

Perfect Strength

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is the founder and now the senior pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens' ministry has spanned four decades and has included the establishment of Maryland Bible College and Seminary in Baltimore and the development of "The Grace Hour," an Angel Award-winning radio talk show that is still heard on Christian stations throughout North America and via the internet.

This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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## INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ was crucified through weakness, according to 2 Corinthians 13:4. What does that mean? It means He stripped Himself from using the power of His deity. This most unique Man was at once fully God and fully human. Yet, as a man, He never crossed over the line to use His power as God for His own advantage. In His weakness, Jesus Christ's strength was drawn from living in connection with the Holy Spirit in communion with His Father.

In His humanity, Christ had to totally submit and trust His Father in all the details of the Cross. This horrible form of execution tested every measure of the Man, Christ Jesus. All of our sins were placed upon Christ at Calvary. Therefore, because He cannot look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13), the Father had to turn His face away from His Son, and darkness descended upon creation for three hours.

That darkest day, however, was a triumph of

humility. The weakness Christ allowed Himself to live in at that moment led to total victory. Completely identifying with our situation as human beings, He knew that only in total human weakness can anyone be made strong. He died in weakness, so we are made strong in His strength. That strength, as you will see in these pages, is now available to give effectual power in all situations. Even when we see no answers and have very diminished capacities, God's strength is made perfect for us.

## Chapter One

# THE GLORY OF WEAKNESS

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

“I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

“And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

“How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

“For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above

that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

“For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you” (2 Corinthians 13:4).

God’s power is best revealed in our worst weaknesses. That may sound like a strange statement for me to make. But consider this: Even the dimmest of lights shines very brightly

in the darkest of places. Astheneo, the Greek word most often translated as “weak,” means several things. This word speaks of human vulnerability—physical sickness or moral weakness due to a lack of definite conviction.

The apostle Paul wrote that weakness was important for his spiritual life. It kept him from exalting himself above measure, according to 2 Corinthians 12. He understood that the greatest revelation of God’s ability in our lives comes out when we are most weak. Paul came to consider the “thorn” in his life as a gift from God—something that made the strength of God perfect for him.

This “gift” was by no means a pleasant thing. The Greek word for thorn, skolops, refers to an object that is like an ice pick. Paul also called it a “messenger of Satan”—some demonic attack sent to “buffet” him. Buffeting can mean that you are spat upon and beat upon with fists. It is punishment inflicted by another, and it hurts.

Three times Paul prayed that God would take this thing from him. But something else happened—something beautiful. Strength sprung up in Paul’s soul and he viewed the thorn as a gift. God allowed it, and through it all



Paul learned the all-sufficiency of God's grace.

The "strength" the Lord developed in Paul is power for battle, which is what the Greek word *dunamis* means. Our battle is made perfect by God when we are weak and let Him do the fighting for us. The Lord fights for us (Exodus 14:14)! The battle belongs to Him (1 Samuel 17:47).

All of these principles are wrapped up in the Finished Work. Jesus Christ fought the battle to give us God's power. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. In our weakness, we realize that we can do nothing without Him. Those are the times when we just get out of the way.

In my weakest moment, the work is still finished. I have it all: the strength of Calvary, the strength of His resurrection life, the strength of His ascension, the strength of His Word living in me. I have the strength of His mercy, grace, and unconditional love. I have the strength of His forgiveness.

There are times when I stubbornly stand in my own strength, and I am simply missing out on all that He has for me. Paul wasn't this way at all. He didn't argue with God and try to prove himself. Look at his response in 2 Corinthians 12:10: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities,

in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

When we are weak, we can easily accept all that God has done for us.

## Chapter Two

# EFFECTUAL POWER

“Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:7-8).

God’s effectual working in me does something precious. It brings out unsearchable riches of Christ for all to see. Like Paul, I can let God show me that I am “less than the least.” This self-perception brings great release. I fellowship in the mystery of what God is doing. It is a mystery even to myself. Christ brings me to the end of what I am so that I can reveal all that He is.

It is just so beautiful to live like this.

Jesus Christ met Paul while he was on the road to Damascus. “Paul, you murderer, why are kicking against Me?” Jesus said to him in so

many words. "I want you to preach My Word to the Gentiles, so I am saving you. You are accepted. You are forgiven. I'm giving you mercy."

