

**DEALING WITH HELPLESSNESS**

Pentecost 4

2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Mark 6: 1-6

July 4, 2021

***Journalist David Osborne was excited about the purchase of his new home at 58 Glebe Street in the suburbs of Sydney, Australia. Renovations were nearly complete, and he was due to move in within a week. After work, he drove to his new address to check on some of the final details. When Osborne arrived he found a frightening scene. A huge crane with a wrecking ball towered over his property. Every floor in the house had been removed. Thousands of dollars in renovation materials including a valuable antique fireplace had been transformed into a large pile of debris. Standing in the rubble that was his home was the Housing Minister of New South Wales, Frank Walder. The Housing Minister offered this explanation: "The contractor and demolition crew were told to go to 58 Glebe POINT ROAD, but instead went to 58 Glebe STREET." Oops!***

Imagine you are David Osborne looking at a mountain of rubble that was your home. How would you feel? Angry? Frustrated? Helpless? Some folks have experienced what it means to see a home destroyed--by hurricane, floods, tornados, earthquake. But they aren't the only disasters that can leave us feeling abandoned. A health crisis--a tumor or a stroke or a heart attack--a divorce-- a business failure. There are those events that happen in life which we are powerless to avoid.

St. Paul, one of the most influential men who ever lived, was courageous. He was brilliant. He was a man of great faith and understanding. But he had

a problem he could not conquer. He called it his "thorn in the flesh." Whatever it was, St. Paul, who had helped so many others, was helpless to help himself, just like you and I are helpless at times to help ourselves.

***Something like this happened to jazz musician Quincy Jones. When he was 41 years old doctors discovered that Quincy had two aneurysms in his brain. He prayed "Please, God, not now," Jones was a first-rate trumpet player who was just then reaping the benefits of having his talents recognized. He had worked with Lionel Hampton's band and now had his own group. But he was forced to face the reality that he could not return to playing the trumpet. He would have to apply his musical talents elsewhere.***

Such things happen to people all the time. We think we have life under control, but adversity strikes--a disaster strikes our house, our family, our body--and our plans are changed. As the saying goes, **"If you want to make God laugh, show him your plans."** Life can change overnight.

Quincy Jones was more fortunate than most people with life-threatening, career-ending aneurysms. He directed his musical ability into composing, directing, and producing, and soon began to attract the attention of some of the entertainment industry's most influential people. After his battle with the twin aneurysms, Jones produced and conducted the WE ARE THE WORLD recording, wrote the score for ROOTS and THE COLOR PURPLE. He was nominated for sixty-eight Grammy Awards and won nineteen. Stephen Spielberg summed up Jones's intensity of life in a SIXTY MINUTES interview: **"He finds two minutes of enrichment out of one minute of living."**

Quincy Jones found a way to be victorious despite the obstacles put in his path. **Not everyone is that fortunate, but everyone knows what it is to feel helpless.**

**EVEN JESUS KNEW WHAT IT WAS TO FEEL HELPLESS--**and it occurred well before his cross on Calvary. After he began his ministry, Jesus returned to Nazareth, his hometown. The next Sabbath he went to the synagogue to teach. The people were astonished at his wisdom and his miracles because he was a local. **"He's no better than we are,"** they said. **"He's just a carpenter, Mary's boy, and a brother of James and Joseph, Judas and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us."** Many citizens of Nazareth were offended that Jesus presumed to teach them! **"A prophet is honored everywhere except in his hometown and among his relatives and by his own family,"** Jesus said. And then Mark writes: **"And because of their unbelief [Jesus] couldn't do any mighty miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them."** (LB)

Imagine that! Jesus was helpless because of the people's lack of faith. Sometimes, like St. Paul, we are unable to help ourselves. Sometimes, like Jesus, we are unable to help others. Some of you are the parents of teenagers. Is there anyone more helpless at times than the parent of a teenager? Life is filled with so many perils at that stage of life.

