

# PBC20061025CS

## SURRENDER

### Brokenness

#### 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

October 25, 2006 - Wednesday 6:30PM - Dr. David H. McKinley

#### [Dr. McKinley, message, SURRENDER: Brokenness]

Band, thank you guys tonight. Great job, really! Thanks so much. Would you just help me one more time say thank you to them for their hard work and leadership? [applause] I know you know what it's like to just try to get here on Wednesday at the end of the day. And each of these try to get here early and get away from the workplace and deal with all the family issues and get here and be a part. And I really do appreciate them doing that, and ah... leading us in such a great way every week.

I was away over this past weekend. Did not... did not get to be here to be a part of our service. I did first thing Monday come in and pick up a copy of the CD and listen to the service and the message. And so evident to me of just God's hand of blessing on these days in the life of our church and God's doing some great things here at Prestonwood.

But I had a rather interesting experience. On Saturday I did ah... a chapel down at the Citrus Bowl stadium for the Rice Owls before they played the University of Central Florida Knights and I'm glad to say that the result of that... not of the chapel but of the day was that ah... 30,000 fans were disappointed in central Florida and that was nice.

And then I got in a car and drove several hours south to Fort Myers, Florida and I preached last Sunday morning in 3 morning services. A wonderful church there in the city of Fort Myers on the southwest coast of Florida called MacGregor Baptist Church. And the reason that I was there is that there was another speaker scheduled to be there. The pastor's daughter was having a baby up in Virginia and his speaker cancelled ah... sort of in the last minute and they called me and asked me if I'd come. And I got to be there to be the substitute speaker so to speak for the weekend.

And when ah... they were introducing me they were talking about where I live... where I was from, but a lot of people didn't know me, didn't know anything about me. And ah... I had a guy come out and speak to me in the hall between the services and he said, "You know, I just wanted to know who you were." He said, "I asked somebody who was preaching today and they told me a guy by the name of Preston Wood was preaching." [laughter] And he said, "When I looked in the worship guide and I realized that the name of the church he

was from... you were from was Prestonwood Baptist Church, he said, I got to go meet some guy who named a church after himself and lived to tell about it! [laughter] Preston Wood.

And I just... I thought that was an enjoyable event that somebody would think that. And yet, you know what? You know what I thought? I thought about the fact that whether we really like to admit it or not, for each and everyone of us there really is a sense in which a lot of the attention of our life, of our faith, of our church, of our activity is really and truly about us. About us! About who we are, about what we do, about our family, about our blessings, about our needs. And certainly there is a great sense in which the church and the ministry and our faith is personal. But there's also an incredible sense in which it becomes something that... well, if we're not careful, it focuses to a large degree just on us.

I think if we were to all be honest tonight, deep down inside of us we all have a little bit of a tendency toward prosperity theology. That is, the idea that God is here to make me happy, God is here to meet my needs, that my faith is all about my being fulfilled in life. And to some degree even if we don't really buy into what we hear, just kind of the name it and claim in theology that sometimes broadcasts on the airways, almost everyone of us is interested in a personal security theology that God's taking care of me. And every one of us seems to want to find a way to fix all of our problems in life, to fix it through faith. And many times what we want is our faith to become a button that we can push whenever we feel pressure, whenever we feel pain, whenever we have a problem and that somehow that... that... that faith button is just going to take care of things in life.

It's sort of like this little button I picked up the other day. It's called the easy button. Any of you guys seen the easy button? A lot of us in life want our faith to be like the easy button. And whenever I start feeling that financially I'm under the pinch a little bit or somebody that I care about is... is faced with a potential bad medical report or there's stress in a relationship that matters to me, or things aren't going right at the job, I want my faith to just kind of be an easy button that I can reach over and say, "Okay... [mechanical voice says: That was easy.] That's what we want." [laughter] We just want to be able to hit the button [Again voice says: That was easy.] There it is! It's all done, you know! And I'm afraid a lot of us are seeking to live a life where what we're looking for is a faith that's simply an easy button.

