

GETTING OFF THE MUD FLATS 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

We all want to be secure and think of ourselves as fairly safe and strong. We situate our lives so they go along as comfortably and usually as predictably as possible. Yet every now and then we get glimpses of just how vulnerable we are, of how thin a strand our lives hang by, and of how quickly they can change. This past week marked the 12th anniversary of September 11, 2001. That day was a shocking reminder that it can all be violently blown apart in an unexpected instant.

Laurie and I had another reminder of the vulnerability of life this week. Carissa has been suffering from a persistent headache, so on Monday we went with her to the hospital where they did a CT scan on her (it showed a sinus infection). We ended up spending several hours in the waiting room of the ER. If you ever want to unsettle yourself and be reminded of life's fragility, do that. Two young guys came in, one of whom looked like he felt terrible. They checked in and sat down and shortly thereafter the obviously sick one began calling dinosaurs. This guy was doing some industrial strength barfing. It was loud, and it was long. And he just didn't stop. I almost went over to the admitting desk and said, "Hey, can't you move this guy into some other room? He's got to be bad for business, doesn't he?" Just being in the same room with him gave me shudders. I didn't know what he had, but I didn't want to get it. I was not only uneasy being in the same room with him, I didn't want to be in the same time zone. Then another young guy came hurrying in, barefoot and crying. He had his hand up by his face with a bandage. I just glanced at him. I didn't want to look real hard because in that one glance I could see a fairly significant amount of blood. I thought from my brief glance he had a head wound. He didn't. I tried to ignore him, but as he was checking in I'm pretty sure I heard the hospital person say, "Do you still have the finger?"

Later an old friend walked stiffly in. He had just been in an auto accident. His day had begun and was proceeding normally when all of a sudden as he was in his car at an intersection an inattentive driver slammed into his car. It was the last thing he anticipated happening that day. So it went. The experience reminded me that life is chaotic, uncertain, and a little dangerous. It also reinforced the lesson that this idea of being "antifragile," able not only to survive the stress and hardship but to actually grow stronger in it, is crucially important. We simply don't know when chaos is going to erupt in our lives. Laurie has a motto. "Embrace the chaos." I love that idea. But how are we to do it? We will look today at another crucial principle for being antifragile that is found in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

THINGS CAN BE GOOD AND BAD

In verse 9 Paul said, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses." He said almost the exact same thing in 11:30, which tells us from there through 12:10 is one passage with one message. It is about boasting about weaknesses, something that is more than a little counterintuitive for humans.

Back in chapter 10 we saw that boasting was a big deal in the culture of ancient Corinth. The Corinthians wanted leaders who were boastful, people who magnified their own strengths and accomplishments. So Paul did a little boasting about how he had suffered for Christ, but

in this section he brings the whole matter of boasting to a conclusion. He made the point we saw last week that we should boast in the Lord. In this passage he brings into focus an implication of boasting only about the Lord.

By human calculation Paul had quite a lot to boast about. The risen Lord Jesus personally appeared to him to convert him from his obstinate opposition to the truth then directly commissioned him to be the apostle to Gentiles. That was true of no one else. But the uniqueness of Paul didn't end there. In 12:2 Paul wrote, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven." In verse 4 he said that this unnamed man "was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell." This guy actually visited heaven. Today we have books from people who had near death experiences and claim to have visited heaven. I have serious doubts about that. I know they experienced something, but I do not think they actually went to heaven.

This man Paul wrote about did go into the very presence of God. He was ushered into the spiritual realm. He saw heaven! What that man saw was "inexpressible." In other words, there was no way human language could explain and describe what he experienced and saw. So who is this man and why was Paul writing about him? Verse 7 says, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations." It was Paul himself. He was the one who was given this rare glimpse of heaven. He initially wrote about the experience in the third person as a literary device. He was building tension. He knows his readers are thinking, "Who is this guy? He really does have something to boast about because God has given him something that hardly anyone else has been given. That guy has a lot to talk about. Now that's somebody we'd like to hear from."

Then Paul drops the rest of the story on them. He was the man. Yes, there were some other people who were impressive speakers, some who had impressive sounding philosophies and theologies, some of them were dynamic and charismatic. But none of them had the experience of being chosen by God to see heaven with their own eyes. If I had Paul's experience and actually got to see heaven with my own eyes, I could become very popular on the speaker circuit. People would be crazy anxious to hear about it. The book would fly off the shelves and the invitations to speak would inundate us.

