

The Surprising Way God Transforms What You Want to Hide

The females in my family line have a weird disorder. I can't seem to find it in the medical books, and I don't think it has an official name, but here it is: We can't do cartwheels.

There, I said it. It's shocking, I know. I was surprised by it when I was little and every neighborhood girl I knew would cartwheel across the lawn like a runaway wagon wheel. My sister and I were in good shape, but our best attempts ended in heaps. Our cartwheel disorder sounds like a small thing, and it was, but when everyone is taking turns doing them in gym class, it feels like a pretty big deal. We don't usually like our weaknesses. They are to be stuffed under the rug or carefully disguised. "Oh no," we assure, as we wander coolly away, "I just don't feel like doing a cartwheel right now."

The truth is that we all have weaknesses, and so do our children, and so will their children after them. We all stink at something. Some of us are slow readers, some clam up in social contexts, some struggle with addictions, some forget things easily.

We hate these weaknesses! Would it surprise you to learn that God likes them?

The apostle Paul lets us in on a personal struggle he had with weakness. He called it a "thorn" in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). It must have driven him crazy. It might have been a sickness or a vision problem, but nobody knows for sure. Whatever it was, he pleaded with the Lord three times to take this weakness away. He wanted it gone.

God didn't give Paul what he wanted. He gave him something

better.

We read in 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 that God basically replied, “Sorry, Paul, I’m going to let this weakness remain so that you can see my power at work in your life, and so others will know how strong I am.” God had a purpose in allowing the thorn to remain. He *lovingly* allowed it to remain.

That must have been hard for Paul to hear. The thorn was still causing him pain. But instead of whining and stomping out of the room, Paul moved toward God. He began not just accepting his weakness, or ignoring his weakness, but boasting in it. Boasting is a loud thing, an obvious thing, a look-at-me thing.

“Hey everybody, check me out! I really am weak. I can’t hide it. I don’t have it all together. But look at all God’s doing! It’s Him, not me! His strength is working through me.” Paul decided to stop viewing his weakness as a thorn and start viewing it as a spotlight that could show off God’s power in his life. What a change.

Have you ever tried boasting in your weaknesses? It’s not easy. Pride is much more comfortable when we’re known for our strengths and successes, not our frailties. It wants us to be needed, not needy. It wants us to be the expert, not the learner. It wants us to be seen as self-sufficient. It wants the spotlight to be shining right back on our faces.

Boasting in weakness requires humility, and according to Philippians 2:3-4, that means counting “others more significant than yourselves.” It means backing slowly out of the center of the circle and pushing someone else in. It’s celebrating their accomplishments, not minding too much if we’re overlooked, and laughing at our own mistakes. When we’re humble, our weaknesses don’t surprise us because we’re not that impressed with ourselves anyway; we’re impressed with God, and we want His strength to be seen.

The Philippians 2 passage above continues by giving us an incredible example—a pinch-yourself-to-see-if-you’re-dreaming kind of example. Jesus, the prince of heaven with all the universe at His disposal, threw it all in. He emptied himself. He walked away from His scepter and His dazzling robes and became an ordinary human being. He laid down strength and picked up weakness. The angels must have covered their eyes in horror.

The prince humbled himself further, even to the point of death. He hung in disgrace and shame on a cross with bystanders gawking and taunting. He was weak and frail, all because He was looking to our interests, not his own. He knew we needed a Savior, so He ignored His own reputation and did the unthinkable for us. He gave us His life. His “weakness” showed us the strength of God’s love. In fact, He gave us His strength. He gave us all of Himself. We can admit weaknesses because we don’t need our own strength. We have His.

Let’s stop pretending. No one is fooled by the cheap facade of perfection anyway, and its coarse fabric darkens the light of Christ in our lives. Let’s get real with Paul and admit that we’re weak. We need help, and help has come. We have all that we need in the infinite strength of Christ. If I could speak to my 8-year-old self, I’d tell her to try the cartwheel, land in a heap, and fall back on the grass laughing because she doesn’t have to be good at everything. Her imperfect life can point to the strength of God, which is so much better than a perfect cartwheel anyway.

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