

Torrey 2001 Weakest Link

By John Hutchinson

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You need to do some creative thinking, but we are in our 30th year to celebrate that next summer and I really believe that God gave to Leah a calling, and that is to transform me from the nerd that I once was to the person you see standing here today.

I was waiting for some wisecracks that I think there were a few. But Lee and I have had a real adventure together through the years, and I've shared with some of you in our seminar groups yesterday and today that one of those adventures was being a parent of two beautiful daughters who are now graduates of Biola and out there earning an income on their own. That's exciting. But both of our girls have been just a delight and a joy in our lives, we now have a son in law, Casey, who is also a biology graduate.

So we're a Biola family. And I must admit it, and I'm going to tell you, you know, as teenagers and young adults, you often think that your parents don't know very much. Am I right about this? Well, guess what? When you first have your kids, you don't know anything at all. It was an amazing experience to have our daughters come along within 16 months of one another and not to have really any idea of what this parenting adventure was all about.

And I distinctly remember one of the resource books being a professor, you tend to get into books. I got a hold of Bruce Naramore's book, which is many years old now. Bruce is, of course, from our Rosemead School of Psychology here, and he wrote a book called Help I'm a Parent and is an excellent book, an excellent book. And I went back to it many times. But one of the memorable things about that book is it talked about the moments in the life of your child as he or she grows up.

And there are aren't a lot of them, but there are a few what Bruce Naramore called teachable moments. Ali and I learned also that there are a lot of very unteachable moments and one of those came to mind today as I was thinking about what I was going to share tonight, our daughter Kara, who graduated just a couple of years ago, my daughter Kara had I think she was age five and had just learned to to write her letters and she had learned to spell a few words.

And our other daughter, Kristen, was just a little bit ahead of her, but one day I was sitting on the couch, we were living in Texas at the time, sitting on the couch, and Leah is an interior decorator and had done some wallpapering on the other side of the wall. And I spotted something and I looked over there and there amidst the print on the wallpaper was something that didn't look right. So I went over and here were the words printed very neatly.

Christie wrote this.

Now, sometimes you think your parents are pretty dumb, but it didn't take much to figure that out and Lee and I were laughing so hard that we we just blew it off as not a teachable moment at all. It was a it was a great, great experience for us as a family. But you know something, God, our heavenly father also knows that you and I have teachable moments, moments in life when we're probably going to learn more than we ever will in other situations.

And tonight, as we look into God's word, we're going to be looking at some things that reinforce really what Christ taught in the gospels, and especially to look at some words of Paul out of the book of Second Corinthians. So I'm going to ask you to turn there if you have your Bible available, Second Corinthians. And as we take a look at Chapter 12, which is where we're going to look tonight. Let's come before the Lord and just invite his Holy Spirit to enlighten our eyes.

Our father in heaven, we are grateful for the opportunities during Torrey week to reflect a little more deeply on our spiritual walk with you. And while we sometimes use the Bible as a textbook. In our classes and other settings lauded, it's also our our guide to life, and I pray tonight as we look more deeply into the words of the Apostle Paul, that we may understand a little bit more of some of these teachable moments that you bring to us or thank you that your Holy Spirit is really our teacher here tonight.

I'm just serving as an intermediary to to talk about the scripture. But it's your Holy Spirit who impresses that scripture, that truth on our hearts. And we believe that and trust that we will go out of here thinking about some things, perhaps more committed to some things than we were when we came in. So we ask Lord that your spirit might guide us in Jesus name. We pray. Amen. Look with me, if you would, add one verse at the end of Second Corinthians 11.

Or as Alastair would put it in his dialect, two Corinthians 11, two Corinthians 11, verse 30. Paul makes it quite an interesting statement. He says, If I must boast, I will boast of the things that

show my weakness. And then if I could have you skip over to Chapter 12. And we're going to look at verses nine and 10. Christ said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, I will to all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that price power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ sake, I delight in weaknesses and insults and hardships and persecutions and difficulties. For when I am weak. Then I am strong. This passage is gotten under my skin and into my soul. And thinking about what Paul is really talking about here and his relationship with Christ. When I am weak. Then I am strong, so I'm going to boast about something, I'm going to boast about the things that show my weaknesses.

