

Embrace Your Weakness

By: Pastor David Holt

I hope you are reading this because you are feeling really weak right now. I know this sounds like a very unusual way to start a tract, but I sincerely mean it. The best time to read a tract like this is when you are in the midst of a very weak time. I am writing this while going through a very weak time in my own life, so I am writing to myself as much as to you.

If you are going through a particularly hard time in your life, I hope that after reading this you will discover the great value that comes from embracing your human weakness instead of just wanting the weakness to go away. What this tract is about is a principle I call the “strength through weakness principle.” The **strength through weakness principle** is this: **God’s power is made perfect in human weakness.** If we will learn to embrace our weakness, and through our weakness turn to God, then we can experience His power in ways we never dreamed possible.

In our day and age, weakness is not something that is seen as positive. Our culture encourages all of us to be strong in ourselves. It is the strong in body and emotion that are applauded. It is strong athletes that we admire. We tell each other, “Be strong. Suck it up. Real men don’t cry. Be all that you can be. Put your best foot forward. Don’t let anyone see your weakness.” All of these and many similar messages encourage people to be strong in themselves and not to admit weakness or need. We do not usually see the positive that can come by embracing our weakness.

However, God’s Word says that human weakness can be a very good thing. “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalms 34:18). “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). “And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the

flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; **whose weakness was turned to strength**; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies” (Hebrews 11:32-35; emphasis mine). We all want to be like these great people of faith, but are we willing to be weak in order to become like them?

One of the strongest Christians that ever lived, the Apostle Paul, talked a lot about the value of weakness. He was going through a particularly difficult time in his life when the Holy Spirit inspired him to write a passage of Scripture that this tract will address.

That passage is 2 Corinthians 12:7-11:

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Let’s look at this passage phrase by phrase.

1. **“To keep me from becoming conceited”**

In Paul’s case, he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. He had experienced many supernatural visions and insights. These experiences with God could have easily caused him to become prideful. Many things in our lives can cause us to become prideful. This is one reason weakness can be a good thing. Weakness keeps us humble and dependent on God. We all tend toward pride and self-dependence. This is human nature. This is the sin nature, to seek to live independent from God. Therefore, God often orchestrates circumstances such that we are broken down and become more dependent on Him. J.I. Packer, in the book Knowing God, says “God at times overwhelms us with a sense of our own inadequacy,

and drives us to cling to Him more closely. This is the ultimate reason, from our standpoint, why God fills our lives with troubles and perplexities of one sort or another – it is to insure that we shall learn to hold Him fast ... God wants us to feel that our way throughout life is rough and perplexing, so that we may learn thankfully to lean on Him. Therefore He takes steps to drive us out of self-confidence to trust in Himself.”

2. “There was given me a thorn in my flesh”

God orchestrated this hard time in Paul’s life. God even used Satan to accomplish His will (i.e. “a messenger of Satan to torment me”). It was God’s doing that Paul was going through this difficulty. Why? Because God wanted to deepen Paul and teach him to embrace his weakness. What was this “thorn in the flesh?” There has been much discussion over the years about this. I think it was some kind of physical pain in Paul’s life, because “thorn” implies pain and “flesh” often refers to the human body. Perhaps you have a thorn in your flesh right now. It may be a physical condition or sickness that often makes you feel weak. It may be a relational conflict with someone. It may be something like depression or worry that you regularly struggle with. Regardless of what exactly the thorn in the flesh was for Paul or for us, God has a purpose in these “thorns”. However, Paul did not like it and wanted it removed.

3. “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away.”

Paul begged God to deliver him from this weakness and need. Paul did not like what he was going through any more than we like to feel weak or be in pain. It is very normal to want our hardships taken away. It is certainly OK to ask God to take them away. Sometimes when we cry out to God to deliver us, He will. God is a God of miracles. God can and does heal. God sometimes intervenes to deliver us from the situation at hand. Sometimes, we will be able to say with the Psalmist, “For He has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes” (Psalms 54:7). However, in this case and sometimes in our lives, God had a higher purpose in the pain. Sometimes God will **not** deliver us. Rather than **deliver** Paul from the thorn, God wanted to **develop** Paul through the thorn.

