Is it ever ok to
NOT BE OK?
Looking Deeper

Is it ever ok to not be ok?

Weakness or a lack of self-reliance can be a frightening thing. We think that we need to stay strong (or at least look strong) in order to stay in control and on top of things. But the truth is entirely different.

Here’s an interesting example. A young man wanted to learn judo even though he’d lost his left arm in a car crash. He started judo lessons, but after many months, his teacher had only taught him one move. His teacher then signed him up for a competition, telling the man that the move he’d learnt was the only one he’d need. He entered the
competition and, amazingly, won all his matches and the tournament, using just one move to pin his opponents to the floor.

   Afterwards, the man asked his teacher: “How did I win the tournament with only one move?”

   “You won for two reasons,” the judo teacher answered. “Firstly, you’ve mastered one of the most difficult throws in judo. And secondly, the only known defence for that move is for your opponent to grab your left arm.” In judo, the man’s weakness—his missing left arm—had become his greatest strength.

   All of us have weaknesses and issues. Whether we choose to admit this is another matter. But what God wants us to realise is that our weaknesses are opportunities to experience His power and strength. Rather than hide our weaknesses, we should present them to Him in honesty, admitting that we’re not ok. He wants to help us and provide for us. But first, we need to be able to accept that we have weaknesses and problems that we can’t handle on our own.

   We think that we need to stay strong in order to stay in control and on top of things.
The strength of weakness

Paul wrote about his weaknesses to the church in Corinth. He told them he asked God to take away a weakness he was struggling with. “And [God] has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NASB).

Paul said he was “content” with weaknesses, and that he’d even “boast” in them! How could he have such a positive attitude to his weaknesses? How could he claim, “When I am weak, then I am strong”? Weakness and strength are opposites. It’s like saying, “When I’m happy, then I’m sad”.

What if true power and strength doesn’t come through trying harder, but by giving up any attempt to be

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—2 Corinthians 12:9 NASB
in control? This is what Paul meant when he talked about the “power of Christ” that was in him. This power wasn’t something he earned or worked hard for. Paul relied on the strength of God, and not on his own ability. This is what it means to be a Christian.

If the man learning judo hadn’t lost his arm, his approach to the tournament would have been very different. He’d have felt stronger and more capable to create his own tactics and rely on his own instincts. Because of his severe weakness, he totally relied on his teacher to tell him how to approach the matches and what tactics to use. The strength of the man’s weakness was that it forced him to rely on his good, wise teacher.

Christians are in a very similar position. Every person in the world has weaknesses, but Christians don’t need to hide their weaknesses and ‘make do’. We can rely on God to help us get through whatever difficulties we’re facing. We don’t have to rely on ourselves when things aren’t ok.

God doesn’t want us to live independent, self-reliant lives. He doesn’t want us to be ok without Him—that isn’t the life we were made for, and it isn’t a satisfying way to live. It is how we try to live, but it’s not how we’re meant to live. God created us to live with Him. Relying on

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our own ‘strength’, we can often feel overwhelmed, out of our depth and confused. We quickly end up hurting ourselves and those around us.

The “power of Christ” is the new life Jesus offers us where we can live with God again. When Jesus came to earth, He did so to pay for our wrongs, mistakes and weaknesses by dying on the cross. He then rose to new life three days later. If we trust Jesus, we have joined Him in a new life and belong to God again.

We need to accept that we mess up and don’t always keep it together. In our weakness and helplessness, we need to realise that we need God, the one who is always strong, dependable and by our side.

for when I am weak, then I am strong

—2 Corinthians 12:10
Admitting weakness

Paul said: “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my [weakness].” (2 Corinthians 11:30). So does Paul mean he wanted everyone to see how pathetic and helpless he was? Did he want to draw attention to his failings publicly?

Actually Paul’s goal was to draw attention to how great God is. By being able to admit his shortcomings, Paul could direct others to the power and love of God being the foundation of his life. Paul wanted people to know that they didn’t have to just cope on their own when things were bad or they felt helpless. By showing his reliance on God (and also, then, showing his own weaknesses), Paul showed that there is strength and provision available for weak people. Paul was saying that it is ok to not be ok, because God is the only one who can truly provide all we need. We can’t do it on our own; we weren’t designed to. Trying to cope on our own will only end in pain and more helplessness.