Well, can I remind you that it was our Lord Jesus Christ who in the Gospel of Mark chapter 8, said this "take up your cross and follow Me":

*34) If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me."*

Jesus didn't say anything about the Christian life being an easy life. He made it very clear that being a Christ follower... that running after God... that being someone who chose... who has chosen to pursue a God-honoring

ambition in life does not mean that life is going to get easier. Sometimes it may in fact get harder. And if you're a believer and your faith seems to be in contradiction to the circumstances of your life, it may not be that you're out of the will of God; it may be that you're right in the middle of what God is doing in your life right now, because your faith is not an easy button. And the Christian life is not easiness. In fact, to the contrary, if there is a point to which I believe that we come time and time again in our walk with God, it is not to the point of easiness, but time and time again, at least for me, it's to the place of brokenness.

Have you been broken by God? Have there been times, places, moments in your life where God has just taken you to a place of brokenness? I believe God uses brokenness in our lives to bless us. And many times we look so much for the blessings of God... the blessedness, that we overlook the blessing of brokenness in life. And yet as I study the Scripture, I believe this is a part of the normal Christian life.

In the book of 2 Corinthians we find the most personal of all of the letters that Paul wrote to any of the churches. It's personal because the nature of this letter was Paul's defense of his office, of his ministry and of his apostleship. He was being attacked... he was being criticized... he was being accused of things in his life, and really, his credibility was under scrutiny. And so Paul tried to write to the church at Corinth to give them a better perspective of who he was and what he was, and he really opens his heart and really, so to speak, spills his guts in 2 Corinthians. You can't read this book without it moving you with a personal emotion that moved the Apostle Paul as you read it. And as we begin to look at 2 Corinthians, we begin to read a series of passages that express something of the raw emotion and the personal reflections of this apostle. I want to just quickly highlight... and they're going to be right on the screen for you... so I want to quickly highlight some key passages in the book of 2 Corinthians so you can begin to see and to feel something of the theme of this book as it unfolds. Second Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 3 says:

*3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, 4) who comforts us in our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort by which we ourselves have been comforted by God.*

Paul says my God and my relationship with God is one in which I had to learn to draw comfort from Him. And that comfort God intends to use with others who need comfort, because in many ways what really brings us together in our faith and in the body of Christ are not just the pleasures of the Christian life, but it is the pain and the pressure that we face in the Christian life. Pain is more often than not the common thread that knits our walk with Christ. And our faith is much more in reality about holiness than it is about happiness. It's true that in the life of Moses, in the life of Joseph, in the life of Job that God brought to them comfort in affliction so that in their afflictions we have learned comfort. And God

has used others to comfort you in affliction and God uses you to comfort others in their affliction.

And so, so much of this life, this walk, this faith isn't about easiness, it's about brokenness and the need for comfort. Listen to 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 8, Paul again describing his ministry says:

*8) We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; 9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10) always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11) For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifest in our mortal flesh.*

That doesn't sound like a series of happy days to me. That sounds like a life that is filled with... with conflict and the challenge and the pressure. Listen again, 2 Corinthians 6: 4-5:

*4) But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5) beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;...*

You see, they're questioning Paul and his faith and faithfulness, and Paul said, "Let me just give you a little piece of my life. And I'm gonna tell you it would be a whole lot easier to say, 'That's it; I'm done!'" But Paul says, "No, my apostleship... my ministry been proven because it's been tested through the fires of affliction." And then listen even again here in 2 Corinthians chapter 11:

*23) Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one: I'm talking like a madman with the greater... far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings and other, often near death. 24) Five times I received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. 25) Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at the sea. 26) On frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27) and toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, and cold and exposed.*

You get the idea that Paul wants them to really understand that this whole thing of faith and life is not about easiness? But instead it's been about his own brokenness.

You see, I don't ever want you to get the idea that when we talk about Paul and all of his great missionary journeys and him being at sea and him going from place to place... and certainly places he went there were great revivals and lives were changed and great things happened. But don't get the idea that for Paul this was some big swashbuckling adventure with Jesus. Sometimes I'm afraid we almost put it in that arena... it's kind of a

swashbuckling adventure that he's out doing all these things. But the reality of it was that it was a stressful battle, it was a painful struggle for endurance in his life. And Paul had a lot of reason to groan... to grieve in his life.

