



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

BEYOND OURSELVES

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES:** John 14:16-20 | 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 11:23-28; 12:5-10 | Ephesians 1:18-19; 6:10 | Philippians 4:13,19 | 2 Timothy 2:1

► SUMMARY

There are two opposing ways to respond to adversity.

Some people get bitter at unexpected hardship. They may become angry at God and draw back from a relationship with Him or even walk completely away from their faith. Other believers go through difficulty but develop a stronger relationship with God. They grow in their understanding of how to draw strength from His supernatural ability to carry them through life's challenges, surrounded by His love and enabled by His sustaining power.

► SERMON POINTS

The apostle Paul was no stranger to difficult circumstances. In 2 Corinthians 1:8, he wrote, "We do not want you to be unaware ... of our affliction ... that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life." In verse 9 he explains that the purpose of this hardship was so they would not trust in themselves, but in God.

For the apostle, this type of situation wasn't unique. Later, he wrote: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (4:8-9). In chapter 11, we learn of his imprisonments, beatings, a stoning, shipwrecks, various other dangers, lack of adequate food, water, and shelter, not to mention his concerns for the well-being of all the churches (vv. 23-28).

As Paul carried out God's work, he constantly faced conflict and adversity. We can learn much about how to handle hardship from this faithful servant.

What are circumstances beyond our limits?

We have all faced tough situations. These may include challenging relationships, a hostile work or school environment, or the experience of rejection and failure. We may be called to endure a difficult and unending situation. Our trial may be physical pain or chronic illness. Regardless of the particular hardship, God wants us to rely on His strength rather than give in to temptation to handle the problem on our own.

Power through Christ

In Christ, we can find the ability to face hardship triumphantly and without losing our peace or joy.

■ **Strength beyond human ability.** When we receive Jesus by faith as our personal Savior, He comes to live inside us through the Person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16; see also John chapters 14-16). He lives the life of Christ through us. In other words, all the strength we need to endure is already abiding within us. We just have to learn how to experience it.

Paul also wrote:

- "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10).
- "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1).
- "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

■ **Available when needed.** We can't learn about this power by simply reading about it. We actually have

to experience it by being thrown into an impossible situation. Only once we are beyond our own strength can we know that Christ's power is flowing through us.

- **Limited by the will of the Father.** This isn't something we can claim to justify anything and everything we desire. We can't use it to accomplish selfish or ungodly goals. God strengthens us only to do His will.

For example, the Father will enable you to do the occupation He has called you to do, since that's within His will for your life. Even when you are treated unfairly, He can empower you to always do the right thing rather than giving in to resentment.

- **Grows greater in our weakness.** The world values pride and self-sufficiency, but God honors humility. To the Corinthians, Paul acknowledged his complete dependence on the Lord: "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:3-4).

When we lack strength, we can experience God's power. The apostle wrote: "I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). In his weakest moments, Paul could experience the supernatural, divine energy of God, empowering him to live victoriously.

When God introduces a great trial into your life, it's an opportunity to learn of His great power and His abiding strength working within you. Don't try to avoid all difficult situations in life or you will miss experiencing His supernatural strength.

- **Available to all believers.** Sometimes we have a hard time believing the Father cares about our seemingly small situation. But He doesn't want us to fail in the

Christian life. Ephesians talks of "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (v. 1:19). The power is a gift from God, not something we earn. His presence doesn't mean we avoid hardship, of course, but that He is with us through it, sustaining us.

How do I get this power released in my life?

- **Acknowledge that you are totally helpless.** A growing child of God will value humility.
- **Throw yourself on the mercy of God.** Genuinely rely on Him to accomplish good works through you, giving you strength to do the right thing in impossible situations.
- **Believe that He will do what He said.** "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

He wants to bring us to the point that we rely completely on him. As Paul said, "we would not trust in ourselves, but in God" (2 Cor. 1:9). This doesn't mean no tears, no discouragement, or no suffering, but that through all those things, we are supported by the love of God.

► RESPONSE

- Think about a difficult situation in which you struggled to turn to God for strength, and instead grew bitter, cynical, or gave up. Ask the Lord to redeem that situation by helping you turn to Him with your painful memories and disappointments to receive His healing.
- When have you been able to see God's power working through your weakness? How could you apply the lessons of leaning on Him to your current adversity?
- In what ways do you need to reset your thinking to rely more on God's strength in trials instead of believing you have to manage on your own? Which Bible verse or verses from the sermon inspire you? Consider writing them down to remind you to lean on the Lord.

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