

SPIRITUAL MATURITY SERIES

The Perfected Strength of God”

Key Verses: 2 Cor. 12:9 and Joel 3:10

The Power of God

Eph 3:20 *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, KJV*

“Exceedingly, Abundantly, Above, All...” Paul uses an arsenal of words just to express the greatness of God’s power and ability that we find within Jesus Christ. But, if God has provided all the strength we need for life’s journey, why do we often feel so weak at times? Let’s begin by examining some possible causes of this periodic feeling of weakness.

Unused Inner Strength

I recently participated in an early morning exercise boot camp. The camp lasted an hour and comprised four 15-minute exercise stations. After about the second or third day, my upper legs were so sore I could barely climb up the stairs at my house. I suppose the boot camp had me using muscles I hadn’t used in a while. The spiritual implications of this are that often life will call upon you to use some inner strength that you may not be aware you had available; or simply haven’t had to use in the past. **READ Eph. 3:20 QUESTION:** What is the purpose of this power “already at work in you?” God in his infinite wisdom has placed the very power we need for life’s journey within our spirit. When we call upon God’s power, the Apostle assures us that at the very moment, it’s already working!

Unused Natural Resources

Joel 3:10 Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. KJV

Though from an eschatological view, this text is believed to address the final great battle referred to as Armageddon when all of Christ’s adversaries shall battle with him; however, for the sake of this lesson, we will focus on its literary implications. In this text, God calls his people to prepare for battle against their enemy. In this battle, God not only calls upon those currently trained and experienced in war but tells even those untrained and unarmed citizens to use whatever resources they have at their disposal to combat the enemy. In using whatever resource God has provided to fight your enemy, the prophet declares that even the weak can say “I am strong!” **QUESTION:** Does God make airplanes? I would have to answer “no.” God does give people dreams, visions and ideas; and then he will provide the raw resources necessary to accomplish those dreams, visions and ideas. We often look for God to do all the work. However, we should be mindful that whenever God blesses you he will always leave something for you to do. What I am saying is, often the very answer you seeking is right within your grasp.

Failure to Simply Stand

Eph 6:13-14: 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and **having done all, to stand.** 14 **Stand therefore,** having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; KJV

Sometimes it’s important to remind ourselves that the chapters and verses were added to the actual biblical text for our convenience; however, at times they can be split in places that may cause us to lose some of the intended message. The division between Ephesians 6: 13 and 14 is just such an example. The Apostle instructs us to begin by putting on the entire covering of God and then after doing all we

can to stand; then simply stand. Do not allow fear to outlive your faith. We must stand with a full expectation that God will keep us at all times.

Divine Thorns and Demonic Messengers: READ 2 Cor 12:7

In this chapter the Apostle Paul tells of an amazing experience he had when he was somehow transported into what he calls a third heaven; there he heard and saw unimaginable divine things. Upon his return to the earthly realm, Paul declares:

2 Cor 12:7 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. NIV

Paul then tells us that he prayed on several occasions to have this “thorn” removed to which God replied: **2 Cor 12:9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." NIV Let's take a moment to address this matter. We have already studied the effects of “Poisonous Pride” so we somewhat understand the potential damage pride could have done to Paul's ministry and the need for God to address it. However, notice that the thorn was “given” to him. It was a gift from God.

QUESTIONS: Why would God give you something that would cause pain? Was this thorn given to Paul because he had sinned? No, the thorn was given to keep Paul from sinning! Then, there's this thing about a “messenger from Satan.” Let's look into this meaning.

READ 2 Chron 18: 19 – 21 I suggest that the thorn and the messenger may quite well be two separate occurrences. I personally believe that there are conversations that begin in hell and end up in the mouths of those people Satan can speak through and your ears are the unfortunate target of their demonic conversation. **2 Chronicles 18:21** suggests that my theory has some bible basis. So, the thorn was aggravated by the messages Satan made sure Paul heard. One of Satan's main objectives is to make us question God's genuine love and care for us. **QUESTIONS:** What things might this satanic messenger have said to Paul regarding this thorn? What does he say to you regarding your thorny struggles?

Perfecting In Weakness READ 2 Chron 26: 14 – 16 and 2 Cor 12:9

In the Old Testament text, Uzziah's talent as a military engineering genius is clearly seen. Unfortunately, the bible says that Uzziah's pride and trust in his inventions caused him to lose his divine help from God. **QUESTIONS:** Does God require us to renounce and abandon our gifts and talents in order to serve him? So what did Uzziah do so wrong? It is not that God requires us to walk away from our gifts and talents but God doesn't want us to rely on them to accomplish spiritual ends. How did Paul come to view his personal accomplishments? **READ Phil 3:8**

Now, for a final word... “my grace is sufficient...” why? Because God's strength is made perfect in our “weakness.” Weakness is not a popular word in today's society. We encounter weakness as a negative response to devastating situations as in the 2013 bombing in Boston. Rather than recognize any weaknesses from the horrific event, people decided to become “Boston Strong.” But for the Christian, we are never too weak to serve God, but we can become too strong to be an effective servant. No one knows exactly what this “thorn” was that Paul was speaking of; that's crucial. Because that means the thorn becomes unique and personal to every child of God. As a remedy for the aches of the thorn's presence, God declares he has prescribed not a cure, but a treatment plan. Grace is like high blood pressure medicine. The medication doesn't cure high blood pressure, but it treats it and allows the patient to on living just as if there was no malady. So, God's grace doesn't remove my mountains, but it does give me the strength to climb and I don't even get winded!