

Lesson 6: “Are You Weak Enough?”

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Craig Crawshaw

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 *And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*

The late Bible scholar and preacher, J. Sidlow Baxter, wrote a marvelous devotional entitled “Awake My Heart.” In it he asks a poignant question which I borrow today as the title of my message: “Are You Weak Enough?” Now the full meaning of this question is, “Are you weak enough in your own self-assertion to be used effectively by God?”

This, I believe, is the primary essence of our passage in 1 Corinthians that holds our attention today. Paul came to the Corinthians in “weakness” – which he describes in these opening verses of chapter two in three ways, which will become the outline of our consideration.

- 1. In Simplicity** He came not with “superiority of speech or of wisdom,” but he simply shared the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (v. 1-2)
- 2. In Fear** He says he was fearful and nervous (“much trembling”) in his own inability. (v. 3)
- 3. In Borrowed Power** He claims his words were non-persuasive in themselves, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. (v. 4-5)

Hudson Taylor was a British Protestant Christian missionary to China and founder of the China Inland Mission. Taylor spent 51 years ministering to this then largely neglected populous, and is considered one of the most powerful evangelists and missionaries since the apostle Paul. This is one of his famous quotes:

“The Lord was looking for a man weak enough to use, and He found me.”

Hudson Taylor

Is this you?

Dwight Lyman Moody, also known as D. L. Moody, was an American evangelist and publisher who brought scores to the Lord through his preaching and writings in the last decades of the 1800’s. Converted to God in a shoe store in 1855, he never thought of himself as being of any great importance, yet God used him mightily. Here is one of his quotes:

“We may easily be too big for God to use, but never too small.”

D. L. Moody

Are you small enough?

WEAK?

Now, when we ask “Are You Weak Enough?” we’re not asking primarily about physical weakness, nor social weakness, nor brain I.Q. God can use the strong or weak of body. And he will use the social introvert or the social butterfly. And He can summon the services of the mentally challenged or the mentally enabled. God loves “type A” personalities for His army of disciples as much as He loves those who are more withdrawn and “behind the scenes” kind of personalities.

Every one of us is on His radar as a promising and powerful candidate to promote His gospel message *IF* we are weak in the proper way. He wants us to become weak in our own ability apart from God’s strength. To borrow from a lyric from Steven Curtis Chapman’s Dove award winning song “His Strength is Perfect:”

We can only know the power that He holds

When we truly see how deep our weakness goes.

Stephen Curtis Chapman

Personal translation: The more I discover and acknowledge my inadequacy and tendency to mediocrity (or worse), the more I will discover the power of God available for me to utilize.

Or to employ a “techy” translation of the same: the more I upload my weakness (i.e. get them off my “computer”) the more I can download the power of God for my use.

Or, the more I empty myself of myself, the more room God has to do His work in me.

This is exactly the lesson that Paul learned and shared with the Corinthians in his second letter.

2 Corinthians 12:9 *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.*

As we "boast" about, or acknowledge our weaknesses and inadequacies, we find the power of God becomes all the more attractive, accessible and sufficient to meet our every need. And then we will be "weak enough" for God to use.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES of "WEAK TO STRONG"

Jacob, son of Issac and grandson of Abraham, was heir of the promise of God to multiply his offspring as the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky. And he was found a bit too "big for his britches." God whittled him down to usable size when he sent that mysterious Wrestler from heaven at the brook Jabbok. Jacob went from that encounter with a limp, but also with a new name (Israel), with God's blessing, and with a new appreciation for the God he had seen "face to face." (Genesis 32)

Moses, high in Egypt's court and hot-headed defender of his people, was found to be unusable to God for a great mission of mercy. So God seasoned and humbled him as a shepherd of sheep and father of a difficult family for 40 years with his father-in-law. Then at the burning bush, Moses protested his ability as a leader, but the Great I AM assured Moses of His indwelling power that would be Moses' strength. (Ex. 3-4)

Isaiah was God's choice to bring a powerful prophetic message to a stubborn and rebellious people. But he was too strong in himself and needed a higher view of God to be brought low and weak to be usable. before God could commission him. It was only when Isaiah saw the Lord lofty and exalted on His throne with the cherubim surrounding Him that Isaiah became weak enough to say "Woe is me, for I am ruined!" and then "Lord, here am I, send me." It was then that the Lord would commission Isaiah. (Isaiah 6)

And the one we know as the great evangelist and church planter – the apostle Paul – was first the great persecutor of the Church, known as Saul of Tarsus. God had to get his attention by striking him blind when he was on the road to Damascus bound to create more havoc. Stricken with blindness and without food or drink for three days he found himself in the house of a lowly disciple of Christ – Ananias. He was humbled and brought low in need to where God could remove the scales from his eyes, both physically and spiritually. At the point of Paul's greatest weakness, God became his great strength.

Remember that Jesus began his great Sermon on the Mount giving, as it were, the Kingdom Constitution, with the words: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit" and "Blessed are those who mourn" and "Blessed are the meek." He made it clear that it is the one weak in himself who is ready to be filled with the strength of the Lord.

1. WEAK - IN SIMPLICITY (v. 1-2)

We all know the saying "Keep it simple, stupid." Paul is saying "keep it – the message – simple." He says he didn't come in superiority of speech. Aren't you glad you don't have to share the message in "superior speech?" He says he didn't come with words of wisdom. Again, aren't you glad that's not what's expected of you? He "proclaimed" – which simply means "shared forth" the testimony of God – meaning "what God had done." I can do that. You can do that. We can share what God has done both on the cross through Jesus, and we can share what God has done in our lives.

