

STUDY 11

Growing Through Weakness

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-12, 16-18; 12:7-10

For the most part, the world celebrates strength and power and denigrates weakness. Society's search for power as a virtue is illustrated by Napoleon I. One day in school he had to stand under the flag of Carthage, a conquered city, while his older brother stood under the flag of Rome. Even though this was only a history lesson, he demanded to change places with his brother so he would not have to stand under the flag of the defeated.

Jesus' not standing up for himself looked like weakness, and his execution seemed a sure defeat. But out of this seeming weakness and defeat came ultimate victory and triumph through his resurrection. We need to learn this principle of strength through weakness, as the apostle Paul did.

1. Why are we afraid to admit weakness?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10.

- ✧ 2. In response to the false teachers' boasting, Paul listed his credentials, concluding with a vision he had of paradise. Instead of boasting of his special privileges and revelations, why does Paul boast about his weaknesses?
- ✧ 3. How did Paul account for his thorn in the flesh?
- ✧ 4. What insights does verse 8 give you into Paul's inner struggle with his weakness?
5. In facing your weakness, what is the value of pleading with God for a specific request, then waiting, listening, and pleading again?

- ✧ 6. Imagine yourself in Paul's circumstances. How would you have responded to God's answer in verse 9?
- ✧ 7. In what ways is Paul's response different from merely resigning himself to living with pain (verses 9-10)?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-12, 16-18.

- ✧ 8. List all of the illustrations you can find in this passage of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 12:10: "When I am weak, then I am strong."
Paul's weakness

God's power

9. We tend to delight in our strength, achievements, power, or success as demonstrations of Christ's power in our lives. Describe a time when you have seen God's power demonstrated in *your* weakness?

- ✍ 10. In what ways are Jesus' death and life being worked out in you daily at home, at work, and in your relationships (verses 10-12)?

11. Paul didn't lose heart because he viewed his weakness from an eternal perspective. How did he show the contrasts between his present experience and eternal reality (verses 16-18)?

12. What difference can an eternal perspective make in the way you view your weaknesses and your anxieties?

Pray the Bible into Life

- Thank God that he knows and accepts your weaknesses even when you don't.
- Confess your fear or denial of weakness to God and ask for faith to believe that his strength is made perfect in your weakness.
- Thank God for the times his strength has been made perfect in your weakness and his grace has been sufficient for you or for someone in your group.