



***Theme: Power Made Perfect in Weakness – The Life of Paul
“Strength and Weakness”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, November 15-16, 2025, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verses:

⁹ Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. – 2 Corinthians 12:9

VIDEO Sermon Starter

SLIDE “Strength and Weakness”

We're getting ready for the Christmas season and this last week we celebrated veteran's day and so I found myself thinking about a toy that I desperately wanted when I was about the age of our confirmation students. It was 1979 and a new movie had come out which got me all amped up for this new toy. This is going to seem really lame because today's toys are so much more technologically advanced, and thank goodness the movie got an upgrade, but here's that original trailer.

VIDEO Captain America Trailer 1979

GRAPHIC 1979 Captain America and Motorcycle

GRAPHIC 1979 Captain America Stunt Cycle

GRAPHIC Captain America Stunt Cycle TODAY

I know the movie seems lame, especially when you compare it to something like Star Wars which also had come out a few years earlier. The special effects weren't great, and the acting was subpar to say the least. But like all good superhero movies it spawned many great Christmas toys. The stunt cycle was cool because it had a zip plastic that you pulled, and it took off and could do jumps and flips at all kinds of great tricks. I tried to order one on eBay this week, but they were over \$100 for the original ones so instead I settled for this \$9 version that we have today. It's made of plastic instead of steel and it's not nearly as cool, but it will have to do.

The most recent Captain America movies with Chris Evans are much better done and the storyline is better. If you're not familiar with Captain America, shame on you, but I'll fill you in. Steve Rogers is scrawny and has several health issues that keep him from being able to enlist any army during World War Two. He wants to do his part in fighting Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, joining his buddy Bucky. He gets rejected on multiple occasions because he's too weak and not much to look at in terms of soldier material. But the doctor in charge of a new project to create a super soldier sees something in him and admits him to basic training and testing. One of my favorite scenes is this one where he joins the other soldiers in his outfit on a 10-mile run and this happens.

VIDEO Captain America Pulls Pin on Flagpole

There's something about the story of the little guy making good which is captivating. There is a paradox about the smallest and the weakest being able the one to do the most difficult task. We sometimes think strength is about our physical abilities to overcome obstacles, and sometimes that's true. But as we grow older and life changes around us, the idea of strength becomes something different. Here's the question I want us to grapple with this week and that I think the apostle Paul helps us answer as he lives out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

SLIDE

What makes us strong?

This is an important question for us to wrestle with, especially in today's world. This is where the apostle Paul is helpful because he often reminds us that he has his own struggles. In his second letter to the Corinthians where we find our memory verse for this week, We find Paul writing about revelations and visions he has received from God but how he tempers those because he doesn't want to appear conceited or that he knows more than everybody else. He then goes on to share a bit about his own personal and physical struggles when he writes these words.

BIBLE

^{7b} So, to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.

Many of us who have read this text, and many scholars have struggled with what this thorn in the flesh might be. The short, honest answer is that we do not know for sure. Paul does not tell us, and he apparently did not want us to know specifically what it is. But that has not stopped people from taking some educated guesses. One educated guess takes us over to the book of Galatians.

In Galatians 4, Paul refers to a physical weakness, an affliction he suffered with when he was with them preaching and teaching.

You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you. ¹³ Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News. ¹⁴ But even though my condition tempted you to reject me, you did not despise me or turn me away...

^{15b} I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible.

Paul uses the same word “flesh,” so there seems to be a connection. They didn’t reject him. They accepted him, and he even says

in that context, “You were willing to pluck out your own eyes and give them to me.” If he’s talking about the same thing in Galatians, then he very well might have been suffering from a problem with his eyes, with his eyesight. Some have speculated macular degeneration or cataracts, but we don’t know that for sure.

Others believe it was a form of spiritual harassment, persecution, anxiety, or an ongoing internal struggle with sin or sinful thoughts. Some interpretations focus on the “messenger of Satan” aspect, suggesting it was a literal demon sent to “buffet” him, or strike him repeatedly. Many scholars and religious leaders emphasize that the text does not specify the affliction, believing the lack of clarity is intentional, allowing the passage to be relevant to the unique trials any of us might face.

What is clear is that Paul was struggling with this weakness and prayed for it to be removed. When that does not happen, which is the case for many of us when we pray for things to change in our lives, he then makes an important decision. While he can’t change the affliction, he can change how to respond. He chooses to get better and not be bitter.

