

Overcoming Life's Handicaps

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Preface

Even Superman had a handicap – kryptonite.

Everyone has handicaps of some sort. I have never known anyone intimately who was not struggling with some sort of weakness.

Our history is full of men and women who accomplished great things in spite of their handicaps or deficiencies.

Ill: Much of modern medicine and vaccination stems from the work of Lewis Pasteur. Did you know he began suffering from a series of strokes at the age of 46 and remained partially paralyzed?

Abraham Lincoln's parents were illiterate and he was raised in a one room cabin. His mother died when he was 9, and 3 of his 4 sons died under the age of 18. He battled depression yet overcame these obstacles to become a lawyer, a member of the House and the 16th President of the United States.

What is the big handicap in your life?

How does one overcome life's handicaps?

Scripture

⁷ *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.* ⁸ *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.* ⁹ *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.* ¹⁰ *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 NIV

Introduction

Paul was a busy successful missionary. He made tents to support himself, had letters to write, sermons to preach and churches to visit in multiple countries.

It is no wonder that three times he prayed asking God to remove his physical affliction. His handicap if you will.

In previous verses, Paul speaks of being caught up to the third heaven in a supernatural experience with God. This must have been a magnificent experience for him.

Yet it is not this experience that makes Paul the great missionary. **It is his weakness, his handicap that makes him grow strong.**

Paul speaks of a nagging physical ailment in his life which he describes as a thorn in his flesh.

What was this great physical thorn in Paul's side? Ugly, epilepsy, blind – we don't know. Paul never tells us – so everyone in one way or another can identify with him and his handicap.

All we really know is that behind the scenes, it caused him great pain and he asked God to remove it three times. And, most importantly through God it became a key to his strength.

There are times in our life when we come face to face with our handicaps, limitations and weaknesses.

Every garden has its weeds. Every life has its strife.

The only perfectly normal people I know are the people I don't really know.

For some of you, I could just mention someone's name to you and tears would begin to flow. For others, I could bring up a tragic event and you would get that knot deep inside.

In a few weeks, the cast of a broken bone comes off and all is healed. But a broken heart can take decades or even a lifetime.

Everybody has a battle to fight, a cross to bear if you will.

But look at what Paul says about his handicap.

¹⁰ *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Paul reaches the point that he delights in his struggles and finds strength in his weakness. Paul found a way to turn his cross into a crown. I would like to discuss 5 ways you can do the same.

Content

1. To overcome life's handicaps, trust that they are no accident.

You are no accident. Ps 139 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." You are the authentic garment made by the creator.

God has a plan for your life and he wants to use everything about you for His glory. God gives us thorns to fashion and mold us.

Illus: The great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon at 35 suffered from gout and kidney disease yet wrote sermons that are still inspiring today. You might say, "Why?" His sermons reflect that the pain knitted his heart so closely to that of Jesus Christ.

Don't get hung up on whether or not you deserved it.

You must recognize purpose in your pain in order to grow from it and put it to work for the Lord.

Accept your hardship as a gift from God and allow God to accomplish His purpose.

2. To overcome life's handicaps, instead of saying "Why me?", say, "What an opportunity".

Paul says, "I delight in my weakness."

He doesn't say, "What if I didn't have this in my life. What a wonderful life I could have had."

Nobody gets to live life on their own terms. You may think you do for a season but you will come to realize that you don't.

Nobody gets a perfect set of circumstances. Those who have power are the folks who look at their circumstances and see opportunity rather than dwelling on their problems.

Illus: There was a famous violinist named Ole Bull. His best most renowned concert was one where he actually broke a string and had to transpose the notes and finish on three strings.

The most thrilling moments in life are when we finish strongly on just three strings.

Parker Trio: When you see a valley, He sees a mountain. When you see a cross, He sees a crown.

Look past your cross and see the crown. Ask God what opportunity is open for you to use your weakness for His glory.

3. To overcome life's handicaps, stop window-shopping and enjoy your own inventory.

Paul makes no bones about it. He asked God to take away the thorn in his flesh. But God said no.

Paul probably thought, "That's not fair. Timothy has good health and Silas doesn't have any major problems."

To this, God would say, "stop window shopping and be happy with what I have given you."

