

How 'Weak Vessels' Can Demonstrate God's Mighty Power

When God looks for a person to carry out a task, He does not tap the person who is self-confident and whose response will be, "Piece of cake, God; I can handle that."

Instead, He chooses the weak who are aware of their own inadequacy and whose response is like that of Mary to the angel Gabriel when he announced that she would give birth to the Son of God. She asked in awe, "How can this be?"

Yes, God chooses those who realize how much they need Him, and through such weak human vessels, He demonstrates His power in the earth.

Paul Learns this Principle

This principle was revealed to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 where Paul had prayed that a difficult, debilitating situation be removed from his life. God responded by saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

The word "strength" in this passage is a translation of the Greek word *dunamis*, which in other places is translated as "power." The word "perfect" is a translation of the Greek word *teleos*, which means "end" or "destination." A more accurate translation of this verse would be, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is maximized in weakness."

Gideon Learns this Principle

Yes, "God's power is maximized in weakness" and this was the principle at work when God told Gideon he was too strong for Him to give Israel victory over the Amalekites. At the time,

Gideon had an army of 32,000, and the Amalekites numbered 145,000. In other words, Israel was outnumbered approximately 5 to 1, but God said they were too strong.

“The Lord said to Gideon, ‘You have too many people with you for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel glorify themselves over Me, saying, “Our own power saved us”’” (Judg. 7:2).

Gideon, therefore, told everyone who was fearful to go home, and 22,000 departed. He is now outnumbered 15 to 1, but God tells him he is still too strong. Gideon then takes his soldiers to the water, and depending on how they drink, he separates 300 and sends the rest home.

God then gave Gideon and his 300-man army a resounding victory over 145,000 enemy troops. God’s power was maximized in their weakness. There was no room for chest-thumping and boasting. They knew only God could have given them the victory.

God’s Power Will Rest on You

After learning that God’s power will be maximized in his weakness, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9b, “Therefore most gladly I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Interestingly, the word “rest” in this verse is translated from the Greek word *episkense*. It is a cognate form of the same word the angel used in response to Mary’s question as to how she could bring forth a Son when she was a virgin. The angel had answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you”(Luke 1:35a).

Do you want God’s power to rest upon you and overshadow you? Then don’t be afraid to have integrity and admit how much you need God. This is what Paul learned, and he goes on to say, “So I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in hardships, in persecutions, and in distresses for Christ’s

sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

Paul is not being negative and wallowing in his pain. No, he has discovered the freedom to have integrity and admit his own inadequacies because he now knows that God's power will be maximized in his weaknesses. He is free to be Paul.

Paul's Integrity and God's Power

We see this clearly in Paul's description of his personal state upon arrival in the pagan city of Corinth. Instead of giving a glowing resume of his strengths and successes, he described his ministry in terms of his frail, human weakness and his radical dependence on God. He wrote:

"Brothers, when I came to you, I did not come with superiority of speech or wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

"Weakness" in this verse is from the Greek word *asthenia* and means "to be powerless and without strength." "Fear" is from the Greek word *phobo* (from which we get "phobia") and, according to *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, means "to be struck with terror and fear." "Much trembling" is from the Greek word *tromo* (from which we get "trauma" and "traumatized") and according to *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon*, means "to shake and tremble with fear and dread."

This does not sound like a great apostle ready to take a city for God. In fact, Paul's description of himself sounds as if he is almost an emotional basket case. Perhaps this is where he learned the principle that he later expresses in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 that God's strength is maximized in weakness and, "when I am weak, then I am strong."

The key was that Paul did not wallow in his weakness or turn inward to self but looked away to Jesus and saw a demonstration of God's Spirit and power in Corinth. God's power was maximized in Paul's weakness and a lively—if sometimes rowdy—church was established in that decadent, pagan city.

Have We Been Too Strong for Real Revival?

Is it possible that we—the American church—have been too strong for God to give us resounding victory through a great, national spiritual awakening? Have we been too proud of our beautiful buildings and too confident in our own talents, skills and abilities to do church?

Perhaps through the coronavirus pandemic we are recognizing, in a new way, how frail we are and how much we need His grace at work in our lives.

In this regard, I am reminded of the December 1906 edition of the *Apostolic Faith*, the official paper of the Azusa Street Revival. The editor made reference to Alexander Dowie and Frank Sanford, two self-proclaimed apostles of that day, and then wrote, "There is no pope, Doweism or Sanfordism, but we are all little children knowing only Jesus and Him crucified. This work is carried on by the people of Los Angeles that God has united by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit."

No pomp or arrogance at Azusa, where they sat on rough-hewn benches, and the pulpit was a stack of used wooden shoeboxes. True to Paul's revelation, God's power was being maximized in their weakness, for this was written at the height of that earth-shaking revival. It reminds us of Paul's words in I Corinthians 1:26-29:

"For observe your calling, brothers. Among you, not many wise men according to the flesh, not many mighty men, and not many noble men were called. But God has chosen the foolish things

of the world to confound the wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. ... so that no flesh should boast in His presence.

Yes, God seeks weak human vessels who will rely totally on Him and through whom His power will be maximized in the earth. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV), "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." {eoa}

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