

# In our weakness He is strong

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Think back through your life. When have you prayed the most and prayed the hardest? What was happening in your life at that time? Maybe you were passing through marital problems. Maybe you had lost your job and had no idea how you were going to provide for your family. Maybe you or someone you knew had a terminal illness. Maybe it was for the salvation of a loved one. Maybe it was because your heart had been broken or your dreams had been shattered.

I would imagine that most of us were driven to prayer because we were in a desperate situation that we could not take care of ourselves. We realized we were not smart enough. We were not rich enough. We were not strong enough. We were not good enough . . . We just were not enough. In our weakness, we had to look outside of ourselves for help, so we turned to God and cried out to Him from the depths of our hearts.

Out of our weakness we turned to God. That is what happened. That is why we prayed so intensely. It reminds us of God's words when He spoke to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9. The Apostle Paul was crying out to the Lord for help and the Lord responded, ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*** In other words, ***weakness drives us to God, and in Him we find everything that we need.*** When, out of our desperation, we cry out to God, He responds, and his glory and power are put on display.

But why do we often turn to God as our last option? Like the disciples in the storm, in the boat, who did not wake Jesus to save them until it was almost too late. Like the woman with the issue of blood, who had exhausted all of her savings on other options before bringing her situation to Christ. We trust in ourselves or in the methods of the world, and when they finally are revealed as weak and insufficient, we turn to God. Oh, that we would turn to Him first.

In James 4:2 it says, ***“You do not have, because you do not ask.”*** How much of God's presence, provision and power do we not experience because we do not ask?

We do not have because we do not ask, but why do we not ask? Because we don't understand how weak we truly are.

Often times we see prayer as a luxury item that we don't need unless the situation becomes dire. We would never actually admit that, but that is what our actions give proof of. We make times for the essentials like meals, showering, work and Facebook, but prayer is attended to if there is enough time and the need is big enough. I am not seeking to make you feel guilty, I am just speaking the reality of life.

**We pray when we realize our weakness, but scripture would tell us that we are always weak.** Then why do we not always pray? It is because we are often fooled into thinking we are strong. We have a place to live. We have transportation. We have food on the table. We live in Spain. We have income of some kind. We are self-sufficient and strong . . . Or are we?

**Many times our struggle is that our inner condition of weakness is hidden by our outer situation of supposed strength.** That may be why the church in many affluent countries is struggling so much spiritually, while in many poorer countries the church is thriving.

**In a poor country the outward reality agrees with the inward reality.** People are more aware of their neediness, so their hearts and their minds turn more readily to God. In wealthy countries the inward reality is the same as the poorer countries. All people are sinful, fallen and desperately needy, but because of the money, possessions and comfort, they believe that they are not needy, and especially not in need of God. So their supposed strength and self-sufficiency drives them towards spiritual apathy and away from God.

Spiritually speaking, to be helpless because of our weakness is one of the best places to be for those who want to be near to God. I know that sounds strange and backwards, but in the economy of God, the best place for a child of God to be is clinging helplessly to our heavenly Father.

In David Platt's book, *Radical*, he writes these words, ***“The goal of present day culture is to make much of us, the goal of the gospel is to make much of God . . . God actually delights in exalting our inability. He intentionally puts His people in situations where they come face to face with their need for Him. In the process He powerfully demonstrates His ability to provide everything His people need in ways they could never have mustered up or imagined. And in the end, He makes much of His own name.”***

It is similar to Christ's teaching in Matthew 5:3, ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*** This phrase “poor in spirit” is the equivalent to being spiritually bankrupt. It is realizing one's utter helplessness in all things spiritual.

In New Testament times two words were usually used to describe poverty. One word that can be translated “poor” was used for the man who had no savings and no job. He would get up each morning

and hope to find some type of work for the day. He would then get paid in the evening and at least buy bread for his family to eat. He was poor.

The second word that we would translate as “poor” was used for people who were without any way to take care of himself. This type of poor would have been the paralyzed man who had no way of working, getting out of bed, or even feeding himself. He was at the complete mercy of those around him to meet his every need.

This second word is the word that Jesus used. It describes how utterly helpless we are. We are spiritually destitute. In our own power there is nothing we can do to please God or pursue righteousness. Without Christ we are not good. We do not seek God. We are sinful and selfish. We are slaves to sin and the flesh. We are prideful and glory seekers. We are lustful and greedy. We complain and we covet. We justify our sin, while condemning others. We refuse to forgive. Our hearts are darkened and our minds are foolish. We have eyes, but we cannot see. We have ears, but we cannot hear. This is the truth that Jesus is presenting to us. Without Him we have nothing. It is this type of man or woman who recognizes truly how needy they are, who is ready to depend on God completely and experience the power of God.

