

How to Come Up from the Wilderness Leaning on the Beloved

INTRODUCTION

Song of Solomon 8:5. “Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved” (Song 8:5)? I always think of this as the Holy Spirit speaking here. He says, “I awakened you under the apple tree”—back in Song of Solomon 2:3-4. The Lord is speaking, because He is the One who awakened the bride underneath the apple tree. “There your mother brought you forth; there she who bore you brought you forth” (ibid).

A LOVE AS DEMANDING AND AS COMPREHENSIVE AS THE GRAVE

Now Jesus is speaking in verse 6. “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” (Song 8:6). It’s a seal of fire. “For love is as strong as death” (ibid). Divine jealousy is as demanding, as comprehensive, and as unrelenting as the grave. In other words, nothing can escape the grasp of God’s jealousy. No sin is too great. It’s as demanding and as comprehensive as the grave.

The flame of the seal on the heart is a flame of fire: “Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame” (Song 8:6b)—or another translation says, “The very flame of God.” He goes on to say, “Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it” (v. 7). Many waters of disappointment and temptation cannot quench this love that has been imparted in the heart; nor can the floods of persecution drown out the love in the heart of the Bride.

THE POWER TO LOVE IS THE REWARD ITSELF

“If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised” (Song 8:7b). If a man would give for love all his inheritance, he would consider it as rubbish. He wouldn’t consider it as anything that was exceptionally noble. He would utterly despise the idea of being recognized for it, because the power to love is the reward itself.

“WHO IS THIS COMING UP FROM THE WILDERNESS?”

In the fifth verse of this chapter, I want to look at the first two phrases. “Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” The reason this is so significant is, again, because verses 6 and 7 are a foundational word spoken in July of 1988 over this whole ministry. We know we have a particular relationship with the Lord, a particular ministry promise related to Song of Solomon 8:6, which is the first commandment. It’s the whole beauty realm in the bridal paradigm. I’ll put on my MCF pastor’s hat right now, because I had been talking to you as the IHOP-KC director, but now I’m donning the MCF pastor’s hat. The reason this is so important is because on Wednesday our senior leadership team, I and several others, are going through a time of prayer and fasting. God has called us to that; some of you know about and will be participating in it. We feel it’s important as we’re changing seasons to acknowledge before the body different blind spots in our leadership, in our character, and in our leadership style that have hindered the body. It’s something that we really feel like we need to do. I feel very strongly about this. Before the season changes we need a time of prayer and fasting for the body to do whatever they do. I believe that some of us, myself primarily and a few others, need to say some things before the body to get us in a divine order—in the Lord’s order.

The Lord has revealed to me some blind spots in my own leadership style, in my character, and in the way I have led; I have energy to speak on those things and ask the body for forgiveness. The verse that the Lord has really encouraged me with is Song of Solomon 8:5. What I want to do tonight is to use my example in advance,

because this isn't going to happen until Wednesday. I want you not to be thinking of me; I want you to be thinking of you. I want to use what I'm going to be doing as a bridge to help some of you to do the same thing in your own lives.

THE REALM OF VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY WEAKNESS

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” I'll unfold this as we go, and then on Wednesday night I'll describe it a lot more specifically. There are five key words in these first two phrases. The number one word is *wilderness*. The wilderness, as I'm going to apply it tonight and as I'm applying it in my own life right now, is a place of weakness. There are several different applications of the meaning of the word *wilderness* here. They're all meaningful to us as we study the Song of Solomon. Specifically it's talking about the place in our own lives of weakness. The wilderness is the place of weakness.

There are two types of weakness that we're looking at tonight. There's voluntary weakness and there's involuntary weakness. It's the voluntary weakness, the bearing or the embracing of weakness, that's critical for us to lean upon our Beloved in the way that the Lord has ordained.

THE SEAL OF LOVE IS NURTURED IN THE WILDERNESS

A general definition of *wilderness* here is the overall fallen world. It's the Bride ascending in the resurrection and coming up out of this fallen, evil, dark world. She has ascended from the wilderness. But also, the wilderness is not only a place of weakness; related to that, it is a place where the seal of God grows most effectively on our hearts. Jesus invites us in verse 6; He says, “Let Me be the seal upon your heart.” The seal is most nurtured in the wilderness. The seal of verse 6 is nurtured in the wilderness of verse 5. The seal of verse 6 grows best in the wilderness posture before the Lord in verse 5. The reward of the wilderness, verse 5, is the seal of verse 6. This is why I feel a small amount energy in my own life about embracing this and really insisting on it. No one asked me to do it; no one asked any of us to do it. We insist on it. We feel like it's right before the Lord.

The reward of verse 6 is found most effectively in the wilderness of verse 5. If you can believe that one sentence and you act on it, then it will change your life dynamically. If you believe the anointing to love, to receive, and to have an impartation of love and receive the awareness that God's love as described in verse 6 flows from the wilderness of verse 5; if that connects in your mind and it changes your actions, then it will dynamically change the way you live. And that's what is encouraging me right now.

The wilderness is the place of weakness in the most specific way. In a moment we'll examine voluntary and involuntary weakness. It's the place in the general sense of ascending out of this fallen, evil world, but prophetically it's the place where the seal grows in our lives. That's the wilderness.

