

Strengthened Through Trials to Strengthen Others

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, brokenness, and going through trials to be effective members of the body of Christ. It draws insights from biblical examples like Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, and Timothy, highlighting how God uses affliction to prevent pride and to prepare individuals for ministry. The message encourages listeners to embrace small acts of service, value humility, and trust in God's plan for their lives.

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12, 1 Corinthians 12:14, 1 Corinthians 12:22, Matthew 11:29, 2 Corinthians 12:7, Philippians 2:20, 1 Timothy 5:23, Genesis 50:20, John 15:5

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Description

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Transcript

I'd like to turn to 1 Corinthians in chapter 12. 1 Corinthians in chapter 12. This is a unique concept that was not known in the Old Testament of God's people being a body.

In the Old Testament they were a kingdom of people who were separated from each other, blessed by God with many earthly blessings. But on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came, it was like a fire. Those 120 believers who were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, they were like little pieces of iron that were thrown into the fire and they came out as one piece.

They melted in the fire. This is what the baptism in the Holy Spirit did for those early Christians, made them one as a body. And that was the beginning of the church as the body of Jesus Christ.

Now theoretically, we know this. It's not a new truth. And we see, if you look down further here, in verse 14, 1 Corinthians in chapter 12 and verse 14, it says, the body is not one member but many.

And if the foot says, I'm not a hand, I'm not a part of the body, it's not for this reason any lesser part of the body. It speaks about different members of the body, where the foot feeling that I'm not as important as the hand and I'm way down at the bottom of the body, nobody, hardly anybody sees me. These are all attitudes that different people in the body of Christ can have, where someone feels very insignificant.

He's at the bottom of the list, hardly anybody thinks about him or personality-wise, he's not so outgoing, maybe he's very inward looking and he's down at the bottom of the body. And the Holy Spirit says, how can you say it's not a part of the body? It's got to function. Where would you travel if you didn't have feet? In the same way the ear feels is not as important as the eye.

This is a feeling that can, that has come to many, many born-again Christians. I'm not as important as that other person. And therefore, what happens is, they become completely ineffective and feel I've got nothing to do.

The idea in most churches is that the only gift worth having is preaching. And if you can't really preach effectively, you're not really going to be very useful for the body of Christ, or perhaps sing. But what about a person who can't do either? There are many things like that, and some person feels that I'm not only insignificant, I'm inward looking, I'm very weak.

I'm not so strong like some of these others. And to them also there is a word in verse 22, on the contrary it's much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are more necessary. It's an amazing truth, which I don't think most preachers and famous Christians recognize.

They feel they are the most important. They feel they are the most necessary for the body of Christ. And that's because they haven't seen the body themselves.

I'm convinced that the vast majority of the world's famous preachers have not seen the body of Christ. Why do I say that? Because I don't find in their ministry any building of a body. They go around from place to place, maybe evangelizing, and maybe some people come to Christ, and then some people go around doing Bible teaching, and the people are blessed by their teaching.

But they're not building a body anywhere. If you ask some of the great evangelists in the world, some of the world's famous evangelists and Bible teachers, well I heard brother that you've been to different countries and brought thousands and thousands of Christ. Where are they? You say, I don't know.

I hope they are in some church. But that's not the answer that Paul and Peter would give. If you were to tell Paul, hey I heard you went to Philippi and some people were converted there.

A number of people. Where are they? He says, come I'll show you. And he'll take you to a church in Philippi.

And he said, these are the people who came to Christ through my ministry. They are now meeting together as a church, and they are building one another up. And say, Paul I heard you went to Thessalonica.

Where are those people? He says, come I'll take you to Thessalonica, and he'll take you to the church in Thessalonica, and he'll show you the people who are there who were brought to Christ through him. Where do you find such evangelists today? Very, almost impossible, of these people who travel around different places. Paul traveled around.

I'm not talking about a local pastor who is in one place. I'm talking about someone like Paul. Travel, travel, travel.

There are many preachers who travel here and there. But are they building a body? Do they encourage the weakest member in some church with a word of encouragement saying, you are very necessary according to Scripture here in 1 Corinthians 12 22. And here's an amazing word.

See each of these, 1 Corinthians 12 is about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Not the fruit of the Spirit. That is in Galatians 5. The fruit of the Spirit is like the life in the body.

Every part of this body must have life. The blood must flow to every part of the body. The oxygen goes to every part of the body through the blood.

