

New Roots Review

April 2023

When I am Weak, then I am Strong

by Fred Wilgenburg

What do you normally choose, to operate from a position of strength, or of weakness? We typically desire to operate from a position of strength, don't we. That seems most sensible. How about spiritually?

I have been reflecting much lately on 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. The Apostle Paul describes having some sort of "thorn" in his flesh, which made life difficult, so he asked God three times to remove it. God responded, "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" (To which Paul responded...) Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." That passage teaches that God and his power will be more present in and through us when we are in our weaknesses. **That's a big truth statement, but countercultural to most of life.**

What weaknesses? It does not mean a weakness like sinning. In Romans 6:1-2, Paul speaks about this: "...shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Rather, Paul meant his weaknesses of "insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities," which were connected to his life as a Jesus-follower and missionary.

And, why is it true that God's power will be more present in our weaknesses? Here are a few reasons: a) When we are humbly in a weaker position, we have to trust more in God. b) It is one of God's supreme ways of ministry, as Jesus Himself offered the ultimate display of power-in-weakness. c) We are probably in new territory when in weak positions, so God has more to work with through us.

What might that look like for you and me? If we are parents, it could include being vulnerable in going to classes on parenting, or apologizing to our children when we are wrong. For couples, it could include going to a counselor or to a marriage-encounter gathering and being open and honest. At a job, it could include riskily stepping out of your comfort zone and learning something new. **Remember, within your weaknesses, the power of Christ rests more on you.**

Spiritually for us Jesus-followers, being in a weaker position does not mean only doing things that are different from spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8 & 1 Corinthians 12:7-11) which we are quite naturally good at. It's important to offer up spiritual gifts which you are good at, but not only those. A year ago, I attended a Dunamis event on spiritual gifts (*read about Dunamis here: <https://events.prmi.org/dunamis-projects>*). Regarding church, throughout my life I have mostly experienced traditional Reformed style, and the spiritual gifts which have been most expressed through me have been "functional gifts," like serving, teaching, giving, leadership, and mercy. The Dunamis event did not minimize the importance of functional gifts, but it also encouraged an openness to the Holy Spirit's work, including through the expression of gifts of manifestation, like tongues, interpretation, prophecy, and healing. Well, I found myself in a weaker position, which was challenging, and great. **Remember, "for when I am weak, then I am strong."**

Paul experienced insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. Can we relate to those kinds of weaknesses when, at least within the United States, studies show that only 1.5% of unchurched people give Christians a hard time (persecution)? Most likely we cannot relate well to Paul's weaknesses. Still, just →



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Kedir's family can relate to being in a weaker position, as described in the article. Kedir (right) has been here for years. His wife and children recently joined him from Ethiopia after years of waiting. I think over time, they will agree; being willing to step into a weaker position is worth it.

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Seeds of Faith Church of Lester, IA did cultural exchanges with a few families. For example, they bought some presents and supplies for Duniyo and her children, who are originally of Somalia, and in exchange Duniyo made them traditional African foods and she talked about her life, culture, and religion.

to move from dancing around the subject of spirituality, and therefore often waiting for years for an opening, to respectfully, but also with more urgency and care, getting to the subject. The results thus far are good, both in the reception and in how I feel as Jesus's ambassador. **Makes sense; in weaknesses, the power of Christ rests more on us.** As I get more comfortable in what have been weaker positions, I suppose I will have to find new uncomfortable, impactful experiences, where I need to really trust in God rather than in my own innate abilities.

Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum is our newest ministry. Sixty-five percent of Jesus-followers communicate about God with non-believers, those whose faith is inactive, and those who are of other religions between 0--5 times/month. That is low considering how important the Gospel is to us. Our goal is to help Jesus-followers move from reluctance to eagerness, expecting that results of this unique, fun time of learning, and then sharing, will carry over to interactions with loved ones, co-workers, neighbors, and others. Whether or not you are in the Sioux Falls region, read about this Friday afternoon experience by scrolling down www.sfnnewroots.com/our-ministries and reading about *Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum*. **"For when I am weak, then I am strong!"** 😊

Continued...

as Paul answered Jesus' commission to go and make disciples, so Jesus makes the same call to each of us who are believers.

Personally, lately I have been placing myself in less natural, more uncomfortable settings of ministry, which are weaker positions for me. As the chaplain at Smithfield Foods, it's easy for me at the lunch hour to sit in a very visible spot and greet those who walk by, while intermittently looking at my smartphone. However, more effective, but uncomfortable for me, is to stand-out as I walk by each table, asking those hundreds of employees sitting at tables how they are doing.

Not surprisingly, people with whom I don't often talk have things—joys and struggles—to share.

A weaker position for me is also to more clearly talk on a spiritual level with those who don't give much of an open door in that way. At least at Smithfield, this is typically older Caucasian people. The majority of people there—new Americans—are quite conversational, including spiritually, but not the long-timer Caucasians working there. So, as the chaplain, I am seeking

What is New Roots Ministry?

It's "a springboard for new Americans & their churches." This is done through workplace chaplaincy (we provide chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & we train & place bi-lingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering new American pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by new Americans, then hear their stories, through helping people navigate the American system and achieve their goals, like education, through driver training for new Americans, and through Everyday-Ambassador Practicum.



Beatrice is a driving student. It can take months to get a license, but both students and volunteer instructors are blessed by this program, especially by the friendships developed.