



Theme: Power Made Perfect in Weakness – the Life of Paul

“Made for a Purpose”

Weekly Memory Verses:

⁴For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. – Ephesians 4:4

Meditation Moments for Monday, November 17 – Read **2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 16-18** and **Romans 5:1-4**. The apostle Paul wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians after a painful time. Many of his converts in Corinth had turned against him, biased by a set of teachers Paul dubbed the “super-apostles.” Seeing his own converts rejecting him was heartbreaking, but Paul did not let it destroy him. In verse 10, he said he dealt with his struggles by remembering Jesus’ death, which looked like the worst heartbreak of all. Instead, the resurrection became a life-changing victory.

 Paul called this life’s troubles, “temporary minor problems.” He was not in denial. He was not trying to convince anyone that it is great to be confused, harassed, or knocked down. But he was clear that the greatest reward in serving Christ comes in eternity and not now, which is why he named it, “an eternal stockpile of glory.” Paul was convinced eternity was worth it. How do you feel about eternity? Is it worth the temporary, minor setbacks we experience today?

 Paul expressed his hopeful spirit in verse 16: “We aren’t depressed...even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day.” The divisions and struggles that constantly bombard us in the news or online can feel overwhelming. Yet, like Paul’s earthly troubles, they are a drop in the bucket compared to the long sweep of Creation. How can you let trouble and endurance build character and hope in you like Paul talks about in Romans? How can Paul’s eternal outlook give you more resilience today?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as your child I live in your eternal kingdom, shaped by your incredible grace which is meant to bring freedom. But I also live with headlines that

make me feel weak. Give me strength to live in your hope and bring about Your Kingdom. Amen

Tuesday, November 18 – Read **2 Corinthians 11:23-20 and 12:7-10**. Later in 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul told his Christian friends of the many difficulties he faced as a traveling preacher. He prayed earnestly for God to remove a “thorn” in his body, an unspecified physical ailment. It may have been poor eyesight, but whatever it was, it was a hindrance to his work. God did not take the ailment away. Yet Paul’s trust in God was such that he took that experience as a message saying, “my grace is enough for you.”

 Paul did not blame God for his ailment. He called it, “a messenger from Satan,” not from God. He, “pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me alone.” How good a case can you imagine Paul, who often traveled on foot, making for God to give him full health? Did having his physical struggle continue mean God didn’t care about him? Or was he right in seeing it as a further message about God’s grace at work in his life?

 Our culture, like the Roman and Greek cultures of Paul’s day, values being “strong.” We often define “strong” as standing on your own two feet, or pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, being tough enough to handle any problem. “My grace is enough for you,” is in many ways the most comforting, healing, and reassuring words ever recorded. In what ways have you found that, “when I’m weak, then I’m strong,” that relying on God’s grace makes you stronger than you could ever be on your own?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I’m not as invulnerable as I sometimes think I am. I’m grateful that your grace is with me even in times of struggle, and your power can work through the weakness I wish I didn’t have. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 19 – Read **Romans 8:18-25**. As we saw yesterday in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, suffering was a regular part of Paul’s life as an apostle. We might think that would leave him bitter, defeated, and hopeless. The apostle experienced hope that it is focused on something in the future that one expects but does not yet possess. He knew real hope grew, not from human resolve or strength, but from the sustaining presence of God’s Holy Spirit.

 Paul also knew he was not the only one who suffered. The whole creation suffers, he said. Have you ever felt that life, or even God, had singled you out to suffer? It in no way plays down your pain to remember that you are not alone, that this broken world’s reality is that “creation suffers.” We do not yet possess the reality of God’s promise to end all suffering. How do you find that trust in a better future gives you strength even in a painful present?

 When Paul wrote, “We were saved in hope,” he wasn’t being glib. Paul is not expressing superficial optimism that everything is going to be good all the time. The ‘good’ that is God’s end goal is our completed salvation. Salvation is meant to be a communal event that benefits all who love God. How do you base your hope, not in vague, general optimism, but in the faithfulness of the Savior who loves you and who you’ve learned to love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, to be blunt, I don't like suffering. I don't like it when I or someone I love is sick, or unemployed, or sad and disappointed. I'm truly thankful that even in these times, especially in these times, you are with me every moment. Amen.

