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The Grace of Weakness

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Series: God's Amazing Grace

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The Grace of Weakness

Heavenly Father, You are such a loving God, that even when we awaken in the morning, Your thoughts have been of us the whole night through. Grace, grace, what incredible grace You have made available to us.

We lift up these that we have brought to You this morning, and pray that Your Spirit will continue the process of working miracles and bringing glory to Your name; and that You would be in the process continually of allowing us to see just how grace works as we bring these people, lay them at Your feet, and trust Your will to be done.

We ask You for a miracle, this morning. We pray that You would be our teacher. We pray that Your Word would go forth, and somehow supernaturally, You would do that which we cannot do naturally—teach. We praise You. Thank You for this day. Thank You for the rain that comes down from heaven to remind us of the Word that never returns void, but always accomplishes what You have sent it to do.

Now, Father, we give ourselves and this time to You. May the glory be Yours. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, the question is one that maybe you haven't been asked today. When was the last time you filled out a résumé for a job? How many have done that in the last year? Can I see your hands? How many have never done it? How many don't know what it is? I've lived so in the dark all my life, that until a few years ago when I was sitting down talking to a couple of young men who were looking for jobs, I never realized what it's like today to fill out a résumé. It's not like it used to be, or however it used to be. Computer programs literally do it for you. Unfortunately, they don't do it the way God would, but they do it for you. There are people you can hire who do nothing but fill out résumés for you. Now, they all have one common factor: they magnify your strengths to the point of absurdity.

The Grace of Weakness

You have to do four things, it seems, to sell yourself today on a résumé. Those of you in business will agree with this, I think. All four of them are in total violation of Biblical principles.

1- You have to ignore your weaknesses. Nobody wants to know that you really apologize for selling your best product because you think it's overpriced. They don't want to know that. They don't want to know that you break out in a cold sweat every time you have to give a proposal. They don't want to know that. "Ignore your weaknesses," they say. "That's creative." God says, "It's lying."

2- You exaggerate your strengths if you can find any. You once starred in a play in junior high school. *Obvious theatrical abilities. Performs well before large groups.* Never mind that you haven't had the nerve to stand up in front of five people since. You take some obscure incident in your past and blow it out of proportion. That now becomes one of your strengths.

3- You replace specifics with generalities. So you can only understand simple instructions; complex things throw you into a panic. Write down: *Especially gifted in performing concise tasks.* It doesn't say anything, but that's okay.

4- Create a new vocabulary. If the words don't mean anything, they can't compare you with anyone else. Right? You are no longer computer illiterate; you are now *digitally challenged*. It isn't that you can't spell; you are *creative with words*. You can't keep anything straight or organized, right? You now possess *random organization*. I've got that. You tend to overlook details. That makes you a *global visionary*. Have problems getting to work on time. You're a *time management designer*. So you can't add two and two. You must be a *contemporary mathematician*.

You have to find words that make you sound different than you are. The mood of the day is, "Don't tell me anything bad about yourself. I want to know how good you are, how strong you are, how smart you are." So we oblige by designing a new vocabulary and ignoring the real issues. Actually, I've seen people fill these résumés out until they read them and believe it. After all, they say, "We are what we think." What the world is looking for is strength.

Strength is defined by and large in physical terms by our society. The athlete who wants to succeed now does so by

The Grace of Weakness

injecting steroids into his system until he is big enough to block a street corner. The announcer on the video will say in awe, "He's a 325-pound bundle of strength." Indeed. In the financial world, strength is now measured in buyouts, takeovers, and mergers. It isn't how good your product is, it's how many of your competitors you can eat alive. You see, bigger is better.

In retailing, strength is defined by growth and size. Megastores now sell everything from bath powder to gunpowder, from speakers to sneakers. You get your groceries in one end of the store and your appliances in the other. Megastores are matched by maxi-malls, and no one dares to be a small startup anymore. You need to belong to a chain store or franchise. That way you get recognition. Never mind that they have the creativity of a donkey. It's safer, because you're bigger.