I chose a title tonight. You may or may not have even seen that title printed in the title I chose is The Weakest Link. Now, I chose that with a little bit of fear and trepidation because I'm not sure I really want to be identified with that television program. Some of you have watched it. Some of you perhaps not. It's a program that has become popular.

All it is a program in which a caustic game show hostess delights in humiliating the people who are taking part and especially the losers.

As you exit the stage, after you've been voted off by the other contestants. You are humiliated. I want to share something with you. I want you to listen very carefully, because this is what Paul is talking about tonight in this passage. In life, God doesn't humiliate the losers. You and I look at our lives and we see things which we perceive to be the weakest link in our relationship with God. And yet, in fact, they may be our strongest attachment to God that we have.

What is more? We look at disasters or other things around us and we say, God can't be in work at work in that. And yet it may actually be some of the most teachable moments that we have in our relationship with God. This is a passage that bears a little bit of development and the verses are short, but let me say a few things, if I could, about chapters 10 and 11 as we come up to this point in Chapter 12.

The Corinthian church was not a pretty place. Some of you know that if you know anything about the book of First Corinthians, it's a church known for all kinds of problems, not the least of which.

Is a problem of divisiveness, people couldn't get along with one another. Aren't you glad we don't have that problem today? There were divisions within the church, we go a little further into First Corinthians, we discover it was a church that had sexual immorality of a kind. Paul says that you don't even hear this much, much about among the non Christians outside of the church. We go on a little further in the book and we find out that Christians were suing other Christians and going to court.

And then we discover that they had some different views and even warped views of spiritual gifts. And and there was all kinds of divisiveness and a lack of love in the community, in the church because of their views of spiritual gifts. And that's just in First Corinthians, we come over into Second Corinthians, and by the way, these these books are probably, as far as we can tell, at least the second and the fourth letters of Paul's writings to this church.

Likely the first and the third letter to the Corinthians has not been maintained by the early church. For whatever reason, it didn't show evidence, perhaps of the inspiration to go on and be used by later churches in later situations. So the Second Corinthians literally is at least the fourth letter that Paul has written to this group of people. And he writes to them about a problem, and the problem basically is that some false teachers have come in among them.

These teachers are similar to Paul and background, but they're going around boasting that they have much more impressive credentials than Paul. In fact, one of their claims is, you know, this Paul is Paul is brave when he writes his letters to you, but when he shows up in person, he's a wimp. He doesn't have any backbone at all. He's really not a leader. And the charges that have been brought against Paul are are tough ones.

And so in this Chapter 11, especially as he leads up to these statements we're looking at tonight. Paul is faced with this issue, the false teachers are boasting about who they are. Should I boast about myself? And of course, he's very hesitant to do that because he sees himself as a servant of Christ. And yet, let me pick this up in the middle of verse. Twenty one. Eleven. Twenty one. He begins thinking about this a little and says this.

What anyone else dares to boast about. I must be speaking as a fool here. I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? Well, so am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? Well, so am I. Are they servants of Christ? And then he pauses, he pauses, first of all, and you can see in your verse, twenty three, you can't believe he's talking like this.

He says, I must be out of my mind for talking like this, bragging about my credentials. Are they servants of Christ? Well, I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently than been flogged, more severely, been exposed to death again and again five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one, three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night in a day in the open sea.

I've been constantly on the move. I've been in danger from rivers and danger from bandits and danger for my own countrymen, in danger from gentile's in danger in the city and danger in the country. In danger at sea. In danger from false brothers. I've labored and toiled. I've known hunger and thirst. I've often gone without food. I've been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily pressure. My concern for all of the churches who is weak and I do not feel their weakness, who is led into sin and I do not inwardly burn.