There are some things that seem to go to peoples' heads. It seems to be part of human nature. Consider for instance Britney Spears, Miley Cyrus, Johnny Manziel and Justin Bieber to name a few. Fame and money at an early age seem to cause inflation of the ego and disconnection of the brain, particularly those parts of it responsible for judgment and wisdom. Paul admitted that being given that amazing revelation by God could easily have gone to his head. He could have fallen prey to rampant pride. So God deflated his ego for him.

Paul says "there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." A thorn doesn't sound that bad. It would be painful and irritating, but there are much worse things than thorns. However what Paul had was more than a mere thorn. The Greek word he used to describe his problem actually meant a stake or a spike. So don't picture a little burr in Paul's side, picture a spike or a tent stake sticking in him.

This thing was painful and noticeable. You might not see a thorn sticking in someone's side, but if he had a spike lodged there you would be sure to notice that. We don't know what this thing was. People have made all kinds of suggestions about it being epilepsy, or some eye disorder, or malaria, or bouts of depression. One even suggested it was a nagging and unsupportive wife.

But as people speculate about the nature of Paul's "spike" they often fail to ask the obvious question. What is missing in this passage? What is missing is an explanation of what the thorn was. Likely Paul didn't include it because the Corinthians knew all about it. It was glaringly obvious to them. But let's assume that if this is God's Word and God thought we needed to know what this thing was, he would have seen to it that we were informed. The conclusion must be that we don't need to know, so quit wasting time trying to figure it out.

The torment Paul experienced wasn't just physical. We know that because Paul said what this thing most affected was his pride. It was embarrassing for him in some way. Whatever this thing was he felt like it affected his ability to minister. It was something that people were aware of and might be distracted by. One biblical scholar wrote that this spike in Paul's side was "a socially debilitating disease or disfigurement which was made the subject of ridicule or invidious comparison" (P. Marshall, quote in Garland, p. 521). In his commentary on this letter David Garland wrote that Paul "thought that this stake...would stymie the effectiveness of his ministry" (p. 522). This was something that would limit him because people he was trying to reach would not be able to get past it.

Years ago while working in the yard I was bitten by a spider. I didn't know it at the time, but I found out quickly. The bite was on my forehead. The thing swelled up and got red and itchy. I mean it swelled up huge. It got so big it looked like I was morphing into a rhinoceros. The problem was the next day I had to preach. It made me so self conscious. I figured no one would be able to listen to anything I said because they'd all be looking at my horn and thinking "what is that thing sticking out of his head?" Of course the answer to that was why would you think anybody is listening to you anyway? But you see the point. This spike in Paul's side was not only painful for him but he thought it would keep people from listening to him.

Paul calls this painful thing a messenger of Satan. We will all encounter similar messengers of Satan. There will be hardships, pains, setbacks, disappointments for all of us. We all will have some spikes in the side. This section of the Bible gives us a helpful framework for how to think about those difficult things. They are often tools of Satan. Satan wants to use pain, difficulty and discouragement to "torment" us. He wants to bring so much hurt and stress that we give up, become bitter and turn away from God, maybe even become angry at him. At the very least Satan wants us to doubt God.

But God allows Satan to perpetrate his foul deeds against us. Did you notice that Paul asked God to take the spike away? He knew God had the ability to stop Satan from doing his mischief. He asked repeatedly to no avail. God had power over this spike, yet God chose not to answer Paul's pleas to take it away. Ever had that experience? Why would God let Satan

inflict pain on his children? Because it is a key way we can learn, grow and become closer to him. God uses these difficult times as crucial moments of growth for us. They are the fire that purifies us and makes us better, more like Christ. In this section it is apparent that Paul had to have the painful spike in his side in order to keep him humble and to learn perhaps the most important lesson of his life.

So Satan wants to beat you up and discourage you, but God uses those very attempts to draw you closer to him and make you more like Jesus. The obvious question this raises for me is why doesn't Satan get this? This has been going on for a couple of thousand years. And this is not classified information that Satan has never heard before. I'm not Edward Snowden, leaking God's secrets to the enemy. This information has been in the public domain since the Bible was written.