THE MOST POWERFUL POSSESSION OF ANYONE ON EARTH

The second phrase that we're going to look at is “coming up.” There's victory. The Bride is ascending. The “coming up from” speaks of victory. There's a triumph that's going on here. The victory is defined mostly as inward in this age. There's an outward victory in this age: there's real physical deliverance; there's real deliverance, very powerful deliverance, in our circumstances. The profound victory that we come up with from the wilderness is the ability to love in verse 6. Verse 6 defines the victory as inward more than outward. It's victory in the heart. It's having a heart of burning desire. When your heart grows in burning desire for God, you

have the most powerful possession of any human being on the earth. I tell you, the victory in the heart of verse 6 flows out of verse 5.

The third word, and the operative word tonight, is *leaning*. We'll look at that in a moment. Right now if you're taking notes, just write, "The meekness of Moses. It's referencing the meekness of Moses. That's the key idea tonight: what is leaning and how do you lean? It's the leaning that the wilderness is to produce.

LOVE IS THE STRENGTH OF THE WHOLE PROCESS

The fourth word is the word *beloved*. Love is the strength of the whole process. When we call Him "Beloved," that implies He's a lover. When we call Him "Beloved," it implies that we love Him. It not only implies that He's a loving God toward us, but it implies that we love Him. Love is the strength of the whole process.

THE LOVE OF GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF OUR LIVES

Here's the problem. When you're in a wilderness time—and we all are in the general sense of being pre-resurrection; we're in the wilderness of this fallen world—when we're in the wilderness of weakness, when we're leaning upon the Beloved and when love is in the equation, the wilderness is transformed. It's the place where the seal comes to the heart. If we don't have the paradigm of the Beloved, the beautiful God who loves us, the wilderness is a very, very difficult place to be. That's one of the great problems today in the Church. The Church is in the time of struggle. They're in the place of weakness, but they're leaning on something other than a God who is their Beloved. They have a different paradigm of God, and being in the wilderness without the paradigm of the Beloved is a very hard place to be. That's where many people in the Body of Christ are today.

Beloved speaks of our source. The love of God is the strength of our lives. It's our motivation. We're in the wilderness leaning because we're lovers. We're leaning. We want the wilderness because we want to grow in love.

The fifth phrase here in verse five is, "Who is this?" There's a uniqueness and a mystery. The spirit of this is what Paul the apostle said in 1 Corinthians 4:9: "We are spectacles both to angels and to men" (1 Cor. 4:9, paraphrased). The angels looked at Paul the apostle and said, "What is the deal with this man?" He wouldn't quit. He was a spectacle to angels. The angels were so used to God's servants being half-hearted that when Paul the apostle came along he was a spectacle to angels. They looked at him and then looked at each other and said, "Well, what do you know, there is one."

"Who is this?" There's a certain intrigue. There's a drama in the question. It's speaking of and emphasizing the rareness and the uniqueness of this group of people across the earth who embrace the wilderness with the paradigm of a God who is their beloved and who comes out in victory leaning.

VICTORY IN LOVE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WEAKNESS OF LIFE

There are so many ideas all wrapped up in this one verse here that all relate to verse 6. It's victory in love in the middle of the weakness of life. It's victory in love in the heart. It's the heart in victory while the body is in weakness. That's what we need. It's the heart in victory while the body is in weakness, or even when the heart is in weakness. The invitation of verses 5, 6, and 7 is to encounter God in weakness—actually to engage God in the season of the wilderness. You're going to see in a moment that the wilderness is both voluntary and involuntary. It's voluntary and involuntary.

What a lot of people do is to make an unspoken contract with God. They say, “God, I’m going to be really red hot for You once I get out of the wilderness. I’m so distracted by the wilderness. I already have it planned out. I’m going to be more committed than ever when You deliver me.” A lot of people think that way. They’re going to be zealous after strength comes in the wilderness. What the Lord wants us to do is to engage Him in the wilderness because we have a paradigm of God as our Beloved.

MEEKNESS ISN’T WEAKNESS

Tonight’s focus is the leaning heart. It’s the leaning heart in the wilderness. I referenced the meekness of Moses. Instead of “leaning on her beloved,” say, “a meek heart towards her beloved.” It’s meekness that we’re talking about. Moses is one of the best examples of meekness in the whole Bible.

What is meekness? Meekness isn’t a lack of strength. You’ve heard it said meekness isn’t weakness. Meekness isn’t the absence of strength. Sometimes you’ll see a really beaten down person, so comatose and so mellow that they’re stuck in monotone: “Hi, I don’t care what you tell me, I’ll do it.”

“Boy, he’s really meek.”

No, he’s almost dead. That isn’t meekness; that’s brokenness. Passivity in a monotone posture of life isn’t meekness. They’re just compliant and easily pushed around with their shoulders down. That isn’t meekness; that’s brokenness in a negative sense.

MEEKNESS IS STRENGTH UNDER RESTRAINT

Meekness isn’t the lack of strength. She isn’t lacking any strength leaning on her beloved, but she is in meekness leaning on her beloved. Actually, meekness is strength under restraint. That’s what meekness is: it’s strength under control. It’s strength under restraint or control.