SLIDE Paul chooses to get better and not be bitter.

We did an entire series on this idea a few months ago because it is such an important part of our faith. Paul writes about this truth in the next words in 2 Corinthians 12 which contains our memory verse.

BIBLE

⁹ Each time [God] said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

BIBLE

¹⁰ That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Repeatedly in the scriptures we have this image that strength, true strength, only comes when we embrace our weakness. I have discovered that one of the reasons so many young people are deconstructing their faith is because many who claim to follow Christ are demanding and rude and call people names to get their way. We continue to act like the world, insisting that brute strength is the answer.

In the movie *Jesus Revolution*, a pastor was dealing with criticism from some of his good church folks and others in the Christian community about the people he was spending time with outside the church. He was reaching out to lost and hurting young people, many with alternative lifestyles and addictions that good Christians felt were evil and of the devil. The pastor even invited these wayward souls to church! As they began to show up and develop a relationship with Jesus, it made the nicely dressed and very proper church members very uncomfortable. There is this powerful and profound line from the pastor's wife as they were facing criticism and rejection.

GRAPHIC The lies are always loud.
The truth is always quiet.
I promise you.

The message of Jesus that Paul echoes is one that is very countercultural: **Weakness is strength**. Jesus put it this way in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

BIBLE

- ³ “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.**
- ⁴ God blesses those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**
- ⁵ God blesses those who are humble,
for they will inherit the whole earth.**
- ⁶ God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,**

for they will be satisfied.

**⁷ God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**

**⁸ God blesses those whose hearts are pure,
for they will see God.**

**⁹ God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God.**

**¹⁰ God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.**

¹¹ “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹² Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

These words of Jesus from his most important sermon fly in the face of what our world often tells us, which is that we should be rich and powerful and strong. We shouldn't cry and we certainly shouldn't be humble because that won't get us anywhere. Don't worry about others but simply take care of yourself and don't be merciful or compassionate because it's weak. It's OK to cut corners and do not spend any time on inner peace but instead spend your time surfing the Internet and seeing how you can get richer and find the next 10 steps to happiness!

What's even more powerful about these beatitudes is that Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of heaven as being now and not something we experience when we die. Jesus ushers in the Kingdom and it is now and not yet. The Kingdom is becoming through his presence in our lives and through us as his followers. Jesus was questioned about this in Luke 17 by the religious leaders of his day, the Pharisees.

BIBLE

²⁰ One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, “When will the Kingdom of God come?” Jesus replied, “The Kingdom of God can’t be

detected by visible signs. ²¹ You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you."

What's clear in the gospels and in the life, teachings, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus is that he is more interested in getting the Kingdom in the us then getting us into some faraway Kingdom after we die. Our faith is meant to be a relational 1 that we live out with Jesus, understanding that we are part of his Kingdom, and that Jesus is the king. We are not the king or queen of our own Kingdom. No politician or political movement or government entity is king. Paul tells us that God's power works best in weakness because it's only in recognizing that we are not perfect and that we need a Lord and savior that we can truly experience strength in the Kingdom of God that lives and dwells inside of us because of Jesus Christ.

SLIDE Jesus is the King

The clear message in the Gospels is that Jesus is the King. When most of us think of a King, we certainly don't think about one who suffers or is weak, do we? What we know is that Jesus preaches and teaches about the kingdom of God. Jesus lays out what life looks like for us as subjects in the kingdom of God. Jesus himself is the long-awaited messianic King. Remember that Christ is not the last name of Jesus, but rather a title which means, "The anointed one."

SLIDE Christ = "anointed one" or King

Jesus has a different way. Jesus is calling us to a kingdom that transcends race and boundaries and geographies and political alliances. It is a kingdom of the heart in which people are following God. Jesus laid out for people a very different path, a path that would lead to peace both in the world and in the human heart. But we often don't understand that, and we don't really want it sometimes if we are honest. We want to be in charge. We don't want to be weak! But Jesus came to be a different kind of King, and Paul understood and preached this truth.

SLIDE What kind of King was Jesus?

All we must do is look at the last week of Jesus' life to see how challenging this is for us humans. Jesus comes into Jerusalem, down the Mount of Olives, on the last week of his life to shouts of "Hosanna to the King." The people are longing for a Messiah that will wipe out the Romans and restore the Temple. But as he comes down the Mount, he pauses and he weeps. What a strange thing for Jesus to do! Jesus only weeps twice in the Gospels. He doesn't weep when people have rejected him. He doesn't weep when he is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he is crucified. He doesn't weep as they are nailing him to the cross. He doesn't weep as he is hanging from the cross.