Why hasn't Satan figured out that God is using his demonic efforts for his own divine purposes? Years ago when Laurie and I were first married we didn't have much money, so vacations were pretty rudimentary affairs. We had fallen in love with Hawaii on our honeymoon and dreamed of going back, but couldn't even get close to being able to afford it. Then we received a tantalizing offer. Come to a 90 minute presentation and you will win a free vacation. The free vacation was guaranteed whether we bought anything or not. It could be to Hawaii, Florida or Las Vegas. We were guaranteed a free vacation that might be to Hawaii! And Florida would be fine too! This was just what we needed. So we went. The 90 minutes stretched to 2 hours. And it was worse than 2 hours in the dentist's chair. This was the definition of high pressure sales. They were relentless. It stretched on like eternity. We were trapped there with seemingly no way out. But we firmly resisted the sales pitch. When it became apparent we weren't going to buy what they were selling they made us feel like dirt. They played up our greed, which was unfortunately real. We never intended to buy anything, we just wanted a free trip. We were confronted with our own lack of integrity, which made us feel even worse. But in the end they awarded us our free vacation trip. It was a bus trip to Las Vegas where they would put us up in a cheap hotel for 2 nights. No thanks.

I recently received a call offering me a vacation in Florida for free. All I needed to do was attend a 90 minute presentation. I may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I learned my lesson years ago from that previous experience. I didn't even let the guy finish before I said, "No thanks." I will never do that again. So here's the question: am I smarter than Satan? I learned from my mistake. If God consistently is turning Satan's attacks to his use, why doesn't Satan figure that out and change his tactics?

Good question. I can't point to a verse in the Bible that answers it so all I can do is offer you my best guess. That's all it is, my guess, not the word of God. There appear to me to be two elements in play here. The first is that Satan is insane. He thinks he's smarter and better than God so he believes his ideas are going to work even when they don't. He's got a bit of that "keep doing the same thing expecting a different result" thing going on. But there is a reason he believes that this will work. That's the second factor. The reason is that sometimes his idea does work. At times his attacks on people do just what he wants them to do. The people do become discouraged. They do give up. They do lose their faith in God. Satan has just enough success to convince him his tactic is effective. He becomes kind of like the gambler

at the slot machine who wins just enough to think if he or she can just keep going they'll hit the jackpot. This time it will work.

So there's a lesson for us in that. When Satan is attacking you, battering you with hardships, disappointments, sickness or pain and you start questioning God, when you give up, it's like blood in the water to a shark. It is encouraging Satan to attack you all the more. You are giving him reason to think if he just stays at it, it will work. So when your life suddenly turns miserable, when you say well at least it can get any worse, and then it does, when you pray with great fervor and get no answers, here's what you need to do. Call out, "Hey, Satan." Then give him the Bronx cheer. Say to him, "I'm not buying!"

WE HAVE A CHOICE BETWEEN OUR POWER AND GOD'S

That brings us to the crucial thing that God wanted Paul to learn. In verse 9 Paul says the Lord told him, "my power is made perfect in weakness." God said, "Paul, it is not your strength, your coolness, your intelligence, your charisma that I need. What I need is your weakness, because when you become weak you will let my power work instead of yours."

Back up to 11:30-33 and you will see how Paul first learned this. "If I must boast I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands."

Now that sounds like a really cool story in which Paul came out looking heroic. This was kind of a thriller where people were plotting to kill Paul and his friends smuggled him out of town by lowering him from a window outside the city walls. I'm writing a book right now, and I'll give away part of the plot, the hero gets in a jam and someone comes to rescue him by...no I can't do it. I can't give it away. You'll have to read the book. But the rescue effort in my book was only slightly more outlandish than putting Paul in a basket at night and lowering him outside the city walls. This was some cloak and dagger excitement with Paul as the hero. And when I was a kid growing up in Sunday School that's what I was taught.

But how did Paul see that incident? He said the event showed his weakness. It was embarrassing for him. It was, in his eyes, an epic fail. Here's the backstory. Paul had just pulled one of the great reverses of all time. He had left Jerusalem as a fire-breathing hater of Christians headed for Damascus to continue his violent pogrom against them. He was on his way to take some names and bust some heads. Those foul Christians were going to change or pay dearly, maybe even with their lives.