It is hard to admit our weakness though. Maybe we can say things like: “I’m no longer the athlete I once was” or “I’m a little heavier than I used to be”. These are ‘safe’ things to admit. But admitting deeper weaknesses threatens our self-image. We don’t want others to look down on us or judge us.
When we face problems or weakness, we often react in one of two ways: negatively (“I quit”, “I’m not up to this” or “This is just impossible”) or positively (“I’ll work through this”, “It’s up to me to fix it” or “I can handle this”)

Maybe surprisingly, neither response is correct. You see, either way, we are focusing on ourselves and what we can do, not on God and what He can do.

The difference for Paul was that he used his weaknesses and difficulties to focus on God, rather than himself. Recognising weakness isn’t about admitting defeat or saying we need to do better. Recognising our weakness allows us to give control of our lives over to God. He knows what is best for each one of us, and He knows what He wants to achieve through the weaknesses we all struggle with.

So what difference does relying on God’s strength make in our lives?

God is the only one who can truly provide all we need
God’s power

So what does God promise to do in our lives? He promises to use His power to help us:

To become more like Him: Ultimately, we can’t change ourselves or fix all our weaknesses, no matter how hard we try. And only God can change us to become more like Himself. But this is exactly what He promises to do for those who trust Jesus (Romans 8:18-30; 1 Corinthians 15:35-50; 2 Corinthians 3:7-18). As we spend time with God, and dwell on the truth and teaching of His Word, He will shape us to be more like Jesus.

We cannot ever be fully ‘perfect’ in this life; but we can take on more of His character, love and patience in our lives. This won’t get rid of our weaknesses necessarily, but will allow us to show people that we no longer need to fear them or be defined by them. Christians are defined by one thing: Jesus Christ. When we trust Him, God calls us His own children (1 John 3:1) who He will grow to become more and more like Jesus.

In this way when others see us, they won’t see just ‘us’, complete with good bits and bad bits. Actually,
they will see something of who God is. When they see the confidence we have in His love, despite any trials we may face, hopefully they will want to know Him for themselves.

To keep trusting Jesus, even in the bad times: There are moments in life when everything seems to be against us. All our efforts to fix the problem have failed, and we feel like just giving up. We need to remember that there is only one person to go to with our problems. We can cast all our cares on God because He loves us and will provide what we need to keep going and not give up (1 Peter 5:7).

In each of our lives there will be times when we’re not sure we can continue trusting Jesus. Maybe we’ll feel weary because the change to become more like God is so slow, we’re not even sure it’s happening. Or we might be overwhelmed by our issues. We need to spend time with God and focus firstly on Him. He is able to strengthen us and reassure us. He promises to keep us going, to continue to make us like Jesus and to bring us safely into heaven after we die (John 14:1-3; Philippians 1:6).
It’s ok to not be ok!

No matter where we are in our journey with God, we have all experienced His power in our lives. It’s only because of Him that any one of us exists (Psalm 139:13-16)! Just as we needed God to create us in the first place, so too do we need Him to ‘grow’ us and keep us going.

We also completely needed Jesus to pay for our rejection of God and bring us back to Him. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). We have no strength or ability to please or figure out God ourselves. This new life with Him is His gift. The Christian life is about continually realising how much we need God for everything!

It is during the ‘strong’ times, when we think we’ve got it all together, that we easily forget about God. And when we forget about God, we quickly start just living for ourselves again. In our self-reliance,
we live by our own skills and experience. These are not bad things, but they need to also belong to God and His purposes. God sometimes allows us to experience the pain of weakness so that we will stay close to Him. That is the only way to become more like Him.

It’s ok to not be ok, because it is during our times of weakness that we ask God to help us, and we see again how powerful and good He is towards us.

As Paul said, “When I am weak, then I am strong”. When we stop trying to hide our weakness or fix them ourselves, we can rely on God and experience what He wants to do with our lives. It’ll be far better than anything we can do—He has no weaknesses! Life may still be tough, but we’ll have a confidence based on God—knowing that He calls us His own children, makes us more like Himself every day and will never leave us.

If you are struggling with weakness, tell a Christian friend or one of your church leaders so they can pray with you and encourage you. It might be helpful to meet regularly with someone who you can be accountable to. This sort of

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safe space can allow you to share your struggles in a supportive environment without feeling shame, so that you can start to discover the freedom and strength of knowing God’s “grace is sufficient”.

[12] IS IT EVER OK TO NOT BE OK?
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