But for all the things that happened outside... for all the things that were happening around him, there was even something more personally and more specific that Paul related to this church, and it's where I want us to sort of land tonight and spend the next hour and a half or so together, okay? (Just want to be sure you're still listening, okay. You're thinking, "Talk about enduring hardships!" [laughter] Okay)

If you'll go one more chapter, let's go to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and here's where I want us to zero in tonight. (They have pew Bibles available there if you don't have one in your hand, you can pick one of those up.) But here Paul begins to describe something beyond just the... the challenges that he faced... the resistance and the opposition. It was a very personal battle that was going on in his life with God. And he says, beginning in verse 7:

*7) So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations (or visions), a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. 8) Three times I've pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9) But he said to me (Would you read it out loud with me?) "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10) For the sake of Christ then I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecution, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

*"For when I am weak, then I am strong."* When I am broken, then God begins to become the source of my strength. And one of the most important lessons in the whole study of surrender in the life of Paul and in your life as a follower of Christ, is the study of surrender that takes us to the place of brokenness. Brokenness.

In many ways the Christian life is a split-level life. It's a split-level not only because we live in heaven and on earth... That is we have life with God in heaven and we have life on earth and we're dealing between the heavenlies and the earthlies, but there's also a sense in which on the one hand our faith gives us understanding to live life on one level. There's some things I know about God... some things I believe, some hopes that I have that really do give me confidence in life. But on the other hand there are these circumstances in my life everyday. There are these challenges... there are these struggles! And sometimes I really struggle to balance between what I know and believe, and where I live and what I feel. And on the one hand I have knowledge that says one thing, but on the other hand I have experience that it doesn't feel that it's consistent with my knowledge.

And so I live this split-level life between faith and knowledge, and feelings and experience. And it's a hard part of living out the life. It's the trans... it's the... it's the difference between on the one hand, Paul talking about his revelations... his vision. I don't have time to preach that whole point to you tonight but starting in chapter 1... or excuse me, starting in chapter 12, verse 1, Paul talks about being caught up into heaven and having a vision of God, and this incredible ah... supernatural experience that he had with God; and that this supernatural, mystical, phenomenal experience that he had with God gave him a vision. But in order to keep him from getting too boastful... too elated... too proud, there's this other part of life called the thorn. And it's almost as though you have the contrast between the vision and the thorn, the revelation and the pain! And that's what Paul is struggling with here in his life.

And he says that this thorn is so great that the way that he refers to it is as a messenger from Satan. On the one hand, God is working in my life, but on the other hand, I have some things in my life... I have something in particular... a thorn in the flesh that is so significant that it's like Satan's messenger pounding [strike] at my life [strike] day [strike] after day [strike] after day [strike]. And it just makes me want to say that's it; I'm not believing, I'm not going on, I'm not doing this anymore!

Paul is struggling with this split-level in life. And interesting enough he feels that it has something to do with keeping him from boasting, from being proud. And that God has somehow got him in a position in life where on the one hand He's blessing him, but on the other hand, He's breaking him in order to keep him from letting pride and arrogance overshadow.

You know we all have a problem with pride, don't we? Am I alone? We all have a problem with pride, don't we? Yeah, we do, don't we? You know what I'm talking about. We all have a problem with... with boasting and it doesn't really matter what age or stage you're in. You know, I find that at every age and stage we want to find something to be proud of, something to boast about. One of the... one of the groups of people that get pretty proud on a regular basis are our grandparents. Got any grandparents here? Yeah, you get proud of those grandchildren, don't you? And you want to think about them and you want to boast about them, and you want to show them off. But you know those very grandkids that you want to boast about and be proud of sometimes... sometimes they can embarrass you. They can... they can humble you. Did you know that?

I was reading this week... in Antigo, Wisconsin there was a 3 year old boy by the name of Robert Moore who went into a store with his grandmother. There were several grandchildren... and in order to try to keep them sort of occupied while they were in this retail store, she got money out of her purse, gave it to each of the grandchildren to let them go play with one of those claw machines. You ever played the claw machine? You know what I'm talking about? Well, they were playing with the claw machine.

