K.E.Y. Bible Study (2012-2013/Year V)

K.E.Y Bible Study is a systematic study of Scripture that equips participants to become acquainted with the major truths of the Bible over a five-year period. Each lesson is self-contained; you can join at any time during the five years.

Purpose: To teach the most significant events, passages, and doctrines of the Bible in a manner and using methods that encourage and empower the student to:
Keep the Faith We Have Received
Be **E**quipped to Serve the Body of Christ
Become **Y**oked in Ministry with Other Believers

Session 26
March 6, 2013
"Steroid-Free Turning Weakness to Strength"

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.
(II Corinthians 12:9)

Why is II Corinthians 12:9 a K.E.Y. verse in the Bible?

When we face problems as Christians, we assume it is God's will to rescue us. Yet, our life experiences teach us that God does not always allow us to escape our problems. This verse assures us that God's failure to rescue is neither His abandonment nor an absence of His grace. It is a wonderful promise to claim during times of suffering.

Who?

- The central character is **God as revealed in Jesus, the Christ**.
- The secondary characters are the Apostle Paul and the church in Corinth.
    - **The Apostle Paul** was a missionary/church planter who had been transformed from a zealous persecutor of Christians to a crusading Christian preacher. While Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, his own background is Jewish. He is very intentional person. His missionary journeys and letters were for a specific purpose: not for developing relationships but for advancing the kingdom of God. When reading Paul's letters, it is essential to remember that context determines meaning.
    - **The church in Corinth** was probably a majority Gentile congregation but also included some Jewish Christians, a small group of Romans with elite backgrounds, and a number of converted slaves. At the time of this letter, Paul had made at least two visits to Corinth and written either two or three letters to them. Corinth was a pluralistic city with a very tolerant morality. Rome permitted soldiers to retire after 20 years of service, and many settled in Corinth. The immoral action of a member, selfish views of spiritual gifts, and an absence of boundaries contributed to Paul sending a letter of correction. We can assume that in an earlier letter Paul taught from the Old Testament, particularity for the benefit of the Gentile Christians, as well as from his own experience and from what he had learned from others about the teaching of Jesus.

When/Where?

In approximately 56 A.D. (maybe as late as 58 A.D.), Paul wrote this letter from the province of Macedonia. This location is suggested in II Corinthians 9:2, as well as several other passages.

Context:

While Paul addressed immorality issues, doctrinal problems, and division within the church in an earlier visit and previous letters, he was not totally satisfied with the response of the church. He wrote his letter for several purposes, including to express thanksgiving for positive response, albeit limited, to prepare them for a third visit, and to answer criticism by the false teachers.

As a result, portions of II Corinthians have an edge. The false teachers criticized Paul by accusing him of being boastful and egotistical. In II Corinthians 10, Paul addressed that criticism by writing that he only boasted in his weakness. Paul said he was given a "thorn in the flesh" to torment him and to keep him from being conceited. Theories regarding the identity of the "thorn in the flesh" are abundant. Some of the more prominent ones are:

- Some believe this phrase is a reference to his "sinful human nature"; however this would not have made his issues unique.
- One church father believed Paul referred to a person or enemy who opposed him continually.
- Others think it was epilepsy, malaria, or vision problems. While we do not know with any degree of certainty, the more common theory relates to a physical illness or weakness.

According to II Corinthians 12:8, Paul prayed three times for it to be taken away. The use of "three" here is not literally; it can be used to mean "too numerous to count."

Word Study

- **"But he said to me"** – Paul may or may not have heard an audible voice. He often wrote of God speaking to him, and the context rarely suggests that it was audible. The best book on the subject of listening to God is "Hearing God Speak" by Dallas Willard (Intervarsity Press, 1999).
- **"My grace is sufficient for you"** – God's unmerited favor is all that is needed. This is a reassurance that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" did not disqualify him from being used of God.
- **"my power is made perfect in weakness"** – The verb in this statement is passive present indicating that God is the one making perfect, not us. We do not turn our weakness into strength, but God does. This is an important verse in understanding why God does not heal or remove our illnesses every time we ask. God is exhibiting and revealing His power through the problem. We prefer rescue; God prefers redemption.
- **"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness"** – Paul's words are a very pointed tongue-in-cheek response to the claim that he was boastful. He said he would continue boasting about his weakness, not his accomplishments.
- **"so that Christ's power may rest on me"** – This statement acknowledges that God's power hovers over us when we are honest in our weaknesses and in our desire for our weakness to be used for God's power. This relates to the biblical concept of "humbling ourselves" before God.

K.E.Y. Truth

God's unmerited favor is all we need in every circumstance of life.

K.E.Y. Application

We can never excuse our sinful behavior or lack of usefulness in God's kingdom on our weaknesses. By surrendering our weakness to God, we exhibit the power of God.