4. “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you’”

- God answered Paul’s request with a “No.” Instead of removing the source of his weakness, God provided the source of His strength amidst Paul’s weakness. The source of God’s strength is His grace. Grace is God giving to us what we do not deserve. God’s grace, despite the affliction, is sufficient for a person to handle anything. God’s grace is God’s enablement. God’s grace is bigger than any earthly challenge. Paul said of God’s grace, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Grace does not mean that we “let go and let God.” Rather, we are to take hold with God. God used Paul’s weakness to lead him into a realm of living out of His divine strength.

5. “For My power is made perfect in weakness”

Here is the key to this entire tract: **God’s power is perfected in our weakness!** When we are strong in our own strength, we do not depend on God and thus God is not able to work like He wants to. But when we are humanly weak, and through that weakness depend on God, then God can be strong in us. When this occurs, God gets all the glory, because we realize that it was God and not us that did it. God loves to do in and through us what we cannot do on our own. Our problem is that we do not like to be weak, so we muster up our own strength and don’t depend on God as we should. “God is near to those who call upon Him” (Psalms 145:18). When we are strong we usually don’t call upon the Lord. It is often when we are weak that we call upon the Lord, and then God can be near us! Someone once said that it is good to be on our backs, because then the only place to look is up! The more we realize that God’s power is perfected in our weakness, the more we will learn to embrace our weakness. This is exactly what Paul did in this passage.

6. “Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

Can you say this? I know of very few people who have grown to this point, where they actually embrace their weakness. Because Paul understood the power through weakness principle, he now boasts about and gladly welcomes his weakness. He can do this because he knows what will come out on the other end of his weakness.

When we know what will come out at the other end of our weakness, then we can rejoice in what we put into it at the front end. For example, if I know that putting dirty clothes into a washing machine will produce clean clothes at the end, then I will learn to gladly put in the dirty clothes. I can gladly embrace weakness if I know that God's power gets released through that weakness. Are you grasping this? Suppose you are asked to lead a Bible Study or speak to a group, and you feel very weak in doing this. If you understand this principle, instead of backing away from this challenge or struggling to fulfill it, you now step into it thankful that you feel weak, because you know that God's power is going to flow through you as you do it. If you are experiencing marital problems, rather than fight these struggles, you can embrace them knowing that as you call upon the Lord, His power will be made perfect in your weakness. He will show you things you need to know. He will perfect your character through this marital challenge. He will empower you to supernaturally love your spouse. If you see an area of failure in your life, rather than feel defeated and throw in the towel, you can embrace that shortcoming by depending on God to change you. All human weakness is a good thing, when it leads us to yielding our lives more fully to God! If this is not radical enough for you, then just hold on because this next part gets even wilder!

**7. "That is why, for Christ's sake,
I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in
persecutions, in difficulties.**

For when I am weak, then I am strong"

Delight in these hardships? Now isn't that going a bit too far? Not for Paul. He had seen so much good come about because of his weaknesses and hardships that now he could actually delight in them. The one that gets me the most is delighting in persecutions. Paul could even delight in these, because through the persecutions he saw many come to faith in Christ. He could look these struggles in the face and say, "Bring it on. You cannot defeat me, because the weaker I am, the stronger God is in me. Wow! What a place to get to in our lives. Can we get there, also? Yes we can ... if we understand and apply this power through weakness principle.

I want you to see one more thing in this passage. Notice that Paul says **"for Christ's sake."** Everything in this strength through weakness principle needs to be for God's glory. We should seek to live this out so that God gets the glory and not us. God is most glorified when He is seen by others for who He truly is. When God's power flows through a weak human vessel, then He is glorified because it will be obvious to all that it was God and not the person. When you lead that Bible Study and it goes well and people are blessed, you will know that it was God and thus give God all the credit. When your marriage takes a turn for the good, you will praise God because you and others will know that it was God who did it. When your spouse doesn't change, but you still have the joy of the Lord, you will know that this supernatural joy is from God and not from you. When that area of personal failure begins to change, you will say to others, "Look at how God is changing me." May God indeed be glorified through our human weaknesses!

God loves to do what only He can do. When we embrace weakness and call upon Him, then He can do what only He can do and thus glorify His name. "Everyone who is called by my name, **whom I created for my glory**, whom I formed and made" (Isaiah 43:7; emphasis mine). We are created for God's glory, and we glorify Him when we embrace our weakness and become strong in Him.