Even the medical profession has gone the way of big business. There are no more "friendly little hospitals." If you can find one, maybe you better not even go there. They can't compete. Now the Baptist Hospital buys out the Lutheran Hospital, and somebody nobody heard of buys out the Methodist Hospital. So now, it's the North, Northeast Community Hospital #26.

Religion has fallen into the same trap. No longer do churches measure their success by changed lives, but rather by budget size, building size, attendance ratio, and number of ministers. Even satellite churches who remain tied to the mother church so they are counted as one, are not even called churches anymore. Now they are campuses, whatever that means. The secular press has so caught on to this, that if you read an article where they do an interview about something going on in the religious world, the only people they interview are the pastors of the "mega churches." If they have the biggest churches, they must be the most spiritual. And on and on it goes.

The world is spiraling into this cocoon of bigness. One of these days there will only be one computer company, one hamburger company, and one soft drink manufacturer. Then they'll buy out each other, and you'll be able to turn on your IBM computer only if you promise to buy a Coke and a Big Mac before it boots up. If you refuse, Bill Gates will come personally and unplug it.

Big. Strong. Mighty. It's a sickness in our day. Gone are the criteria of character, integrity, and service. Gone is the ability to pick up the phone and talk with a person. The elderly, and I

The Grace of Weakness

am one, have to master “press one if you have a middle initial between K and L” or “press the pound button” (whatever that is) so you can speak to another recording. So, they just quit calling anybody.

Why are we so obsessed with bigness and size in our generation? It goes back a long way. Satan began by taunting Eve and saying to her, “Don’t settle for less than everything.” You can have it all. Can’t eat of that tree? Oh, come on. What right does God have to keep something from you? If you’re going to be the best, you have to have it all.” So, she went for it all and lost it all. God’s plan is so different from man’s. God sees strength as internal. Man sees it as external. God sees power as spiritual. Man sees it as physical. God looks at the size of a man’s heart. Man looks at the size of his pocketbook.

God had to do something to bring things back into perspective. He invented something called “grace.” Grace was a way back. It was a commodity that exercised itself in proportion to a person’s weakness, rather than his strength. It only began to function when man couldn’t. It only did what man couldn’t do. It only worked when man knew he was without strength. The stronger a person thought themselves to be, the less grace they would receive, and the more they thought they deserved it, the less they could appropriate it. It was God’s tool to rebalance life.

No small wonder 2,000 years have passed and man is still mystified by grace. We can accept that God used it to save us because we experienced it. But as we begin to dip into the deeper waters of God’s transforming, enabling grace, the power He makes available to the Christian who knows that apart from God He can do nothing, we begin to chafe and rebel. It’s so far from how the natural mind thinks. And as society rushes toward Armageddon, and human strength becomes the measuring stick of success in every walk of life, we who call ourselves Christians seem to have more and more difficulty grasping the concepts of the grace-controlled life.

Maybe we need to spend more time reading the works of the men and women of generations past. Read the works of George Mueller, Oswald Chambers, Watchman Nee, Harry Ironsides, Arthur Pink and Françoise Fenelon. Every word they wrote sent forth the fragrance of God’s sovereignty, omniscience and grace. So infused with a knowledge of God were they from spending

The Grace of Weakness

time in His presence, that their own talents and abilities were bathed in the essence of God's grace. Everything spoke of what God could do, not what man could do.

Now move yourself into today's society and go into a Christian bookstore. It is an ocean of "how-to" books. They focus on man's problems rather than God's nature; on man's methods, rather than God's higher ways. It isn't hard to find material on what to do if...; but so often there is lacking that precious seed of humility that takes the awesomeness of the provisions that only God can give us when we get out of the way. Even our theology today has lost some of its power because we have entered into the holy place with God and decided we can co-labor with Him to build the kingdom.

