

Boasting in Weakness

Have you ever known, or even *been* or *are*, someone who seemed to **enjoy** his or her ailments? As we get older and physical maladies increase (while other activities of aspects of life decrease), some of us start to almost *revel* in what is “wrong” with us, and especially the telling of our many infirmities. Such becomes almost like a competition of sorts, and we can’t hardly wait for someone to ask, “How are you?” so we can list in intricate and graphic detail everything that hurts, doesn’t work, or otherwise creaks and pops. So, “itises” of all sorts are outlined (and *magnified*?) with regard to their frequency and severity. Perhaps this all just part of getting “old”... at some point, the “Check Engine” light comes on, stays on, and then starts flashing!

But in the last several years, **fragility, weakness,** and “**having issues**” have become seemingly commonplace for the younger generations as well- perhaps even “fashionable.” So much so that it is now somewhat rare for one to be *healthy, strong,* and *well-balanced* physically and mentally. Though the rate of increase has considerably slowed for population, it has dramatically exploded for ailments, illnesses, sensitivities, and “mental health issues.” Whether this is simply a product of better diagnostics for previously undetected or unreported problems, or we are or think we are (Hypochondria) just sicker, is not really relevant to our purposes and points of consideration in this lesson. However, our **motivations, attitudes** and subsequent **activities** related to these maladies (whether *real* or *imagined*) are worthy of attention.

- Have we become so isolated and anonymous that having “something wrong” has become a mechanism for gaining attention and sympathy?
- Since seemingly everyone has problems with their physical or mental health, has a “me too” effect arisen? Or,
- Is it that some sort of “victim” mentality in regard to physical or mental health lessens or remove responsibilities to *be* or *do* better?

Perhaps parts of all three motivations are at play. Whatever the incentives or perceived “rewards”...

- Gaining *attention from* or *popularity with* the world is a bad idea, John 15:19;
- Efforts to *conform to the world* and its *ways* are never a good tact, Rom.12:1-2;
- God expects us to “*overcome the world*” rather being its *victim*, 1John 5:4-5.

Despite these things, many seem to **enjoy** and even **boast in** their **weakness(es)**. But I don’t think this is exactly what Paul meant (or even *implied*) in 2Cor.12:9. Consider that:

1. Paul **did have** a “**thorn in the flesh,**” v.7;
2. He called it a “**messenger of Satan to buffet**” him, v.7 (it either was, or was viewed by Paul as, an *impediment* to his work of ministry- which is bad)
3. But it also *kept* Paul “**from exalting**” himself, v.7 (which is *good*, or at least God used it for *good*, and not what Satan would want or desire);
4. He “*entreated the Lord three times*” that this “*thorn*” might **be “removed,”** v.8;

5. But was told, “My **grace is sufficient** for you, for (My) **power is perfected in weakness**,” v.9a (basically, that this *thorn*- regardless of Satan’s intents and purposes for it, was *good* for him; that it would not be *removed* since it: *kept Paul from exalting himself* and provided opportunities for Christ’s *grace* and *power* to be manifested *in* and *through* him);
6. Thus in this *context* and *application*, Paul said he would “*boast about*” his “*weaknesses*, **that the power of Christ may dwell in me**,” v.9b; and,
7. That He would, therefore, be “**well content** with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, **for Christ’s sake**; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (through Christ), v.10.
8. Such is **very different from “enjoying”** our weaknesses and “**boasting**” about how *bad*, *severe*, or *frequent* they are to gain the **attention, popularity,** or **sympathy** of the world. Such is making our weaknesses all about **me**, rather than as providing an opportunity for the *grace* and *power* of **God**.

Applications:

- A. Paul’s “**thorn in the flesh**” probably was **physical** (personally, I think the context suggests it was the *insults*, *persecutions*, and *difficulties* he mentioned in v.10 that were *predicted* by Jesus in Acts 9:16 and detailed in the previous chapter, cf. 2Cor.11:23-30), **but he pled for its removal for spiritual reasons** (he viewed it as an *impediment* to his work of ministry). **Unless we’re “boasting” of our weaknesses for the same reason(s), we ought to stop.** *Physical* life was never meant to permanent. *Death* comes to all who live long enough, and “yes” it sometimes hurts. But if we’re “boasting” of our *weaknesses* to gain the attention of or garner the sympathy of the world, **we’re seeking the wrong thing, Col.3:1-4.**
- B. This **doesn’t mean we can’t talk about our physical problems (or pray for ours or others’), but it does mean that such things can’t be allowed to become our primary focus.** We’re all *physically* dying- if “time” continues, some of us will die *sooner*, some will die *later*, and some will die *in between*, but *all will die*, Heb.9:27. If maintaining *physical life*, or the challenges and obstacles to such, becomes our **primary focus**, our **spiritual lives will suffer.** It *shouldn’t* be this way, Matt.6:27,33-34, and it *doesn’t have to be* this way, 2Cor.4:16-18.
- C. **God intends us to be victors in and over life, not its victims, 2Tim.1:7.** Just like Paul, the Lord’s *grace* and *power* is “*sufficient*” for us to also *spiritually overcome* any and all *physical weaknesses* Satan sends and God allows. When our **faith** permits this conclusion, we, too, will become “*well content*” with and able to “**boast about**” our *weaknesses* and *obstacles* through **God’s grace** and **power...** for then it will be abundantly manifested in and through us!
- D. **Unfortunately, our thinking and actions regarding spiritual health can be as flawed as those of our physical health.** We can (and often *do*) “*boast of*” and perhaps even become “*well content*” with our weaknesses instead of striving for strength and perfection, 2Pet.1:5-11.