That's how he left, but to his own shock and dismay and to the confusion, astonishment and disbelief of everyone else, he arrived in Damascus a believer in Jesus. The resurrected Jesus had stopped him on the way and he had no choice but to begin to believe in him. And now the former fire-breather was on fire for Jesus. He was one of the most knowledgeable rabbis in the entire world and he knew instantly what God wanted him to do. Jesus obviously had made this unique appearance to him because he would be the one to convince the Jewish people to follow their Messiah Jesus. He had the knowledge and the ability to debate circles

around anyone who disagreed with him, and he also had the astounding evidence of his own life, violently yanked out of disbelief into belief by Jesus Himself. Who would be able to argue with him? No one!

Surely Paul would play a key role in turning the Jewish people to accept their own Messiah. Paul knew the Old Testament promised that a time would come when the Jewish people would worship Messiah en masse, so obviously he would help bring that about. He had the skills, the knowledge and the experience that would do it.

Acts 9:20-22 says, "At once he began to preach in the synagogue that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?' Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ."

That sounds like it was working out just the way Paul thought it would. He was running rings around anyone who disagreed with him or tried to debate him theologically and they were stunned that the former Jesus hater was now preaching Jesus. No one could answer him. He just kept growing more powerful. Note that word. Paul was powerful. He had the ability to overpower everyone. So it was working, right? Wrong. Acts 9:23 says, "After many days had gone by the Jews conspired to kill him." They couldn't defeat his arguments, but they could sure shut him up. Paul didn't convince anybody. He just made enemies who wanted to kill him. He had to be smuggled out of town because he had fallen flat on his face. He was powerful all right. But his power accomplished nothing except to make people mad. Using his own power Paul totally failed. It got worse. The rest of Acts 9 tells us from Damascus he went back to Jerusalem. He tried again there with the same result. Total failure. More attempts on his life.

God did want to use Paul. Years later he sent him out to do some ground breaking work as a church planter. Only he sent him to Gentiles. Do you see the irony of that? God gave him a ministry assignment in which most of his assets would be useless. All that rabbinic training and knowledge was useless with Gentiles. That would be of as much help among them as being fluent in German would help you working with people in Mexico. As Paul set about flashing his great knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures he'd see nothing but blank stares. Yeah, but what about his amazing experience of converting from a hater of Christians to a Christian himself? Shoulders would shrug. No one would care. So he changed from being Jewish to being part of some weird sect of Judaism. Whoop de do.

Why would God sent a leading, brilliant Jewish rabbi to Gentiles? Because among them he had nothing to rely on except God's power. He could only go to those people and tell them the good news of Jesus Christ and ask God to do something exceptional in their hearts. Either God's power would work and change those people or nothing would happen. To Paul's amazement, he went, this not dynamic, not charismatic Jewish rabbi with a really distracting spike sticking out of his side, and did nothing but tell Gentiles about Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. It seemed a ludicrous enterprise. Why would they believe such a

bizarre story? Yet many of them did just that. They believed in Jesus and a powerful movement began.

Years ago I was lifting weights out in the garage. Toby was probably about 9 years old when this happened. He and his buddies were playing both in the front yard and in the garage while I was working out. At one point they got interested in the weights I was lifting. They decided they wanted to see how much they could bench press. At that point the bar bell with some weights on it was sitting on the floor. It probably had about 70 pounds on it at that moment. They asked if they could try the bench press and I said they could. I told them I would put the bar up on the bench press rack for them. They said, "No, we want to do it." So the three of them tried to pick the bar up. They could get one end just a little ways off the floor, but that was it. There was no way they could get the whole bar up, and certainly they couldn't lift it up enough to put it up on the rack. But they insisted on trying some more. They heaved and grunted, but could not even get close. Finally they said, "Okay, you do it." I easily picked it up and set it on the rack.

My power was perfected in their weakness. As long as they were trying to lift that bar up using their strength they were in my way. I had to let them strain and struggle, and ultimately fail. It was only when they failed and came to the realization that they simply couldn't do it that they let me lift the bar. And that's when the task got done. They had to choose between their power and mine. As long as they relied on their own power they were doomed to failure. My power was perfected in their weakness.

This is a difficult lesson to learn. It is one we tend to give mental assent to, yet it is so foreign to us that we have a hard time actually living by it. And its application to daily life can sometimes be a little difficult to figure out. Yet this principle is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ and it is the essential key to living the life God wants us to experience. This is why Paul said he delighted in his weakness, for in his weakness God's power worked in ways his puny human power could never work.

GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

I would have expected Paul to write in verse 9 that God said to him, "My power is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Instead God told him "my grace is sufficient for you." Isn't it interesting that in the context of discussing of power and weakness what Paul identifies as the solution for the human condition is God's grace. Why did Paul speak of grace there? Because it is God's grace that puts his power to work. Because God's grace is what is necessary for God's power to function in our lives. Were it not for God's grace his power would only be a threat to fallible, fallen humans.

What is grace? It is undeserved kindness. The powerful message of this incredible section of the Bible is that God's grace is big enough, strong enough and ample enough for us in every situation. You've heard from me so many times it probably grates on you, "what God supplies is enough." God's grace was sufficient to allow his power to work in Paul's life. That power was able to take a person who had nothing to commend him to a group of people and use him to bring those people new life, hope and joy through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is a scene in the old classic movie *The African Queen*. In that great old film Humphrey Bogart plays a disreputable steamboat operator in East Africa in the early 1900's named Charlie Allnut. When World War I breaks out Allnut teams up with missionary Rosie played by Katherine Hepburn. They escape the Germans then steam downriver trying to reach a large lake where they hope to do their part for the British war effort. They survive one ordeal after another only to end up stranded on a mud flat. They are hungry, exhausted, and Charlie is sick. The boat can go no further. Charlie says to Rosie, "Even if we had all our strength we'd never get her off this mud. We're finished." She agrees and they resign themselves to dying on that boat stuck on a mudflat. As they are falling asleep Rosie prays, "We've come to the end of our journey. Open the doors of heaven for Charlie and me." Then the camera pans back and shows what they cannot see. They are actually not that far from the lake. And upstream a torrential rainstorm hits. The river begins to fill with a flood of water. While the two sleep on the boat the channel they are in fills with water, lifts the boat and carries it into the lake. No amount of human strength could move the boat. That's a picture of us, stuck on the mud flat. Our power can never get us off, but God's grace is sufficient. It is his power that will lift our boat off the shallows and carry us home.

There were two effects when Paul learned that lesson and lived by it. First, God was glorified because it was clear that he was the one who was producing the change in people's lives, not Paul. Second, Paul stayed humble because he knew it wasn't because of his ability or charisma that people were coming to Jesus.

IMPLICATIONS

THIS PRINCIPLE IS AT THE HEART OF THE GOOD NEWS

The majority of people, and even many Christians, have a defective understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is truly good news for it is good news for everyone, no matter who they are or what they have done. For the truth is we all have our weaknesses. We all try so very hard to convince ourselves and everyone else that we are good, but we all know we're putting on a good show, but inside we are weak.

The message of this passage is that while we are not sufficient, we are weak, God's grace is sufficient. We have a choice. It can either be our power, our goodness, or it can be God's grace. It cannot be both. The good news is that no matter who we are, no matter how far down we might be, how weak we might be, God has provided the forgiveness and love we need through Jesus Christ his Son. We are to receive that gift by faith, but trusting in Jesus and what he has done for us. It is his grace that lifts our boat off the spiritual mud flats so we relax and rest and his power moves the boat forward.

THIS PRINCIPLE IS THE ENGINE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Dr. Brene Brown is a researcher in social work at the University of Houston. She has become rather famous as a result of a talk she gave at the Technology, Entertainment and Design conference. They put the video of her talk on You Tube and it has gone viral. Over 4 million people have viewed the talk. The result is that she has a couple of books out now and gets invitations to speak all across the United States.

Brown has verified two principles that go right back to the gospel. The first is that connection with others is the core of life. To be fully alive we must be connected to others. We were made for connection. I will advance that and say that the connection starts with connecting to God. If we do not have that life will always be missing. The second principle is that Brown affirmed is that what destroys connection is shame. Shame is that sense that I am not worthy. I am not worthy of belonging, of being loved. We may cover it up, but every single one of us carries that shame around continually. Our attempts to cover up actually keep us disconnected from God and from other people. We grasp at every little shred of advantage we might have over other people and magnify it in the effort to convince others and ourselves that we are worthy, deserving of love, respect and approval. Our shame also makes us afraid to fail thus limiting our creativity and energy and sapping joy from life.