Beloved, the kingdom is God's to build, not ours. The problems are God's to solve, not ours. The church is His, not ours. Until experientially we come to grasp that His is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory forever, we will labor relentlessly and try to build man-made houses for Him to dwell in, man-made programs for Him to work through, and man-made glory for Him to share, *and He will have none of it.*

It is that precious commodity called grace that we come back to look at this morning. That's what makes the difference. In the past few lessons, we have been trying to build a foundation so we can understand somewhat of the awesomeness of its power and the uniqueness of its grasp. We have been looking at how God demonstrated that by choosing the likes of us in eternity past, adopting us, accepting us, and even adoring us; paying the total price, Himself, to transplant into our hearts, His precious heart at the cost of His Son's life. The more we see of what He did, the more in awe we ought to be of this incredible thing called grace. It's F-U-S-E, remember? It's free, undeserved, sovereign, and eternal.

It is that humility that equips us to receive this thing called enabling grace, on a day-to-day basis. Grace that also is free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal, can actually be appropriated on a minute-by-minute, day-by-day basis, if we will just ask God for it, provided that as we ask, we maintain an attitude of dependence, unworthiness, and humility. As we begin to think we deserve it, don't need it, or we begin to share God's glory for it, we lose it. The Scripture says, instead of pouring out grace,

The Grace of Weakness

He resists us.

Unfortunately for many, that chemistry lasts a lifetime. You'll meet people who have been Christians for 30, 40 or 50 years, and actually have lived out their existence, somehow trying to live for God, rather than letting God live through them. His desire is that we enter into the rest that He has provided for us.

One thing we have learned in the week or two just passed, is that in order for God to that, there has to be a need. Without a need, we just don't call on Him. So God, in His mercy, in order to give us grace, creates certain needs in our lives, so we will cry out to Him and ask for grace. Last week we looked at a few of them, and we will be examining them in detail in the next four to five weeks. We saw that God brings certain needs into our lives which creates a need for enduring grace; the grace that allows us to stand fast in situations we would like to run from. He creates a need for comforting grace, the kind of grace He gives you when there is the loss of a loved one or something you held very dear. Agape grace, the supernatural ability to love those you cannot naturally love. Submissive grace, the ability to humble yourself, and submit to those God places over you, even when they are wrong. And, of course, holy grace, the ability for God supernaturally in you, to make you holy, which we will look at in our next lesson, God willing.

This morning, we embark on the road to practical Christian living, how grace works on a day-to-day basis, and how this provision ultimately becomes the tool God uses to lead others to Christ through you. We are going to begin at our most vulnerable point. We are going to look at weakness grace. Actually, it's the door through which all grace enters. We must understand our weakness to appropriate His strength. Beloved, this is so contrary to how the natural mind works. Unless you pray, even this moment, for the Spirit of God to give you a mind that is open to truth, all you have learned from the world in years past, will come flooding into your mind and do battle with the Word of God.

I want us to remember one thing as we begin. It is the acknowledgement of human weakness that releases divine strength. It's that same acknowledgement that the flesh hates. We will justify our inadequacies in a thousand ways, and we will even use words to indicate we're the ones who can't. But all the while, the way we teach, the way we preach, the way we

The Grace of Weakness

witness and the way we pray, shows we are still the ones who can. God, remember, looks on the heart. He's looking for that spirit of despair, that spirit of dependence, that spirit of total humility that allows Him to know that we recognize, that apart from Him, we can do nothing.

THE PREPARATION FOR GRACE

Now I understand, this is a tough subject and you're saying, "What's new?" I am going to ask you to pray and listen, if you will, and remind you that the process of preparing the human heart for grace, and for the relinquishing of our strength for God's, began a long, long time ago. This is not a new, New Testament picture, although it culminated in the coming of Christ to planet earth. We've been through this several times in this class. Originally, God designed us to be created and to operate in His image. An image simply obeys. Your image in the mirror simply is a reflection of the real thing. It doesn't originate anything. It does what its origin does because its origin is real. By design, an image just reflects the will of the source. Remember that.

