

Invincible!

Life In the Storm

2 Corinthians 1 May 8, 2022

Play video: Invincible (Proclaim Media – 1:53)

Today, we are embarking on a thirteen-week journey in what Eugene Peterson has called one of the Apostle Paul's most important books: 2 Corinthians. I love what he says about this letter in his introduction to the Message Translation:

"For anyone operating under the naïve presumption that joining a Christian church is a good way to meet all the best people and cultivate smooth social relations, a reading of Paul's Corinthians correspondence is the prescribed cure. But, however much trouble the Corinthians were to each other and to Paul, they prove to be a cornucopia of blessings to us, for they triggered some of Paul's most profound and vigorous writing."



The Apostle Paul
Rembrandt van Rijn, 1657

In other words, sometimes we learn more from failure and storms, than we do from success and calm conditions. EW all know that life can throw many

storms our way that can be crushing, defeating, discouraging and debilitating. Storms can send us to the very edge of giving up. ***How can we learn to live INVINCIBLY under such conditions?*** The occasion of Paul writing 2 Corinthians is the community's contesting of Paul's power and authority in and over their lives as an Apostle of the Lord. Here is **Rembrandt's 1657 depiction** of Paul pondering what is his next move in the difficult world of theology and discipleship.

The Corinthians were wrestling with a significant question: ***What does Christian power really look like? The problem confronting Paul was that he did not embody any of the marks of power the Corinthians valued.*** In many ways, he was the exact opposite of what they desired: He did not have an impressive physical presence; he lacked bravado and confidence; he was meek and gentle in his leadership (2 Corinthians 10:10). He did not speak with eloquence (2 Corinthians 11:6), and he did not boast in money, intentionally refusing to take money for his "services," choosing to work a menial job that would have been socially dishonorable in his day for traveling teachers (2 Corinthians 11:7). So, what on earth do we do with our weakness in a culture like that? As it turns out, there are only two things we can do with our *WEAKNESS*.

With My Weaknesses, I will be...

***SHAMED* by it**

or

***SHARE* from it!**

What do you think? Should we HIDE our weaknesses from each other, or should we HERALD them unashamedly as fellow pilgrims and confessors of a savior who has come to repair and redeem us? ***The human family struggles to display the demands of discipleship*** and its new, disciplined way of living. Moving into the transformed story is not a quick, easy, or failure-free path. Our theme verse as we journey through this book will be 2 Corinthians 12:9

**"My
POWER
is made perfect in
WEAKNESS"**

2 Corinthians 12:9

When we are weak, He is strong. Paul's approach to a contentious, defensive, and resistant Corinthian culture is to showcase a healthy Kingdom approach to power, authority, control, and identity. **He embraces a modest self-posture that affirms a starting point of WEAKNESS** as the spiritual foundation for God's mighty strength and sufficiency to flow into and through our lives. This is our only path to the transformed and risen life.

I want to take you through chapter one this morning in three different segments, stopping to make some observations and applications along the way. In this book, Paul is recounting his sufferings and troubles he has faced in life. "Why do the righteous have to suffer" has been a timeless question for humanity. Paul opens this letter by sharing three big ideas about why God permits His people to suffer. Let's begin with the first seven verses:

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-7 NIV

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

To say that our journey through life is a troublesome-filled path should be heard as a "firm grasp of the obvious!" Trouble and distress is common among humanity, in all of its many forms. Suffering these hardships, and unwanted painful passages, can be deeply distressing and life-altering. Paul's redundancy in these opening remarks is very clear.



<https://discoveryseries.org/courses/the-strength-of-weakness/>

We are all in need of **COMFORT (parekaleo – coming along side, encouraged, consoled, lifted up)**. Most of us feel like powerless pawns in the game of life. But Heaven reminds us that we are royalty, chosen, and gifted with a spirit of "power, love, and self-discipline" (2 timothy 1:7). So, if life is full of troubled passages and broken experiences---then **we need something that will produce within us a PATIENT ENDURANCE** to keep us in the story, on the path, and in the fight for hope to win and love to prevail. **This is the gift of comfort.** Receiving and giving the gift of

PARAKLETE – coming alongside to love, aiding, companionship, encouraging, and empowering for victorious living. We are to do for others what the Holy Spirit does for us.

Paul's First Big Idea:

Our sufferings are to produce within us an empathy towards others, and a compassion that moves us into engaged comforting and companionship through difficult passages of life!

How is this story being played out in your life? Who might stand up here today, or elsewhere, and say, This person has been a PARAKLETE to me? Let's continue the journey.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 NIV

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the *troubles we experienced in the province of Asia*. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that *we despaired of life itself*.

9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 *He has delivered us* from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again.