Thursday, November 20 – Read **Acts 16: 22-34**. In Acts 16:6-15 that we read last week we learn that Paul and his young associate Silas had been in the Roman colony city of Philippi for several days when they were unfairly beaten and imprisoned. Around midnight, in chains in prison, they were praying and singing hymns. Luke reported that a violent earthquake shook the prison. If a Roman jailer let prisoners escape, he usually suffered the prisoners' penalty, so Paul and Silas calmed their jailer's fear. They led the man and his family to new life in Christ.

 Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns was a deeply faithful act. To what extent can you deal with a long wait on a web site or a minor error on your electric bill by praying and singing hymns (inwardly if not outwardly)? In what ways does Paul and Silas' example provide a challenging benchmark to help you assess your level of spiritual maturity, of how you are letting Jesus lead you in your life?

 After the earthquake, Paul's jailer was ready to kill himself rather than face the penalty for letting any prisoner's escape. He was asking, "Can you tell me how to get out of this mess?" He got more than he bargained for. Paul and Silas' reply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus," reached deeper than his immediate concern and spoke to messiness of human existence. This is a basic question each of us faces: how can I trust Jesus to help me find hope within the messes in my life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, that desperate, nameless jailer, and his whole family, found in you the answer to their needs. I trust you to be the ultimate answer to all my needs, too. Amen.

Friday, November 21 – Read the whole story in [John 11](#). Jesus' friend Lazarus fell ill. However, Jesus did not arrive in Lazarus' hometown of Bethany until four days after his friend's death. The man's grieving sister Martha greeted Jesus with an "if only" type of statement. His answer began with the explosive words "I am": "*I am* the resurrection and the life." With that "I Am," as scholar N. T. Wright noted in his commentary *John for Everyone*, "He is challenging her, urging her, to exchange her 'if only ...' for an 'if Jesus ...'. If Jesus is who she is coming to believe he is ...If Jesus is the Messiah, the one who was promised by the prophets, the one who was to come into the world ...If he is God's own son, the one in whom the living God is strangely and newly present ...If he is resurrection-in-person, life-come-to-life ..."

 Martha and her sister Mary had "if-only" questions for Jesus— "if only" he had done things differently, they thought, things would be better. Jesus made seven "I am" statements in the gospel of John. His words to Martha are probably the most cherished of those statements: "I am the resurrection and the life...everyone who believes in me will never die." Jesus has many ways of bringing good news, hope, and new possibilities into the mess and grief of life. He asks us for trust, as he did Martha and Mary. Often our "if-only" questions, like theirs, reflect our time-limited, earth-bound understanding. We face the question

Jesus asked Martha: "Do you believe this?" How easy or hard do you find it to trust that Jesus is working for your good, even when what you wish would happen doesn't?



In John 11:27, Martha replies confidently to Jesus' question with these words, "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God." What can help you have that kind of confidence in today's shaky world? Can it help you to have that kind of faith in the coming days? Why or why not?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, sometimes it is hard for me to trust you amid my "if-only" questions. Thank you for offering me an eternal hope when I put my faith in you. Amen.*

Saturday, November 22 – Read **Romans 8:28, 31-32 and 35-39**. The apostle Paul did not teach that God caused evil things like sickness, violence, or broken relationships, but God knew they would happen. Paul faced, "trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword," and more. His list of these "broken world" realities was not a complaint. As we've read this week, none of those things could quench his hope and sink him into despair. After listing the obstacles that some might think could separate us from God's love, he wrote in verse 37, "In all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us." No matter what life throws at us, we can live with courageous hope, knowing nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.



Romans 8:28 did not say, as people sometimes think, that "all things" are good. They're not. It said God, who is always good, can take even bad and painful things and bend them to serve a good purpose, if we are willing to put them in God's hands. Can you recall times when God has brought good out of hard things you have faced?



Paul asked a compelling question: "Who will separate us from Christ's love?" His Greek phrasing assumed that the answer was, "Nobody and nothing could do that!" We all live through moments that are painful, frustrating, and scary. What in those situations is most likely to leave you feeling separated from God's love? What spiritual "anchors" can keep you connected to God's love, hope and peace, even in a time like this?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you that even when I feel overwhelmed, I have your promise that you can win a sweeping victory through me in "all these things." Amen.*