God designed us in His image. He designed us to reflect the source, but He designed us with a free will. He gave us the ability to look at the source and make a determination on a minute-by-minute basis, whether we want it to be a reflection or not. We were designed to be images, not sources, but we were designed to be images by choice.

Then sin entered the world, and death by sin. The curse came in, and man made a really rotten decision. Eve started it; Adam agreed, and rather than be an obedient image, they decided they would rather be inadequate sources. At Satan's beckoning, they decided to become like God. Sin entered the world. Chaos entered the world. Confusion entered the world. Separation entered the world. Instead of simply watching God and allowing His choice to work through them and His power to flow through them, Adam and Eve said, "Whoa, we'll make our own decisions, utilize our own power, and God you can become some kind of genie. We'll call on you if we get into big trouble." You probably can't relate to that, but that was their purpose.

Originally, all of God's creation was designed for us to enjoy. In Genesis chapter 1, God took the keys to the whole thing and handed them to Adam and Eve.

The Grace of Weakness

So God created man in his own image, [that is, to reflect his likeness] in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion [there are your two key words—have dominion over everything] over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.
(Genesis 1:27-30)

Everything has been given to you. Merry Christmas! Beloved, it was all ours. Everything God made, He made for us to enjoy. He only made one little exception, and it was for our benefit, not His. There was one tree in the middle of the garden, and He said, “Don’t touch that.” Eve listened to the voice of the stranger, Adam followed, and sin was the result. What happened? Man lost his strength. Man lost the ability to have the power of God working through him, because he was no longer an obedient image. Now he had the freedom to try to live in his own strength or appropriate God’s. Man’s natural bent from that time until now, is to try to do in our own energy what God wanted to do for us. Even the universe and its ability to release its strength and sustain us, became our enemy. In Genesis 3, we read:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; [your job is going to be rough from now on; it’s going to have lots of problems] in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

The Grace of Weakness

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3:16-19)

In other words, not only would the power be gone, even the ground God created to produce fruit, would become our enemy. Man's pride and arrogance would cause God to create resistance where once there was cooperation, conflict where there was once comfort. So, there's a war on now, and the war is to see whether we will operate in our own energy or God's energy, and grace is at the root of it. We found out that as sin abounded, the conflict intensified, and God said to Cain:

And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength... (Genesis 4:10-12)

The natural strength of nature had now turned against us. The power God built into the universe designed to give us the freedom to experience God's energy, became a powerhouse of resistance. And what used to be our friend became our enemy. So, this long, slow descent into the abyss of self-destruction developed, until at one point, God had to wipe out mankind except for one family.

The progression has not abated, but God had a plan. He wanted us to be able to reappropriate, minute-by-minute, the same power we relinquished through sin. He wanted us to be able to have a supernatural power to enable us to do what we cannot do in the flesh. He wanted us to be able to enter into God's heart and receive God's power and energy again. He wanted us to be images again, that were clear, because He knew once the image was clear, other people could see the image and go to Him. That's how it worked.

Now, the key would be—and I hope I haven't lost you yet—to have that image clear, man would have to get out of the way. He would have to stop trying to be anything on his own, and let God become God. He would have to stop trying to imitate God and let God do supernaturally what he could not do naturally. And God said, "I'm going to call it grace, but what it would literally mean is, you would have to return to the very process God originally

The Grace of Weakness

initiated when He created man. It would be God's universe, God's man, God's power operating through us. Wouldn't that be neat? Folks, it is neat! It is the natural Christian life. Why don't we live it? Why don't we experience it minute-by-minute?

I want us to take a look at Scripture this morning, and understand that this is not a new principle. All through Scripture, God built building blocks to prepare us for the concept of weakness into strength. We will begin looking first of all—and some of you can relate to this; I'm sure most of you can't.