So that is a picture of life which every single member must have. Whether you're a very important part like the eyes or the tongue, or a very unimportant part like the nails. Every part of the body needs the life of the body and the blood to flow there.

That's a picture of all of us born again. But there's another thing mentioned here which is gifts. Now the gifts are not the same for everyone.

The hand is pictured as one gift. The ear is pictured as another gift. The eye is pictured another gift.

Now the question is, it doesn't mention all the gifts, all the parts of the body because there are other parts of the body that you don't see like the liver and the kidney and the heart and any internal organs. But the important thing which I wanted you to see here is, in verse 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 7, to every single member in the body is given some manifestation of the Spirit for the good of the whole body. The point, the word I want you to notice there is to each one there's not nobody left out.

There's no part of this body which has got no function at all. Now if you believe, I want to make it personal now, you believe you're really born again and if you have made Jesus Christ Lord of your life, I want to ask you, do you believe that you have a function in the body of Christ? I believe in the early church everyone was a member of some local church and if a person was a lonely person he prayed until two or three came there and it became a local church. You don't need more than two or three to have a local church by the way because Jesus said in Matthew 18 20 where two or three are gathered together I'm in the midst.

You don't need 200 or 300 and so those Christians were part of a local church and they edified one another you know there were just three people. So here it says that every single person has got some manifestation of the Holy Spirit. You must be sure when the Holy Spirit has come and dwelt in you and you must be eager that he should fill you with his power then he will give you some gift.

May not be a spectacular one like preaching or teaching. It may be a gift which is more hidden like the internal parts of the body which are not seen but the important thing to know is every single person is given a gift by God. Now the thing is you can frustrate God's plan for example if a hand is very useful but if it gets paralyzed what does paralysis mean? Its connection with the head is gone.

That's all. It's still there. The blood is flowing through it.

The life is flowing through it. You can say that's that person is a member of the body of Christ but he's a useless member of the body of Christ. He just hangs around there coming to all the meetings but he does

nothing.

He's like this hand which is always part of the body. Wherever the body goes he's there and it's like some believers. They come to every single meeting.

They never miss a meeting. Every single zoom meeting they'll be there but they are absolutely useless to the body of Christ. Don't be a member like that.

That's a paralyzed. Oh yeah yeah you may be a member of the body but paralyzed member which means your connection with the head is gone. That's why I can't do anything.

He just hangs around there and such a hand becomes a burden on the rest of the body because that hand was supposed to fulfill a function but the other left hand now has to do the job of two hands because of this one lazy member who does not work out his own salvation and seek to have a living connection with the head. That's the tragedy of so many people in the body of Christ. Think of how much more the Lord could accomplish on this earth if every member of Christ's body decided I'm gonna take my calling seriously.

I may never become a preacher like Paul or Peter or I may never have a gift of healing or teaching or any such thing but I believe according to 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 7 there is some gift of the spirit which I'm sure you've given me. Maybe some invisible, maybe a vein or an artery or some nerve inside the body which is completely invisible but very very useful and you know how painful nerve pain can be. The nerve doesn't function properly.

Very useful. Many members of the body are not visible. Most of the members in our human body are not visible.

They're inside but everyone's got a function. So I want to encourage you my brothers and sisters to remember today that you, I don't care when you were born again, even if you were born again yesterday, ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. You have a function in the body of Christ.

So why is it that so many do not fulfill that function? How do we fulfill that function? See primarily by walking with God. The Bible says if we walk in the light as God is in the light we have fellowship with him and with one another. Fellowship with one another means we are ministering to one another, helping one another.

Every part of my body, see no part of my body is paralyzed internally or externally and so all of them are working together for this body to function. Some of the members are visible, some invisible but those invisible parts are also not paralyzed. They are fulfilling a function, active function every single day.

So why is it that so many do not fulfill that function? I want to show you a verse in 2nd Corinthians in chapter 1. Many people think it's by studying the Bible that we can have a ministry in the body of Christ. You know I used to wonder why printing was discovered only in the 1400s. The first book that was properly printed as a book was the Bible and that was in the late 1400s, 1470 or something like that.

That means for nearly one more than 1,400 years after the day of Pentecost, Christians were without a printed Bible and the handwritten scrolls of the Old Testament and New Testament was so expensive that you could have only one copy in a synagogue or somewhere and most Christians would have some scraps of something, one part of Paul's letter or one part of Peter's letter. That's about all they had and they had to listen to someone who had heard the rest of it or had a copy of it somewhere who could tell

them. That's why it says, Paul says to Timothy you must publicly read the scriptures in the churches because those guys sitting there don't have a Bible and it's amazing how much those early Christians accomplished without having a Bible.

