
PAUL THE APOSTLE: Greatly Used – Greatly Stressed

THE GLORY:

Paul: Spirituality Personified

Acts 7:59 – 8:3/ Acts 9:1-31/ Acts 13:9
Romans 8:28/ Philippians 4:13/ Galatians 5:22-23

BEYOND THE GLORY:

Bad Days and Dog Days

1 Corinthians 16:8-9/ Romans 7:15-25/ 2 Corinthians 7:5-7/ 2 Corinthians 12:7-10/ Acts 16:6-10

His open doors always came with many adversaries.

He struggled with temptation – and didn't always win.

He was stressed out and depressed – until good news came.

He struggled with pride – and paid a painful price to beat it.

He had a hard time figuring out what God wanted him to do.

The churches he planted were all messed up.

TABLE TALK:

Beyond the Clichés

The Truth About A Great Walk With God

Romans 8:35-39/ Hebrews 10:35-37/ 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

- ❶ Some days it's tough.
- ❷ When it's tough, suck it up.
- ❸ When you struggle – you don't have to fake it.
- ❹ Remember, you'll get through it.

Food for Thought

For the week of December 9, 2007

(Questions and Scriptures for further study)

1. Two truths that helped Paul deal with all the difficulties he faced were

1) Christ's love for him; and 2) God's commitment to use what Paul was going through to develop his character. How do the following verses show Paul's firm understanding of these two truths?

Romans 5:3-5

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; [4] perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. [NIV]

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. [29] For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. [NIV]

Ephesians 3:16-19

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18] may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19] and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. [NIV]

In what ways have these two truths been helpful to you in handling difficult times in your life?

2. David, like Paul, was a leader who faced times of great stress. One high stress incident in his life can be found in 1 Samuel 30:1-20. How did David respond to this very challenging episode in his life?

1 Samuel 30:1-20

David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, [2] and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

[3] When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. [4] So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. [5] David's two wives had been captured--Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

[6] David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

[7] Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, [8] and David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?"

"Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."

[9] David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some stayed behind, [10] for two hundred men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. But David and four hundred men continued the pursuit.

[11] They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat-- [12] part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights.

[13] David asked him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?"

He said, "I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. [14] We raided the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag."

[15] David asked him, "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?"

He answered, "Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them."

[16] He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. [17] David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. [18] David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. [19] Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back. [20] He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, "This is David's plunder." [NIV]

What do the following passages (written by David) teach us about finding strength in the Lord?

Psalm 18:1-6

For the director of music. Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:

I love you, O Lord, my strength.

[2] The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;

my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.

He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

[3] I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,

and I am saved from my enemies.

[4] The cords of death entangled me;

the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

[5] The cords of the grave coiled around me;

the snares of death confronted me.

[6] In my distress I called to the Lord;

I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears. [NIV]

Psalms 27:1-14

Of David.

The Lord is my light and my salvation--
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life--
of whom shall I be afraid?

[2] When evil men advance against me
to devour my flesh,
when my enemies and my foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.

[3] Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then will I be confident.

[4] One thing I ask of the Lord,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.

[5] For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle
and set me high upon a rock.

[6] Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

[7] Hear my voice when I call, O Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.

[8] My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.

[9] Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me,
O God my Savior.

[10] Though my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will receive me.

[11] Teach me your way, O Lord;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.

[12] Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
breathing out violence.

[13] I am still confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

[14] Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord. [NIV]

Psalm 28:1

Of David.

To you I call, O Lord my Rock;
do not turn a deaf ear to me.
For if you remain silent,
I will be like those who have gone down to the pit. [NIV]

Psalm 28:7-8

The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.
My heart leaps for joy
and I will give thanks to him in song.
[8] The Lord is the strength of his people,
a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. [NIV]

3. This weekend Larry encouraged us to hang in there when life gets difficult. What attitudes or actions do you find in the following passages that help us to persevere in difficult times?

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. [NIV]

James 1:12

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. [NIV]

James 5:10-11

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. [11] As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. [NIV]

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. [2] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. [NIV]

4. Psalm 77 is a good example of someone who was honest in the midst of a tough situation and yet maintained a focus on God. Use this Psalm as a guide as you write out your own “psalm” about a tough situation you’re currently facing. Honestly express your thoughts and emotions to God. Also include a list of the things He has done for you which will help you maintain your focus on Him.

Psalm 77:1-20

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A psalm.

I cried out to God for help;

I cried out to God to hear me.

[2] When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands
and my soul refused to be comforted.

[3] I remembered you, O God, and I groaned;
I mused, and my spirit grew faint.

Selah

[4] You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.

[5] I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;

[6] I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

[7] "Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?

[8] Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?

[9] Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

Selah

[10] Then I thought, "To this I will appeal:
the years of the right hand of the Most High."

[11] I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

[12] I will meditate on all your works
and consider all your mighty deeds.

[13] Your ways, O God, are holy.
What god is so great as our God?

[14] You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.

[15] With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

Selah

[16] The waters saw you, O God,
the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.

[17] The clouds poured down water,
the skies resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.

[18] Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,
your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.

[19] Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.

[20] You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron. [NIV]