One of the most powerful "simple" (and short) testimonies found in the Bible is by the man who Jesus healed of blindness from birth:

John 9:25 *"I was blind, now I see."*

We love to sing this as our testimony when we sing the first verse of John Newton's "Amazing Grace:" "Twas blind, but now I see." It may not speak of physical blindness, as it did for the man in John's account, but it surely speaks of spiritual blindness that was removed by God when by faith we received the free grace of God to believe and accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord. (Have you done this?!)

Verse 2 tells us the “weak” testimony (simple) we are to bring: “Jesus, and Him crucified.” You can say simply “Jesus died to pay the debt of your sins” or “Dying on the cross is how Jesus shows how much he loves and forgives you.” Keep it simple!

Directly before Paul came to Corinth for the first time, he was in Athens. We read of this in Acts 17. Do you remember his famous sermon on Mars Hill when he described God in philosophical terms in the hopes of persuading those who worshipped an “Unknown God?” We marvel at his eloquence and bravado in that setting. Yet what was the result? There was no known church formed in Athens and but a few converts among many scoffers. I wonder if Paul did not reflect on that as a failure, and therefore tried a different, “simpler” and more direct approach in Corinth by knowing “nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

This week we lost to the world one of the greatest men of God the last 100 years has produced - the Reverend Billy Graham. God gave him a fruitful 99 years on this planet. And oh how many have come to know our blessed Savior through his ministry – my wife Joanne being one of them, who was moved to go forward at one of his crusades years ago.

Listening to Billy’s preaching, as I have on many occasions, I am always impressed with the simplicity of his presentation. I’ve often thought, “there is nothing super-special about his preaching style.” And then I realize that’s the point – it is simple. Jesus, the cross, our need, God’s love, receive Him, be saved.

There is a time and place for well prepared and rehearsed apologetics and persuasive debate. But the general principle in sharing is “keep it simple.” That is being *weak* in the way God will use powerfully, as He did through Billy Graham.

2. WEAK - IN FEAR (v. 3)

This is not fear or nervousness for safety, nor fear for “blowing” our presentation. We certainly might have times of feeling that way, but this is not the “fear” or “trembling” that Paul spoke of and would encourage us to have. Paul wanted to do the best possible job for God and yet he knew his limitations.

This fear Paul had was the nervous fear that all good athletes have before a big game, or all good performers have before a play or concert, or all excellent speakers have before an important speech – or all servants of the Lord should have before a presentation of the gospel message. It is this “weakness” that drives one to a power and encouragement outside of themselves – a coach, a mentor, a parent – or in the case of Christians, to God in prayer.

If you feel nervous in sharing – join the club! And take encouragement in knowing that the great apostle Paul shared in nervousness. Remember too that the enemy feels nervous about you sharing the power of God and will do what he can to make you nervous. William Barclay, the great New Testament commentator says this:

It is that person who has this trembling anxiety, who has that intensity which is the essence of real greatness, who can produce an effect which artistry alone can never achieve.

William Barclay

Everyone “psychs” themselves up differently. Some try to relax with music or meditation, others get their heartbeat up, others go over and over their game plan. But go to God. Let Him be your strength in the weakness of nervous fear. And remember that God promises to give you the words to say and boldness of speech. Keep it simple. And keep it humble. Relax in His strength.

3. WEAK – IN BORROWED POWER (v. 4-5)

And that brings us to the final aspect of “weakness” that Paul mentions in our passage.

“When we come to the end of ourselves, we come to the beginning of God.”

Billy Graham

So far in chapter one and in the opening verses of chapter two, Paul has spoken of Godly wisdom and of the powerful message of Christ crucified. But now in verse 4 and 5 he introduces the dynamic of the indwelling power source that is ours through the Holy Spirit. And this thought will take us through the rest of chapter two and beyond.

Notice that Paul says his works were not in “persuasive words of wisdom.” This does not mean that Paul

did not have the ability to persuade, or that his words lacked any energy. He is rather saying that the wisdom he dispensed was the wisdom of God. And that wisdom of God carried a walloping power that was backed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says his words were “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” He was filled with the Holy Spirit, having emptied himself. That meant he was “controlled” or “influenced” or best, “intoxicated” with the Holy Spirit. That is the actual best translation of Ephesians 5:18, where Paul compares the filling of the Holy Spirit to the drunkenness of wine. The Greek word for “filling” is the same Greek word for “drunk.”

Ephesians 5:18 *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.*

Remember Jesus taught that it was the Holy Spirit who teaches (John 15:26), and convicts (John 16:8) and guides into all truth (John 16:13). And the writer of Hebrews tells us that when we utilize the truth of Scripture, there is a powerful work of the Spirit that is not our own:

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

This is not a promise for our opinions or persuasive rhetoric, but for the use of the gospel message of Scripture. Paul wanted his hearers to be convinced and convicted by God, not by his persuasive words.

So keep it God and Christ-centered! We are to display the “weakness” of borrowed power – the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of power. He is the one who will convince, convict, teach – through your yielding to His power, working through you.

Here is the “weakness” God wants you to display:

1. **“Keep it SIMPLE”** - Christ and Him crucified
2. **“Keep it HUMBLE”** - fearful and desperate for God’s help
3. **“Keep it GOD-POWERED”** - let the Spirit do the convincing

The prophet Zechariah summarized it well.

Zechariah 4:6 ... *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts.*

Are you weak enough? – to be used by God?