And apparently this little 3 year old boy, Robert, got frustrated because he couldn't get SpongeBob to get in the claw. And it was really frustrating because SpongeBob is right there in front of him and every time he puts money in and puts the claw down, SpongeBob doesn't stay on the claw. So grandma knows that Robert is struggling with this and he's really starting to get a little bit cantankerous, and she said, "Sweetheart, sweetheart, hang on. I'll just get some more money. We'll try again." And she's digging in her purse and all of the sudden she hears something and guess what Robert did? He climbed into the claw machine! That's right! She turned around and Robert had climbed into the claw machine. Now he had SpongeBob! [laughter]

There was only one problem: he couldn't get out of this claw machine and the store didn't have the key to the claw machine. And an hour later the emergency rescue is leaving the store after all this has happened because they had to come and get little Robert out of the claw machine. The sad thing is he left without SpongeBob. I don't know how that happened. Somebody wasn't thinking there. But there's this incredibly embarrassing thing that happens to this grandmother. I mean just reading her account of what happened and the... and the difficulty of this precious little grandchild suddenly bringing this great embarrassment to her life because he's stuck in the claw machine. Everybody's going about thinking, "What were they... why did they let that kid get in that claw machine?" Her boasting turned into humility.

And God uses things in life to keep us from boasting. God uses things in life to make us dependent. God uses things in life to teach us incredible lessons about brokenness. Someone has said there's no true Christianity without brokenness. If we are not broken then we have not met God and we do not know ourselves. If we are not broken and we've not met God then we do not know ourselves.

God had used the brokenness in Paul's life. And I think for Paul and I think from this passage there are several insights that we discover that are important for us to learn about brokenness because we live in a broken world because of sin. But you are going to be broken and I am going to be broken in order that we might learn strength in our walk with Christ.

What are the things we learned tonight? Well first, brokenness rises out of the mystery of suffering... brokenness rises out of the mystery of suffering. None of us can exempt ourselves from the reality of suffering. Try as we may to understand, explain and unravel the mystery of suffering in life, there are just a lot of things in life that we do not understand and we cannot explain. Ultimately it is all linked to sin and to the fall, ultimately we know that this world that we live in is a fallen world, a broken world, but the mystery of this world in which we live and the mystery of suffering is what gives rise to brokenness. And it touches you and it touches me and impacts every one of us.

On the one hand, this mystery of suffering is something that God uses. God uses us to teach us who He is and what He's like and how to depend on Him. And I've had so many people in life who've been down the road of cancer or been down the road of some other form of physical affliction, and they've said it time and time again: "I would never wish this on anyone, but I thank God for what I've learned through this experience." How do you say that? Cause there's nothing fun about that, there's nothing good about that, unless we begin to see it through different eyes. And brokenness rises out of the mystery of suffering and... and of difficulty in life.

Now the other side of that, there is a satanic side. There is a sense in which Satan uses the mystery and the injury of suffering to derail us, to distract us, to discourage us, to ultimately defeat us. And so we struggle.

Over in the book of Romans... I don't need you to turn there, but you might want to write down Romans chapter 8, verse 18; Paul was writing. He said:

18) *I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

But then he says this in verse 22:

22) *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption of sons and the redemption of our bodies.*

We are groaning in this world, and you can't escape the echo of the groaning of this life. Paul was groaning [tap,tap,tap] before God and he cried out and he said, "God, this thorn in my flesh... it's a hindrance to everything that I want to be and do for you. God, release me!" But did God release him? No. No. And one of the mysteries that you will live with and that I live with in life is that there is a brokenness that rises out of the mystery of suffering that I can't explain and I have to endure, but I see and understand it to be a part of God's work in me.

It's been said that grace will not do for us what it did not do for Christ. It will not exempt us from suffering. Jesus suffered and died and bled on the cross. Do you remember that in the Garden of Gethsemane He said {Matthew 26:39}:

*"Father, if it be Your will, let this cup pass from Me."*

And I can assure you plenty of us in this room at one time or another have said, "Lord, let this cup pass from me." But you're not going to be exempt and I'm not exempt because brokenness rises out of the mystery of suffering.

