

Leading Out of Weakness

Sunday, December 7, 2025

- **Last lesson's exhortation:** Reexamine the people you follow, and why you follow them, in light of 2 Corinthians 11.

INTRO

- **We are going verse-by-verse, in a topical study through I & II Corinthians**
 - **Current Topic:** Leadership – What it looks like to have authority under Christ
 - In this fifth and final topic in our study through 1 & 2 Corinthians, we've been learning both how to identify godly leadership, and how to live it out in whatever authority or influence God has given to each of us. We've seen that God gives people authority so that they can serve others, and that godly leadership is identified by how closely it matches the character and attitude of Jesus.
 - In today's lesson, we're going to see Paul demonstrate what it looks like to "lead out of our weakness" which means to "treat weakness as an advantage and starting point from which you develop your attitude as a leader."
 - Whereas weakness is often seen as a negative thing, we must learn to see it as the pathway to becoming more like Jesus, which positions us to receive from Him.

READ

2 Corinthians 12 CSB

¹ Boasting is necessary. It is not profitable, but I will move on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether he was in the body or out of the body, I don't know; God knows. ³ I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body I don't know; God knows—⁴ was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a human being is not allowed to speak. ⁵ I will boast about this person, but not about myself, except of my weaknesses. ⁶ For if I want to boast, I wouldn't be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will spare you, so that no one can credit me with something beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, ⁷ especially because of the extraordinary revelations. Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. ⁸ Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. ¹⁰ So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. ¹¹ I have been a fool; you forced it on me. You ought to have commended me, since I am not in any way inferior to those "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. ¹² The signs of an apostle were performed with unfailing endurance among you, including signs and wonders and miracles. ¹³ So in what way are you worse off than the other churches, except that I personally did not burden you? Forgive me for this wrong! ¹⁴ Look, I am ready to come to you this

third time. I will not burden you, since I am not seeking what is yours, but you. For children ought not save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ Now granted, I did not burden you; yet sly as I am, I took you in by deceit! ¹⁷ Did I take advantage of you by any of those I sent you? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus didn't take advantage of you, did he? Didn't we walk in the same spirit and in the same footsteps? ¹⁹ Have you been thinking all along that we were defending ourselves to you? No, in the sight of God we are speaking in Christ, and everything, dear friends, is for building you up. ²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come I will not find you to be what I want, and you may not find me to be what you want. Perhaps there will be quarreling, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambitions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder. ²¹ I fear that when I come my God will again humiliate me in your presence, and I will grieve for many who sinned before and have not repented of the moral impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality they practiced.

EXAMINE

#1 | “Leading out of your weakness” first means you embrace weakness as a positive

1. 2 Corinthians 12:9 “...he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me.”
 - a. Poor leaders will deny their weakness, a decent leader will acknowledge their weakness (perhaps as something they have to work around), but a

godly leader will embrace their weakness as an advantage, given to them by God.

- i. *The presence of weakness puts you back in touch with reality, acting as a safeguard that keeps you from becoming overconfident and foolishly trying to “do it all.” (2 Cor 12:7)*
- b. Weakness positions you to rely on Christ and to collaborate with others in the Body. (1 Cor 12:14-22)
 - i. *Weakness is only a problem if you want to do everything on your own and/or receive all the credit.*

#2 | Embracing weakness as a positive is how you receive strength from Jesus

- 1. 2 Corinthians 12:10 *“So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*
 - a. When we stop seeing our weaknesses as a negative thing, then our ego is less likely to block our view of Jesus’ greatness and the glory of what is available to us in Him. (Eph 3:16-19)
 - i. *One of the most common barriers to receiving from Christ is simply thinking that we don’t always need Him, or that receiving help from Him somehow diminishes us.*
 - b. God’s power works best when you do not try to mix it with your own. (James 4:6)
 - i. *Your ability adds nothing to what God can accomplish. God wants you to work with Him, but He can do everything just fine without you.*

- ii. *When you are able to see the beauty in that truth, then you are ready to accept His invitation to partner with Him in His work. (Eph 2:10)*

#3 | When you are strengthened by Jesus, you are able to give to others without needing something in return