The best natural illustration is an illustration that I’ve heard for many years, and preached on many times. Undoubtedly you old people over forty have also heard it preached many times over the years. It’s the illustration of a horse. When you first get a horse, it’s just raw strength. When the strength of the horse is brought under the bridle, the horse is said to be meek. It isn’t because the horse has lost its strength; it’s because the strength is under the restraint of the bit and the bridle. The name they use for the horse is *meek* now. The strength of the horse is now fully directed and under control. Meekness is awesome strength under restraint.

Strength is a relative word. In other words, strength only makes sense, and you can only use the word *strength* and make sense of it when comparing it to inferior strength. Something is only strong compared to something else, and all the other things are weak. That’s what makes strength strong. It’s superior to the other things around it. The very definition of strength implies superiority. It implies uniqueness. If all the people in the world, six billion people, doubled their strength, then it would all be average again and it wouldn’t be strength. It’s a relative word. It’s a comparative word. The word *strength* by its very definition implies superiority, and therein lies the peril of strength.

All strength by definition has an element of superiority, genuine superiority to it. That’s why it’s called strength. The superiority and uniqueness is its peril, and therein lies its vulnerable part in our hearts. When fallen human beings have a superior dimension in their lives, *strength*, it causes tremendous problems in the spirit in our lives. The Lord has a solution for it.

MOSES WAS THE HUMBLEST MAN ON THE EARTH IN HIS GENERATION

Moses is the example I'm going to use. Turn to Numbers 12. It's a really unusual passage. Numbers is the fourth book in the Old Testament, starting from the very beginning. This is interesting: look at Numbers 12:3. "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all the men who were on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Moses was the humblest man on the earth in his generation. Let's read that again. "Now Moses was very humble, more than all the men on the earth." The difficulty with verse 3 is that Moses wrote that. He did. It's true. He was the humblest, but he wrote that.

It reminds me of John the Baptist. John the Baptist says, "Jesus is mightier even than I." He said, "He is mightier than I" (Mt. 3:11, paraphrased). The best example of might that John the Baptist could come up with was himself. He said, "He is mightier than I. However, I'm not fit to untie even His sandal" (ibid). John the Baptist had no false humility; he knew who he was. The same thing is going on here.

JESUS WAS TOTAL POWER UNDER TOTAL RESTRAINT

Before we develop this, it's interesting that the only characteristic Jesus ever used of Himself with His own lips was that He called Himself meek. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus never said, "I'm loving." He's loving, but He never said it with His own lips. Jesus never said, "I'm great," or, "I'm good." He never, ever described Himself with a single character trait, with one exception. It was the word *meekness*. That's significant. The Son of God comes to the earth in the fullness of power, and He lays it down. The most powerful reality He can say about Himself is, "I'm total power under total restraint. I'm meek. I did Genesis 1, and now I'm walking in flesh and blood. I'm under the total restraint, and I'm the transcendent God. Here I am. I'm meekness *par excellence*, strength under total restraint."

Of course, not the greatest, but one of the great miracles of Jesus' life is what He didn't do, and not what He did do. The miracle isn't that He said, "Lazarus, come forth" (Jn. 11:43). The miracle is that every grave didn't empty when He spoke the words, "Come forth." He had to say *Lazarus*. He did. He said, "Lazarus." If He had said, "Come forth," all the graves would have opened, because He's going to say that one day. Every grave in the whole earth is going to open when He says, "Come forth." The real miracle of Jesus' miracle ministry is what He didn't do. He's the One who acted in Genesis 1. He walked through the hills of Galilee remembering when He formed that hill. He looked at His hill and said, "I like this hill." He made that hill at the right hand of the Father. Perfect power under perfect restraint—that's Jesus.

MOSES WAS A MIGHTY MAN IN EGYPT

It says in Acts 7:22 that Moses was a mighty man when he was in Egypt. He was mighty in Egypt. Moses had quite a journey. It says specifically, "He was learned in all of the wisdom of Egypt" (Acts 7:22, paraphrased). Moses was one of the smartest men in the earth. He was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt. He was a math and science genius, He grasped all of the sciences and the philosophies of Egypt, that great nation. That's number one: he was very intelligent.

He was mighty in word (Acts 7:22). He was a very powerful communicator when he was in Egypt. Forty years later he was so transformed that he said, "Lord, I can't speak; my brother has to do it for me" (Ex. 3:10, paraphrased). But when he was in Egypt, he was mighty in speech. He was a very eloquent man. The wilderness changed him.

It says also in Acts 7:22, “He was mighty in deed” (Acts 7:22b, paraphrased). He accomplished great feats. Undoubtedly he organized the building of great buildings and conquered nations. No one knows what he did, but he was mighty in his accomplishments and in his deeds. He was a very, very accomplished man by the age of forty. He was the most powerful man in the earth.

MOSES SPENT FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

We know that Moses’ life is broken into three seasons of forty. The first season was forty years in Egypt. The second was forty years in the wilderness. The third was forty years leading the children of Israel. Again, I’ve heard half a dozen sermons on this through the years, and they all say it differently, but in nearly the same way. In the first forty years, he was gaining strength: he was being powerfully educated, and he was mighty in word and deed. He was becoming a somebody. He was becoming strong in the first forty years. He was gaining strength. He was becoming a somebody.