***On him we have set our hope* that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.**

Sometimes it takes great vulnerability and openness of life's perilous passages that have harmed us, before others can learn to let go of control and trust that only God can deliver us and save us. Paul is baring his heart here as an Apostolic leader, describing one of the lowest points in his life. He is not seeking sympathy, and he certainly is not carefully protecting his image or reputation. **What he is doing is pointing the way forward to dependency and trust!** Life's trouble is meant to teach us (as they say in the recovery community) **"I can't, but God can!"** One might think (as the Corinthians did), *"Is an Apostle, a pastor, supposed to feel at the end of his rope? Despairing of life itself? Unable to endure any further?"* Should our leader be saying these things to us? This isn't the polish, shine, and strength we had hoped for! Isn't Paul concerned about what people may think? He is indeed. He is concerned that they may think that strong, intelligent, refined, sophisticated human power and image is the only game in town! And so here is his second big idea:

Paul's Second Big Idea:

***Our confidence must reside in God alone!
Deliverance comes from God's sufficiency and not our own.***

How is this story being played out in your life? ***Are you willing to SPEAK YOUR WEAKNESS to others so that they may be RE-DIRECTED*** to hoping and trusting in God? If my story and my struggle can help another human being embrace hope for their future, is this not a fulfillment of the scriptural command to be **"encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching"** (Hebrews 10:25 NIV). Paul then finishes off his opening remarks with these final thoughts:

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-24 NIV

12 Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with *integrity and godly sincerity*. We have done so, *relying* not on worldly wisdom but on *God's grace*. 13 For we do not write you anything you

cannot read or understand. And I hope that, 14 as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

15 Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. 17 ***Was I fickle when I intended to do this?*** Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both “Yes, yes” and “No, no”?

18 But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” 20 ***For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.*** And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. 21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

23 I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

The Context of Paul’s closing comments are the Corinthian community’s accusation against Paul’s apparent **FICKLENESS** due to his changed plans. To them, that meant he had not kept his promise. If you are wondering what dynamic arose due to these circumstances, think of politicians being roasted because of their so-called unkept promises. Paul intended the change of

plans to lead to TWO VISITS instead of one – and then that didn't even work. Here's how his schedule went down:

Plan A: Ephesus → Macedonia → Corinth → Jerusalem
(1 Corinthians 16:1-6)

Plan B: Ephesus → Corinth → Macedonia → Corinth →
Judea (2 Corinthians 1:15-17)

Actual: Ephesus → Corinth → Ephesus → Troas →
Macedonia (Acts 18-20)

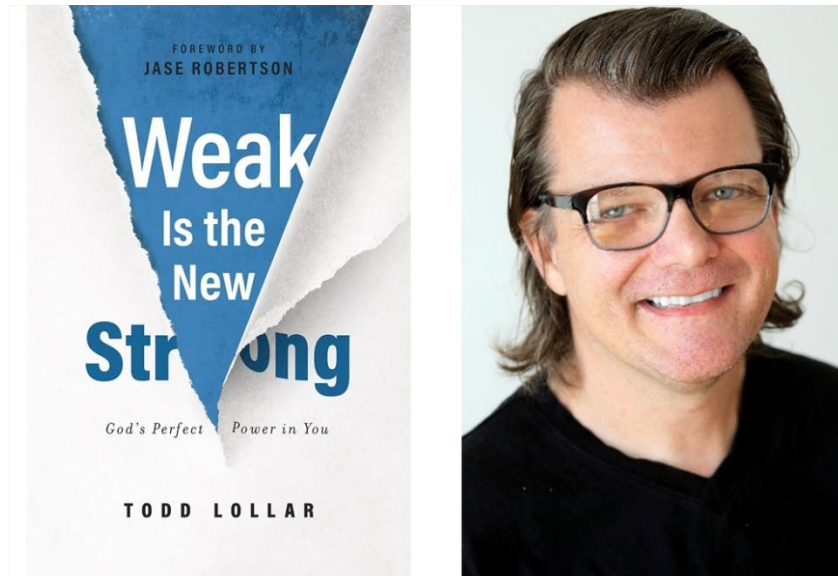
“Man Plans, and God Laughs” – Old Yiddish Adage

The Corinthian congregation used these change-in-plans to accuse Paul of capricious vacillation, indecision, lack of dependable character and gross negligence of his office. Are you getting that warm fuzzy feeling yet? You can tell by Paul's insistence that he is distressed by these charges. Being misunderstood and mischaracterized is not fun for any leader. Many things can change life's course, climate, plans and pathways. Reliability is not grounded in the word of man, but the word of God!

Paul's Third Big Idea:

We claim and live by the promises of God, even when life shifts around us. Broken human life produces YES and NO'S. God's promises will only produce YES's in Jesus!

Paul was ***Suffering, but not Defeated***. He was vulnerable and transparent, but not ashamed. He was heaven's authorized leader, but he knew the people actually needed to look to Jesus, not to him.



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From his childhood, Todd Lollar never had the option of hiding his physical weakness. With cerebral palsy binding him to a wheelchair and slowing his speech, Todd's physical weaknesses have always been apparent, both visually and verbally. But through God's movement in the trials, (***suffering but not defeated***) Todd was given a new thought:

What if your weaknesses are actually your greatest strengths?

He started a journey and became deeply thankful for what many would consider devastating. In his book, **Weak Is the New Strong: God's Perfect Power in You**, Todd invites us into the most authentic and real kind of life-change we could ever imagine. And what is the key? Well, according to Todd, it is learning to live confidently in God's power through your weaknesses, not despite them. Learn to see them as an asset, not a liability. Anything that drives us back to Jesus in dependency, launches us into success and victory. Let's pray!