I think the idea is inwardly empathize with them. And then Paul, almost as though a revelation is coming over him. Realizes something that he's been saying. How do you show that you're a greater servant of Christ? He's listed the life of a loser. Is listed a long list of failures, at least the way many people would view life is listed things that nobody in their right mind would brag about. But Paul brags about them. Because he knows it's been in those experiences.

That Christ has been at work the most. And that's why he says in verse 30. If I must boast. I'm going to boast about my weakness. I'm going to boast about the things that show my weakness. And then he goes on the first six verses of Chapter 12 to describe a vision that he once had, he speaks in the third person, but we can easily see that this is Paul. And he evidently was taken up experientially into heaven.

And he was able to see some things that Paul says, I can't even write in human words, and this is quite an amazing claim because you remember that Peter James and John went up on the Mount of Transfiguration and saw a most amazing sight of Jesus.

But they were able to come back, weren't they, and to write it down in human words and describe what they saw.

Or we think of the apostle John who wrote the Book of Revelation, and he saw some visions of Christ, but he was able to write them down. Paul said, I can't even write them down. They're

so amazing. There's so beyond human experience. And then he makes a most interesting confession, look at chapter 12, verse seven. Because of this vision, Paul says, to keep me from becoming conceited. Because of these surpassing great revelations there was given to me a thorn in my flesh.

A messenger of Satan to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me, but he said, my grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness. As many of you know, I've studied this passage, we don't really know what this thorn in the flesh is. I think there's a pretty good clue that it is described as in the flesh, and so it is some kind of a physical ailment, but beyond that, we really don't know.

Probably one of the best theories is that it may have involved his eyesight later on and other writings of Paul, we see an indication that he had a tough time seeing and that would have been very difficult as he traveled and as he was writing the letters to the churches. Others say no. There's some indication in a few of his letters that he may have had a debilitating disease that came back periodically. And we do know that in the first century there was a form of malaria that did not necessarily take your life, but it kept coming back and wearing you down and didn't allow you to go on with life normally.

Perhaps that's Paul's thorn in the flesh. But we really don't know what it is, and I think it's better that we don't know. Because Paul lays down for us here a deeper understanding of how God used this, he prayed earnestly to the Lord, Lord, take this away from me so that I might better serve you. And God didn't answer his prayer, but rather answered his prayer in a different way. God said to me, my grace is sufficient for you.

For my power is made perfect in weakness. And Paul goes on to say, therefore, I'm going to boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ power may rest on me, and that is why, for Christ sake, I delight in weaknesses and insults and hardships.

In persecution. You know, as we reflect a bit and some of us during this week have reflected on our Christian experience. One of the most difficult parts of that is to understand how suffering or trials fit into the Christian life. I totally agree with Alastair earlier in the week, yesterday. When he said a critical doctrine of scripture that Christians need to perhaps understand more than any other if they're going to reach their world for Christ. Is the theology of suffering.

Why is it that a good God allows us to go through difficult times? Now, I'm not going to go entirely through that issue. Some of you were with me in a seminar yesterday, by the way, for those of you who didn't get some of the handouts, I do have some extras up here on this front row. You're welcome to pick it up, even if you weren't in the seminar. A lot of scriptures that relate to this subject.

But as Paul reflects on his, he thinks about it. So do we. When are the times? When you feel weak. And when you feel weak, I'm talking about spiritually and otherwise. Doesn't it seem like those are moments when God is furthest away from you, maybe even abandon you? Those may be our most teachable moments. Those may be the times when God is at work the most. A defining time in our spiritual lives. And you know something, I don't know exactly what I mean in saying this.

But I sense that I need to say it. I want to take advantage of those moments. I don't want to let them get away from me often I pray, Lord, get me to the end of this. This hurts. I'm not having fun right now. But God. May be more interested in the time between now and when I get to the end of it, what is going on in my life? Is there growth happening? Have I drawn closer to him?

And might be combat becoming better equipped to comfort others who I will later encounter going through the same kind of trial, there's a whole list of reasons in scripture why God takes us. Through the trials of life. Moments when we feel weak, one of those certainly is going through a trial, but another one, as Paul shares here, is when God doesn't seem to answer prayer. Let me take you if you keep your place here in Second Corinthians, go go back with me to Psalm 13.

