

So, you want to be spiritually powerful?

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

I. You don't get spiritual power by boasting to others.

- A. The Corinthians were really good at boasting about their great spiritual power. Five times in the first 10 verses of 2 Corinthians 12 Paul uses the word boast or boasting (vs. 1, 5, 6, 9). According to Paul, how much is gained when you boast about yourself (vs. 1)? Nothing! He is embarrassed by his own boasting that he feels like the Corinthians have forced him into. So, Paul does something weird in 2 Cor. 12. He starts talking about himself in the third person.
- B. Paul says in vs. 1 that he will go on boasting about visions and revelations of the Lord. In vs. 2 Paul talks about a man who has had these visions. Then in vs. 7 Paul talks about how it was him who had these revelations. Paul's spiritual experiences with God then were far greater and far more powerful than anything the so-called super-apostles in Corinth had ever experienced. And yet, the humble Paul did not want to brag. So, he spoke in the third person.

II. You get spiritual power through painful trials.

- A. Paul's experience in going to heaven could have given him a big head. So, what did God send Paul to keep him from pride? We find the answer in vs. 7: "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being conceited." We don't know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. We just know it was some painful trial that Paul endured.
- B. Every trial that God allows in our lives is for a good purpose. And since God is an all-powerful Father that means that if we trust Him, He will powerfully turn the work of Satan into something good. God would teach Paul a very important lesson through the painful trial of his thorn that we read in vs. 9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Grace has the power to sustain you when you are going through painful trials.

III. You get spiritual power through weakness.

- A. Christ's power comes in and through your weaknesses (vs. 9). It is when you become painfully aware of your weaknesses and inadequacies that you realize how desperately you need Christ's strength to make it through life. Don't brag about yourself or your strengths or your achievements or your spiritual experiences if you want spiritual power. Brag about your weaknesses. And brag about how Jesus has strengthened you in your weaknesses. Surrender to God in your weakness like Jesus did in Gethsemane: "Not my will, but yours be done."

Application:

We get spiritual power through trials that make us weak. Surrender to God in your weakness.

Sources:

The Bible

Commentaries by Trent Casto, Gary Millar, and David Garland.

Sermon Discussion Questions

- 1) What do people hope to gain by boasting about themselves? But do we gain anything by such boasting? If boasting is not the source of spiritual power, what is?
- 2) What good did God do for Paul by allowing him this thorn in the flesh? In what way was God's grace sufficient for Paul?
- 3) How does knowing you are weak as a Christian help you? What does Jesus do for Christians who cry out to Him when they have needs?