Look at what He has done for us: Mercy takes care of all of our sins and gives us salvation. Grace then adds to me God's righteousness. The Lord puts His robe upon me, and I have a position in Him. Grace extends beyond mercy. God's love is unconditional, and He never leaves me nor forsakes me. His Spirit has sealed me forever.

When believers get this combination in them through the Holy Spirit, the world notices. The mystery of how we love each other gets people's attention. Others wonder at how we live in edification and the eternal purpose given to us by Jesus Christ. All of it comes by His strength being made perfect in our weakness.

### Act on Your Belief System

Faith is really about acting on your belief system. Patient faith is faith that stands strong when you don't see immediate results. The reward doesn't come right away, and yet you go on, believing, and you keep going forward with God.

Then God brings other things into your life,

such as endurance and perseverance—qualities that are grace motivated, Spirit-operated, and Word of God oriented.

Even in failure, we use rebound and we recover. Our faith is entire. This doesn't mean that we are perfect in our lives. It simply means that we have a magnificent, mature faith. We know how to believe God and to receive His strength for this situation.

When did Jesus Christ appear to folks in the Bible? He appeared to them in their troubles. The three Hebrew boys were in the furnace, and then the fourth man showed up. The fourth man was the Son of God. Daniel was lowered down into the den where four hundred and ninety hungry lions waited for dinner—but God stopped up their mouths.

Peter was in prison and awaiting execution when an angel arrived and led him out. Paul and Silas were jailed and started a song service. The earth quaked and the walls shook and soon they were set free, but not until seeing the jailer set free from sin. Later, his whole family came to Christ.

A strong belief system brings big results in the lives of weak people.

## Chapter Three

# ANSWERING THE WHYS

We could speak with Paul the apostle about his thorn. Here's how I think the conversation would go.

“Paul, that thorn? Is it still bothering you?”

“It doesn't bother me anymore. I realize that it was from God and it was for me. I would have been arrogant and proud without it. Remember, I was trained as a Pharisee. My scholarship was without peer. But God taught me how to find strength in weakness by resting my entire life upon the Lord.”

A broken and contrite spirit God will not despise. Human weakness marked the Savior's moments on Calvary. Listen to what He said from Psalm 22:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” (verse 1).

“I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou

art my God from my mother's belly.

"Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.

"Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.

"They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

"For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

"I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.

"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

"But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me" (verse 10-19).

There is not one real Christian living today who knows the "why" of how certain things happen. Jesus Himself cried out, "Why?"

## The Measure of Christ's Suffering

Three measures of suffering were going on at the Cross. Men's hands were against Christ. The devil's hand was against Him. And, the justice of heaven, written with the finger of God, was being laid upon Him.

In His humanity, Christ could only ask "Why?" The answers were not there for Him because He had been made sin for us. He had become "weakness" itself so that we might become strong in Him.

Have you ever been in the midst of a trial and thought that God was very far from you? Sure, you have. All of us have cried out for an answer regarding our spouses or our children or some situation in our lives. We have cried out because of failure and heartache and defeat.

Let me tell you the story of a young girl who was beautifully saved in one of our summer camp meetings. On her way home from camp, she got the news that her older sister had been killed in a car accident. A few weeks later, her other sister was diagnosed leukemia and lived just three weeks more before she died. Several years later, when this girl was a teen-ager, her father left the family.



Why?

Why?

Why?

God comforted that young woman. She became a great Gospel singer, and today, she is a wonderful wife who has also served on the foreign mission field.

Jesus Christ brought mercy, love, and grace into her life. She once talked about how God had allowed her to become so weak. "This life is so real, and God has given me such strength through these things," she said. "To have a broken and contrite heart is so important to me. It is greater than any human strength we could ever have. His power comes through the weaker vessel."

## CONCLUSION

God is the only answer when we ask “Why?” Our only option is to turn to Him, rest in Him, trust in Him. It is pointless to lean on our own understanding when we can acknowledge Him in all of our ways.

The record of the Bible proves that we can trust God. His Word has never been proven false.

In the dark nights of our soul, we can trust Him. We cannot think straight. We cannot feel anything. We may even be experiencing some emotional pain. Still, God is there for us in our weakness where He is so strong.

We have a great, big wonderful God. He is worth loving and serving with all our hearts. Jesus is right there for us in every situation. He always reveals Himself when we need to see Him most.