Brene Brown says that the answer for this shame is to convince ourselves that we are worthy because all human beings are worthy of belonging and love. But there I have a big problem. Laurie and I went to Disneyland a couple of months ago. We had a great time there. That evening we decided we wanted to watch the great fireworks show they have then go to their multimedia *Fantasmic* show after that. It is always difficult to find good places to see these shows because they are so crowded. As we waited for the fireworks we chatted with two young women who worked for Disney. We found out about their schooling and career goals and where they lived. They were really pleasant young ladies. They asked about us and our day in the park. We told them about our plan to see *Fantasmic* and asked if they had any recommendations on where we should try to find places to sit. One of them, Alezandra, left for a little bit. When she came back she said, "I went and talked to Tinkerbell and she spread some Pixie dust on you guys, so we have VIP seating for you for *Fantasmic*. We were stunned. She told us what to do so we could get our special seating when we went to see that show. We were so grateful. We've never had anyone do that for us before. She walked away again. When she came back it was about 2 minutes before the fireworks. She said to us, "You guys come with me." She took us through the crowd control lines and said, "I've also been able to get VIP seating for you for the fireworks show." All around us were thousands of people jockeying for position, standing on the concrete. Alezandra took us past the hoi polloi to some roped off benches and said, "You can seat right here in the VIP section." We sat down on that bench right in front of the castle with the perfect, prime view of the fireworks.

I found out I have two absolutely contradictory thoughts inside me. One was I walked by all those people and sat in our special place and inside my head said to those people, "That's right, commoners, I'm special and you're not. Don't you wish you could be me? How nice it is that someone has recognized that I truly am special and should be given special treatment." The more rational side of me, on the other hand, was thinking, "This is crazy. I don't belong here. I'm no VIP. In fact, I'm a TUP, a totally unimportant person. I'm not worthy of VIP treatment. I don't belong here." That thought is never far from us. "I'm not worthy."

Brene Brown says the answer is that I need to believe I am worthy. The problem I have is I know better. I knew in the VIP section I wasn't worthy of that. And I know if others knew the truth about me I wouldn't be worthy of their love, their acceptance, of belonging to them. I certainly am not worthy of God's love and acceptance. I feel that because it's true, just as it was true that I didn't belong in the VIP seating. It is this sense of shame and unworthiness

that makes us most fragile. It is hard to shake and convince ourselves otherwise because it is true.

That's where this passage hits home. I am not sufficient to be worthy, but God's grace is sufficient. I can boast about, admit my weakness and my unworthiness because then I quit trying to prove my worthiness and let God's power take over. And his grace is sufficient. His grace lifts me up off the mud flats of unworthiness and shame. His grace and power are sufficient to make me accepted and of infinite worth in Christ.

This principle is at work everywhere in our walk with Christ. It is his grace that makes us worthy and his power that enables us to serve him. When it comes to being the husband, the father, the pastor God wants me to be it's not my ability that matters, it is his grace working through his power. Man is that freeing. Paul's job was to be faithful to tell Gentiles about Jesus, despite his Jewishness, despite his lack of glitz, despite his distracting and painful spike in the side. Just do what God said, and God's grace would be enough. In every endeavor in your life this principle is at play. I know that God wants me to be a beacon of his truth and grace to my neighbors. I'm not adequate. I'm weak. Great. Now God's power can work because I've gotten to the place where I have said, "I can't do it." My power is out of the way. So my job is just to care about those people, be faithful and let God work. Are you weak, inadequate? Great. That means you see and admit the truth. Your strength and adequacy were never enough to begin with. So just be faithful.

THIS PRINCIPLE IS KEY TO BEING ANTIFRAGILE

This is a world where some rednecks with long, ratty beards have become the stars of a hit television show called Duck Dynasty. Could you have ever predicted that? Did you expect that? Weird things are going to happen. They'll happen to you and they'll reveal your weaknesses.

So what do you do about that? You rejoice! Hey, I'm weak. I was tempted to depend on my strength, but now I see it's not enough and God's grace and power are way more than enough. So I will boast about my weakness, and trust in God, because his grace is sufficient and his power is only perfected in my weakness.

This has been of huge help to me. I spent many years leading another ministry, as you all know. At the end of that period of my life I heard the message from some people loud and clear. "Epic fail." Now I can be hurt, defensive, angry, go curl up in a corner and suck my thumb. Or I can learn from Paul and boast in my weaknesses. I can say, "Yep, I am inadequate, just like those people said. I knew that the whole time. It was never about my adequacy. It was only about my faithfulness though people rarely get that. But God's grace and power are sufficient, so now I just need to be faithful to what he has for me to do today." Guess what. I'm still inadequate, but I have even more reason to be humble, even more awareness of how much I need God's power. Here is what I know: God's grace is sufficient.