Here are some additional reasons why we should embrace our human weakness:

1. Human weakness can show us our sin.

For example, suppose one area of weakness in your life is anger. Your anger will often reveal sin. Anger is usually due to a selfish goal or desire that is getting blocked. We are not getting what we want, and so we get angry. This is not **always** the case, but it is usually the reason for our anger. Therefore, the human weakness of anger, which is normally seen as negative, can now be seen as a positive in that it reveals a selfish goal that we need to yield to God. Realizing this can cause us to see anger as a weakness to be embraced, not in that we stay angry, but rather that we yield the source of the anger to God and see Him take the anger away.

In my weakness (anger) am I made strong (God removing the anger or helping you to be angry but sin not.) When you feel weak, ask God to show you if there is any sin that He is trying to reveal to you. The same is often the case in a marital struggle. We see the marital struggle as a weakness that we want removed. Instead, God often wants to use the marital struggle to show us sin in our lives. Instead of wanting the marital struggle to be gone, we need to ask God to show us what He wants to change in us through the marital struggle. As we repent of sin, then we are in a great position to be filled with God's Holy Spirit.

2. Human weakness can lead to the filling of the Holy Spirit. “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Why does Paul contrast drunkenness with being filled with the Holy Spirit? He does this because when one is drunk, the alcohol controls him. We say he is “under the influence.” When one is filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit controls him. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). I believe one of the most important truths for living the Christian life is the principle of being filled with the Holy Spirit. To be filled with God's Spirit is to allow God's Holy Spirit to empower your life, to yield your life to God and allow Him to live His life through you. Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and **I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.** The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20; emphasis mine). We cannot live the Christian life in our own power. Therefore, we must yield to God and allow His Spirit to empower us. It often takes embracing our weakness to enter into the filling of the Holy Spirit. Whenever you feel weak, let this be a signal to ask God to fill you with His Spirit. Pray something like this, “Lord, I yield to You. I realize that I cannot do what is needed right now to live for You. Therefore, I surrender to Your control and ask You to empower me with Your Spirit.” Once you pray this, then move forward confident that God is filling you because you asked according to His will, and He promises to answer prayers that are in accordance with His will. “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according

to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us-whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

3. Human weakness can lead to greater dependence upon God. We have already covered this under 2 Corinthians 12 and the life of Paul. However, it is worth stating again just for emphasis. When we feel weak, God wants that feeling of human weakness to direct us to depend on Him. When we depend on Him, then we experience His supernatural power doing in us what we could not do on our own. Isn't weakness a great thing?! Where are you feeling weak that you need to depend on God? Where are you fighting weakness that God wants you to embrace the weakness? What do you need to yield to God? Perhaps take some time now to ask God to show you where He wants you to embrace weakness. It is hard to imagine someone like the Apostle Paul feeling weak in ministry. Yet, he did, but look at how his weakness caused him to become more dependent on God: “I came to you in **weakness and fear**, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a **demonstration of the Spirit's power**, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power” (1 Corinthians 2:3-5; emphasis mine). Paul says here that he felt fearful and weak to preach. However, through his weakness God demonstrated His power. The times in my preaching when I have felt the greatest anointing have been when I felt very weak and inadequate. It is almost the joke in our family that when I don't feel real good about a sermon they respond, “Alright, then it is going to be a good one.” I am learning to rejoice in my feeling of inadequacy in preaching.

4. Human weakness can give us greater compassion for other hurting people. When we go through tough times, it gives us greater understanding for others who are going through tough times. The greatest healers are wounded healers. In other words, those who have been in pain and experienced God in the midst of their pain can greatly assist others who are in pain. Once you have experienced God's power in your weakness, then you can minister to others who are weak and point them to the strength that only comes from God. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all

comfort, **who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.**

For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows” (2 Corinthians 1:3-6; emphasis mine). One modern example of this is Joni Erickson Tada. Joni was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident when she was sixteen. For years she struggled with God over this. She cried out for healing and nothing happened. Much like Paul, she pleaded to have her weakness removed, but God said, “No.” As she yielded her weakness to God, she became strong in the Lord. She is now ministering effectively to thousands of hurting people from her wheelchair. She is on Christian radio each day throughout the U.S. and world sharing deep truths of the faith that have come through her suffering. Suffering can be very redemptive. Joni is touching the lives of many hurting people, because she has learned to be strong amidst her human weakness. Those who are hurting can relate to her because of what she has been through. What are you going through that God wants to use in the lives of others? What area of weakness in your life does God want to use to help others, if you will allow Him to make you better through it?