1- The very process of aging itself begins to demonstrate the weakness principle. Now, all of you know somebody who is older, don't you? You see, now that sin entered the world, man was born to die. Those of you who are younger, don't minimize the effect that aging has. When the physical body starts to go, desperation and discouragement often settle in. And men and women who think they are the ones who can make it without God, suddenly when the body begins to fail, begin to cry out for strength from some place.

Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. (Psalm 71:9)

Now also when I am old and grayheaded, [or maybe even bald-headed, I hope] O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. (Psalm 71:18)

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10)

2- God began to then teach Israel through national principles, what would one day become a personal principle; and that is, He was going to put them in situations where the enemy surrounded them and they didn't have the strength to win the battle. When they got into that position, their very weakness would cause them to cry out to God. He would nationally build a wall around them or enable them, and they would win these battles by very unusual means, so that He would get the glory.

And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place... [you didn't do it; if it was up to you, you would have

The Grace of Weakness

been massacred—loose translation]. (Exodus 13:3)

And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: (Exodus 13:14)

He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me. (II Samuel 22:18)

God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. (II Samuel 22:33)

3- We see as the Scripture begins to unfold, God began to develop through His Word, a principle that weakness would play a part in appropriating strength.

The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation... (Exodus 15:2)

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. (I Chronicles 16:11)

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him... (II Chronicles 16:9)

4- David personalized it through the Psalms. We begin to see these national principles become more personal, as David began to write the songs that expressed the desires of His own heart.

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. (Psalm 18:2)

It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. (Psalm 18:32)

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. (Psalm 33:16)

My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. (Psalm 73:26)

The Grace of Weakness

5- God begins to show, through the Old Testament, the relationship between weakness and strength, and the danger that when we become strong, we forget God. He begins to repeat the patterns that went on over and over in the lives of His people.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;

Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

(Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

(Isaiah 35:3)

He giveth power to the [tough guys, right? No, he gives power to the] faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

(Isaiah 40:29-31)

THE PRESENTATION OF GRACE

That becomes the platform, and then Jesus came. God came to earth in meekness and weakness. One day He will come in power and great might. But first He had to demonstrate the very concept of grace. So, He came as a slave, so we could become kings. He came to serve, so we could be saved. This One who never sinned came in total surrender to the Father's will so He could demonstrate that the image could be restored; that God's indwelling Spirit could live in us and once again we could simply obey the source of the image and become transparent vessels through whom the Light could shine. That's why Jesus said:

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth,

The Grace of Weakness

these also doeth the Son likewise. (John 5:19)

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:30)

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself.. (John 8:28)

Paul, speaking of Jesus said:

Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him...

(II Corinthians 13:3,4)

Paul made this analogy.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

(I Corinthians 1:25,27)

That's the reason for it.

For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but [when you look at him...yuck—loose translation] his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

(II Corinthians 10:10)

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.(II Corinthians 12:9,10)

He draws this conclusion:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. (Ephesians 6:10)

Looking backwards, the writer of Hebrews makes this observation about the great men and women who were listed in Hebrews 11:

The Grace of Weakness

[They] quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong...

(Hebrews 11:34)

Get the picture? The Bible is one book. Its message has not changed since man stepped in and intruded on the plan of God. God created an alternate plan, which was locked in His heart even before the foundation of the world, and He called it grace. It needed one thing to work. It needed man to be nothing more than an image, a reflection that mirrored the will of the One who made him. As long as man would let God be the source and the power, he would be joyful, successful, and filled with peace. But, at any point, if man deviated from the role of an image, God would step back and let him be his own god until, through weakness, he came to the end of himself, cried out to God for power, and surrendered. And when he did, grace came through.

It happened to Israel as a nation. It happened individually to the men and women God lifted off the pages of Scripture. But God knew that at some point in time, man would have to see the image and a final price would have to be paid so the image could indwell His people and never leave.

