

“Embracing Weakness”

Profiles of Faith #1: Paul

Read 2 Cor. 12:1-10, Philippians 1:21, 3:1-11

The apostle Paul was a spiritual force. Outside of Jesus, he probably influenced more people for the gospel than anyone else, planting dozens of churches, writing 14 of the 27 New Testament books, and training hundreds of leaders in the apostolic church of the 1st Century. However, I believe his greatest contribution to our faith today is his revolutionary view of weakness as a spiritual asset. His theology in this area literally turns human wisdom on its head. In his writings and life, Paul consistently teaches that his weaknesses actually make him strong and deepen his faith in God. In today’s world, this still blows people’s minds.

Here is the amazing thing: Paul had every right to be strong in and of himself. There simply was nobody who could match his spiritual pedigree. He was from Tarsus, a talented, cosmopolitan city that Paul referred to as exceptional (Acts 21:39). He was a Roman citizen, which immediately put him in a high level category that commanded respect. He considered himself one of God’s chosen people, referring to himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews.” He was brought up in a strong home, known for piety, character and religious traditions. He was most likely trained at the college of Rabbis in Jerusalem, which was presided over by the premier teacher of the time, Gamaliel. He was a skilled thinker and orator and his zeal was legendary. He eventually became a competent tent-maker. It was a rule among Jews that every boy learn a trade should he have the need to fall back on other resources, and it certainly helped him be self-supportive at a time when critics of Christianity assumed the leaders were motivated by profit and greed. Paul was simply a strong, self-sufficient, capable man.

How did this man come to the conclusion that his weaknesses in life would energize his faith and actually draw him closer to God? Simply put, he grew up. He realized something that eventually becomes clear to us as we mature – our human strength will fail us. The road of self-sufficiency is tiring, and if our talent and ability are the fuel that fills our tank, we inevitably break down. Paul saw inspiration in the man Jesus, who being in his very nature God, eventually fell prey to his human limitations, even doubting God’s love and protection (Matthew 28:45-46). It was Jesus’ humility in the face of despair that provided a deep connection with his Father. I also believe Paul finally realized the greatest gift we could ever receive in this life: grace. God’s grace is kindness and unconditional love towards his people, no matter what they have done or are going through. It broke Paul’s heart, and inspired a level of emotional intimacy with God he never thought possible, and could certainly never attain intellectually! God’s grace only makes sense to us when we need it, and we won’t feel we need it until we reach the limits of our human capabilities.

Strong people don’t impress me much anymore, there are just too many times when I don’t feel strong. On the other hand, I find inspiration in people who are real and honest about their weaknesses, and are drawn closer to God as a result. They seem free to me. That seems like true strength and character. I desire to be a man who has the courage to embrace my weaknesses and let it allow me to be more spiritually strong. Thank you Paul for such leaving us a meaningful legacy!