

Mark 14:32-42; \*Philippians 4:10-13

“*Getting Past Your Last Nerve*”

What Bible verse would you choose for your tattoo? Some of you have a favorite verse. Today I’m preaching from one of those Bible tattoo verses – a favorite passage for some of our friends. (It would be interesting to collect, across the room, verses you’ve found to be so meaningful that it has become your defining value.)

Philippians 4:13 is one of those verses, but let me set the message in the context from which it comes. We discover from his letter to the Church in Philippi that Paul writes from prison.

The road as a missionary has been filled with threats and dangers for Paul and his friends. Christianity, in the early generations, was a very small segment of the population. Paul has had to deal with floggings and was left for dead, he’s suffered 39 lashings with a whip five different times, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked three times, adrift at sea for over 24 hours, “danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

And from out of this Paul writes to us: READING Philippians 4:10-13

<sup>10</sup> I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

What many of us have heard as a promise is more an expression of his *faith!* Paul believes, in fact, he has experienced a special ability to do more than he could have imagined “through Christ who strengthens me!”

“To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly.” (1 Corinthians 4:13)

You think you’ve had a hard day ...until you hear from where this mighty expression of faith comes!

Let’s explore what this great verse has to say to us, and we’ll break it apart into four phrases. I’d like you to think about what this statement of faith means with the handicaps or the anxiety or the suffering and worries you experience on a daily basis.

1. First, Paul begins simply ***I can...*** I can do all things. I can do all things through Christ...

I can imagine how easily discouraged Paul would be with all that he has endured! It would be easy to quit! I mean, to heck with it! He’s suffered more than a man should endure!

Yes, it would be easy to call it quits, just give up and go on to something else. If it was up to me, I might look for something that brought a little more pleasure and accomplishment. I might look for something that took care of *me!* If it was up to me!

But it’s not up to me anymore. The Bible describes what really happens when we invite Jesus Christ into our lives: **I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live,**

**but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me...** (Galatians 2:19-20)

I am no longer my own. I am His! And that has prove to be awesome!

The time in which we live pushes us to be driven by our own ego, believing “Yes, I *can* do all things!” relying on our own resources, our own knowledge, and we assume we can handle any situation.

And so people might ask, “Does God add anything more?”

I think of athletes in action on the field, the one who hit the towering game winning home run or the football player who scored in the final seconds to lead his team to victory, and we see that star fist-pumping, chest- thumping, as though to say “I ...am a mighty warrior!”

Well, there are great moments of individual accomplishments. But we have limitations. We are weak. There are some things we are unable to do! We will be powerless against forces such as disease or inflation or job closings or the hate we find in others.

But these are the moments when faith can stir us to believe! God whispers, “I can! And because I can, so can you!”

I, who can’t do much, I who accomplish little – I have potential. I am valuable to God! I have a calling and a purpose that outlives me and grows beyond me! Yes, **I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.**

When you don’t know if you can go on because of bad news remember: “I can!” I am precious to God and He knows me! “I *can* do all things through Christ who strengthens me!”

2. ***All things!*** I can do ***all things!***

Really? All things? Can I compose music like Beethoven? Can I run the New York marathon in world-record time or lift a tractor in the air?

Well, maybe I could do some of these if I really practiced. But this verse points us in another direction as we think about acquiring that vision and attitude that comes with the Spirit of Christ.

How many of us have grumbled over our lack of patience? And we know how ugly the temper can be! How many of us have held on to anger or revenge ...or how many of us are content with indifference and not getting involved?

The Bible addresses the presence of grace, the kindness of God that enables us to do what we couldn’t do or wouldn’t do before. God wants you to believe you can do *all things* through Christ who strengthens you!

Years ago, a college football player was drafted into the NFL by the Seattle Seahawks. During training camp he met linebacker Ken Hutcherson. Ken’s T-shirt read, “Hutcherson’s going to Seattle to do God’s battle.” The new rookie thought, “I’ve come 3,000 miles to run into another hypocrite?!” In college some guys who talked to me about the Christian faith talked one way but lived another.

So for six weeks I watched Hutch, and by then he was one of my best friends. He played his position hard. He encouraged me when I was tired. He encouraged me even if I beat him on a route.

But at the end of the preseason Hutch injured his knee. I went to console him and found him in the locker room, with ice on his knee. Even knowing that his career was over, Hutch had a big smile. He figured from the look on my face that I was confused.

“Sherman,” he said, “I’m a Christian. Nothing happens in my life unless it’s filtered through God’s hands first. I’m excited to see what God has planned for me.”

You see, Ken Hutcherson understood there would be new opportunities on other stages

where he'd perform – like in his kitchen helping his wife, or in the garage teaching his son how to fix a car, or in the street helping his daughter learn to ride her bike, or talking to friends about Jesus Christ.

Hutch “can’t” do football anymore, but he *can* do “new things!”

Sometimes God may guide us into *new things* – and show us what *all things* really looks like; things we didn’t even know about, new possibilities in spite of what we thought was possible! I can do all things because God is inviting me into new places and new ways!

Now let’s carry this over into our every days lives. Think of those hours spent busting knuckles as you’re trying to tear apart an engine in a tight spot, or trying to make something “work” in the office despite a stubborn staff. There’s a dozen places throughout the week where you’ve just about given up! The headache’s coming! You’re at your wit’s end!