So it's not by studying the Bible that we become effective in the body. That's important. When we have a Bible of course we're glad to have it and we can do more for the Lord.

But my experience is I've seen so many people who've been through big Bible schools who get degrees of bachelor of this and masters of this and doctorate in this that and the other and let me tell you my testimony. I have never in my life been blessed by anyone who came out of a Bible school. Not one.

As far as I'm concerned they're all a dead loss because they've all got a lot of knowledge. They study study study and cram their head with information. That's not the way to have a ministry.

That's why Jesus never sent any of his disciples to a Bible school. Instead of that he gave them the Holy Spirit. He says the Holy Spirit will teach you.

And that's when I was converted 61 years ago. That's the thing that came home to me. That I can study the Bible on my own just like those early apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit and understand it.

And I began to understand it. And I sought for the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill that function in the body of Christ. In my case it was preaching and teaching.

But whatever function God gave me I would have been happy to accept it. But that gift also didn't come initially. Initially I started out doing evangelism because I didn't know the Bible so well.

But I did know that Jesus died for my sins. So I could give out tracts when I traveled in a bus or a train or stand in the streets and preach the gospel. That's what I did in the early days because I didn't know what else to do.

I couldn't teach the Bible to anyone. So if you do what you can do the Lord will lead you to something more. You know when she poured the ointment at Jesus' feet you read that Judas Iscariot criticized her for what she did.

And when Jesus saw that, Jesus rebuked Judas Iscariot and said, don't trouble her. She has done what she could. That's a tremendous expression.

I have never forgotten it. She has done what she could. And I say that's all God expects you and me.

God's not asking us to do some impossible thing. It can be said about you that in your earthly life you did what you could through the power of the Holy Spirit. You fulfilled God's purpose.

And then God will lead you more and more into wider and wider horizons to serve him. For 2 Corinthians 1, let me show you the basis on which God produces the ministry in us. It's not by head knowledge as I said.

It's not by study. And that's the one reason I believe God did not allow printing to be discovered in 1480 because everybody would have thought we can serve God by going to a Bible school. No, they had to depend on the Holy Spirit.

That's what he's trying to teach them. If the written scripture was absolutely essential for spiritual progress, God would have allowed printing to be discovered about a hundred years before Christ was born. So that as soon as he was born, everybody could have a Bible.

I get a message from the fact that God did not allow printing to be discovered for 1,400 years after Christ. We need to depend more upon the Holy Spirit than upon just the book. The book is very important.

But without the Holy Spirit, you just become a dead Bible scholar like the scribes in the Old Testament who crucified Christ. So 2 Corinthians 1 verse 3 and 4. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort. And I believe the word comfort means strength.

The last four letters of comfort is F-O-R-T, fort. And comfort, who comforts us, who strengthens us in our affliction. What does God do? He allows his children to go through some type of trial.

If you're a real disciple of Jesus, I guarantee you will go through trials. If you don't have any trials in your life, I wonder whether you're a disciple at all. Because God allows his children to go through trials just like a parent will send his child to school.

Which parent is there who loves his child, who does not send his child to school? And in God's economy, the school is a school of trial and affliction. That is his school. And we start in the kindergarten, and we don't remain in the kindergarten forever.

We go to grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, deeper and deeper trials. And just like you learn more and more in a school as you go through from one grade to another, in the same way spiritually as God leads you through to one level of trial to another level of trial, you learn more. Now if a person says, I'm fed up of going through these trials, it's like your son saying in second grade, Dad, I'm fed up of going to school.

I'd like to just sit at home and not study. So when a Christian says, Lord, enough of these trials. I don't want any more of this.

Just leave me alone. Let me live a comfortable life. It's exactly like a child saying, I don't want to go to school anymore.

I've had enough of this education. They give me homework to do, and I've got to study this, and I've got to memorize that, and I'd rather play games. A lot of Christians, that is their attitude, and that is why they are absolutely useless to the body of Christ.

So God's greatest saints, he took them through affliction. The God of all strength, 2 Corinthians 4, gives us strength in our trial. So that, why does he give us strength in our trial? So that we may be able to strengthen others in their trial with the same strength that we got when God strengthened us.