He cries when his friend Lazarus dies when he sees the grief of people all around him. And Jesus weeps as he looks over the city of Jerusalem coming down on the donkey from the Mount of Olives. The place that Jesus stopped to weep is now marked by a chapel. Here is a picture of that chapel.

GRAPHIC Dominus Flevit church

That phrase is Latin for, **"The Lord wept here."** You will notice that the building is shaped like an inverted teardrop. As you go inside the chapel there is a window that overlooks the city of Jerusalem, and you can see the Dome of the Rock.

GRAPHIC Dominus Flevit Church with Dome of the Rock

This is the view that Jesus would have had that day. Why does Jesus weep at this moment? What are his tears about? Luke tells us in this passage of scripture from Luke 19.

BIBLE

⁴¹ But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. ⁴² "How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ Before long your enemies will build

ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you."

Jesus weeps as he looks over the city of Jerusalem because he knows what is going to happen. He knows that the people will reject the path that he laid out for them. He knows that they will follow others who will take up the sword and rebel against the Romans. And he knows that when they rebel against the Romans they will be utterly crushed and destroyed. **Jesus knows that within 40 years the city of Jerusalem will lay in ruins.** As he looks over the city of Jerusalem and sees the holy Temple, he sees in his own mind what is to come. And he weeps before the people who were there.

I believe Jesus weeps when we see women gunned down due to domestic violence. Jesus weeps when he sees the conflict in our community around a family torn apart because of confusion in our immigration process. Jesus weeps when we struggle with addiction or anger or pain that leads to self-destruction or violence against others. Jesus weeps when he sees Israelis and Palestinians killing one another in the name of God.

Let me remind you of what is going to happen. Jesus will be crucified and buried and then he will rise from the dead. A band of small followers will continue to believe in him but most of the people will not. They will continue to wait for a Messiah who was going to overthrow the Romans. In A.D. 66, there are three different would-be messiahs who will try to lead the people in open rebellion against the Romans. The three will fight with one another for power and control over who will lead and the true messiah.

GRAPHIC Map Roman March on Jerusalem

There were some initial victories which took place and when word got back to Rome, Caesar sent the 10th Legion, their best troops to

Jerusalem to quell the rebellion. They were led by the next Emperor of the Roman Empire, and they marched first into the northern regions of Galilee. They began their path of destruction by killing thousands of Jews until they finally surrendered in the north area of Galilee. The Samaritans had already declared a truce with the Roman Empire, so the Roman Legion continued straight through Samaria and marched onto Jerusalem without any resistance.

The Romans arrived in Jerusalem and surrounded the city. The city walls acted as a barricade that kept the troops out to begin with. All the rebels fled to Jerusalem and hid within the city walls. But inside the walls they had their own infighting amongst each other which aided their downfall. They held up inside the city walls for 3 ½ years during which time they consumed most of their food. There was a severe famine inside and very little access to water.

The Romans built ramparts up the city walls and as some of the Jews tried to escape the Romans would capture them and crucify them around the city walls as a warning. They crucified so many Jews that the entire city was surrounded by crosses. They would have to take down crosses with dead bodies on them quickly because they had more crosses to put up as they crucified so many Jews.

Finally, in August of 70 A.D., the Romans breached the walls and invaded Jerusalem. They went into the temple and took all the holy and valuable items and carried them away to Rome. They took 90,000 slaves back to Rome as booty to demonstrate their victory. They slaughtered 1.1 million Jews inside the city which included mostly children, youth, and women.

They burned the city to the ground. They tore down the stone buildings and ripped up the foundation of many buildings. Josephus, the Jewish historian who came to Jerusalem several years later, wrote that you wouldn't even believe there was once a magnificent city when you see the ruins that are left behind.

GRAPHIC Arch of Titus

GRAPHIC Arch of Titus with Menorah

This is what Jesus sees as they pursue the way of the sword. In Rome you can see the arch of Titus which celebrates the victory of the Roman legion against the Jews. You can see the soldiers carrying the menorah from the Temple as well as other Temple furnishings, along with the slaves they brought with them. This is a celebration of a great victory over people who were crushed.

SLIDE Jesus recognizes there are two paths in life.

