***Strength*** in ***Weakness*** – a study of 2nd Corinthians

2nd Cor. 12:9 “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

**Second Corinthians** was definitely not Paul’s 2nd letter to the Corinthian church. It was his third or later letter to this church that he had planted 3-4 years prior. (In his first letter he mentions a “previous letter”). It was written by Paul (and Timothy) from the location of Macedonia, (probably Thessalonica or Philippi) in about 56AD. Paul kept in touch with and exercised accountability over the churches he had planted through his letters.

In First Corinthians, he addressed several problems within the church including “tolerated sin”. This letter, which may have been written shortly after an actual visit by Paul to Corinth, refers to an upheaval within the Church there, in which Paul had been disparaged and his *apostolic authority* was being challenged.

Still he maintains a loving and compassionate attitude toward the church, and offers fatherly advice. He knows that they *suffer and struggle* there in Corinth, and he is aware that they have enemies both from the outside culture, and from within their own church body.

In the first chapter, he reminds them of the suffering they ***all*** must endure, but offers them comfort, and urges them to comfort each other as well.

**2nd Cor. 1:1-2**

**“**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia: **2**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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**2nd Cor. 1:3** “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the “Father of compassion” and the “God of all comfort”,

It’s amazing that Paul begins this letter describing God as; *“the Father of Compassion” and “God of all comfort”.* These beautiful titles show the heart of God’s love for us, and the wealth of *compassion and comfort* that we can find in Him not only for ourselves, but also so we can share it with others.

This church in Corinth is *wayward and worldly* in many ways. Paul rebuked them harshly in the first letter and will correct them sternly again in this letter as well. But he knows that they suffer and struggle just like he and the rest of the churches do, so he wants to make it clear that God is foremost; a God of love, and shows His love to us through compassion and comfort.

**2nd Cor. 1:3b-7** “… the “Father of compassion” and the “God of all comfort”,

**4**who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. **5**For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. **6**If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. **7**And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.”

If you ever happen to go through, or have already been through a severe crisis, you will find that you can receive an enormous amount of hope and encouragement if are able to connect with someone who has gone through the same thing, and prevailed successfully. Whether it’s an emotional crisis, the death of a loved one, a disease like cancer or MS, a surgery, even an organ transplant like kidneys, heart, etc. (I know several who have.) It’s of great comfort and reassurance to find support and encouragement from someone whose gone through it. This is what Paul is telling the Corinthians. Yes, they are experiencing persecution from others and attacks from the Devil, but Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus (Silas) experienced it as well, and were able to overcome by God’s power and *patient endurance*. He tells how bad it was for them in the next verses;

**2nd Cor. 1:8-11** (NLT) “We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. 9 In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. 10 And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. 11 And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.”

Praying for people really helps. God graciously answers the prayers of those who call out to him on behalf of others. Paul tells us that they were *“crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die”.*

But the people prayed, and God rescued them from many dire situations; stonings, beatings, imprisonments, death threats and attacks.

*Once (in Acts 14) when he was in Lystra (in Asia Minor) his enemies thought they had stoned him to death, and left his body outside the city. The disciples gathered around his body (presumably praying), and he stood up, and went right back into the city again.*

As he said here in verse 9, they; “*stopped relying on themselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And He did rescue us from mortal danger, and He will rescue us again.”*

When we place our confidence in Him, He shows us *His Strength in Our Weakness.*

**2nd Cor. 1:12-20** “We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God’s grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you. 13 Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can’t understand. I hope someday you will fully understand us, 14 even if you don’t understand us now. Then on the day when the Lord Jesus returns, you will be proud of us in the same way we are proud of you.

15 Since I was so sure of your understanding and trust, I wanted to give you a double blessing by visiting you twice— 16 first on my way to Macedonia and again when I returned from Macedonia. Then you could send me on my way to Judea.

17 You may be asking why I changed my plan. Do you think I make my plans carelessly? Do you think I am like people of the world who say “Yes” when they really mean “No”? 18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you does not waver between “Yes” and “No.” 19 For Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does not waver between “Yes” and “No.” He is the one whom Silas, Timothy, and I preached to you, and as God’s ultimate “Yes,” he always does what he says. 20 For all of God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding “Yes!” And through Christ, our “Amen” (which means “Yes”) ascends to God for his glory.”

Paul is explaining here that His plans are all subject to the leading of the Spirit not his own will. Sometimes we come up with plans that we think are the Spirit-lead, but soon find out that God really wants us to go someplace else, or do something different. We can sometimes get confused, but The Holy Spirit is *never confused* as to how and where to lead us. His promises are always fulfilled with a “Yes, and Amen!”