1. 2 Corinthians 12:14–15 *“Look, I am ready to come to you this third time. I will not burden you, since I am not seeking what is yours, but you. For children ought not save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”*
 - a. One of the greatest challenges of leadership is feeling like people don’t appreciate what you’re doing.
 - i. *This struggle is often a sign that some part of you chose a leadership role in order to satisfy some need in your life. (Such as the need for validation, love, sense of accomplishment, etc.)*
 - b. Paul was able to lead and love the Corinthians like this not because he was abnormally altruistic – but because he had already found everything he needed in Christ. (Phil 4:12–13)
 - i. *When you empty yourself to receive from Jesus, you also become more like Him in His ability to give sacrificially. (Phil 2:7)*
 - ii. *While it still hurt that the Corinthians didn’t seem to love him back (and he was honest about that) he didn’t need love from them to continue serving them.*

REFLECT

Let's take a moment to pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our attention and lead our conversation, helping us see and understand what He wants us to apply in our lives.

APPLY

Process the passage together with these questions:

- Why did Paul believe his "thorn in the flesh" was necessary for his spiritual health?
- How does our own self-reliance act as a barrier to receiving from Jesus?
- What is the difference between embracing your weakness, and using your weakness as an excuse to remain as you are?

Where we want to "land the plane"

- We often view our weaknesses as liabilities to be hidden, but the Gospel transforms them into assets where God's power is displayed. By leading out of our weakness, we stop relying on our limited abilities and start operating in the limitless grace of Jesus. This shift frees us from the need for validation, enabling us to love and serve others sacrificially just as Jesus did. Ultimately, when we empty ourselves of pride, we are filled with Christ's strength to "spend and be spent" for the sake of others.

Exhortation for the Week

- Rather than denying your weakness, or using it as an excuse, ask yourself: “Why has the Lord given me this weakness and what does He want to do through it?”

FOOTNOTES

1. **Paul’s Vision and the “messenger of Satan.”** Paul’s indirect reference to himself as a man in Christ showed that he regarded this great experience not as a consequence of inherent worthiness or spiritual excellence but because he was “in Christ.” As such it anticipated what everyone in Christ will one day experience, the presence of Christ in heaven. This event occurred 14 years earlier, sometime in the years A.D. 42–44 before Paul’s missionary journeys reported in Acts. Paul was raptured (caught up is from the same verb *harpazō* used in 1 Thes. 4:17 of saints at the Rapture) to the third heaven, the dwelling place of Christ and the saints, which Jesus called paradise (Luke 23:43; cf. Rev. 2:7). Temporal and spatial sensations were absent (whether he was in the body or apart from the body he did not know). What he heard he was forbidden to communicate, possibly because it applied to him alone (cf. Acts 9:16). The experience, however, no doubt contributed to Paul’s conviction that “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17). 12:5–6. Paul boasted about a man (cf. “a man in Christ,” v. 2, and “this man,” v. 3) because his accent was on Christ, not himself. The Corinthian preoccupation with the external and the spectacular was regrettable to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 14:20). He could boast of these things truthfully (2 Cor. 12:6; cf. 1 Cor. 14:18; Phil. 3:4), by which he implied that the claims of other men in Corinth were suspect. But what mattered to Paul was not his

achievements but God's work through him and the gospel that he preached. 12:7–9. So that Paul would not forget this, God gave him a constant reminder of his weakness. Countless explanations concerning the nature of his thorn in the flesh have been offered. They range from incessant temptation, dogged opponents, chronic maladies (such as ophthalmia, malaria, migraine headaches, and epilepsy), to a disability in speech. No one can say for sure what his was, but it probably was a physical affliction (for the work of Satan in this, cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 10:10). It is understandable that Paul would consider this thorn a hindrance to wider or more effective ministry (cf. Gal. 4:14–16) and that he would repeatedly petition God for its removal (2 Cor. 12:8). But he learned from this experience the lesson that pervades this letter: divine power (My power, v. 8; Christ's power, v. 9) is best displayed against the backdrop of human weaknesses (cf. 4:7) so that God alone is praised (10:17). Rather than removing the problem God gave him grace in it. This grace is sufficient (arkei, i.e., adequate in the sense of providing contentment). (The Gr. words trans. to keep me from becoming conceited occur in 12:7 twice, at the beginning and end of the verse. The NIV translates only the first one.) *David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 582–583.*