There are two paths which are laid out before the people and Jesus recognizes this. Today, there are still two paths laid out in life. There is a **narrow path** which is hard and difficult, but it leads to life. It is the way of peace, not only in the world but **in the heart**. There is a broad path which is **wide**, and it often leads to destruction. **One path leads away from God, and the other path leads towards God and the Kingdom of God.** One path will offer hope and joy and life, and the other path will offer a dead-end and destruction. That path of violent victory seems so appealing to us. It seems to make sense, and our heart often yearns for that broad path.

Jesus tells those who are following him to take the narrow path which he had already laid out for them. He said to them, “We’ll conquer the Romans, but we will **conquer them with sacrificial love and not the sword.**”

Jesus gave them **rules for his kingdom**. He said that when the Roman soldier commands you to **carry his pack for 1 mile**, which he was allowed to do under Roman law, then what are you supposed to do? You carry it a second mile. When they **demand your coat**, you give him your cloak also. When they strike you on the cheek, what are you supposed to do? **You turn the other cheek.** You are supposed to love **your enemies and pray for those who persecute** you. Do good to those who wrong you. Show mercy to those who require or need your forgiveness, even if

they have not asked. **These all seem like weakness, but Jesus tells us they are the ultimate strength.**

Jesus says that this is what life in the kingdom of God looks like and this is how Israel would defeat her enemies. **Israel was called to be a light to the nations** and show the rest of the world how human beings are meant to live, and it is the only path which leads to peace, but they could not see it. Jesus weeps when he says, **“Oh Jerusalem, if only you knew the way that leads to peace, what you would not.”**

Instead, he knew it would be a sword and revolt against the Romans. It would be the desire to not pay taxes anymore and an **unwillingness to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s**. It would be the desire for fame and wealth and all the things that would come when they were their own kingdom ruled by their own King. But God says, “I don’t care about that stuff. **There is a way that I have intended for human** beings to live, and this leads to peace, but the path you are choosing does not.”

You see that in present-day Israel. You have Palestinians who have been living where they are for hundreds of years, and they feel they are oppressed. They want power and control over where they live, and this is the Palestinian perspective on things. Some of the Palestinians believe that they will only be free if they overthrow the Jews and send them into the sea. So, they send suicide bombers into the Jewish territories and they fire rockets.

But what does that do? It doesn’t bring peace. It can’t. Instead, the result is that Jewish settlers seek security, and they surround the Palestinian territories with giant walls and barricades. They send F-16s in to destroy Hamas. What does that do? Does that bring peace? No, it creates more suicide bombers, and the cycle of violence continues, because the only way out is to love your enemies. But that doesn’t make any sense to anybody, and this is why Jesus wept.

This is true in Ukraine, Russia, in our political discourse, and tragically, in our public schools. It is true not just in foreign countries

where there is violence, but it is true in other dimensions of our lives.

I had a man start coming to church when I was a youth pastor some 25 years ago. He shared that his son had spiraled into drug abuse and addiction. He loved his son so much, but he felt helpless as he watched him go to prison and destroy his life. He was associating with people who were dangerous and eventually his health began to deteriorate. The father sobbed as he shared his son's story with me. **He weeps over his son** because he sees that there is a path that would lead to life and peace and joy and hope for his son, but his son is taking his other path which is easier and wider but leads to destruction.

I watched as my own son went down this same path. It's like watching a car crash in slow motion. You can see it coming, but you can't do anything to stop it. There are two paths in life and Jesus calls us to the narrow path. It seems weak, but in the end, we find strength. In many ways when we take that narrow path, we find joy and peace that we have never known. But when we stray from that path, ultimately, we find pain, heartache, and separation from God and others. The question we must ask is simple.

SLIDE Am I willing to admit I am weak like Jesus?

Am I still following on the journey with Jesus, or have I begun to stray from the path? We see this choice before us in many ways in our world today. Am I willing to recognize that it is in those weakest places that I can be strong because God can do all things for those of us who find our hope in him? We follow a God who came in the person of Jesus Christ and gave everything for us so that we would know this truth that even in our weakest moments we can find strength.

That brings me back to Captain America. During all the tests that he must go through as Steve Rogers before he gets the Super soldier serum, most of the rough and tough soldiers think it's silly that he is even able to participate in these trials. It's one thing to be smart enough to figure out how to take down the flagpole, but it's another thing to fight

others in combat. As they are wrestling with this final decision, we see this scene unfold.