Some 13 is a great song. About a God who seems to have forgotten. It's written by David. And we can surmise, even though it's not stated at the beginning of the song, that this song may actually be written by David during the years that Saul is chasing David around the wilderness, David has been named king of Israel. And yet because Saul is still alive, he is not able to step into his role. And if we do the math, we come up with 13 years of this.

Thirteen years after Samuel named him King, before he's going to become king. How long, oh, lord. Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long? Must I wrestle with my thoughts? And every day of sorrow in my heart. How long will my enemy

triumph over me? How long, Lord, before you're going to answer? My prayer. Have you ever prayed? And it just didn't happen.

And it went on and on and on. Those are some of the weakest moments in our lives. Those are some of the times when God seems far away from. Just like a trial as Paul prayed that God would remove this from him. So the prayer wasn't answered. Well, it was answered it was answered in a different way that he was praying. And the answer was this call, my grace, is even better for you. Then getting you out of this trial, my grace, is going to show.

You knew things about me that you've never known before, new experiences, a new faith. Things which cannot happen. I don't want you to misunderstand, folks, I'm not a masochist. I don't enjoy hurting any more than you do. I find that emotionally when we heard we don't feel like being joyful, and yet the reason in scripture that the command to rejoice is there. It's because some good things are happening. Some good things are happening in our lives.

What's another time of weakness? I don't know about you, but when I'm in the midst. Of temptation. I'm struggling, I feel weak. Let me take you back to the first episode of Corinthian's, we'll go to Second Corinthians in a moment, but First Corinthians, go back with me, if you would, to chapter. Ten, first Corinthians 10. First Corinthians 10 12 says. So you think that you're standing firm? Be careful. That you don't fall.

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful. I listen to this, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will provide a way of escape, a way out. So that you can stand up under it. Do you believe that? That when you and I are in that moment of temptation. Could be a number of things, our obviously our humanity, our human experience provides all kinds of things that cross our paths could be sexual temptation.

Could be temptation about issues of integrity and honesty. It could be so many kinds of things, but when you and I are in that moment when the situation is there.

It's pressure is building up, it's like we feel we. Lord, is there any way out of this and we maybe don't even take the time to utter that prayer, but we sense that there's no way out. That's one of the greatest lies that Satan would want us to believe that at that moment there's no way out for.

You see, if I understand what this is talking about, that weakest moment. Maybe the opportunity for God to show his greatest strength.

And I'll be able to watch him do that in and through my life. Some of us stopped short of that, we give in to the temptation we never get to see God work. There's an opportunity there. And you know, I don't want to miss I don't want to miss. That opportunity, it will never be there again for me. To watch God work to to let him show me that his strength is sufficient for me in that situation, there's one other example that I want to share.

These are all examples of times when we feel weak, we feel weak, when the trials of life come along or when God doesn't answer prayer, or in this case, when we go through temptation. Over in 1 Corinthians 12, we also feel weak when we are called upon to do a ministry. We're put in a place to serve the Lord in some way, and I don't have a clue, Lord, how I'm going to do this. Have you ever done that?

If you ever volunteered for something and kind of on the spur of the moment or maybe even you thought about it and there's a lot of emotion behind it and you volunteered to do it. And then when the time comes, you say, Lord, why did I do that? How did I get myself into that? And, you know, it's at that moment when we feel we. Well, first Corinthians 12, the entire chapter reminds us. Our God equips us with spiritual gifts, various gifts to serve him in different ways, but there's one verse I want to look at especially, and that is over in verse twenty two.

1 Corinthians, 12 to 22. He's talking about the different gifts. The different members of the body of Christ and Paul says, on the contrary. Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the ones that are indispensable. And the parts that we think are less honorable, we ought to treat with special honor. You know, if you're like me. You tend to look at others around you who have a similar background, maybe a similar experience in life, then you begin comparing, for example, if you're a musician.