Put the word strength instead of comfort there, and you see how it means meaning comes in. The strength that God gives us in our trial is so that we can communicate that same strength to others who are going through trials, with the same strength with which God strengthened us in our trial. So think of a person who's never been through any trial.

He's like a child who's never gone to school. What can he teach others? But here, even if you learned a little bit, I used to tell my children that if you're in the third grade, you can teach your younger brother who's

in the kindergarten, sure. When you go to the fourth grade, you can teach your younger brother who's in the first grade, and as you go up to the fifth grade, your younger brother will be in the second grade, you can teach him.

So every one of us, you don't have to become a PhD before you become a kindergarten teacher. You just got to know a little more than those kindergarten people. Everybody has got someone who knows less of the Lord than him.

I want to say to you, all around you are people who know less of Christ than you do. God has put you among them so that you can strengthen them and teach them the ways of the Lord. So he says that's the reason why God takes us through this education of trial.

And in those trials, one of his main purposes is to break our confidence in our own ability. Now this is where God's ways are completely different from the ways of the world. In the world, if you apply for a job, they want to see how much self-confidence you have.

If you're applying for a managerial job or to be a nurse, a supervising nurse or a doctor in a hospital or a teacher, they want to see how much confidence you have. Or whether you're scared and timid and feel that you know nothing. No, they want to see if you got some confidence in yourself.

Are you capable? It's exactly the opposite in God's kingdom. The stronger you are, the more capable you think you are, the less effective you'll be in God's kingdom. In God's kingdom, he has to shatter you so that you recognize this great truth, the most glorious truth for a member of the body.

That's described in John 15 and verse 5. That's what Jesus said. Without me, you can do zero. Apart from me, you can do absolutely nothing, he said in John 15 and verse 5. Just like a branch in a tree can produce no fruit if it's cut off from the tree.

That's the example he uses. That branch can never produce one single fruit by itself, but if it stays in the tree, such lovely apples come through that. When you go and ask the branch, how do you do that? He says, I don't do anything.

I just stay in the tree. And the sap, the picture of the Holy Spirit, keeps flowing. And the branch will say, I don't know how the fruit comes.

And I'll tell you this, my brother, sister, from all these years of my experience, I've seen more than 50, 60 years, that we don't even realize how God produces the fruit. We're amazed when the fruit comes. Say, how is that? I didn't do anything.

I just leaned on the Lord in helpless dependence upon him. And he somehow made me a blessing to somebody here and a blessing to somebody there. That's exactly what he'll do for you.

Don't just say he'll do that for some great servant of God over there. He'll do it for you. But you have to be broken so that you have no confidence in yourself.

The opposite of the world, where they say, you've got to have self-confidence if you want to do this job. Right. But in the kingdom of God, the more self-confidence you have, the more proud you become and the more useless you are to God's kingdom.

What you need in the kingdom of God is to recognize that without Christ you can do nothing. Nothing means zero. And what you think you're doing for God is just an absolute waste of time.

There are people who've got great singing ability, who think, ah, I can use my singing ability for God's kingdom. No, you can't. You've got to go through some shattering experience in your life of trial and brokenness before you can sing, perhaps not so beautifully anymore, but in a way that will bless people like anything, because of what you've been through.

It's the same way, Paul says, I went through many trials, that's what we read in 2 Corinthians 1, so that I could experience God. And then when I share God's Word, I'm not just preaching from my head. I'm preaching from what God taught me in the trials I went through.

So the way God brings fruit from us is also mentioned here. It says here, if a branch abides in me, my Father will prune him so that he produces more fruit. God's will is always, verse 2, every branch that bears fruit, my Father prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

God's will is always that you produce fruit, verse 2, and then produce more fruit, John 15, verse 2. And that pruning is what I was just speaking about, trial and affliction. And you cannot go from fruit to more fruit without being pruned. So if you face some peculiar situation in your life, don't say, Lord, why is this? I've been faithful to you.

You've been faithful, that's exactly why God's leading you through there, so that he can lead you to something greater and higher. And this is not some new message, because right through in the Old Testament, I could give you example after example after example, that this is the way God prepared all his servants to serve him. Let me give you the example of Joseph.

You know the story of Joseph, the favorite son of his father, Jacob, blessed in so many ways. His father was the darling of his father's heart. He'd give him special gifts, coats and dresses and things like that, that made all his brothers jealous of him.

And he had ten brothers who were so evil, they wanted to kill him, and finally they had mercy and sold him off as a slave to Egypt. Now think of this, this boy is only 17 years old, remember, and God had already shown him, I'm gonna do something through you. I'm gonna do something through you.