In the second forty years, he was in the wilderness, tending sheep like David. Can you imagine this brilliant, scientific, learned man of philosophies, who undoubtedly built large buildings and conquered nations, tending sheep? Not for ten years, but for forty; think on that. Some of you have been in the wilderness for maybe nine straight months, and you’re absolutely at the end of yourself. You’re saying, “When is this going to end?” I understand that. When I was younger, nine months was a lifetime. I still don’t like nine months in the wilderness, but nine months is not a long time in the wilderness.

THE NOBODY WHO WAS USED BY THE SOMEBODY

If the first forty years was gaining strength, then in the second forty years God’s purpose in his life was for him to lose strength; to become weak. The most difficult task for a sinful man is to embrace God’s agenda for becoming weak. Everything in our being screams against weakness. We scream against it, but God put it on Moses. Moses didn’t know about what would happen in the next forty years. In other words, he was becoming a nobody in the second forty years. In the first forty years, he was becoming a somebody. All of his energies were in becoming well-known in the earth. In his next forty years he was becoming a nobody. He was becoming weak. In the third forty years he was finding his strength in God. It has been said that he was being a nobody who was used powerfully by the Somebody. He was the nobody who was used powerfully by the Somebody, the Lord Himself. He was becoming strong in the Lord in his human weakness in the third forty years of his life.

I love this: one time, Paul Cain was on a platform. People were up there going on and on about him. They said, “He’s this and he’s that.” He got up and said, “I’m nobody from nowhere, representing Somebody from everywhere”—the ultimate Somebody.

MOSES HAD NO INTEREST IN PERSONAL GREATNESS

Moses had so much power, but it was completely restrained. He was called the meekest man on earth. I’ll give you one more example, and I’ll just quote it to you. It’s Exodus 32:10, and you can look it up later. The Lord is angry at the nation of Israel. He says, “Moses, I have a deal with you. I’m going to destroy them and make you great” (Ex. 32:10, paraphrased).

Do you know what Moses says? He says, “I don’t want to be great without them. No, I don’t want that, because Your name will be great if You redeem them.” Really the Lord was testing Moses, but that was the ultimate.

He says, “Moses, those guys are so out there. I’m going to destroy them. I’m going to make you great.” Here’s the God of the heavens: “I will make you great.”

Moses says, “No! Save them and make Your name great.” That’s one of the best definitions of greatness I have ever seen. This was not a false offer. Moses had no interest in personal greatness; he had interest in the Lord’s name being great in him. That’s so easy to say. It’s cool to put on a chalkboard, but beloved, that’s a reality that’s stunning. The thunderous, audible voice of the Lord comes and says, “I want to make you great.”

You say, “No! If you do it differently, You’ll be great and I’ll be lost in the crowd.” He meant it in Exodus 32:10.

PAUL WAS FORSAKEN BY ALL BUT A FEW

Turn to 2 Corinthians 12 for the rest of our study here. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 the best commentary on Song of Solomon 8:5, leaning on our beloved in the wilderness. I don’t know of any passage that’s a better commentary for the question, “Who is this leaning on her beloved, coming up from the wilderness in victory?”

Remember, the victory is at the heart level. The victory is in the heart level. It’s really critical to know that. Many, though not all, of the great men and women of God, were considered off the wall when they died. They didn’t die at the pinnacle of fame; they died at the pinnacle of heart maturity. Typically, by the time the apostles died, and many of the great men and women of history, the very people of God were writing them off in that hour of their lives. Paul the apostle says in the very last days of his life, and in the very last paragraph he wrote, “All of Asia has left me” (2 Tim. 4:16, paraphrased).

Remember the great Ephesian revival in Acts 19 and 20, the revival in Ephesus? It was the mightiest revival in the whole New Testament, far beyond Jerusalem. The Word of God went out of Ephesus throughout all of Asia. Some years later Paul is in prison and he says, “They have written me off; they will not stand with me.” They thought Paul was not worth standing with. Paul was very burdensome to relate with because he brought persecution on them. They denounced Paul, and he was alone. He says, “Only Luke is with me. All have forsaken me” (2 Tim. 4:11, paraphrased). Luke, you didn’t know that. That’s where I actually named you, from that passage, from loyalty. Literally, I preached on that passage and you were born a couple of weeks later. I never told you that; I’ve never thought to tell you that. It was that passage in 2 Timothy 4. It speaks of loyalty under the fiercest opposition, “and only Lukie boy was with me.” OK, there you go. That’s what Paul said. I don’t know if he said, “Lukie boy.” He should have.

Can you imagine Paul the apostle? Could you imagine the church of Kansas City? Here we are, and Paul the apostle came. We’re all together. Or the church of New York, or Asia—it doesn’t matter—and Paul the apostle was with us for a year, and now he’s gone, and we just say, “Bah, humbug.” It would be amazing. It’s unthinkable, but it has happened all throughout history. Would I do it? Would you do it?

Let’s read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast” (2 Cor. 12:1). *Boasting* means, “prove myself.” He hates it. By *boasting*, he means proving he’s real. Here in Corinth they were writing Paul off. By the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, the Corinthian church had written him off as off the wall. You can find that in 2 Corinthians 13:7. Look at 2 Corinthians 13:7, since you’re right there. “Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved...” (2 Cor. 13:7). Paul said, “I know I don’t look like I’m approved of God to you.” By the time Paul wrote the letter, they were embracing false apostles and writing him off. He

says, “I know I appear disqualified to you, but still I ask you to do right.” Can you imagine that? Is that bizarre or what?