**Proverbs 16:9** “A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.”

[Finishing chapter 1…]

**2nd Cor. 1:21-24** “It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, 22 and he has identified us as his own *by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts* as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us.

23 Now I call upon God as my witness that I am telling the truth. The reason I didn’t return to Corinth was to spare you from a severe rebuke. 24 But that does not mean we want to dominate you by telling you how to put your faith into practice. We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy, for it is by your own faith that you stand firm.<>

[repeat passage]

**2nd Cor. 1:21-22(NKJV) “**Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, **22**who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

God has given us the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This is the only way we can be led by the Spirit and have His “patient endurance” in the *Spiritual Trials* that we face. The Holy Spirit gives us comfort, guidance, patience and strength to endure.

(It’s interesting that one of the primary names that Jesus called the Holy Spirit was “Comforter” [gr. paraklētos].)

**Romans 8:26“**In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us…”

Paul encourages the Corinthians to pray and stand firm in “their own faith”, by living in, walking in, praying in, and operating in the power of the Holy Spirit.

He told the same thing to the other churches;

**Galatians 5:25** “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

**Ephesians 5:18** “be filled with the Spirit.”

**Gal. 5:16** “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

**What exactly IS Walking in the Spirit?**

“Walking in the Spirit” means living in such a way that the Holy Spirit directs your will, your actions, and even your thoughts.

It basically means relinquishing *your will to His will*, allowing God to navigate your life through the Holy Spirit within you, to where He wants you to go, and how He wants you to be.

That’s why I always come back to Romans 8:6 on this issue;

**Romans 8:6** “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”

To understand this, you need to know the difference between, *“Death”, and “Life and Peace”.*

Start with “Life and Peace”;

This is the experience of having God’s peace in your life. The feeling that comes from resonating with His will and purposes. The compete satisfaction of knowing that you are walking in the Spirit, and are being used by God for His purposes, with the joy, peace, love, and life-giving fruit of the Spirit within you.

“Death” in this verse, is the opposite of all that. It’s that heavy, dark, feeling of being outside of God’s will. It’s the feeling of shame, regret, despondency, and emptiness that comes from being led to do things out of your own flesh and selfish desires, instead of the Spirit within you.

*“The mind governed by the flesh”* simply means walking in ‘the soul’ instead of the Spirit, because the flesh is *part* of the soul. It’s the part that wants to please itself, instead of doing God’s will. It is never satisfied. It always craves more time, attention, and devotion to satiate its desires. It’s also the part of you that is drawn to lust, controversy, conflict, rage, and dissonance. The results of these attractions are the negative feelings that fester inside of you.

Many people are feeling stress, fear, and anxiety in these days especially in the season we are in.

Your anxiety, worry, anger, stress, dissonance, and lack of peace will never cease if you continue to *walk in the soul*, but these will dissipate when you walk in the Spirit. *(This is why it’s so important to know the difference between your Soul and your Spirit.)*

**Romans 8:16 “**For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.”

It is so important in the times we are living in to understand how *“His Spirit joins with our spirit”* because as the darkness gets darker, we are more desperate for the peace, the power, and the *patient endurance* of the Spirit in our lives than ever before.

The truth is that when you are *filled with His Spirit* and *walk in the Spirit*, you have joy and peace, and are guided by *His wisdom*, and empowered by *His strength*, you will have victory in the battle of the soul, and will find yourself no longer bound to living just to gratify the desires of the flesh.

*Walking in the Spirit* means seeking Him first above all things. Submitting *your* will to *His*, confessing your weakness, operating in His power, and being available to do what He directs you to do, and go where He leads you to go, which will be way beyond your own abilities.

*\*\*\* You experience* ***“His STRENGTH” in “your WEAKNESS”*** *in a profound way.*

Paul had to learn this just like we do. He said right here in this chapter;

“we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.”

**Romans 8:11“**And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because ofhis Spirit who lives in you.”

This is such good news to all of us. It tells us that it’s not all up to us. We are not placed here in this world to try to work it out on our own strength, and fight through with our own resources and tenacity. We have power within us that is more than enough to prevail over the forces of darkness that try to discourage and destroy us.

Remember,

**2nd Cor. 1:22** “He has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

What we need to do is ask the Him to help us to;

* “live in the Spirit,”
* “be filled with the Spirit.”
* **“**walk by the Spirit,”

…so we will not gratify the desires of the flesh!