

# Sermon Note: In Weakness and in Strength

## Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

### Introduction

In our journey of faith, we often encounter moments of profound strength and times of deep weakness. The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, shares a personal testimony of his own struggles and the divine strength that sustains him. He speaks of a “thorn in the flesh”—a persistent challenge that he pleaded with God to remove. Yet, God’s response was not to take away the struggle, but to provide grace sufficient to draw him nearer to God’s purposes. This powerful passage invites us to reflect on our own vulnerabilities and the ways in which God’s strength sustains us when we feel weakest.

As we conclude our “Open Your Heart” series, we turn our attention to this paradox of faith: how embracing our weaknesses can reveal God’s strength in our lives. Let us open our hearts to understand how our limitations can become opportunities for divine power to be made known.

### Illustration Video

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyYDz\\_A6HO8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyYDz_A6HO8)

In the 2006 film *Rocky Balboa*, Rocky speaks to his son about life’s hardships and the importance of perseverance.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. How does Rocky’s speech to his son illustrate the concept of finding strength in the midst of weakness?
2. What specific points in Rocky’s speech resonate with Paul’s message in 2 Corinthians 12:2-10?
3. How does Rocky redefine strength and weakness for his son? How can we apply this re-definition in our own lives?
4. In what ways can enduring life’s hardships make us stronger spiritually, emotionally, and physically?
5. Reflect on a time when you faced a significant challenge. How did that experience shape your understanding of strength and weakness?

### 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 (NRSVue)

<sup>2</sup>I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—<sup>4</sup>was caught up into paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. <sup>5</sup>On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, <sup>7</sup>even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup>Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of

Christ may dwell in me.<sup>10</sup> Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

### **Scripture Discussion Questions**

1. The theme for this week is “Open Your Heart: In Weakness and in Strength” Have you ever needed someone else’s help? How did that feel in the moment? How did it feel if/when you reflected on it later?
2. Have you ever helped someone in great need? How did you feel in the moment? How did it feel if/when you reflected on it later?
3. Paul talked about being caught up in the “third heaven” and his being taken up into the heavenly realms where he heard things he kept to himself (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Do you believe it is important to keep some spiritual things or blessings between you and God? Why or why not?
4. Paul describes a “thorn in the flesh” given to him by God (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). Why do you think Paul had to keep struggling with the painful thorn, even after Paul pleaded three times for it to be removed?
5. What are your thoughts on the world’s meaning of wealth and riches versus God’s meaning?
6. Paul in this text says he is content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for the sake of Christ. How is it possible to be “strong” when you are “weak?”
7. Have you ever felt strong when you were insulted, faced hardships, or were lied about? How did you stay strong?
8. As we read Paul’s letter, we should notice that this thorn doesn’t come from God. I don’t believe that God causes suffering to get us to pay attention or to change our ways or our thinking—despite what some loud voices in our world today are trying to tell us. I can’t imagine an infinitely good God using suffering as a punishment. But I also believe that God can use any occasion, any circumstance, to help us grow and learn, if we pay attention, if we ask in humility what we could learn. Are there some loud voices in our world today that influence our thinking? How might you be able to stop those voices from influencing you?
9. This week, in which area of your life do you want to grow and learn?

### **Add'l (Optional) Discussion Questions**

1. What is your definition of strength? What is your definition of weakness?
2. How is being connected together both a strength and a weakness?
3. How do you think personal strength and biblical strength differ?
4. Talk to a trusted friend or family member about a time when you just weren’t strong enough. Explore the emotions and spirituality of this time. Discuss how you might learn and grow from the experience.
5. What does culture or modern media tell you about strength? What does it tell you about weakness?
6. How can we “boast in our weakness?”
7. Why is it powerful to share your weakness rather than your strength?

### **Weekly Action**

This week, take some time to reflect on an area of your life where you feel weak or challenged. Write down your thoughts and feelings about this area. Then, spend a few moments in prayer, asking God to show you how divine strength might sustain you when you feel weakest. Consider sharing your reflections with a trusted

friend or within your small group, inviting them to support you in prayer and encouragement. Remember, embracing our weaknesses can open the door to experiencing God's transformative strength.

### **Prayer**

Great and mighty God, help us understand the meaning of being strong even when we are weak, to persevere and stay strong when we are persecuted. Bless us to have joy in our suffering because your grace is sufficient. Amen – We believe it to be so!