THE LEANING HEART IS THE HEART THAT’S GLAD IN INFIRMITIES

In 2 Corinthians 12:1, Paul says, “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast” (2 Cor. 12:1). He says, “I don’t want to make a case for why you should listen to me, but I need to do that a little. This is stupid that I have to prove that I’m authentic to my own children in the Lord.” That’s what he means right there.

THE HEART THAT REJOICES IN ITS OWN WEAKNESS

He says, “Let’s go to visions and revelations. Let’s start with the big stuff. I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago—whether in the body I don’t know, or out of the body I don’t know—only God knows. Such a man was caught up to the third heavens, and I know such a man” (2 Cor. 12:2, paraphrased). He says again, because he’s still bewildered, “Whether in the body or out I really don’t know. I think I was in, but I’m not sure; only God knows” (v. 3, paraphrased). “He was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible words, which are not lawful for man to utter. Of such a one I will boast. I’ll talk about that man” (2 Cor. 12:4-5, paraphrased). He’s talking about himself. He says, “Yet of myself I don’t like to boast, except in my infirmities” (v. 5b, paraphrased). That’s what we’ll look at. The leaning heart is the heart that’s glad in infirmities.

I’m not glad in infirmities. I’ve seen it a little. Mostly infirmities look negative. But the leaning heart of the bride coming up from the wilderness is a heart rejoicing in her weakness. This is a stunning revelation that’s out of my full reach. I don’t walk in this in the way I can preach it, but I long for it, and I touch it every now and then.

Look at verse 6: “For though I might desire to boast...” (2 Cor. 12:6). He says, “There’s a temptation in me to make my case. I do have a desire to boast, but that would be foolish.” He says, “I refrain lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be” (ibid).

“And lest I should be exalted above measure...” (2 Cor. 12:7). The NASB says, “Unless I should exalt myself...” I think that’s the right interpretation. He says, “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”—and he repeats it again—“lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7)—meaning, “so that I don’t exalt myself.”

Here’s my point. If Paul the apostle, a mature apostle, has the temptation to exalt himself, where are you and I? Here’s a mature apostle, and he says, “I’ll be honest: I’m tempted to exalt myself. I’m very honest about it.” He says, “Most people aren’t honest. They exalt themselves and they come up with reasons why they’re not. I’m being very honest, and I do find that temptation sometimes.”

If a mature apostle has that temptation, do you think you and I still have that temptation? My point is, let’s not be surprised.

A man comes to me and he says, “I need tell you something that’s really wrong with you. I don’t want you to get mad.”

I say, “Stop. I live under the presupposition that there are dozens of wrong things. This isn’t some shocking new concept that I do things wrong, so just relax.” Maybe they were referring to some other time when they were

talking to me and I didn't treat them rightly. We all have things in our lives that shouldn't shock us, but Paul the apostle was the least surprised of all.

"Now concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me" (2 Cor. 12:8, paraphrased). When Paul is pleading three times for this thorn, for this messenger, to depart, he doesn't mean three prayers one afternoon. He means three seasons of concerted prayer and fasting. He means three intense times of seeking. I'm just adding the words, "prayer and fasting." He means three seasons of earnestly pressing in.

"MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU"

Then one day, the Lord speaks to him (2 Cor. 12:9). Let's make it dramatic: let's imagine that the Lord has appeared to him, because He did appear to him in Corinth once. If you read the record in Acts 18, the Lord stood in front of him and spoke to him. Let's say it's there. Perhaps the Lord is standing there in front of him. He says, "Paul, let Me tell you something." This is the absolutely stunning truth that will change our lives if we buy into it. It's stunning! He's standing before him, possibly right there in His resurrected body. This is Song of Solomon 8:5 right here. "Paul, I have a new doctrine right here." It's straight from the mouth of Jesus. "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). You can use the word *enough*—"My grace is enough for you."

He talks about two things: His grace and His strength. It's made perfect in your weakness. "When you have weakness, My strength is perfectly displayed in you to the degree that I have called you."

Beloved, that's a stunning reality. If we believe that the fullness of what God has ordained for our lives comes to fullness when we embrace weakness, we won't resist weakness. It's the only place where the seal of love has its full reign in our lives, in voluntary weakness.

Paul says, "Therefore since the Son of God stood before me and told me this face to face, I'm glad. As a matter of fact, my boast is in my infirmities so that the power of God will flow towards me, and a new, fresh anointing will operate in my life" (2 Cor. 12:10). What we want is a new anointing, but no weakness. When the weakness knocks on our doors, we resist it while we're pursuing the new anointing. You can't have the new anointing apart from embracing weakness; it's impossible. When Paul settled it, he got happy. He became happy in the weakness.

I'm theoretically happy in the weakness. I have it clear enough, and I have preached this a few times over the years. I've studied it, looked at it, and prayed over it where it's real on paper. I say, "I know this is the way into the power of God. I know it in my mind. OK, got that, I know it."

Then the Lord says, "Enter into it."

"Well, I will next year."

