heroes of faith, the great men of the Bible. *"But Lord, I'm not great. I live in a small, insignificant town in a poor, insignificant country. What can I do?"* Then the Lord showed me something. At the end of a long list of the great things that these men and women did, we find this verse referring to most if not all of these great people, *"... from weakness were made strong ..."* I suddenly realised that the one common denominator of all these *"heroes"* was that they rose from a position of weakness.

Just consider *Moses' mother*. Ladies, tell me how you would have felt taking that precious little bundle of joy, your baby, putting him into a wicker basket, and standing at the edge of the Nile. Then shoving the basket gently but firmly away from you for the Nile to take wherever ... Do you think she was feeling strong at that moment? I don't think so. I think she turned around and ran back home, fell onto her bed, buried her face in her pillow and sobbed her heart out. Nevertheless, in faith

she rather entrusted her child to God despite the dangerous Nile River, than to obey the wicked Pharaoh's edict, and have him killed by the evil ruler. The Bible calls this act of hers an *act of faith*, and it is recorded amongst the "*heroes*" of faith.

I suddenly realised that it is not our greatness that God is looking for. It is rather our *child-like trust*. I have been a preacher of faith for many years, but I have often come across times of *my own utter weakness* in situations. The times I have aspired to do great things for God have not really worked so well. But I can tell you of many miracles God has done for me, and through me, when I have been at my lowest ebb and *cried out to God in my desperation*, just like a small child to his father.

Folks, you don't need to be a great person to be heard. The big, important Pharisee prayed a well-articulated prayer about how great he was and all that he had done. The publican, on the other hand, would not even lift his head to heaven, he was so ashamed of his own wretchedness. He simply called out, "*God, be merciful to me the sinner.*" Jesus remarked that he went home justified rather than the Pharisee - God had heard his simple cry for help.

Insignificant people

And here I am, too - just so insignificant. Maybe you feel the same - just small and insignificant. *God hears the smallest whisper and cry for help*. Out of weakness you can also be made strong. Your marriage can be healed. Your business can be mended. There is a job somewhere for you, sir. He is the One who supplies our need. Yes,

you can trust Him. He is a wonderful, loving God who hears the cry of the needy.

Isaiah writes to the barren:

*Isa 54:1 "Shout for joy O barren one, you who have born no child. Break forth into **joyful shouting** and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman,' says the Lord."*

That is a shout of faith. It is the barren woman who shouts here - in other words she has not yet received her child. But in faith she rejoices. Out of her weakness she is made strong - just like Hannah, Samuel's mother; when she got up from praying *"... she went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad."* She had not even been with her husband yet, but in her heart, she had already received her child by faith. Her face was *"no longer sad"*.

And that child was Samuel, who grew up to be a great prophet in Israel. It was this same Samuel who anointed the shepherd boy, David, to be king, and Jesus was born of the lineage of David. What a legacy was left by this barren woman who prayed and believed right in the face of the mocking impossibility. Her faith was a part of the foundation that was laid for the coming King of kings. How awesome! Certainly, *the kingdom of God is built upon an insignificant little mustard seed faith.*

Go your way, friend. Rest in His loving arms of mercy and grace. He loves you and wants you to be His child. Plant your mustard seed of faith. You can confidently put your trust in Him!

With special love to you all,

Henry D Jackson