Did you know there’s more help beyond your last nerve – and that you *can* do *all things*?

We get to that place where we just don’t care. We’re too tired. We’re too busy...

And those who have lived with Jesus Christ tell us, “I can do all things...!”

You *can* go on! Christ in you strengthens you!

I know you get used to that place where you’ve always stopped before. Where you’ve always given up before!

You don’t have to give up there. You don’t have to blow a fuse where you’ve always blown before. You can go on!

Christ in you is showing you “all things,” “new things,” and new landmarks you haven’t even imagined!

I can serve. I can stay late. I can give. I can go. I can wait. I can say the right thing. I can love. I can learn. I can listen. I can sympathize. I can be more sensitive. I can be strong! I can rise above the complaining. I can overcome the negativity. I can believe! I can hope! I can walk with the Lord through the ruts and the danger and temptations – because He lifts me up. I can do all things...!

**3. *Through Christ!*** With the power of Christ! The Spirit of Christ in me!

Oh, friends: Too often we rely on our own strength; on “will-power!” Trying harder! But will power is a stumbling block to trusting in Christ. When you rely on your own strength, your own knowledge, your abilities and resources you assume you can handle situations without God’s help.

So you can be stuck between your own will-power and God’s power. Here’s a story that lays it out for us. It’s the story of a highly successful businessman in a church. This man’s story was not an easy one. He had not been given the big breaks along his path to success. He had not inherited anything. (From Maxie Dunnam’s *Living the Psalms*, pg. 46-47)

He worked for everything he had, and over the years this hard work, combined with will-power, eventually paid off. His minister tells the story: I remember sitting in his office thinking that this guy could probably accomplish anything he would set his mind to do. And then he shattered my strong-man perception of him.

He told me about the drinking problem he had suffered for several years. He had tried to keep it a secret from everyone, but eventually he had to face the fact that it was a disease and that he needed treatment. He entered an alcohol treatment center and was determined to beat his problem. Normally, a person is in treatment for about thirty days and is ready to be released. But not this man! After twenty-seven days, he had not experienced any real growth and decided he would discharge himself from the program.

The next morning, on the twenty-eighth day of treatment, something happened to the man

that changed his life and his perception of himself. Here is his story.

“I had thought all along that these people were here to help me use my will-power. But finally I realized it had nothing to do with will-power. **Will-power is not the proper tool to use in trying to overcome something you cannot control. There was nothing I could will, there was nothing within my being that could affect the situation.**

“Suddenly, I realized that the only help I could count on was grace ...grace: a strength, a power, a force that was outside of me and other than me. For twenty-seven days I had tried to beat my disease by using sheer will-power. All through my life, will-power had always worked. But not this time. For it was only when I humbled myself, fell on my knees, admitted my total, unbroken, unconditional powerlessness – only then was I on my road to recovery.”

Here was a man who knew *grace* and was known by grace. Here was a man who knew that strength and drive and will-power were not enough.

If you’re feeling real strong and confident in some area of your life – watch out! It is in your strength, your will-power, rather than your weaknesses, that hinder you from trusting God.

4. By now you get the point: I can do all things *through Christ* ...who **strengthens me!**

What if we stopped griping, stopped criticizing, and plugged ahead, one foot in front of the other ...trusting and believing that God has something new for me!

God gives us strength only when we continue – *because* we believe in Him!

If you’re trusting in Him, He will strengthen you! When you wait on Him, He will strengthen you! When you cry out, “God, I need you!” He will strengthen you!

In fact, Jesus cried out from that place of misery and dread: “Take this cup of suffering away from Me! Yet I want Your will, not Mine.”

And in those moments of prayer Jesus Christ found the strength necessary! In the hour of need, He found He could do all things He was here to do! And obedient to God, He was raised to new life and new power!

We too can share in Christ’s new life! Through our faith and our desire for Him, Christ can live in us and we can experience a new strength under His guidance and by His power!

INVITATION: Is Jesus Christ a part of your life? Does He have access to your heart and soul and mind? Some of us just “play” with religion. We’ve kept Jesus at arms length 1) either because we don’t understand this indwelling “idea” of Christ in me; or 2) we’re just resistant to the whole idea of surrendering lordship and authority of our lives over to God. We don’t trust Him; we’re worried what He might expect us to do.

But I need the Spirit of Christ in me.

In fact, if you’re a Christian believer, the Spirit of Christ lives in you. And the more you yield your life to Him, the more His strength flows through you. Friends, you are called to live through the power of Christ who strengthens you. Not as those who are weak, but those who are strong! Not as those who fail but as those who are victorious! Not as those who don’t know their way, but as those who are self-disciplined. Not as those who are lost, but as those who are found! Not as those who are blind, but as those who see! He is here, ready to empower you.

Isn’t that great news?

Your new life in Christ begins with prayer. When you confess to God that you want His help, that you need His strength, that you don’t want to make your way through this world alone, something spiritual, powerful, happens in your spirit and soul. God comes to you in a way that can relieve your mind and your heart!

“Come,” Jesus said. “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

If you've been waiting to hear how this powerful promise of God can be real for you, I want to pray with you...  
Will you come?