VIDEO Captain America Grenade Scene

I love those final words, “He’s still skinny.” What I hope all of us will remember is that following Jesus everything together it's not about being the strongest or the biggest or having. Following Jesus is about admitting when we are weak so we can allow Christ to make us strong. Following Jesus is about recognizing that we have a crucified king who invites us to a path it is narrow but leads to grace and peace in a violent world.

Here is what I know about my own life. There are moments where I stray from the path. I didn’t even realize it at first. It just happens slowly and by degrees. Where does Jesus weep in your life? Jesus is King over a kingdom where there is second and third and fourth and an infinite number of chances. Today is the day to return to God be being honest about our weaknesses. Jesus invites us to learn that serving others, being open and vulnerable, giving ourselves away instead of demanding our way, is the way that leads to peace and joy and life.

If only the people had known the things that make for peace. They would have known that Jesus came to be a deliverer but a different kind of deliverer. Jesus came to suffer on our behalf. He came to cleanse us from our broken places. Jesus came to save us from ourselves and the path that we typically want to take because it’s easier. Jesus came because he loves us. He weeps over us and our brokenness.

The irony is that weakness is inevitable for every single one of us. We are born weak and we die weak. Our confirmation students who are here have family who brought you into the world and without whom you wouldn't exist. No matter how perfect or imperfect our families may be, they did give us life and without people to care for us as infants we would never get to the next year of life let alone to this time of transition towards adulthood. Each of you will continue to grow in your faith and

to ask tough questions and you will have moments of weakness in your life where you decide not to follow God or where you feel like God is far away.

I pray that in those moments you might remember this moment when you come to baptism and confirmation. One of the reasons we invite you to get in the tub is because this is the ultimate act of surrender, allowing your pastor to hold you under the water for however long your parents paid me to do that! The image is meant to be that we die with Christ and we are reborn because of his offer of grace and because of his sacrifice on the cross. We are made new and strong because we are willing to be weak and vulnerable in the water.

A number of years ago I baptized someone in the river who was in the last stages of cancer which would eventually take their life that next year. I remember them smiling as they came up out of the water even though they knew their time on this earth was limited. They confessed to me that they felt a sense of peace letting go and allowing themselves to sink in the water and to be weak. That idea of surrender is what allows us to find the ultimate strength in Jesus Christ. My hope and prayer is that each of us will remember this truth as we say again these words from the apostle Paul which is our memory verse for the week and reminds us of this truth of what it means to follow Jesus every moment of our lives.

BIBLE

⁹ Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. – 2 Corinthians 12:9

I want to invite you to close this service by singing a song with me that you may have learned as a child. Even if you didn't learn it when you were younger because you didn't go to church, you may have heard it somewhere before and it's very easy to sing. This song reminds us that

when we are weak is when we will find strength and we will understand how much we are loved by God.

SLIDES

**Jesus loves me, this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
they are weak, but he is strong.**

**Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.**

That is still the invitation from Jesus to each one of us today, recognizing that we are weak and God is strong. It's why Jesus invited children to come to him, because they understood they were dependent. I pray you might always remember this biblical truth that I believe Jesus wants us to carry every day. Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

Lord, you read us like an open book. You know our hearts. You know the things that we do in secret that no one else sees or knows. You know the places where we deceive ourselves. You know the times we have sought strength and power instead of weakness which leads to the way of peace.

Forgive us as a nation for those times that we have moved in directions that cause you to weep over us. Forgive us for the times that we have strayed from your path—when we have walked away from you and your kingdom—when we have brought pain to ourselves or others.

Lord, help us to love you with our whole heart and to love our neighbors. Forgive the times that we have compromised and fallen short of your will. Help us to faithfully serve you as our King, our Lord, and our Savior who was weak so that we may know true strength in Your Kingdom. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

November 15-16 Order

1. Nathan welcomes people.
2. Song: “Graves into Gardens”
3. Jeff welcomes people:
 - a. QR Code and Connect Card
 - b. Invite people to greet each other, however comfortable and be seated.
4. (Baptism of Louis Hermesman at 9)
5. Sermon
6. Offering **Confirmation Students**
7. Med Moments
8. Confirmation Video
9. Baptisms Saturday Night and Confirmation Sunday morning
10. Song: “Great Are You Lord”
11. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
12. Care Ministers
13. Connect with Us
14. Closing Prayer