



Shaped for Serving God

Chapter 35

Notes: This Bible Study is intended to be a companion to "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

Chapter 35: Power in Your Weakness

What are weaknesses?

Weaknesses are any limitation that we do not have the power to change ourselves. It could be physical like a handicap or an illness; it could be emotional such as a trauma scar, a personality quirk, or a hereditary disposition; or it may be a talent or intellectual limitation. It is not a character defect that you can change such as overeating or impatience.

How does God view our weaknesses?

God gave us our strengths for a purpose so He also allowed us our weaknesses for a purpose. God often works through our weaknesses which is the opposite of what we would expect...

1 Corinthians 1:27 - But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

Isaiah 55:9 - For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Why should we not be discouraged by our weaknesses?

Our limitations are not a problem for God, He enjoys putting great power in ordinary containers...

2 Corinthians 4:7 - But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

Because we are less likely to turn to God when our strengths are used, when we work in our weaknesses God clearly gets the glory. This is why God had Gideon reduce his 32,000-man army down to 300 to fight the Midianites.

In Acts 14:15, Paul told an idolizing crowd, "we also are men with the same nature as you." What example does this set of us for what we should admit about our limitations?

We should own up to our limitations, admitting our weaknesses.

What attitude did Paul demonstrate in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 that we should have regarding our weaknesses?

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. We should be content with our weaknesses.

Why should we be content with our weaknesses instead of wanting to be freed from them?

Contentment with our condition is a statement of faith in the goodness of God. It is an acknowledgement that God loves us and knows what is best for us.

How can Paul say, "For when I am weak, then I am strong?" What does this mean, how can a person be strong when they are weak?

A person can be strong when they are weak if their weakness drives them to God.

So when we feel weak, what should we do?

When we feel weak, this should remind us to depend on God and drive us to call out to Him.

What did Paul have to say about why God allowed a weakness in his life per 2 Corinthians 12:7?

2 Corinthians 12:7 - And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep him from having a big head over his relationship to the Lord. God sometimes gives us a weakness to keep our egos in check.

How do our weaknesses increase our fellowship with other believers?

If our weaknesses drive us to help from fellow believers, it becomes a source of blessing for them. While strength breeds an independent spirit, weaknesses show how much we need each other.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 - Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Also, it is encouraging to others when they see that God can use you even in spite of your weaknesses. It gives them

hope that God can use them as well. As Rick Warren said, “our strengths create competition, our weaknesses create community.”

How do our weaknesses increase our capacity for ministry?

Recognizing our own weaknesses should cause us to be more compassionate toward others concerning their weaknesses. It can also help you to minister to others who have similar weaknesses. Often the things we are most embarrassed about and reluctant to share with others are the very tools God can use to heal others.

What character weakness did Moses demonstrate by his murdering an Egyptian and striking a rock with his staff when he was supposed to speak to it?

Moses’ weakness was that he had a temper, yet God transformed him into the humblest man on earth...

Numbers 12:3 - (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

- Despite Gideon’s low self-esteem and deep insecurities, God transformed him into what He called a “*mighty man of valor*” (Judges 6:12).
- God transformed impulsive, weak-willed Peter into a “*rock*” (Matthew 16:18).
- God transformed the adulterer David into, “*a man after My own heart*” (Acts 13:22).

There are numerous other examples in Scripture...

Hebrews 11:32-34 - And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. God wants to turn our weaknesses into strengths.

What did Paul say in Romans 7:19 that made him more effective in his ministry?

Romans 7:19 - For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Paul was an effective minister because he took off his mask to honestly share his own struggles and failures.

What did Paul say in 2 Corinthians 6:11 that made him more effective in his ministry?

2 Corinthians 6:11 - O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.

Paul was open about his feelings.

What did Paul say in 2 Corinthians 1:8 that made him more effective in his ministry?

2 Corinthians 1:8 - For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in

Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Paul shared his frustrations with his ministry.

What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 2:3 that made him more effective in his ministry?

1 Corinthians 2:3 - I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

Paul shared his fears.

Why is opening your life up to others risky?

When you open your life up to others, you make yourself vulnerable to rejection.

What benefits of opening yourself up to others make it worth the risk of rejection?

Vulnerability is emotionally liberating. Opening up relieves stress, defuses your fears, and is the first step to being free of your fears, frustrations, and feelings of failure.

James 4:6 says that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” What is humility?

Humility is not putting ourselves down or denying our strengths, rather, it is being honest about our weaknesses. So the more honest we are, the more grace we will receive from God and others.

- Vulnerability is an endearing quality, we are naturally drawn to humble people. Pretentiousness repels but authenticity attracts and vulnerability is the pathway to intimacy.

Which is better, to impress people or to influence them?

God has not called us to impress others, but he does want us to influence them to follow Him. The best way to impress people is to remain distant from them, but we need to get close to those we influence.

How does revealing our flaws to people make it possible for us to influence them?

The most essential quality for leadership is not perfection, it is credibility. For people to trust us, we must be honest with them.

In Genesis 32, there is a story about Jacob wrestling with God where Jacob would not let go until God blessed him. God did but dislocated his hip so that he always walked with a limp after that. What is the significance of this story regarding our strengths and weaknesses?

The thigh muscle is the strongest in the body. God turned Jacob’s strength into a weakness. It kept him from running away from God and forced him to lean on God for the rest of his life. If you want God to bless you, you must be willing to walk with a limp the rest of your life because God uses weak people.