

“Confident in Weakness”

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Graphics: rock climbing, climbing gear, mountain, handholds

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are called to be confident in God’s provision, love, grace, and mercy. Often, when physical affliction, criticism, lies, unmet needs, and weakness are present in our lives, we tend to take our eyes off Jesus and focus on the problems. The Apostle Paul gives us encouragement to be confident in God no matter what. Like a rock climber who faces all kinds of adversity, God has given us the tools to win the race for eternity with Him.

Focus Phrase: God’s power is shown to me and the world through my weakness.

1. Introduction

- A. Rock climbing is not an easy sport. It takes the right equipment. It takes some specific training. It takes trained people to help the climber climb. It takes full trust in the equipment and the helpers. And, finally, it takes some strength and mobility to be able to push and pull yourself up the rock wall, and then, of course, back down again, safely. When those things are in play, then a climber has confidence in the climbing.
- B. When a disciple of Jesus Christ trusts in God’s provision, has faith to close the gap to be more like Jesus, believes the truth about God and God’s truth about him/her, and is generous in meeting others’ needs, then that disciple becomes more and more **confident** in living life with Jesus. No physical affliction, no spiritual gaps, no untruths, and no needs can possibly stand in the way of what God is doing in your life.
- C. One of the biggest challenges we have as the Church (capital C) is that we sometimes don’t confidently represent Jesus. This is especially true in a world that loves to turn its head the other way when Jesus people show up. We’re tempted to blend in, not make waves, and not boldly proclaim the freedom we have in Jesus, even though other are in need of salvation!
- D. Because you’re here this morning, or worshiping online, YOU are making waves. You are making a statement. You are not blending in. And that’s exactly where Jesus wants you to be.
- E. For the past four weeks, we’ve been using the metaphor of rock climbing to help us grow in CONFIDENCE as followers of the man Jesus. The series is called CONFIDENT.
- F. God’s forgiveness, salvation, and example are gifts for us...Jesus’ death and resurrection are gifts for us...and as disciples of Jesus, we’re called to be CONFIDENT in who HE is and who WE are!
- G. This morning, we’ll take one final look into the second letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Paul’s whole point in this section of this letter is to tell the Christians in Corinth that it’s not about their wealth or skill. It’s

not about their status or strength, at all. It's about God's glory shining through their weaknesses. The title of this message is Confident in Weakness.

- H. We are all weak in different ways and at different times in our lives. And we need help.
- I. On a climbing wall, that help comes in form of handholds like this one. No one can climb a smooth rock wall, unless they're Spiderman. Spiderman could do it. But besides Spiderman, the rest of us need help. On natural rock faces, handholds cracks, ledges, and tiny juts and crags on the wall to put your hands and feet on and in. In the gym, handholds are fancy colors, different shapes and sizes, and are secured strategically to the wall to create a route...depending on how hard the climb is designed to be.
- J. These handholds highlight the fact that we need help to climb. We're not strong enough to climb without them. They also remind us that we're not Spiderman, too. Yet, we can still climb confidently because in our weakness, we use the tools we have been given to help us.
- K. To grow in discipleship, we have to come face-to-face with the weaknesses and failures we have because we're human. And we can try harder to make ourselves look better or even BE better, but it will fall short. A better route to take is to allow OUR weaknesses to prove God's strength and power...to let our weakness show the power of Christ in us.
- L. THAT's what give us CONFIDENCE in Jesus.
- M. **PRAY!**
- N. Grab a bible and turn to 2 Corinthians 12, starting in verse 1.

2. Scripture

A. **READ 2 Cor. 12:1-7a**

- i. OK...let's just stop there for a moment and get our legs underneath us.
- ii. Who was this 'person' that Paul was talking about? And what happened?
- iii. Before we get to that question, we need to know that in the Ancient Near East, where Paul was writing this, the cultural expectation for public discourse included something called **boasting**. It wasn't exactly what we might think of as trash talking today on the football field or enhanced memory after a fishing trip. "The fish was ... THIS close to shore."
- iv. Instead, boasting was like someone giving a verbal description of their resume and accomplishments when addressing a crowd as a way of trying to convince others of something.
- v. Apparently, there were some people inside and outside the church in Corinth that were boasting of their spiritual prowess. And apparently, they were also trying to discredit Paul's background and experiences because of

who he was before meeting Christ. They also may not have liked Paul's direct way of leadership and speech.

