

Try Boasting About Your Weaknesses!

²¹ ... Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

Parents love to talk about their children or grandchildren. Their phones are overloaded with pictures. I have some pictures. And when folks talk about their kids, I listen, and I like to learn about their children, but I am biting at the bit for my turn to brag about my kids. They are no schleps, you know. We might brag about sports. Maybe you are still talking about that big play you made way back in high school. Or we like to brag when our team wins. I have a Detroit Lions shirt. I haven’t worn it for a long time. It is number thirty with the name of Barry Sanders on the back. It has been that long since the Lions had anything to brag about. Maybe you are proud of your home and how you fixed it up so you give tours to anyone who comes over.

Paul had a lot to brag about, too. You heard some of that in our epistle reading earlier. But did you catch something? At the very end of our text he said, **“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”** Paul didn’t like to brag about his accomplishments. Instead, he wanted to brag about his weaknesses. Lord willing we will understand what he meant by that and may we also brag about our weaknesses.

I. Paul had much he could brag about.

Normally, bragging comes naturally to us. But Paul was reluctant to brag. ²¹ ... **Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about.** To Paul, it is foolish to brag about his ministry. Four verses before our text he said, **In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast.** Boasting and bragging is a worldly virtue, but not in the Kingdom of God. Being last and not first is a virtue in the Kingdom of God. But Paul was forced to brag like the world. He had his detractors. Paul sarcastically called them “super apostles.” They would point out his faults and accuse Paul of being a subpar apostle. And they were influencing his congregation. So, if his congregation was interested in credentials, Paul dusted them off.

²² **Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.** These super apostles came from a strong background, generations of believers who studied the Bible and raised their children in it. Impressive. So was Paul. Paul also was raised with the Bible. More than that, he was highly schooled in it. So, if it mattered to the congregation who had the better credentials, then Paul reminded them he had the same credentials than the super apostles.

But he had more he could brag about. ²³ **Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.** ²⁴ **Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.** ²⁵ **Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,** ²⁶ **I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.** ²⁷ **I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.** ²⁸ **Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.** It wasn’t easy for Paul. Everywhere he went he met opposition. If only one of the things on this list happened to you or me, I guarantee we would grumble and complain. But not Paul. He was not deterred no matter how bad it got. Could any of the super apostles claim the same thing? No. Paul had more to brag about than all of them. And to top it off, he reminded his congregation of the daily stress and pressure of managing not just one church, but many. Paul started dozens of congregations and was daily involved in their well-being. If his congregation was looking for dedication, Paul had the most to brag about.

What would you say if people asked you questions about your church? If they asked me, one of the first things I point out is our enthusiasm for Christian education. It always has been and always will be a priority for us. That is why we are happy to use half to two thirds of our budget to run a Lutheran elementary school. We likewise spend time and treasure to have a Sunday School. I would continue with our building. You can’t replicate this today. I would praise our volunteers. Of course, we don’t have people

stepping up for everything we want, but we have folks who are there for many the dirty jobs. We just came off our 150th anniversary. Yes, we didn't keep it a secret. Throw in music, Porky's, all those years with the Cancer Cruise, we have a lot to brag about.

Or do we? How did you feel when Paul boasted about all the terrible things he endured for the church? Maybe you felt relieved that you didn't get whipped multiple times, jailed, beaten or bobbing up and down in the sea for two days. Or maybe you were ashamed that you haven't endured such things. Maybe we have been sitting on the sidelines this whole time doing really nothing. I overheard one pastor say that maybe we are not suffering like other Christians because we are not talking about Christ as they are.

Yes, Paul boasted, but he didn't want to. He boasted about his ministry and his accomplishments and his sacrifices only because his congregation was looking at things in a worldly, numbers way. But there is a kind of boasting out there that is good. It isn't boasting about how good we are. It is boasting about our weaknesses.

1. Paul rather wanted to boast about his weaknesses.

That is what Paul wanted to do. ³⁰ **If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.** That doesn't make sense, boast of one's weaknesses? But Paul does. Right after our text, this amazing Paul who endured ship wrecks and whippings, had to be lowered down from a window in Damascus in a basket to save his life. No heroics there. After that he describes a thorn in his flesh that obviously bothered him and made it harder for him to carry out his ministry. He admitted to this congregation that he was not an eloquent speaker and did not come with wisdom or well worded arguments. This was in part the reason the super apostles picked on him. He admitted there were times he couldn't find the words in prayer. He admitted he was the least of the apostles and the least of God's people.

Why? Go back to chapter four. Paul called himself and the other legitimate apostles clay jars. Clay jars are cheap. They are plain. There is nothing remarkable about a cracked clay jar. Paul always deflected attention away from himself to show that this all surpassing power comes from God and not the human apostles. People believed not because Paul was a good preacher. They believed because of the power of God alone. Paul boasted of his weaknesses because it would give the Lord, and not him, all the credit.

Paul confessed his most major weakness. **Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?** Paul inwardly burned with temptation and sin. Paul? The same guy who endured whippings for Jesus? Yes, he was still a sinner. This doesn't mean that Christ's death on the cross has failed. No. Rather, it highlights and praises Christ. Paul admitted to Timothy that he was the chief of sinners. That means that Paul considered himself the worse sinner in the room. But this only makes Christ all the more special. As he said, **Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.**

Paul endured a lot for Christ, but not a single thing he did got him any closer to God or heaven. Christ is the reason he was sure of his eternal salvation. Likewise, the good he didn't do, the evil he kept on doing, and the temptations and sinful desires that burned within him would not keep him out of heaven. Jesus' death paid for those sins yesterday, today and always. Jesus knows we still struggle with sin. So he is patient with us, patiently showing our sin, patiently forgiving our sin, patiently assuring us of his love.

Paul didn't want to boast about himself. Rather, he hid behind God. What about you? Someone asks you about your church. How can you boast? How about boasting about your weaknesses? I am not saying we hang our dirty out in public and show everyone all of our problems. Instead, let Christ shine. Admit, as Paul does, that sin is still present in your life. We will be perfect in heaven, but right now we struggle with sin. Tell them how wonderful it is to come to a church where the Bible is opened and points you to Jesus. Tell them how neat it is to send your kids to Sunday School so they can hear about Christ more than just at home. Tell them how wonderful it is to ask the kids what they learned in Sunday School and talk about it. Talk about our school. Yes, our kids do very well academically, but we have it for one reason, so we can open up the Bible every day, in every subject and see our God and how he saves us in Christ.

In other words, boast, but boast about your weaknesses. Boast how God still loves you, forgives you, is patient with you. Let them see you hiding behind Christ. Amen.