God gives each of us a special plot to till. If the soil is thin, the rocks more numerous and the prospects smaller, then so be it. That's how life is. We must stop looking over the fence and day dreaming about what we could do with somebody else's field.

Paul learned this lesson when in 2 Corinthians 10, he says, "Stop comparing yourself with somebody else, it is not wise."

The real test is not what you could do with somebody else's life or circumstances or health, but what you are doing with what you have been given.

In Jesus Christ we have every opportunity for abundant life with what God has given us.

4. To overcome life's handicaps, recognize that handicaps set the stage for spiritual service.

We live in a society of excuses. Everybody has an excuse for everything. It is never our own fault.

As a Pastor, I could write a book on excuses. My headache, my arthritis, the kids this and the kids that. If it weren't for this..., I would step up and do that but...

Look at what Paul says in verse 10, "*When I am weak, I am strong.*" Paul would never have been Paul without his struggle. **His weakness became his strength not his excuse.**

God wants to use your handicap to become your spiritual service to His glory. But you must stop making excuses and let Him.

Illus: This week I asked a couple if they would be willing to pray about teaching a Sunday school class. Their response was, "We don't have to pray about it we already have been praying for that God would give us an opportunity to serve."

5. To overcome life's handicaps, find strength in God's grace which is always sufficient.

Though Paul asks God three times to remove his affliction, God says no. But then God gives him a promise.

God said, I'll give you something better than that, "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in your weakness."

Someone once said, **"We don't live by explanations, we live by promises." This is your promise, God's grace is sufficient.**

God's grace is sufficient for all of the thorns, handicaps, troubles and problems in your life. When you are weak, when you need it, it will always be there.

God's grace is not given just that we might endure. His grace is given to enable us to rise above our circumstances and do great things for Him. His power is displayed through us and our handicaps.

So delight in your hardships and persecutions and insults. For when you are weak, you can be made strong through the grace of God. Stop making excuses and start serving God.

Paul was asking for substitution - sickness to health. But Paul got transformation instead. His weakness transformed into strength.

Conclusion

Illus: Not many years ago, a television producer decided to do a documentary on what it's like to be told you have cancer. So he arranged with a cancer specialist to place a hidden camera in his examining room, and then he got permission from a number of patients to be filmed the moment the doctor walked in with the results of their cancer test. They profiled three of those patients. Each one was told they had terminal cancer and only months to live. The camera caught it all—the shock, the disbelief, the anger, the fear, the horror, the terror. It was all there as the doctor said, "You've got terrible cancer. You've got months and only months to live."

They followed these three individuals for the next several months. All three of them died. What stood out was the different ways that these individuals handled their terror.

Two apparently had little faith, and the audience walked through the anger and the bitterness that arose over those next several

months and never really came to grips with it. They became estranged from their spouses and their families because the anger and the bitterness precluded their relationships.

That is what made the third individual so inspiring. He was a humble black pastor of a small church in his late sixties. When the doctor came in and relayed the news, "You've got terminal cancer, you have only months to live; it's very bad," there was no outcry, no great anger, no bitterness. Patiently the man and his wife asked the doctor exactly what this meant. The doctor described how he would try to treat it and the steps they'd go through, and they thanked the doctor and they left. As they were heading out to the car, the camera followed along to eavesdrop as this pastor and his wife sat down on the front seat. They quietly bowed their heads and recommitted their lives to Jesus Christ.

The cameras were there on his final Sunday, the last Sunday he ever preached. He was very open about his illness. I'll paraphrase what he said that last Sunday. He said, **"A number of you have been asking me if I'm mad at God for this disease that's been ravishing my body. I want to tell you: I'm not mad at God. We live in a world that's been cursed with sin and sickness and death is just a part of it. I am not mad at God. In fact, I love God more now than I've ever loved him in my life."**

"And don't be sorry for me. I'm going to a better place where there's no tears, no death, no heartache, no sorrow." Right there on television he began to sing a song of praise in a broken, old voice.

God wants to take your cracks and flaws to use them. Are you willing to allow Him?

Announcements:

1. Pray for nominating committee
2. Volunteer for choir practice children
3. Pray for HV Street surgery
4. Pray for our offerings
5. Me on vacation
6. Maury Wednesday night
7. Jason next Sunday
8. Pray for Youth