PLEASURE IN INFIRMITIES, PERSECUTIONS, AND INSULTS

Look at verse 10; this is unthinkable: "Therefore I take pleasures in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions" (2 Cor. 12:10). Underline that word *pleasure*. Look at this: "In reproaches." In almost every other translation of the Bible—the NIV, the NASB—the word *reproaches* is rendered, "I take pleasure in insults." He says, "The insults sting me. The sting drives me to reality with God. The power of God is new in my life when I

don't answer back. I'm glad that they do that. I take pleasure in needs, in persecutions, and distresses." Distresses are all the difficulties in life. Why? When I'm weak, there's a new flow of the power of God.

CRUCIFIED IN WEAKNESS, ALIVE BY THE POWER OF GOD

"For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4). What a sentence! Here it is: Jesus was crucified because of weakness. The fact that the uncreated God is human is weakness. The fact that He's walking in flesh and blood: even though there's no sin in it, we're talking about the transcendent God walking in a clay body. That's weakness. When He's judged on the cross, that's weakness beyond measure, but He lives in the realm of power. He lives by power.

Look at this next sentence. This is one of the strangest sentences Paul ever says: "For we also are weak in Him" (2 Cor. 13:4b). We always talk about being strong in Him. We're weak because we follow the wooing of Jesus to stay in the wilderness in weakness like He did. We're weak in our life with Him. In our intimacy with Him we find a resolve to embrace weakness like He did. That's what it means. We all know the verse about being strong in Him. We're weak in our intimacy with the risen Lord. We find a resolve to embrace weakness. We're weak in Him, but also we live in power as He does. Wow!

"We are glad when we are weak" (2 Cor. 13:9). What a sentence!

GOD PROTECTS HIS ANOINTED SERVANTS WITH PROBLEMS

I only have a few minutes left, but I want to give you a couple of principles. Verse 7: there's a God-orchestrated weakness on the people God places an unusual anointing upon. I'm going to say it again. There's an undeniable God-orchestrated weakness. I'll say it the way Paul Cain says it. He says, "There's a God-orchestrated stigma upon any man or woman upon whom there's an unusual anointing. It's God-orchestrated. You can't pray and fast your way out of it. If you pray and fast, you fall into it more."

Beloved, there's a God-orchestrated weakness for the anointed of the Lord. Why? That's what verse 7 is saying, and I'm going to ask why. Here's the principle: it's because God protects His anointed servants with problems. God will protect you with problems. We look at problems as our enemies. Problems are what God uses to protect the anointed of the Lord. That's how He protected Paul. He protected Paul from pride. He protected Paul from establishing people in error. What do I mean by establishing people in error? When you can raise the dead, the people look to you in a wrong way and it establishes them in error. Even the most well-meaning man can't turn the people away in a right way. Then it all comes out at the judgment seat. The Lord says, "Paul, you don't have the ability to raise people from the dead and keep the people out of error. They'll look at you inappropriately, and it will hurt their lives. You can't raise the dead and keep the people out of error. They'll look at you inappropriately."

"I have a problem..."

God says, "I have a solution. I'm going to protect you with problems. I'm going to protect your pride, and I'm going to protect the people from error that you're trying to teach. What do you think, Paul?"

Paul says, "Is there any other way to do this?"

“No, Paul, because you’ll exalt yourself if I show you great things” (2 Cor. 12:7, paraphrased). The most mature apostle becomes proud at seeing the heavens. The most mature man or woman in the Holy Spirit, when they’re in the anointing, can’t turn the people away from them, so God exhibits the people as weak. He says, “I’ll help you. You don’t have the power to pull this off, so I will take care of it for you.” Weakness is the highest way God has to protect the power of God, which He has placed in your life to protect you in the power. It’s God’s wisdom to protect you. It’s God’s love to protect the anointing and to protect you. It isn’t just the anointing, but you in the anointing through problems.

The wilderness of Song of Solomon 8:5 is a lifelong reality. We come from the wilderness with a heart burning with love. There’s a weakness all the way around us as we come out leaning with a meek heart. The only word Jesus ever used is strength under perfect control, meekness, leaning.

FIVE CATEGORIES OF WEAKNESS

What is weakness? We have two categories. I’m going to go through this real fast. It will be on the tape if you care about them. I want to give you two categories of weakness, and there are five each. You know them anyway. You’ll say, “Oh, of course.” But some of you are teachers and you like to have them 1, 2, 3. The two categories of weakness that both operate here are voluntary and involuntary. Both of them are in my life and in your life. The voluntary weakness we can shun. But if we shun it, we will never, ever find God with the seal on our heart in the way we’re longing for. The reason I’m doing all of this now is because the Lord is calling me to a voluntary weakness. It’s kind of counterproductive to tell you, but you’re like my team or something. Meaning, I’m not trying to be heroic, but I’m working through this, and this is the passage. The Lord says, “This is good for you. I will deliver you through the acknowledgement of your own errors to yourself and then to others.”

I’m not trying to do something about me. I’m trying to give you the courage, the theology, and the wherewithal to do this in your life. It’s the way forward. It truly is.