5. Human weakness can help us to identify with Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus means that we are called to walk as Jesus did. “Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). In coming to earth as a man, The God-man Jesus experienced human weakness. Jesus was tired and hungry and tempted. He can identify with us because of His experience in all aspects of humanity, minus sin. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been **tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.** Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16; emphasis mine). We can be confident coming to Jesus with our weakness because He can relate to us. This is why God’s throne is called a throne of grace. In addition to this, we can identify with Jesus when we enter into our own weakness. “For to be sure, **he was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God's**

power. Likewise, **we are weak in him,** yet by God's power we will live with Him to serve you” (2 Corinthians 13:4; emphasis mine.) As followers of Jesus, we are called to be like Jesus. We need to embrace weakness as one way to become like Jesus.

6. Human weakness can ignite faith.

Before you can have a fire, you must ignite something. The match must be ignited in order to start the fire. Our faith must be ignited in order to see God move. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). When we are weak, we see our need for God. In this condition of need we are faced with the choice of either turning to our own resources or trusting in God. To trust in God requires faith. When we feel weak, we must exercise faith in God for that weakness to get turned to strength. When we are weak, we must not just “let go and let God.” Instead, we must actively exercise our faith in God. We exercise faith by praying and calling upon the Lord. We exercise faith by taking God at His Word and believing His many promises. I encourage you to find promises in the Bible that you can claim in prayer right now. We exercise faith by obeying the Lord. We exercise faith by “waiting on the Lord” (Isaiah 40:31). We exercise faith by taking every thought captive and making it obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:2-5). We exercise faith by not giving up and remaining steadfast to the Lord. God is faithful and will bring you through this time of weakness, **if** you trust Him.

7. Human weakness can help us gain an eternal perspective.

Living with an eternal perspective is so important in life. See my tract “What On Earth Are You Doing For Heavens’ Sake?” When we feel weak, it is a good reminder that our hardships on earth will not always be with us. There is coming a day and a place where there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4). Paul said, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Be encouraged that the positives of heaven will far outweigh the challenges we go through on earth.

Finally, and most importantly,

8. Human weakness can glorify God. When we are weak and God is strong, God is glorified. We are created to glorify God. When we live our lives separate from God and don't live in humble dependence upon God, we do not glorify God. We are not fulfilling the reason we were created. On the other hand, when we are weak and thus depend on God, He is glorified. We were created to live in total dependence upon God. Our weakness is designed to point us to God. Our weakness is designed to humble us. Our weakness is designed to lead us to cry out to God for help. Our weakness is meant to glorify God.

Conclusion

Are you fighting weakness or learning to embrace it? Are you ready to delight in weakness, knowing now all the good that can come from it? Another tract I encourage you to read is "Life is Tough But God is Good." It can be found at our Welcome Center or on our church's website at www.firstfree.org. Finally, feel free to email me at davidholt@firstfree.org to let me know how this tract has helped you. May God's power be strong in your weakness! Embrace your weakness today.

"Finally, **be strong in the Lord** and in **His mighty power.**"
Ephesians 6:10 (emphasis mine)

"When we arrive at the end of our own strength,
it is not defeat, but the start of tapping into God's boundless resources.
It is when we are weak that we are strong in God."
Brother Yun (The Heavenly Man, p.194)

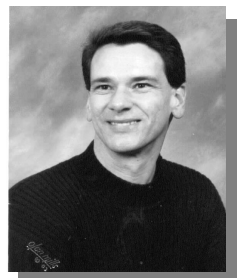
All biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New International Version.

Duplication of this material is permissible if not for monetary gain.

First Evangelical Free Church
1950 Hwy 35
Onalaska, WI 54650
608-782-6022
E-mail: office@firstfree.org
Website: www.firstfree.org



Pastor David Holt has served as Senior Pastor of First Evangelical Free Church since 1990. He is a graduate of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he earned Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, and Doctor of Ministry degrees. He is married to Dede and they have four children.



March 2005