- vi. Paul was well-versed in boasting, as a Roman citizen and former Pharisee.
- vii. Besides that, Paul had the street cred to out-boast anyone he met, because of his direct encounter with Christ.
- viii. In fact, the 'person' that Paul said he knew who had the experiences he listed out in this section was, indeed, HIM (Paul, himself)! The use of third-person perspective was another tactic used in rhetorical speeches in the first century to help make an argument.
- ix. So, Paul, having had the experience of being caught up to the third heaven and hearing directly from God, COULD boast about that experience, which would trump the experiences of the others working against him.
- x. Yet, he chose NOT to (even though he kind of did, right?).
- xi. Now, a quick aside about the Third Heaven. What is THAT? Well, in the Jewish culture, it was believed that heaven was divided into layers. Some sources list 3 heavenly layers...some 7 layers. Some say God is in the third layer, others say the 7th layer, and still others say God is ABOVE the layers. For Paul here, he was identifying that he had a spiritual experience that he couldn't fully describe and that only, "...God knows," as he said a couple times.
- xii. Given ALL that...Paul made the argument that he COULD boast in this experience or that experience, and would be in his right mind to do it because he had some incredible experiences given to him in the Holy Spirit.
- xiii. BUT, he wrote, it's WAY better for me to boast in my weaknesses. It's way better to show you what it means to magnify the **Lord's** strength exhibited in my human WEAKNESS than to ever try to boast fully in my own credentials.
- xiv. And THAT's because whatever credentials he had came from God anyway.
- xv. If he boasted in his OWN spiritual prowess, God's power wouldn't be fully identified. If he boasted his **weaknesses**, then the incredible things Paul experienced would prove a powerful God at work in him and in the world.
- xvi. Paul wanted the church to know that, despite the logic otherwise, human weakness is what gives confidence in Jesus because we must rely on His strength, especially when we are weak, or tempted, or fail.
- xvii. Paul then gives us a glimpse into his life...verse 7b...

B. READ 2 Cor. 12:7b-10

- i. Paul could boast in his weaknesses because God kept reminding him that he was weak. That reminder came in the form of a 'thorn' in his flesh.

- a. The Greek term used for ‘thorn’ is skolops. Skolops is the term for a sharpened wooden stake used to impale ones enemies on the field of battle. This ‘thorn’ of Paul’s isn’t some rose bush thorn, but something far greater, maybe even of a spiritual nature.
 - b. Actually, we have no idea what this affliction was at all. Whatever it was, God was keeping it in Paul’s life as a way to humble him...remind him who he was and who God is...and to use it for good to teach and boast in weakness.
 - c. Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”
 - d. The sharpened stakes meant for harm in our lives will remind us of how weak we can be sometimes.
- ii. The good from this is that Paul was steadfast in boasting in his human weakness. And even though he prayed for God to take that thorn away... God told him that *divine power is made perfect in human weakness*.
 - iii. (pause) Divine power...is made perfect...in human weakness.
 - iv. Therefore, Paul wrote, he is content in weakness...in insults...in hardships...in persecutions, and calamities. Those things make him confident that divine power is being perfected in his weakness...through his weakness.

3. Application

- A. A tiny baby is the ultimate example of human weakness. And yet, through that baby, God’s power is seen. I love that we have several new babies either born or soon-to-be born here at PUMC. Divine power is seen in our midst in the miracle of birth and growth. In the intricate design of the body and mind. Divine power...is perfected...in total human weakness.
- B. Yet, you and I are not infants? We are strong! We are capable! Yet...YET, if we’re honest, we have profound moments of weakness.
- C. How are YOU experiencing human weakness?
- D. Human weakness is certainly physical for some, if affliction is present. Human weakness is emotional for others, if you’ve been wounded by someone or struggle with depression or fear. Human weakness sometimes is relational, if you find it hard to love someone. I struggle, sometimes, with cognitive weakness, when I can’t figure out a problem or understand what God is asking. Weakness is sometimes seen when we are tempted and give in to the temptation and then Satan jumps all OVER it to convince us that we are broken beyond repair. When that happens, human weakness becomes spiritual, and doubts rise up or your faith is tested.

