

Power through Weakness: The Pattern of Christian Ministry

Near the end of Paul's most personal and emotional letter, he makes a surprising confession: 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12:10). Taken at face value, it sounds like nonsense. How can one be, simultaneously, both weak and strong?

Yet on closer examination, Paul is imparting a profound truth. In fact, probably nowhere else does he expound the riches of the Christian ministry in such depth. For those of us seeking to be effective servants of Christ, we must make sense of the paradox of power through weakness.

This will be the goal of our class sessions together. We will examine a number of such paradoxes in 2 Corinthians – comfort through suffering, glory through shame, life through death, riches through poverty, power through death – and piece together a mosaic of clues which, in the end, will reveal a picture of the Christian ministry that is at once thrilling and practical.

Clues will be gathered from two sources: in particular, from the influence of contemporary culture on members of the Corinthian church, an influence made evident by archaeological data drawn from first-century Corinth; and from the influence of Paul's own understanding of the cross of Christ.

What will emerge, from our homework and discussions together, will be insights strikingly relevant to us in the late-modern West. We will discover that the 'weakness' of the cross is a radical foil to the 'powers' of our world.

It will be an exciting course. It will cause us to re-examine our assumptions of Christian ministry. It is my prayer that, by the time we finish our sessions together, we shall be eager to adopt Paul's motto as our own: 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'