So, beloved, Jesus came. God came to earth. For 33 years, He always did those things that pleased the Father. He was nothing more than the express image of the Father, full of grace and truth. Truth never changes. Grace never fails. He conquered death. He went back to the Father and now He sits at the right hand of the Father, and whenever we fail to be the images we were created to be, He intercedes for us, the Father forgives us, and we become agents of grace again.

The key to it all is weakness. As long as we think we can, we can't. As long as there is spiritual pride still flowing through our veins, we quench His Spirit; we deny Him from giving us the grace He wants to give us. So, this process of living the Christian life must include everything Paul said we don't want—infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses. Now, do you really want to know what those things mean? You don't do you? Good. I'm going to tell you.

1- Infirmities - אֲנֵנִיּוּתָא astheneia {as-then'-I-ah}

The word literally means “physical weakness caused by sickness or bodily failure.” It is the very thing we spend so much of our time as Christians, so much of our money and prayers

The Grace of Weakness

seeking to avoid. It is the frailty of health that makes normal activities either impossible or difficult. Paul said, “When that happens—and I’m not going to go looking for it—that’s neat.” Hello? He says, “I am sick, then I can’t be strong. And when I’m weak, He gets strong.”

2- Reproaches - ,ַרְבּוּבֵי hubris {hoo'-bris}

A wrong springing from an insult; inflicted by the violence of a tempest. It is the joy of being railed at and misunderstood. It’s the joy of wrongfully becoming the subject of the violent rage of another. What a strange thing to be thankful for. Why would that be helpful? Well, for the same reason sickness can be helpful, because there’s no defense against it. And if there is nothing you can do naturally, you have to look for supernatural strength. That’s why it was said of Jesus:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (I Peter 2:21-24)

3- Necessities - אַנְגֵיכָּהּ anagke {an-ang-kay’}

A necessity, imposed by circumstances, distress, straits, or calamity. It means circumstances out of control. Paul was shipwrecked. Life’s necessities were in danger. He rejoiced. Grace was his.

4- Persecutions - דְּיוֹגְמוֹס diogmos {dee-ogue-mos’}

The unjust treatment that comes when you stand for your faith. Paul’s imprisonment was persecution. He said, “Boy this is neat,” in Philippians 1. “I praise God because the lost are being saved, and the Christians are being encouraged and because I get to be in prison. Hallelujah.”

5- Distresses - אֲרֵשְׁנוֹרְיָהּ stenochoria {sten-okh-o-ree’-ah}

A narrow place; an extreme calamity. It is the end of everything. It’s being put in a situation the other four things create that are

The Grace of Weakness

so difficult, for all intents and purposes except for a miracle, it's all over. Paul said, "I rejoice at that. Nobody can take glory for that, but God." Jesus, facing the cross was a perfect illustration, because unless God had a higher purpose, it was all over. He did, and it wasn't over, but He was about to unveil a living portrait of grace. So Paul said, "He became weak for your sake, so that you because of your weakness, could become strong. So, God sent Him to the Cross.

Look at Paul's life, if you will. Not just his thorn, but his life. I want to remind you of the Christian life that is filled with grace. If I were to ask you to hold up your hand if you really wanted the grace of God to flow through your life, and you understood that weakness produces strength, would you be willing to have Paul's kind of life? Most of you would think, "Wow, to be like Paul." This is how Paul described his life.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

(II Corinthians 11:24-27)

What a life. Isn't that neat? If you saw an ad in the paper, and that was what you were offered, how many of you would sign up? Now, beloved, when you ask God for His grace to pour through your life, is that what you mean? Are you willing? Should God desire to use the canvas of your life to paint such a portrait, to become that weak so He can become that strong in you? Or do you have preconceived limits to which you are going to hold God? That's your privilege. You can draw lines anywhere you choose. The only problem is, when you do it to that degree, you limit the grace of God.

