

How to Hit a Curveball Week 3
Finding God's Strength
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How cool is that?! We all just learned how to throw a curve ball from a Major League pitcher!

There are many things in life that are very difficult to navigate that we just didn't see coming.

A pandemic
A divorce
A separation
An addiction
A layoff
A sickness

And sometimes it's a combination of all of the above.

How do most of us navigate tough times?

SLIDE _____) Special Sermon Slide
Picture of Zoom (logo)

SLIDE _____) Special Sermon Slide
Comfort Food (Picture of junk food in a pantry)

SLIDE _____) Special Sermon Slide
Netflix (Logo)

SLIDE _____) Special Sermon Slide

Online shopping (more logos)

**SLIDE _____) Special Sermon Slide
Social Media (logos)**

And for some, alcohol is how they navigate tough times. Alcohol sales are up almost 300% during these quarantine days.

For others, it might be drugs or pornography that is the pandemic navigator for them.

**SLIDE _____) Proverbs 18:10
“The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous man runs into it and is safe.”**

A strong tower is an elevated tower. Could it be that it is so elevated, as to be high, or inaccessible for capture? I do not think that it is a stretch to come to this conclusion. One of the uses for towers in the Old testament is that they were used as fortresses in times of war.

We’ve all got a tower we run to. The question we have to ask ourselves today is what have they done for us lately?

I want you to know today that there’s a name you can call on today that can absolutely change your life if you let Him. There are many people in scripture who had to hit a curve ball. I want to look at one man today who had to do that. And I believe there’s a lot we can learn from the adversity and trials he faced in his life. His name is Paul.

Paul wrote a few letters to the church of Corinth. Two of them are present in our Bible. The first one he sent (1 Corinthians) was addressing the many problems the church was having but It was rejected by most based off what Paul says about and to them in 2 Corinthians. So, 2 Corinthians, technically what scholars believe is the 3rd letter to the church of Corinth, has 3 main parts. The first 7 chapters is Paul reconciling with the Corinthians. Chapters 8 and 9 Paul is encouraging them to be

more generous. Chapters 10-13 Paul is challenging the remaining naysayers in Corinth who are still rejecting his teaching.

These naysayers are very prideful and the word Paul uses frequently is boasting. So, Paul appeals to their ego and says... if you want to boast, we can play that game.

The beginning of 2 Corinthians 12 Paul reveals to us that he had a heavenly vision where he himself didn't know if he was taken up to heaven literally or just shown it, but in this letter he lets them know, hey, I was given revelations by God himself at His place. If anyone has bragging rights here, it's me.

And here's what he says...

SLIDE _____) 2 Corinthians 12:7-8

“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.”

We don't know what this was. Sages of the ages have speculated what this thorn was. We have no idea. But we do know how he felt about it. It was painful enough and important enough for Paul to bring it up to God. It's a rather interesting request Paul would make to God about this thorn when you compare and contrast it to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11 where he was in the middle of his challenge and argument against naysayers who were boastful. He says this....

SLIDE _____) 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

“Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked.

Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.”

And there are days when I think I have it rough. ha. No sir. Paul says if there’s anything he wants to boast about, it’s not going to be his accomplishments, but his weaknesses and his downfalls. He’s not laying this out for us to feel bad for him. He’s using it as a technique to illustrate humility. But when I see this list of things he endured, I think to myself...

You were VERY specific about your persecution and what you’ve been through in chapter 11, but in chapter 12... it’s... “this”.

What could be worst than what you just told us?

Have you ever had a “this” that you’ve prayed about that you wouldn’t even tell your best friend about?

Story of a friend who would pray at a tree and eventually stopped praying at the tree. I think God is inviting us all back to the tree.

SLIDE _____) 2 Corinthians 12:8

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.”

SLIDE _____) 2 Corinthians 12:8-9

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me ‘My grace is sufficient for you...’”

Has God ever told you no?

Have you ever prayed for something and your request was denied?

You prayed for an outcome financially, relationally, and God just said... nope.

I think Paul would make the argument to God... hey have I not proven my love & loyalty to the gospel in chapter 11? There are Christians who never endure 10% of what I've gone through, so don't we think that I could be more useful to you and your kingdom without this... thorn.

SLIDE _____) 2 Corinthians 12:8-9

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”

God's response: how'd you get through chapter 11?

How'd you make it through 39 lashes from the jews 5 times? How'd you endure prison?

How'd you stand to your feet after being beaten with rods and stoned?

How'd you make it adrift at sea for 24 hours?

How'd you survive poverty?

Hey Paul, what in the world sustained you when you had a sleepless night?

It was the amazing power and grace of God that brought you through chapter 11 and that same amazing grace is sufficient for your thorn in chapter 12.

Might you be encouraged today to know...

His grace is sufficient for a quarantine.

His grace is sufficient for a pandemic.

His grace is sufficient for your darkest hour and your darkest day.

SLIDE _____) 2 Corinthians 12:9

“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

SLIDE _____) 2 Corinthians 12:10

“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Paul had an approach to hitting curve balls that we should adopt.

Paul saw dark times as an opportunity for God’s light to shine brightest. We all want to see God’s strength on display. We all would love to see signs, miracles, and wonders. But we don’t get to see any of that without going through something.

I have a one point sermon today that answers one question.

SLIDE _____)
How do we find strength in God?

The answer is profound and will blow your mind.

Invitation.

SLIDE _____) Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Whether I’m sitting with leaders & executives, students, young adults, married couples, or athletes, the biggest mistake I see people make is attempting to fix their own problems with their own understanding.

One of the greatest spiritual disciplines we can have is fighting the “I got this” mentality.

What if we don’t... got this? What if we invited an able and willing God to... help us. Have you invited God to give you His strength? Have you invited God to give you his perspective?

Our prayer this week should go from....

How to Hit a Curveball Week 3

May 1/3, 2020

Deliver me from this.

Save me from this.

Help me escape from this...

To...

Meet me in this.

Give me strength in this.

Make me better in this.

I had a guy who's heard me speak a lot see me at a Mavs game. In my mind, the Mavs won the NBA championship this year. But we're all entitled to our opinion I guess. So I see this guy at a Mavs game and he stops me, and paid me a very high compliment. He said, I've heard you speak several times and I just really look up to you. I said, man that's very kind of you. He said, no man, you don't understand. I wish I had your strength. You seem like a strong man of God and I just wish I had your strength.

I'm thinking my strength?

Be not deceived my friend, I appreciate the compliment, but what you see standing before you is not a display of my own will and strength. I'm just a man who's called on God when he was a boy when his dad had a stroke in 5th grade.

Close with [Story of the first time I remember finding God's strength.](#)