He had dreams where he saw his brothers bowing down to him. What do young 17 year old boys nowadays dream of? It's a sad state of affairs in the world today, that if you were to ask the average 17 year old what he's dreaming of, he's usually dreaming of some sexually filthy thing. But Joseph was having dreams about God doing something through him.

You know our dreams are an indication of where our conscious mind is set on most of the time when we are awake. Our subconscious recognizes by what we think of, not what we do or read, but what we think of most of the time in our waking hours. Our subconscious says, I know this guy is interested in this.

This is his primary interest. You can fool everybody in the world, but you can't fool your subconscious. The subconscious knows exactly what you're interested in.

You want to be a great man in the world. Yes, subconscious knows that. Or you want to make a lot of money, the subconscious knows that.

And your dreams will be related to that. Or if it's some impurity that subconscious knows that you have some impure desires in your mind which give you a lot of pleasure, it gives you that. The dreams are very often the subconscious giving you what you really want.

Whatever you may fool other people, the subconscious is not fooled. And so when I think of Joseph having dreams about how God is going to fulfill a purpose through him in the future, I say boy, this young boy really took to heart all that his father Jacob taught him. The father taught all the twelve sons about God, but Joseph was the only one who took it to heart.

I find that, you know, you can preach something in a church strongly and there are only few people there who take it to heart. The others are listeners and you ask them at the end of the message what they have good brains and they'll tell you what what was preached, but it doesn't grip them. So when God wanted to fulfill his purpose for Joseph, God had a plan that 13 years from now this young boy will be 30 years old and I want to make him the second ruler in Egypt that will feed the entire known world around there with food during seven years of famine.

How am I going to prepare him for this responsibility? Not, I mean Egypt, the best academies were there, education, universities and all that. He says no that's not the place. I'll put him in prison, accused falsely.

Lord, is that the way you educate your servants? Yeah? Not sending him to a Bible school, he'll rot away there. Let me put him some brief trial in his affliction, he will get to know me. And that's what happened to Joseph.

Let him be falsely accused. Let some woman come up and accuse him with a total lie and others believe it and imprison him. Not for one or two years, for ten years at least.

And there are many other things that he went through there. In his affliction, he got to know God better and is prepared to one of the, you know, one of the most wonderful things that Joseph learned. Because he lived a long life after that, many many years.

But when he was 37 years old, when the famine was beginning, his ten brothers had to come to Egypt for food. And one of the great things that God had worked in Joseph's heart to make him a man of God, was he gave him the strength from above to forgive his brothers. You need strength to forgive somebody who tried to kill you and who sold you off as a slave.

Imagine if you were sold as a slave by somebody, especially a relative who hated you, was jealous of you. And you got imprisoned because of all that. And one day you see that person and that person is coming begging you for some favor.

And you know what Joseph did? He put double into their sacks and wouldn't even take their money and blessed them and forgave them. And you know what he said to them? Have you heard Romans 8 28? God makes all things work together for good to those who love God. Let me show you the Romans 8 28 of the Old Testament.

You know that? God makes everything work for your good. That's in the New Testament, Romans 8 28. The Old Testament is the words of Joseph in Genesis 50 and verse 20.

Genesis 50 verse 20. This is after years of experience. God, you meant evil to me, he's telling his brothers.

But God meant it for good. To bring about this present result, to preserve many people, to make me a blessing to many people, your evil, somehow God converted it into something good. I mean, if he were to expand on that, he'd say, my dear brothers, he could tell his ten brothers, if you guys had not sold me to those slave traders, I would never be in Egypt.

I'd have been rotting away in Canaan and dying in the famine like the rest of you. And when I came here, if that evil woman Potiphar's wife had not accused me falsely, I would never have been put into jail. And if I were not in prison, I would never have met Potiphar's cupbearer, who introduced me to Potiphar later.

So every step what other people did turned for my good. Imagine if he was not, if he hadn't gone to prison. If Potiphar's wife had never accused him falsely, he'd never gone to prison.

He'd have just been an important servant in Potiphar's house. But he'd never have met Pharaoh's cupbearer, to whom he had interpreted a dream. And when Pharaoh had a dream, nobody would have told him, hey, there's a guy called Joseph who knows how to interpret dreams.

See how God planned every little thing. So what you meant for evil, he tells his brothers, God planned it for good. And verse 22 there says, Joseph stayed in Egypt 110 years, 80 years.