*You may have heard about the phenomenon known as the "Romeo and Juliet Effect"--named for the young lovers in Shakespeare's drama who committed suicide because their love was doomed by a feud between their families. Their*

*parents' hatred toward their romance seemed only to fuel the fire of Romeo and Juliet's devotion to one another. That's not unusual, according to researchers.*

*Studies show that the opposition of parents to a teen relationship can often cause the pair to feel greater love and determination to marry. And the more parents seek to interfere, the more intense the love experience of the teens becomes. When the interference weakens, romantic feelings cool.*

*What's a parent to do? Implications of the Romeo and Juliet Effect can be horrifying. A parent sees danger in a relationship and, with the best of intentions, tries to intervene, but instead of helping they makes the situation worse. This same phenomenon can be seen in youth involved in cults or gangs. When the parent brings up objections, the young person begins justifying the commitment that they have made to the group. The very fact of providing a justification gives the young person an even greater emotional investment in the stand he or she has taken. It is a scary phenomenon. Sometimes we are frustrated because we are unable to help ourselves. Other times we are unable to help others.*

**WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT HELPLESSNESS USUALLY DESCRIBES AN ATTITUDE AND NOT A SITUATION.**

*We are never really helpless. The late Pastor Robert Schuller wrote that there are eight words that, when used in a positive and affirming sense, can transform a person's attitude and their life. Those eight words are: I AM, I CAN, I WILL, I BELIEVE. These eight words reflect a person's identity, self-image, competency, character, will and motivation. But these eight words can't stand alone. Each one is the beginning of a phrase. How we end that phrase will decide what our identity, self-image, competency, character, will*

**and motivation are. Do we say, "I am a winner"? "I am a person of value"? Or do you say, "I am a loser"--"I am not good **enough**"? How we finish these phrases reflects who we are and what we'll get out of life.**

While St. Paul had his thorn in the flesh that he could not get rid of it he didn't let it defeat him--any more than Quincy Jones let those two aneurysms.

**HELPLESSNESS IS AN ATTITUDE, NOT A SITUATION.**

**(2) WE SHOULD ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS IN OUR WEAKNESS WHERE WE MEET GOD'S STRENGTH.**

St. Paul searches as we search for a reason that God has not removed this thorn in the flesh from him. ***"Three different times I begged God to make me well again," writes St. Paul. "Each time [God] said, 'No. But I am with you; that is all you need. My power shows up best in weak people.' Now I am glad," St. Paul continues, "to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ's power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite happy about 'the thorn,' and about insults and hardships, persecutions, and difficulties; for when I am weak, then I am strong--the less I have, the more I depend on him."*** (LB) Paul concludes that his **weakness** was one of his greatest strengths.

Perhaps Jesus concluded the same thing. Imagine that Jesus had been successful in his hometown. There might have been a temptation to settle down there? After all, there is no place like home. Jesus could have founded his own tabernacle in Nazareth--with the crutches of those he had healed lined up around the walls. He could have opened a seminary and devoted

more time to training his disciples for the ministry to which he had called them. Since it was his hometown, he could have looked after his mother. More pointedly, he could have avoided Jerusalem - the beatings and the cross. A fortunate thing for those of us who know Jesus as our Lord may be that he could not go home. When you come to one of life's difficult moments, when you are most aware of your weakness, **look for God's strength.**

*I read of a Dr. Gibbs who loved planting trees on his property. But he treated them strangely. Dr. Gibbs never watered his new trees. And he had the odd habit of beating his new trees with a rolled-up newspaper. It almost looked like he didn't want his new trees to survive. But that wasn't the case. The doctor said that regular watering caused trees to grow shallow roots. Trees forced to find their own water would grow roots that went deep into the ground. And beating a tree helped it to toughen up. And 25 years later Dr. Gibbs' had a forest standing solid and strong.*

Now I don't know if Dr. Gibbs really knew anything about growing trees or not. But I do know that **spiritual strength is refined in the fires of adversity. Helplessness is an attitude, not a situation. In our weakness we discover God's strength.**

**FINALLY, WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT A CLAIM OF HELPLESSNESS REVEALS OUR LACK OF TRUST IN GOD.** To say we are helpless is to say that God doesn't KNOW about our situation. To say that we are helpless is to say that God doesn't CARE about our situation. To say that we are helpless is to say God is POWERLESS TO HELP US in our situation.

**All not true.** God knows, God cares, and God is able to do for us all that we need. As the Bible reminds us:

- God knows our name (John 10:3).
- God numbers the hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30).
- God counts the steps of our feet (Job 14:16).
- God holds our right hand in His hand (Psalm 73:23).
- God supplies all our needs (Philippians 4:19).

St. Paul could not help himself with his thorn in the flesh; Jesus could not help others because of their unbelief. If there is something you feel helpless about - a health problem, a problem with a child, something at work? Remember, that helplessness is an **attitude and not a situation**. **Our weaknesses can, if we ask God to help us, become our greatest strengths**. A claim to be helpless is lack of trust in God. **WE ARE NEVER HELPLESS BECAUSE GOD IS WITH US.**