There's a second thing that we see tonight and that is that brokenness relates to the intensity of suffering. Brokenness comes in my life because there is intensity to the suffering and to the struggle of this world. It's



one thing for me to stand in a pulpit and talk about suffering, it's another thing for you and I to go home and know what the private hurts are and the heartaches are in our lives; to know about the worries, the struggles, the tensions.

And for Paul this was obviously... this thorn was something very specific. Now when you get the idea of a thorn, you know we read that passage... thorn in the flesh, we think about a little rose thorn... you know sort of... plume... it hurts. You know.

But that's not at all what the Bible's talking about. In fact the very word that is used for thorn is actually a stake [tap]. It's the idea of being impaled. And Paul said, "It's as though I'm impaled and this thing is so real in my life that I can't move in any direction without having to be afflicted by this impaling pain! It is an intense thing in my life!" And brokenness was being revealed in the life of Paul because of the fact that there was such intensity in his suffering.

Now the big question is... and you can read as many commentaries as you want to on the Bible... the question is what was it? What was Paul's thorn in the flesh? Some people have said that it was some form of a physical deformity; that he was actually born in such a way that he lived with something that was limiting to him. Others have said, no, it was ah... actually a...an issue of epilepsy; that he had seizures and that periodically Paul would suddenly... would unknowingly face the reality of a seizure. Of course, in that day and time that sort of thing was without medication and without control. Others have said it was some form of an eye trouble. Some have said that it was a migraine. Maybe it was an ingrown toenail. I... no I was just... I don't know what it was! Nobody knows what it was! Paul just said, "I have a thorn in the flesh." And out of this thorn there was an intensity of suffering that constantly pushed him to God. It was a chronic pain... a chronic issue, an ongoing disability. Time and time again... three times specifically Paul said, "I said God, remove it[strike]! God, take it away!"

I have a hunch there are some people here tonight who can relate. There are some people sitting in front of me tonight who can't help but say, "God, if... if only... if only my body were stronger; if only I weren't living with this disability in my life; if only I had more money; if only my mate were a believer; if only my job could be different; if only I didn't have to deal with this difficult person every time I turn around in my life!" And you live and I live at times with intense struggle and agitation. And yet it's the reality of the intensity of that suffering that brings brokenness to us. Paul said this thorn was a messenger; a reminder of his dependence upon God and his need for God.

So brokenness is something that rises out of the reality of suffering. And brokenness is something that is ultimately seen in our lives and ultimately released in our lives. Ah... I talked about the mystery of suffering but let

me go back and just say that clearly: that it relates to the intensity of our suffering.

The third thing is that brokenness reveals the reality of all human suffering. My brokenness and your brokenness... the places where we find ourselves dependant upon God and we can't get out, it just simply reveals the reality of all human suffering. I kinda go back to something I've said, but let me just reiterate it here and that is that being a believer doesn't exempts us from pain or thorns. Someone has said pain plants the flag of reality in the fortress of a rebel heart... Pain plants the flag of reality in the fortress of a rebel heart. And God reminds you and God reminds me and God reminds people in the world around us that we're not going to get out of suffering and that it is a reality that we all must faith... face and we all must deal with.

God doesn't always heal every person who's sick. God doesn't always remove every problem that comes to life and He doesn't resolve every broken relationship. And time and time again we find ourself facing difficulties and we look to our faith and we want to think that faith is gonna be the easy button that says all right all I gotta do is hit this button and I'm going to be delivered! Sometimes we touch the button faith to find... no, it's faith that's going to give me the ability to endure. And faith allows you to endure an illness and to endure a hard relationship and to endure a breakup in life. And faith begins to become a part of the... of something that is revealed in my life as I trust the Lord.