SOCIAL AND RELATIONAL WEAKNESS

There are five categories of weakness I’m going to look at, voluntary and involuntary. I’ll give you two on each one. Social weakness is voluntary; there are two types. You can refuse to defend yourself. The most powerful urge in the human spirit is to defend ourselves. It’s the silence before false accusations. There’s no greater urge in your being than the urge to speak when you’re falsely accused. That’s voluntary weakness, refusing to speak.

But they both have two dimensions, and the second is speaking. It’s speaking to declare your faults, acknowledging them and making them known. It’s voluntary. You go to the people, your prayer teams and your home groups; you look them right in the eyes and you say, “I’m selfish when I do that. I’m defensive, and I don’t listen to you when you talk to me.” That’s weakness. That’s a part of leaning.

I’ve heard this a number of times: they come to you on the worship team and say, “You’re off beat, you sing badly, and you talk too much.” You know what I’m talking about. The involuntary part of social, or you can call it “relational weakness,” is when they tell deliberate lies and rumors about you. It’s called persecution. Or maybe you’re just misunderstood by your friends. You have no control over it. They have a mindset and they don’t understand you. They’re locked in the idea that you’re just off. That’s an involuntary part of weakness. The deliberate lies are like an attack against you. As some of you get released in the ministry more, you’ll have attacks against your ministry. Some of you had it in your businesses or in your families.

PHYSICAL WEAKNESS

Physical weakness is the second category; I'll give you an A and a B: fasting from food and sleep. Fasting from food and fasting from sleep. That's what the Night Watch is. I don't care how we say after it; not sleeping is brutal to your body clock. It's a form of voluntary weakness. It's a form of fasting. Your emotions are crazy when you go without food and sleep. It's a voluntary weakness. I don't mean to take it to an extreme and do funny things, but fasting is a form of weakness.

Hard work and serving people in the ministry: Paul said, "I toil more than you all," and he didn't get anything for it. He says, "I work long hours to fix you and I don't get a thing for it." That was a part of physical labor. It wore him out; it was hard work in the kingdom of God.

The involuntary aspect of physical weakness is physical persecution, prisoner beatings, or physical sickness. No one voluntarily wants to be sick. Both dimensions, voluntary and involuntary, make your body weak.

EXTRAVAGANT GIVING IS VOLUNTARY WEAKNESS

Economics: extravagant giving is voluntary weakness in the realm of money. When you give your money to the kingdom of God, you're making yourself economically weak. The difference is that God releases more back, but you make yourself weak in that regard.

I was talking to one of the interns. I was talking to Shelley Hundley the other day and I said, "Shelley, let me tell you something. The way you're going right now, you're going to give a million dollars to the kingdom of God."

She said, "How is that?"

I said, "Well, a person with your abilities could easily make \$30,000 a year, easily." I gave her a few things and she said, "Yeah, I could do that."

I said, "That's \$30,000 easily. You're living on \$5,000. Do you realize you're giving the kingdom of God \$25,000 every single year?"

She said, "I never thought of that."

I said, "I know, but the Lord does. In ten years that's \$250,000. I just did the math, and in about forty years you'll have given a million dollars to the kingdom of God, and you never even thought of it."

She said, "Cool!"

A number of you have said this, and I don't mean everyone is called to this by any means. But the very way you have chosen to live your life is weakness economically. You have deliberately put yourself in a position of weakness. The very occupation of an intercessory missionary is weakness the rest of your life in economics.

There are involuntary ways. People steal money or commit injustice. There are all kinds of ways. I don't want to go into it now for time's sake. I'm talking about the involuntary ones more than any in ministry. There's a

God-ordained time of hiddenness in ministry. You could do it right now, but God says, “I want you hidden like Moses in the wilderness.” You could do it. You could make a name, but by the Word of God He says, “Don’t,” and you stay hidden.

Another way of ministry weakness is that because of obedience to the Lord you refuse promotions. I have refused several promotions that were wide open to me, and a number of you in this room have, too. When we refuse a promotion in ministry because of obedience, when we refuse profile and economics for the sake of obedience, that’s voluntary weakness you’re embracing. If you do it in the will, of God there’s a dimension of the anointing related to it spiritually.

Hiding your righteousness. In Matthew 6. Jesus says, “When you fast, when you give, when you work hard and do righteous acts and charitable deeds, don’t tell anyone. Hide your righteousness” (Mt. 6:1-4, paraphrased).

“If I hide it, how will anyone know?” Doing this in a hidden way is a form of weakness. Even more severe is hiding your revelation. “If I go to heaven and don’t tell anyone, how will they know that I went to heaven? How will I get credit for it?” It’s weakness. Obviously there’s a place to tell your revelation and there’s a place to hide it.

For time’s sake I have skipped the involuntary ones. The voluntary dimensions of weakness are social, which is refusing to defend ourselves. It’s silence before our accusers. Secondly, it’s confession of our faults, which is speaking instead of blame-shifting. That’s tough. The physical weakness is fasting food and sleep or hard work in the kingdom. Your body is worn out in the work of the kingdom in the will of God. I’m not talking about stepping over the line.

Thirdly, it’s weakness in the economics: giving extravagantly or accepting a role in the kingdom where you lose your economic opportunity that was well within your reach. The Lord sees that. That’s weakness.

Fourthly, in ministry you live in hiddenness that’s God-ordained. Or you refuse a ministry opportunity because God has given you an assignment that’s smaller. That’s weakness.

