

2-28-2010, COTR Texarkana

Title: Limitation Can Be My Friend

Purpose: Provoke people to embrace limitation as a gift from God that can be a door to spiritual power.

Spiritual Truth: My limitation may not limit me.

Text: 2 Cor 12:10, Judg 6:1-16

Topic: Limitations, Weakness, Strength, Gideon

Limitation Can Be My Friend

I. Introduction

A. Let's look at one of the most unusual verses in the Bible.

1. 2 Corinthians 12:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ ...when I am weak, then I am strong.

a. 2 Corinthians 12:10 (The Message)

¹⁰ Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so **the weaker I get, the stronger I become.**

i. At 1st glance this is like a weightlifter saying the less I work out the more I can lift or a runner saying the less I train the farther I can run.

2. How could Paul say that a weak person can be strong? It doesn't make sense. It is a contradiction unless "weakness" somehow qualifies you for spiritual power much like financial need qualifies you for financial aid.

3. Similarly, Paul learned that when "Christ takes over" my weakness is turned into strength.

B. Today

1. We are going to study an incredible story about God turning a nation around with a "weak" man named Gideon. He defeated a cruel army too numerous to count with an army of 300 men. He had an army of 32,000 and God made him get rid of all but 300 thus getting rid of human strength so in human weakness God's power could come forth.

a. Judges 7:2 (NLT)

² The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. **If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength.**

2. There is a parallel to ancient Israel and modern America. Their nation was in a mess. Their sins had gotten the nation in trouble. Things seemed hopeless and the people felt helpless. Then something amazing

began to happen. They cried out to God because of the pain. God heard their cry of repentance and found a man to deliver Israel. He didn't choose just any man. He was looking for a man who had been humbled by limitations but had great faith and was willing to obey God and not allow pride to control him. He found one; his name was Gideon.

3. Gideon's story teaches us that **limitation can be our friend because it makes us realize our need for God.** Then we can exchange our strength for His.

C. Title: Limitation Can Be My Friend

D. Purpose: Provoke people to embrace limitation as a gift from God that can be a door to spiritual power.

E. Spiritual Truth: My limitation may not limit me.

II. The story of Gideon

A. Judges 6:1-16 (NLT)

¹ The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. ² The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian...would attack Israel, ⁴ ...They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. ⁵ These enemy hordes, coming with their livestock and tents, were as thick as locusts; they arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare. ⁶ So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help. ...¹¹ ...Gideon...was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. ¹² The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!" ...¹⁴ Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!" ¹⁵ "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? **My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!**" ¹⁶ The Lord said to him, "I will be with you..."

B. Spiritual Lessons

1. Sin brings judgment and pain.
2. Pain is good when it causes me to cry out to God.
3. When we turn back to God/ repent, God begins to restore us.
4. God sees beyond my circumstances to my potential.
5. When God is with me I can do anything.

III. #6 Limitation can be a door to spiritual power

A. Judges 6:15-16 (NLT)

¹⁵ "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? **My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!**" ¹⁶ The Lord said to him, "I will be with you..."

1. Naturally speaking, the weakest, least qualified person with God's help can overcome overwhelming odds.

2. God is not limited by my limitations. My limitations can become a door to God's power.

3. Text: **2 Corinthians 12:10 (NKJV)**...**when I am weak, then I am strong.**

4. If I was looking for somebody to deliver Israel I'd do a Google search and find somebody who was big, strong, fast, experienced, well trained, type A, brimming over with self confidence.

5. God's choice was hiding in a winepress who saw himself as "weak and the least"

a. Why did God choose somebody like this? **Limitation, if embraced, makes you depend on God and not yourself.** Limitation makes you aware of your need for God.

b. E.g. I have had countless experiences as your pastor in which I was unable to solve COTR's problems or meet her needs. I have been helpless to meet financial needs, solve problems with people and counter spiritual attacks. I have spent untold hours in prayer looking for His strength in my weakness. I've learned I can do more through Him than I could ever do on my own.

B. The apostle Paul understood this.

1. **Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)**

¹³ I can do all things **through Christ** who strengthens me.

a. This is modern day self esteem misses it. The search for esteem looks to self for confidence and worth instead of Him.

2. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (The Message)** [Context: Paul went to heaven and received personal revelation from Jesus.]

⁷ Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, **I was given the gift of a handicap** (a thorn in the flesh NKJV) **to keep me in constant touch with my limitations.** Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! ⁸ At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, ⁹ and then he told me, My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness (**My power works best in weakness** NLT). Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. ¹⁰ Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so **the weaker I get, the stronger I become.**

a. Maybe this is why God will cause or allow us to experience financial problems, health problems, doors that won't open and even death.

C. We've got to learn to replace our strength with His

1. *The Little Engine that Could* is a children's story that is used to teach children the value of optimism and hard work. A little railroad engine was employed about a station yard for pulling a few cars on and off the switches. One morning it was waiting for the next call when a long train of freight-cars asked a large engine in the roundhouse to take it over the hill "I can't; that is too much a pull for me," said the great engine built for hard work. Then the train asked another engine, and another, only to hear excuses and be refused. In desperation, the train asked the little switch engine to draw it up the grade and down on the other side. "I think I can," puffed the little locomotive, and put itself in front of the great heavy train. As it went on the little engine kept bravely puffing faster and faster, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." As it neared the top of the grade, which had so discouraged the larger engines, it went more slowly. However, it still kept saying, "I--think--I--can, I--think--I--can." It reached the top by drawing on bravery and then went on down the grade, congratulating itself by saying, "I thought I could, I thought I could."

a. The problem, however, is that optimism and hard work aren't enough to deliver us from the Midianites. We need God's strength instead of our own.

b. We need to rewrite the *Little Engine* story with a spiritual message: When I think I can, I can't. When I realize I can't, He will. As long as I think I can I probably won't.

2. Often we need a limitation we can't get rid of to teach us to become weak so we can become strong by trusting in Christ.

IV. Conclusion

A. God likes to use unlikely people to do amazing things:

1. He chose 12 uneducated, common men with no authority in the religious world to be His disciples and change the world.
2. He chose the youngest son of Jesse who was a shepherd to defeat Goliath and become King of Israel.
3. He chose an unknown 16 year old virgin with no social standing to give birth to The Son of God.
4. He chose a man described as "the weakest and least" that was hiding in a winepress to deliver Israel.
 - a. "The weak and the least" can accomplish great things for God because they've learned the weaker they get, the stronger they become through Christ.

B. There is within every Christian a desire to be used by God to do something great for Him. The problem is we can't do it in our own strength. Pride or self confidence must be replaced with humility or God confidence.

V. Response

A. Commitment

1. Do you want to be a Gideon in your nation, your city or your school?

B. Prayer

1. Make me strong where I'm weak and give me your power in my limitations

C. Souls

1. The cemetery is full of people who faced limitation. It's called death. The cause is sin and the answer is Jesus.
2. At some point we're going to meet our maker. I suggest you go looking for Him before He comes looking for you.

D. Join COTR

1. I want to extend a personal invitation for you to become a part of our church family. It's very easy. After service go to the Connect Room and meet with our staff and they'll show you how to get connected.