**WHEN I AM WEAK**

***Finding Strength In Our Weakness***

At 68 years of age I am weaker, much weaker, than I was at 18, 28, 38, 48, and even 58. The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics says, “All things tend toward disorder and decay.” In other words, things break down over time. The world, and all things in it, including you and me, are wearing out.

As Isaac Asimov, the famous scientist, once described it in common man’s terms, “The universe is constantly getting more disorderly! All we have to do is nothing, and everything deteriorates, collapses, breaks down, wears out, all by itself. It is like when you clean your bedroom, and even if you do not let anyone go in for a year, it will be messed up again all by itself. It will be dusty and musty, the windows will be dirty, the white curtains will be yellowed from the sun, and the carpet will need vacuuming.”

Believe me, I feel the effects of this Law (also called The Law of Entropy). Speaking of my body I have gradually, and automatically, gone “from order to disorder” or, more accurately, “from strength to weakness.”

In the scientific world of nature there are no exceptions to this Law. Even if men once lived over 900 years: Adam (930), Seth (912), Enosh (905), Cainan (910), Jared (962), Methuselah (969), Noah (950) – it was said of all of them, “*and he died*” (Gen. 5:5,8,11, 14,20,27; 9:29). No one gets out of this world alive (except, of course, Enoch and Elijah – Gen. 5:24; 2 Kgs. 2:11). If we escape accident or deadly disease we all will grow old and die. Growing weaker is set in God’s order of things (Eccl. 12:1-7).

In the spiritual world, as in the natural, those of us who wear the name of Christ will also face a growing weakness. The longer we live in the faith the more we become aware of just how weak we really are. The apostle Paul, as strong as we perceive him to be, tells us very bluntly that the acceptance of his weakness became his strength. It’s a paradox (a seeming contradiction) that makes us stop and think. How does weakness equal strength? A study of Paul’s life reveals the answer. Meditating on 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 is so enlightening to me as I grow into the sunset years of my life.

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for *My strength is made perfect in weakness*.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. ***For when I am weak, then I am strong***.”

What was Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” that led to his weakness? It seems it could have been his never-ending, daily, persistent struggle with “*infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses*.” There just seemed to be no relief in sight for Paul. He couldn’t seem to catch a break from the physical, mental and emotional forces arrayed against him. Paul was truly learning what Jesus meant when He said, *“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (Ac. 9:16).* His daily suffering became like a thorn in the flesh, ever reminding him of his sinful past when he tortured, imprisoned, and killed Christians (Ac. 22:20; 26:10; I Tim. 1:13). In this weakness he grew to accept his total reliance upon the strength of God (Phil. 4:13). In other words, in weakness he became strong.

Through every trial and temptation in his life he had grown to rely less and less upon his own strength, and more and more upon God’s strength. Didn’t Jesus teach this very principle in His famous “Vine and Branches” illustration? *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing*” (Jn. 15:5). Have you learned that truth in your life yet?

You have already studied the various physical infirmities he faced (2 Cor. 11-12). But now I ask you to examine Paul’s endless list of persecutions city by city to appreciate the non-stop stress he endured every day of his apostleship. Tell me, how could he bear this?

1. Threatened with a plot on his life in *Damascus* (Ac 9:23)
2. Threatened with his life in *Jerusalem* (Ac 9:29)
3. Persecuted and run out of *Antioch* of Pisidia (Ac 13:50)
4. Faced the threat of stoning in *Iconium* (Ac 14:5)
5. Stoned and left for dead in *Lystra* (Ac 14:19)
6. Experienced the loss of his dear friend Barnabas in *Antioch* (Ac 15:39)
7. Beaten with rods, imprisoned, then cast out of *Philippi* (Ac 16:23)
8. Threatened in *Thessalonica* (Ac 17:5-7,10)
9. Forced out of *Berea* (Ac 17:13-14)
10. Mocked by philosophers in *Athens* (Ac 17:18)
11. Put on trial before the judgment seat in *Corinth* (Ac 18:12)
12. Opposed by silversmiths in *Ephesus* (Ac 19:23-41)
13. Plotted against by the Jews in *Greece* (Ac 20:3)
14. Accosted and beaten by a mob in *Jerusalem* (Ac 21:27-30)
15. Arrested and detained by the Romans in *Jerusalem* (Ac 22:24)
16. Slapped and put on trial before the Sanhedrin in *Jerusalem* (Ac 23:1-8)
17. Threatened with an assassination plot in *Jerusalem* (Ac 23:12-22)
18. Imprisoned in *Caesarea* for two long years (Ac 23:33 – 27:2)
19. Shipwrecked on the island of *Malta* (Ac 27:41 – 28:1)
20. Imprisoned for two years in *Rome* (Ac 28:13-15)
21. Likely re-imprisoned in *Rome* and put on trial before Caesar (2 Tim. 4:6-8)

I’ll confess to you, that is enough to break any man, even Paul. No man could have kept their sanity, or their strength, through that amount of endless suffering. So He said to him, and now to us, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in* (your) *weakness.”* May we all learn, like Paul, to lean on God’s strength, not our own.

I might be getting older, and weaker, but God has promised me this: *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our* ***outward*** *man is perishing, yet the* ***inward*** *man is being renewed day by day.”* In that promise I feel like Hercules! - Rick