I love Hebrews 11. I wish I had time to go over there tonight and spend some time there. I don't, but Hebrews 11 is just so full of kinda God's Hall of Fame. One by one you read of these great heroes of the faith. By faith Moses, by faith Daniel, by faith Abraham, by faith... And you're going down the list and you just kind of going yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah! It says but others... others were sawn asunder or were stones and were put to death. Suddenly you go whoa... wait a minute, that doesn't sound like my kind of faith. I like the faith that walks on the water; I like the faith that calls down the fire; I like the faith that closes the mouth of the lions. The Bible says by faith.

Sometimes it's the very place that we're broken that God meets us at that point of brokenness. And the reality of brokenness and weakness is that it takes us into a new realm of living with the corresponding reality of God's grace. The reality of brokenness is that it takes me into another realm of living with the corresponding reality of God's grace.

To illustrate that ah... I've told you this before, but one of the fascinating things in the universe in physics is that right now there's a phenomenal amount of pressure in the atmosphere pressing down on you. Did you know that? Did you know that right now where you are sitting there are 14.7 pounds of pressure per square inch pushing against you. No wonder when you just take a deep breath you've got all this pressure on you. There's pressure in the atmosphere around you. It has to do with how many square

inches of you there are. And.. and all of us are facing a variety of pressures! But why is it that the pressure around us doesn't just collapse us [strike]? Because there's a corresponding pressure on the inside that keeps you going, that keeps you strong, that keeps you able.

And you see the Bible tells us here that while we can't escape the reality of suffering, we can begin to experience the corresponding pressure of God's grace. And what we begin to see is that while we may not be strong, and while we indeed may be broken, that God in His grace begins to work in our lives. Grace begins to become the seam of my life between my weakness and God's strength.

And one of the greatest things that I can tell you tonight, no matter who you are, what your facing in your life, no matter what the thorn or the stake is in you that is impaling you tonight, hear me, God uses weak and flawed people to accomplish His great purposes. God uses weak and flawed people to accomplish His great purposes. I didn't say stained people, I didn't say people who are living and indulging their lives in sin. The Bible is very clear that there's an issue of walking in the light versus walking in darkness, but the Bible is clear that all of the people that God uses and has used in time and history have been people that have been broken and then they have been blessed.

In this same letter to the Corinthian church, not the second letter but the letter of Corinthians I want to just turn over quickly and just point this out. Chapter 1, verse 26 of 1 Corinthians it says:

*26) For you see your calling, brothers, not many of you are wise according to worldly standards, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. 27) But God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; He's chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong 28) God has chosen what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are, 29) so that no human being might boast in his presence.*

God specializes in using weak things and broken things and flawed things. The things that the world would discard, because when He touches them with grace He changes them. Brokenness, therefore, releases God's grace at my greatest point of need. That's the final point tonight. Brokenness releases God's grace at my greatest point of need.

I live in a world where every day I face my weakness, but on the other hand, there is the corresponding reality of God's grace and strength. And for every place where I feel that my weakness.. I'm going to give in and go down, God says, “\*I have strength and grace that is sufficient for you.”

Here's what I'm trying to tell you tonight. God blesses brokenness. Listen to Psalm 51 [Psalm 51:17]:

*17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—You will not despise, O God.*

Now contrast that with the New Testament that says [James 4:6]:

6) *The humble God hears, but God resists the proud.*

If we're proud... if we're boasting... if we're living by our own strength and trying to pull ourselves up, the Bible says that God resists us in pride. But the Bible says God welcomes a broken spirit.

And Paul lived out his life with brokenness. What did he say? Look again in 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 9. Let me read it to you this time from The Message. Paul says:

9) I quit focusing on the handicap and I began appreciating the gift. It was a cause... it was a case of Christ strength moving in my weakness. 10) Now I take limitations in stride and with cheer. These limitations that cut me down to size. Abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks... I just let Christ take over. And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

Jesus Christ wants to prove to you this strength in your weakness. And the very thing that takes you and takes me to the brink of brokenness is so often the very thing that God uses in surrender to take us to the place of strength. And so wherever you are and whatever you are battling tonight, do not fear the lesson of the thorn. Do not shy from the blessing of brokenness because God uses these to teach us surrender and to teach us His grace.