He had a ministry there in Egypt. But he came through trial and affliction. We could go through many examples like that.

Let me just mention one or two more to show you. This principle applies right through Moses. He was another person who 40 years was in the best, in the palace in Egypt.

He knew how pyramids were built and brilliant man, absolutely brilliant. I mean, even today, engineers wonder at the constructions in Egypt. This is Moses.

He knew all that. And it says in Acts 7, he was powerful in speech and powerful in action. Strong, mighty man, he could kill an Egyptian with one blow.

Muscular, intelligent, educated man, age of 40. And he thought, we read that in Acts 7, that Israelites should recognize how God had prepared him to deliver them. God said, no.

You're too strong, Moses. Have you ever heard God say to you, you're too strong? You're too proud of your cleverness. I can't use you, sorry.

You're too self-confident. So what does he do? He takes this big prince of Egypt and puts him in a wilderness and makes him look after sheep for 40 years to humble him. And to add to that, makes him stay with his father-in-law for 40 years.

Have any of you had an experience of staying with your father-in-law for even one year? And not only staying with them, but dependent on your father-in-law for your job. Think of that. What a blessing that can be.

That you're dependent on your father-in-law for your job and you have to live in that house. Not one or two years, 40 years. That's enough to break anybody.

Moses, the great mighty prince of Pharaoh, was thoroughly crushed to the dust so that when God appeared to him at the age of 80 in the burning bush and says, Moses, I want you to go as my

representative Pharaoh. You know, this man who was mighty in words at the age of 40 says, Lord, I can't speak. How did God accomplish that? 40 years of crushing and breaking and made him the mightiest servant of God in the Old Testament.

And I've often thought when he was 40 years old, he could kill one Egyptian. When he was 80 years old, he lifted up his rod over the Red Sea and the entire Egyptian army was buried underneath in one moment. That's God's power.

With his human power, he could kill one man. Imagine if he had tried to kill the Egyptians one by one like that. Where would he have ended? God's ways are so different.

When God succeeds in breaking you, brother, he doesn't need your human strength. He can do much through very, very weak people. And that's what he seeks to do.

You take another example in David. There's another person in the Old Testament who's called a man after God's own heart. God called him, I think he was around 17 or 20 years old when he killed Goliath.

Around the same age as Joseph. And God had a plan for David. This young boy, by the time he's 30 years old, I want him to be the king of my nation Israel.

Because my first king Saul would have failed me. I want to make David king. But I have to prepare him.

You see, the thing with Saul was, he was from a rich family. His father was a wealthy man. And he grew up in wealth.

And he straightaway became king. And he failed almost immediately. This is what happens usually to children who grow up with wealth all around them.

They can ask whatever they want their parents give them. Foolish parents. And the end result is they are useless to society.

Saul. But David was different. He wasn't from a wealthy family.

And he earned his living by looking after sheep. I mean, not living, he was looking after his father's sheep. And he was so insignificant that when, I love that time where Samuel came to the David's father's house, Jesse's house, and you read that in the first book of Samuel and how he came to Jesse's house and said, you know, God has sent me here and one of your children has got to be the king.

And he brings all his six or seven children except David. And one after the other, God says, not this one, not this one, not this one, not this one. And Samuel is confused.

I asked Jesse to bring all his children. He says he's brought all of them. And God says no to all of them.

Did I get it wrong, Samuel says. So he checks up again. Jesse, are all your children here? He says, oh no, there's one young, younger boy.

I mean, he's just a kid. I didn't even bother to call him. He's not the type of person who would be a king.

He's just looking after sheep. No, Samuel said, call him. I got to see him.

And as soon as he comes, God says to Samuel, this is the one, anoint him, the one despised by his father, despised by his brothers. And he was anointed, but he couldn't become king yet. God says, I got to prepare him by breaking him, by allowing him to go through affliction so that through what he learns of God in that affliction, he can strengthen others.

Same principle that we read in 2nd Corinthians 1. And so God allows David to go through 13 years of Saul chasing him to kill him. He's running for his life from one cave to another and another. And once he's got Saul at his mercy, sleeping in that cave and he wouldn't kill him.

God was testing David. Will you trust me to give you the kingdom which Samuel anointed you for? Or will you stab Saul to death and take over and become king yourself? You know, a man, if God wants to give a man something, he doesn't have to grab it for himself. He can sit back and never do anything unrighteous to grab it.