Is a natural tendency to compare yourself with other musicians that do things similar to you. In other kinds of experiences, we we look at one another, we say, wow, you know? I don't have anything to offer compared to her. I mean, if I have to step up here after an Alistair Begg. What can I possibly say without a Scottish accent? That is going to even communicate. You know, it's in those moments. If God has a special plan, none of us are the same, none of us is the same.

We are people who are diverse in our gifts and our talents. And God doesn't want us to be like that other person. He brought you into his kingdom because he wants you to be you. And some of us in those experiences of serving him, get ourselves into situations where we are gifted, but we don't know how to go about it. We feel we. What an awesome time. To watch God work. To step into the gap. I may have shared this on another occasion, I know I have with my classes, but.

It's really common for you to see a speaker standing up here. And think this is just a really natural thing for me to do. Isn't a natural thing for me to do at all. I love my classes, I'm much more at home, in the classroom, but all of my life, I spoke earlier of being a bit of a nerd, but all of my life. I've been a bit of an introvert. The number one fear I read, at least, is standing up in front of a huge group of people.

Well, I had that fear even before I read it. It's true. And yet, for one reason or another, and I can't explain this, God called me. And gifted me. Into a situation where I'm periodically called upon to do this. You know what's exciting about that? I feel very weak right now, I feel probably like you would feel. If you were here, I feel very weak. But I'm compelled to be here. And compelled to be here, because I know that the things that we're looking at and the truth of the word of God are what God wants to say to us tonight.

And at that moment, is God at work? It's not me, it's not Alastair, it's not any of us as speakers. It's God at work. We're just servants of the Lord. Servant servants of Christ just using the. The paltry things that is given to us. To try to serve him in the kingdom. And those are moments of weakness, you're going to find yourself. It may not be standing up in front of a group of people, but you're going to find yourself in ministries and in situations and you will not know where the strength is going to come from.

You feel weak. Is that a time of disaster? No. That weakest link may be God's strongest moment. The opportunity for God to show who he is and his power and his strength. I'm so grateful for the encouragement that Paul gives to us here as we go back to 2 Corinthians 12. He says again in verses 9 and 10. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, along with Paul, we will boast all the more gladly about our weaknesses.

That crazy power may rest on us. And that is why, for Christ sake, we can even delight in weaknesses and insults and hardships, even persecutions and difficulties. For when I am weak. Then. I am strong. Don't miss. The teachable moments that God has for you. Don't automatically

push them aside. Because you don't have that rush or that feeling. Of the power of God there. That moment of human weakness, whether it be temptation or feelings of inadequacy, a time of trial, whatever it is, that moment of weakness.

Is a time when God wants to show you what he can do in your life. And as we experience those through our lives, we grow and we grow and we grow. And God makes us into the Christians, he wants us to be. Teachable moments is what it's all about. Don't miss them. Don't overlook them. Commit to the Lord as he brings you into them. To put on a different sort of spectacles, to look at life in a different way, God.

It doesn't feel like this is you at work. But I'm going to trust. That your strength, your power is going to be made perfect. And weakness in my life. The power of the Holy Spirit. Goes to work. As we experience our moments of weakness, let's pray together. Dear Lord God, and this evening, our. I want to thank you for the experiences we've had here tonight. The beautiful celebration and meditation that came through the music.

Thank you for these gifted musicians. Who have poured their heart out to lead us. To celebrate the faith. That we have in Christ and to meditate on what it means. Thank you for the apostle Paul Lord. How discouraged he must have been at times. Humanly speaking. And yet you allowed him to go through this revelation, not the one in heaven, but the one on earth. Where he began to see. That it was in those moments of weakness that you were doing your greatest work.

Lord is my brothers and sisters and I. Stand and sit here tonight, we want to commit our lives to you in a greater way. And as we go through those times of weakness, would you bring to mind these words? Would you help us to see life in a new way? Would you give us a zeal and a desire to find those teachable moments? In which we grow the most. It's not natural, Lord, it's supernatural. But we commit ourselves to you and commit ourselves to follow you in Jesus name, we pray.

Amen.