- E. What's even worse is that the culture around you tells you that weakness, in any form, is a flaw. That you are deficient. The world's message is that being weak is some how wrong or bad. And so, you and I often will attempt with fierce grit to deny our weaknesses and show the world that we are strong, despite the fact that we know we're not.
- F. Unfortunately, when we do that, it's a cover-up. God knows the truth about my weaknesses and yours. Other can see the weaknesses too.
- G. Instead of denying our weaknesses and finding ways to try to convince the world we're strong on our own, God wants you to come face-to-face with your moments and areas of weakness, and look for HIM at work...teaching, forgiving, loving, and guiding. THEN...THEN, you can boast in your weakness and give glory to His power at work IN YOU!
- H. Now, let me throw out a caution. You might be tempted to say, "Well, if I stay in my weakness, stay in my failure, keep giving into temptation, then I'll show God's power even MORE! Paul says, "Surely NOT!?" Don't make your weakness a scapegoat for not doing the work of discipleship in your life. God's work is that your weaknesses will highlight His power, as you find strength THROUGH the weaknesses, so it's turned into power to grow in holiness!
- I. Paul ended verse 10 with, "...for whenever I am weak, then I am strong." This is a process of moving from weak to strong in the power of God.
- J. He can say that with confidence because God says to you:
 - i. #1 - **My grace is sufficient for you.**
 - a. God's grace is the undeserved favor that He gives to us. Sometimes that grace is giving before you even know that God loves you and wants to be in relationship with you.
 - b. Once you respond to God's grace and accept the salvation that comes in Jesus Christ, then God's grace continues to grow you as you climb with Jesus...to be more like Jesus.
 - c. God's grace is what ultimately ushers you into the everlasting life in the Kingdom of God.
 - d. You can't earn it. You can't buy it. You and I can only receive it with joy and gratitude.
 - e. You're completely helpless to save yourself, but praise the Lord our weakness makes God's power 100% sufficient for life.
 - f. The other thing of which God reminded Paul was:
 - ii. #2 - **My power is perfected in your weakness.**

- a. Not only is God's undeserved favor completely sufficient for salvation from a state of weakness, but God's power is perfected in that process.
- b. To perfect something is to remove all flaws. In order to remove any flaw of power, God would have to remove all weaknesses.
- c. When you identify your weaknesses, even your thorns, say to God, "God, I can't do it and I know you don't want me to try it on my own... I'm weak and ready for your strength."
- d. In YOUR weakness, God's power can take center stage.
- e. You won't remain humanly weak, but will exhibit the power of God working in your life - over sin, temptation, discouragement, fear, confusion, pain, apathy, and any other weakness in your flesh.
- f. And once God's power is perfected, then you will start to see God's power at work in YOU...and others will see God's power at work in YOU. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see!

4. Conclusion

- A. The helmet, the rope, the carabiner, the harness, the belayers, and the handholds. It's what we need to have some fun and climb a wall...and it's good exercise too. We can have confidence when climbing.
- B. Imagine a church that's confident together in the power of God...the provision of God. A church that's confident in faith and trust in God alone, and not our own clever ideas. A church that works together with Christ at the center.
- C. There's one way to be that church. And that way is to see and model the ultimate weakness that ever was shown. It's an ultimate weakness that God designed so that God's ultimate power could be ours, church.
- D. That weakness was **Jesus on the cross**. (pause) Jesus' choice to show full weakness...until death...was for you and your weakness. The cross is the ultimate proof of divine power being shown through total weakness.
- E. Let your weakness show God's power in the blood of Jesus on the cross.
- F. Church, we're called to be confident - not cocky or arrogant or self-assured - but confident in Christ...to model his death on the cross to show God's power.
- G. In a few moments, we'll come forward to receive Communion. Jesus gave us a way to remind ourselves of his weakness that led to God's power.
- H. In the bread...in the cup...is weakness for Jesus. But in the grace of God, is the power of love. There is no greater power, church.
- I. Be CONFIDENT in Jesus!
- J. Let's pray...