One day God will give him a ministry. Remember that. I remember in my younger days, I mean, God had anointed me in the Holy Spirit and I could, somehow, I'm not a born speaker, but somehow God anointed me to speak when I was just 23 years old.

And I found a lot of people that liked to listen to me. But the church where I went to, the elders were all in their 40s and all day. They looked down upon me.

They would never allow me to speak there. So I said, fine. I mean, God in the streets, they started preaching on the streets where I didn't have to get anybody's permission.

That's where I learned to preach out in the streets. That's where I learned to preach the gospel. That's where I learned to preach.

Where people made fun of me and laughed at me. And over a period of two years in the town where I was a naval officer, I went to every single street corner. I'd take my scooter and travel with another brother and stand in a corner, sing a few songs, preach the gospel, give a few tracts, five minutes, and then go to the next corner.

And in two years, we covered every single street in that town. I said, well, that's where I got it. And people called me the devil and all types of names.

And I was, God was breaking me. I didn't know what God had for me in the future. I had no idea.

I was 23 years old. But God had a plan, which I did not know. But he knew that I had to be broken, so I didn't have high thoughts about myself or imagine that I was somebody or important or any such thing.

And I found the same thing. God does that with every single person. You know with the Apostle Paul, even after God began to use him, the great danger of people, when God begins to use them, is they become proud.

And this is a law with God. The moment you become proud, God begins to oppose you. It's a law.

God opposes the proud. Twice written in James 4 and 1 Peter 5. He gives grace to the humble. He opposes the proud.

So as soon as a man becomes proud, God begins to oppose him. This is how so many people have lost their ministry and become useless to God. They become puffed up because God used them in some way or somebody spoke a word of appreciation to them and that went to their heads.

Be very careful, dear brothers. God's got great plans for every one of you who are members of the body. But the devil knows how to ruin God's plan for you.

All he's got to do is put a little thought in your head of how important you are. How much better you are than another person. That's all the devil's got to do.

And he knows that God will do the rest. He will humble you, humble you, humble you, and you'll waste your life on earth. And so Paul had that danger too.

Let none of you think that you don't face that danger. I'm reading the Apostle Paul's life, I say I face that danger all the time. And so I'm careful.

And so what did God do to Paul? He gave him a sickness, an affliction. Can God teach people through sickness? Does God heal every sickness? Could God have healed Paul's sickness? Of course he could have. But he didn't.

It's not God who gave that sickness. No, God does not give sickness to anyone. He loves us like a father and no father will give sickness to his child.

That sickness came from the devil. The first book in the Bible is the book of Job, written 500 years before Moses wrote Genesis. Job lived in the time of Abraham, 500 years before Moses.

And he wrote the book of Job. And the first book of Job tells us that the devil gave sickness to Job. It wasn't God.

God permitted it. The devil gave a sickness to Paul. Second Corinthians chapter 12 says, a messenger of Satan, verse 7, his sickness, he calls it a thorn in the flesh.

A messenger of Satan. That was his trial. That was the affliction.

That was his Bible school. His Bible school was not a classroom where he sat with the Bible and writing notes and all that. No.

His Bible school where he went through affliction. And it was very painful. It was a sickness which the devil gave him.

Because he calls it a messenger of Satan. Second Corinthians 12 7. But at the same time, it says in verse 7, it was given to him by God. It's an apparent contradiction.

But this is true. Given by God, but a messenger of Satan. It's God who allowed Job to become sick, but it was the devil who did it.

It was God who allowed Satan's, Job's family to be killed, but Satan did it. So, without God's permission, it's not possible. It made Job a better person at the end of his trial and made, it preserved Paul in humility.

It says there very clearly, to prevent me from becoming proud. Second Corinthians 12 7. To prevent me from becoming proud because of all the fantastic way in which God was using me. Anyone whom God

uses in an amazing way, faces the danger of pride.

And God himself makes sure to protect him in some way. And gave him this thorn in the flesh and broke him. The result was Paul's ministry became anointed.

And he became a tremendous blessing. He could write all these scriptures which have blessed people for 2,000 years. Where did it come from? Not from head knowledge.

Paul was a clever person. He spent three years in a seminary run by a great Jewish scholar called Gamaliel in Jerusalem, when he was a Jew. The rich Jews would send their children to Gamaliel.

Paul's father was a rich businessman in Tarsus. He sent him to Jerusalem to study in the seminary for three years. And you know what God did when he selected Paul? You read in Galatians chapter 1 that God sent him for three years to the desert.