An unknown Confederate soldier learned the lesson that I'm talking to you about tonight and he penned these words: "I asked God for strength that I may achieve; I was made weak that I might hum... learn humbly to obey. I asked God for help that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked God for riches that I might be happy; I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked God for power that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness that I might feel my need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life that I might endure all things. I got nothing I asked for but everything I hoped for. Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all men most richly blessed." That's Paul's testimony. When I'm weak, then I'm strong.

Amen? We need that lesson tonight. We need that message tonight because so many of us are fighting God at a point where we need to learn brokenness in life. I believe God is work... doing the work of brokenness in many of our lives right now; brokenness that leads us to grace. I believe He's taking our church through a time of... of brokenness by seeking Him and praying and fasting and asking Him what the future holds, and it takes us to the place of surrender and sacrifice. That everyday in life you face little moments where you have to deal with this issue of brokenness. I just want to challenge you to time and time again go back to the Scripture and remember that when you're weak, then by God's grace you're made strong.

Every one of the ah... worship guides tonight has a prayer card in it. And every one of those prayer cards relate to either someone who is dealing with a very specific point of injury and brokenness in their life... physical need, death. Or maybe just a trial.

The blue cards that are in your prayer guide tonight in these piece all relate to troops that are serving in Iraq, Afghanistan or some other part of the world; and I think you know this has been the deadliest month in a long time in Iraq. There are a number of our church family who have children who are there, husbands and wives who are there. And I just want us to pray for them to be true to that pledge that we've made that we would pray.

And so before we go tonight... before we walk away, I want us to just take a few moments to pray... to pray for the needs that you hold in your hand tonight, and certainly to pray for needs that you may have in your life tonight. And the way that I want us to do that is simply this: I want us to in just a moment to just simply stand together and I want us to cluster in groups.

Now let me say very quickly, if you're uncomfortable with getting in a group to pray, you don't have to; you can stay right where you are. Okay? Just stay right where you are and just pray privately, personally there, that's fine.

But we have many people here who are grateful to pray and willing to pray and I want us to pray tonight. And then in that group I just want to voice the needs of several of the... the needs that you have there. And maybe one person in that group pray... if there's somebody that's willing to pray, you pray, okay. I don't want anybody being put on the spot and somebody's saying "You pray for us." No, we don't want to force anybody to pray publicly, okay? But we just want to pray, cause we believe that God's grace is ministry, and that God's mercy touches us as a church when we pray.

So I'm going to ask you if you will right now to just stand with me wherever you are, and there are people around you who would be willing to invite you to pray with you. You can just turn to them and say, "Hey, let's pray." And we'll take just a few moments together here. Some music will play, we'll pray and then I will close our prayer in just a couple of minutes, okay? So take just a moment here and let's just turn together; let's just pray together. You can stand and pray silently or you can pray in these groups but take time right now. [background music begins] Lift some of those needs and concerns to the Lord. And give me just a moment, I'll lead us in prayer.

[silence while background music plays]

*...And Lord, we confess it tonight that we are Yours. That You are Lord, and that we give ourselves completely to You tonight. We thank You for these*

*lessons in surrender that we have embraced through the life of Your servant, Paul. Lord, we truly want to know what it is to say that "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Father, forgive us for how many times we've tried to make our faith an easy button. God, take us to a place in life where we are willing to embrace brokenness, that we may know the measure of Your grace and power and strength in our lives. We pray, O God, tonight for people who are broken, who are needed, who are hurting. People who have expressed to us "help me, pray for me". God, tonight we lift up those names and those needs to You. Father, I thank You for what You are doing in our heart and our fellowship and our lives. And I pray that You would help us to prove today, tomorrow that when we're weak, we're strong. Help us not to try to muster our own confidence in our own ability, but to be willing to come clean, to be willing to stand stripped and to say, "Lord, You are our help, You are our strength, You are our life." We love You, we thank You for the fellowship of the gathering tonight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Well, I'm so glad that you came tonight and I hope it's been good for you to be here, to study God's Word with us. Here every Wednesday night! We're going to be back next week. Don't forget that Global Gathering of Prayer and we'll look forward to it. God bless you and goodnight.