Weakness—God has many ways to provide it. Grace—God has one requirement primarily to receive it, and that's weakness. So, it goes circular. As we begin our journey next week, walking through the land of grace, looking for how, on a day-to-day basis

The Grace of Weakness

it works in our lives, may we never from this point forget, that to ask God for grace is to ask Him to make us weak. To ask Him to make us weak, is to ask Him if He chooses, to take from us anything and everything we glory in.

In the past few weeks, God has been working on me big time. He's got a big job. I'm such a hard-headed, hard-hearted soul. What He has been doing, is giving me a little glimpse of grace by allowing things to come into my life that have caused me to be weaker, and thus more dependent. My first response is to cry out to Him to remove the problems and give me back my strength. And He listened. He is such a good listener. Then He quietly whispered through the Word, "My child, my grace is sufficient for you. How can you teach others of the blessing of weakness if you cry out for deliverance when I make you weak? Sit still. Let Me be your strength."

Beloved, I ask you, are some of you there? Are the circumstances of life descending on you like an ominous cloud and have they taken away your strength? Do you feel weary and defeated? I remind you that:

Even the youths shall faint and are weary and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the Lord [they that appropriate supernaturally, His enabling power] shall mount up with wings as eagles. (Isaiah 40:30,31)

How can that be? It is called grace. My friend, it is God waiting to do supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. You have two choices: you can chafe at your weakness and demand to be delivered, and that's your privilege; or you can quietly submit to the Master Artist as He paints on the canvas of your life a much deeper image of Himself. The question is, what will you ask Him for? Deliverance *from* the storms, or grace *through* them? The choice is yours. You decide. There is one last thing to add. There's a good chance He will give you what you ask for.

Let's pray.

Our Father and our God, strength out of weakness; what an unusual thing. So foreign to the heart of man, so contrary to the ways of man. We glory in our strength. We glory in our productivity. We glory in what we are proud of. We glory in our children. We glory in our buildings. We glory in our jobs.

The Grace of Weakness

We glory in our church. We're the ones who can, all the while telling You we're not the ones who can.

So, in love, You bring things into our lives that cause us to chafe a little, and to recognize that apart from You we can't do everything. Then, as the time progresses, we begin to realize that apart from You, we can't do anything. But, until we get there, the grace You have for us, we miss so much of.

Father, we pray we might come to grasp, in a way perhaps we haven't before, the glory of weakness and the wonder of Your strength, and surrender to Your precious will. If we need to be weak, so be it, as long as You can be strong.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A Challenge to Further Study

1- Take those key words in II Corinthians 12:10 found on pages 13 and 14 and cross-reference those words to other parts of Scripture using a concordance. What conclusions do you come to? Give them names that describe how they would be viewed in today's world. (Illus: infirmities=sickness) Now, find other Scriptural characters who experienced the same problems. How did they respond?

2- How does the curse of the ground that accompanied Adam's sin relate to the pressures of work today? Is God using your job to make you weak, so He can give you more grace? How are you responding? Search the Psalms, using the words "strength, power, weak, weakness" as your key words. What other verses and what other thoughts surface?

A Challenge to Further Application

1- Listing those key words from pages 13 and 14 again, now apply them to your own life. Which of them has God used in your life to bring about a state of dependence and need? How have you responded? If you knew for certain that by crying out for grace,

The Grace of Weakness

rather than for deliverance, your character would become more Christ-like, would it change the way you respond? Is it possible to know that? Can you prove your answer from Scripture?

2- How do you pray for those you love and those you know who are being made weak through circumstances? Do you pray that God will give them grace, or do you pray that God will solve their surface problems? How did Jesus pray in the Garden? How does that pattern help us? How can this study help you pray?

A Challenge to Scripture Memory and Meditation

Memorize Isaiah 40:29. To whom does God give strength? What does that mean to you? Does waiting on the Lord mean to wait for Him to do what He wants to do with your weakness? What does it mean to “run and not be weary”?

Memorize II Corinthians 12:9. How is God’s strength perfected? Do you “glory” in your infirmities, or do you chafe under them? Ask God to change your heart as you meditate this week.

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