Fifthly, spiritually hiding your righteousness or hiding your revelation. I don’t mean all of it, but in the appropriate way. Most people, when they get revelation, can’t hide it. The ability to get honor from it is too enticing. They have to tell it. I have to tell it. You have to tell it. We all tell it. Paul was leaking it out a little too much. The Lord said, “Paul, this isn’t working too well. You’re exalting yourself, and the people are looking at you in an inappropriate way. This isn’t good.”

WEAKNESS IS LOOKING WEAK TO PEOPLE

What is weakness? Let’s sum it up. Weakness is looking weak to people. I don’t mean trying to overdo it, but it involves looking weak to people.

“Oh, I don’t like it!” You and I want to look strong to people. I want to be prepared. I want to be this; I want to be that. I want to be strong. When we look weak, it chafes us, but that’s where strength is.

Some people do that funny little thing with their appearance. They get as dirty and scroungy as they can, but really they’re just trying to get attention. They’re trying to look strong in the sense of, “I don’t care what anyone

thinks.” They’re still living in the realm of people looking at them and thinking they’re awesome. They’re just doing it in the scroungy way instead of the Saks Fifth Avenue way.

“Looking weak to people, ouch!” “Oh, I don’t like to look weak to people.” I’m just summing up the others: weakening our power position. We give our money away. We don’t take the promotions; we don’t take the positions. We lose our power base.

What’s worse than looking weak and losing our power base? The third one is actually being weak. It isn’t just looking weak, but actually being weak inwardly, through fasting, giving, bearing insults, the pain, and standing up for righteousness when people are against you; inwardly knowing the fear and the trembling of our weak frames. Being weak is another reality, and not just looking weak.

“MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS”

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Jesus says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Strength is harnessed. God puts this strong horse in a bit and a bridle. Strength is harnessed when we say yes to weakness. What kind of strength? Natural strength is harnessed, but so is the anointing.

The Lord says, “Mike, I want to anoint you more, but here’s what I want you to do. I want to harness you with weakness. I want you fasting. I want you giving your money away. I want you silent when people speak against you. I want you admitting your errors all the time. I want you working long and hard hours. I want you to be last in line. I want you to not have a power base, but I want to put more anointing on you. What do you think?”

“Why don’t I use my anointing to prove that I’m right, to make more money, to get a sense of security, and to make people afraid of me? That sounds better.”

He says, “No, I want to give you strength, but I want to harness it with weakness. I’ll start with voluntary weakness, but then I’ll do the involuntary. You might have a prison stay. I’ll raise up a controversy against you. I’ll allow sickness to touch you and a demon to touch you for a season. I want you weak. I want you harnessed. Do you want the anointing?”

“Yes, I think. I mean, of course.”

“OK, I want you giving your money away. I want you to spend more time in prayer and fasting, working harder, and admitting your errors more than ever.”

Paul was receiving revelation that weakness was the highest method God uses to release perfected power. Look at that: “power is perfected.” Wow! The same God who planned Jesus’ crucifixion is planning yours.

The same God who planned Jesus’ crucifixion—not who is planning it, but who planned it—is planning yours as well. He wants you leaning in the wilderness on your Beloved. I want to yield to it. I want to yield faster and more. Here’s the problem. Well, it’s good; it’s really not a problem. You can’t counterfeit this thing. It isn’t the kind of thing you preach on and it’s done. It isn’t the kind of thing where you convince your best friend that you’re doing it and it’s done. It can’t be counterfeited, because God is the only realm that it operates in.

THE POWER TO BE A LOVER IS REWARD ENOUGH

Here's what the Lord tells him in verse 9: He says, "My grace is sufficient." Here's what He means: three things. "My grace is sufficient": instead of the word *sufficient*, put the word *enough*. "My grace is enough": it's enough reward. The power to be a lover is reward enough. It's enough right now. You may never get the breakthrough in ministry. "My anointing on your heart is enough. Is it enough?"

"Yes, it is."

The reward is enough. The people are all speaking against you.

The Lord says, "The anointing on your heart is sufficient. It's enough, isn't it? For Me to be near you, is that enough? Is it enough that you're Mine?" It's sufficient. It's enough. It's enough reward. Secondly, it's enough power. "My anointing on your heart, though everyone comes against you, though the demons rise against you and sickness racks your body, is enough to keep your heart in victory. It's enough power to keep your heart in victory on the inside. It's sufficient for you."

Thirdly, it's enough impact. "Well, Lord, if I'm all broken down, scatterbrained and dorky, I'll not influence anyone. I have to look good and be sharp."

The Lord says, "My anointing is enough. You can be a little rough on the edges because you can't pull it together. It's enough. I'll change hearts through you. My anointing is enough reward. My anointing is enough power to sustain your heart. It's enough anointing to change hearts, even though you're rough around the edges and you won't look slick."

Here's the last point. In verse 10, Paul said, "Therefore I take pleasure in insults" (2 Cor. 12:10, paraphrased). Look at this: in the middle of verse 9 he says, "Therefore most gladly..." (v. 9, NKJV). Then he says, "Therefore I take pleasure..." (v. 10). "For we are glad when we are weak" (2 Cor. 13:9). He boasts in his infirmities.

Amen. Let's stand.