Have you read that? He spent three years in the desert in Arabia. You know why? To get rid of all the chaff in his brain, which Gamaliel had put in there. And God says, you know, my other disciples are all fishermen.

They didn't get any chaff in their head from the Bible school. They never went to Bible school. But Paul, unfortunately, he went to a Bible school for three years.

I've got to get rid of that. So I'll take you to a desert for three years and get rid of all this useless knowledge you've accumulated in your head and your understanding. You'd be a scribe.

But I want you to be a disciple, not a scribe. That's how God had to make him dependent on him, to fill him with the Holy Spirit and go through affliction and trial. Timothy was Paul's closest co-worker.

In fact, Paul says about Timothy in Philippians 2, there's no one like him among all his co-workers. He's the only one, I can say, who genuinely seeks the kingdom of God, seeks the things that are Christ's, and concern for others. But he had a thorn in the flesh, too.

He had a stomach problem. You know that Timothy had a stomach problem from which he was never cured? Paul tells him about it. Paul tells us about it in 1 Timothy 5, in verse 23.

You know, frequent stomach problems. They say, hey, Paul, you got the gift of healing. Didn't you pray for him? Sure, I laid hands on Timothy numerous times, but he never got healed.

Just because Paul healed some people, doesn't mean he could heal everyone. Paul was not healed. He couldn't be healed.

Did Timothy pray for his own healing? Sure. He was not healed. Frequent stomach problems.

That was a thorn in the flesh because Timothy was a mighty servant of God. Why? So that he can be broken, so that he'll never think too much of himself, so that he'll be helpless like a branch dependent on the tree saying, Lord, without you, I can do nothing. But with you, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

That's what happens when a man goes through trial. So, I just took you through a quick review of numerous examples in the Scripture. We started with this verse.

Every member in the body of Christ has got a ministry. That applies to you, especially you. So, one of you who thinks that, oh, not me.

I couldn't possibly. I'm talking to you, the one who feels is most useless, most incapable of doing anything for God. You're the one God wants to use you in his body.

But he has to take you through trial to get rid of your self-confidence, or to get rid of your self-condemnation. You think you're humble because you keep condemning yourself. No.

Why do you condemn yourself? Let me ask you a straight question. Why do you condemn yourself saying, oh, I'm useless? Because you've got such high thoughts about yourself. You say, no, no, no, I don't have high thoughts.

You do have high thoughts about yourself. That's why you're saying, oh, I'm so weak, because you want to do some great thing. Why can't you be happy to do some small thing for God? Why do you want a big ministry? Why don't you say, Lord, I don't want a big ministry.

Make me like a nail. Not even a finger, but a nail. That's enough.

I can scratch somebody's back and encourage them. You know what scratching the back is? Giving a word of encouragement to somebody. Only the nails can do it.

Is don't ever think that there's no member who cannot be useful to others. A word of encouragement. Who cannot give it? Can you speak? Don't you speak to people every day? Don't you use your phone? Some of you have emails.

Do you ever write a word of encouragement to someone? Do you ever speak a word of encouragement after you've finished your phone call? You say, hey, sister, before I finish, I just want to say this to you. God's got a plan for your life, I believe. May God bless you.

That's enough. You have ministered to one person through one sentence. Why don't you do it? Why didn't you say, Lord, I'm not a great preacher, but teach me how to add one sentence at the end of my emails.

I'll speak one word before I finish that phone call. Just to lift up somebody's spirit. Maybe the other person at the end of the line is highly discouraged and allowed that person to give you a call.

Don't let God down. Don't say, I'm not a great preacher. You are a member of the body of Jesus Christ.

His life is flowing through you. Don't have high thoughts about yourself. Just humble yourself and say, Lord, I want to just be an ordinary member.

If it's a nail, a nail. But I'm going to scratch somebody's back and encourage him or her. Break me.

Humble me. Take away all this pride. I believe it's only pride that makes us useless to God.

You look for something big and God says, no, I want you to do something small. Be willing to do any small thing and God can multiply those small things and make you a fantastically useful member in the body of Christ. Amen.

Let's just pray. Heavenly Father, these are not new truths. I've shared them often and many of us have probably heard this so many times.

Unfortunately, we become so familiar with it that we don't value it anymore. Forgive us. Help us to value this great truth in Scripture that it's only when a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies that it'll bring forth much fruit.

Teach us to die every day. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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