Once again, the problem for many of us is that God tells us that we are poor in spirit, but we don't see this poverty in the physical world around us. We have a house, a job and a comfortable life. We don't think we are as bad as those criminals we hear about on the news. We don't feel poor and spiritually bankrupt, so we convince ourselves that things are fine. We continue to make life work for us by using godless strategies, all the time regularly attending church.

We resemble the church of Laodicea that was mentioned in Revelation 3:17: ***“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”***

Self-sufficiency and self-righteousness are traps that stifle one's spiritual life. It is pride at its worst. It is only the poor in spirit that will know the blessedness of God.

God speaking through the prophet Isaiah said, ***“To this man will I look. Even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembles at My Word”*** (Isaiah 66:2).

Psalms 34:18 puts it this way, ***“The Lord is near to those who are of a broken heart and saves such as be of a contrite spirit.”***

Isaiah 57:15, ***“I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”***

Jesus calls us each to the blessedness of being poor in spirit, and the strength found in weakness.

Listen to the words of Psalm 34:17-20: ***“When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”***

Do we not hear the heart of our God in these verses? **He is ready to save** (Ephesians 2:8-9). **He is ready to deliver us from temptation** (1 Corinthians 10:13). **He is ready to forgive our sin** (1 John 1:9). **He is ready to grant wisdom** (James 1:5). **He is ready to be our hope** (1 Timothy 1:1). **Through Christ He is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace** (Isaiah 9:6). **The LORD is our Rock, our fortress and our deliverer** (Psalm 18:2). 1 Chronicles 29:14 and Proverbs 3:5-6 tell us that **we can depend on God for everything and in everything.**

If the Syrian woman with the demon-possessed daughter, in Mark 7:26-30, had not called out to Christ, her daughter would not have been set free. If the blind man, in Luke 18:35-43, had not called out to Christ, he would not have received his sight. If Jairus, the synagogue leader, who we read about in Luke 8, had not admitted his weakness and fallen at Jesus' feet in the midst of the crowd, humiliating himself and crying out for the life of his daughter, his daughter would not have been raised from the dead. In their weakness they cried out to Christ, and it changed everything.

The key is realizing and accepting the fact that we live every moment in weakness. As we come to grips with this truth we will be driven to the kind of **"prayer without ceasing"** that the Apostle Paul talks about in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. As we pray we will experience Christ's working in our lives like never before.

Even in the Lord's prayer, in Matthew 6:11, Jesus prays from a position of weakness. **"Give us this day our daily bread."** This was not only a prayer for literal bread, it was a request to meet all the needs that would arise during that day. It is asking God for all that we will need to sustain us today, without even knowing for sure what the day will bring. For the poor, it may mean providing them with the food and the shelter that they will need to sustain them physically. For those with a marriage on the verge of divorce, they will need the grace and forgiveness that will hold them together for another day. For those who are facing important career decisions, it may be wisdom and peace. It will be different for every person, but our God, who is intimately aware of all of our life situations, can be trusted to meet us in the midst of our weakness.

God has created our needs and our weakness so that we will realize our need for Him on a daily basis. We see a great picture of this in the story of the Israelites in the Old Testament. They had been freed from slavery in Egypt, but were now wandering in the wilderness as nomads. In Exodus chapter 16, it tells how the people began to grumble and complain about the lack of food. In response, God provided a substance He called *Manna*. It appeared on the ground every morning, similar to morning dew. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. It could be prepared by boiling or baking.

God commanded that the people come out to gather it each morning, but only enough for that day.

God used this gathering of "daily bread" to remind the people of Israel that they were needy, that they could not meet their own needs, that God knew their needs, and that God could be trusted to meet their needs. But they had to depend on God every day. These same principles apply to us.

We will not pray for daily bread, if we do not realize that we need it. We will not pray for daily bread, if we are convinced that we can provide for ourselves. We will not pray for daily bread, if we do not believe that God is aware of our needs. We will not pray for daily bread, if we do not have faith that God will provide. God knows that being near to Him is the best place we can be. Because of this, through our weakness God draws us to Himself with daily needs that only He can meet.

### **How do I become more aware of my weakness?**

You can start by reading Jesus' **Sermon on the Mount**, found in Matthew 5-7. Read through it multiple times. Ask God to give you a humble heart, to enlighten your mind, and to convict your spirit as you read through these teachings of Christ. The standard that Christ calls you to will be impossible without relying on Him to bring about righteousness in your life. Your weakness will be revealed and hopefully drive you to Him to be your strength.

Regularly sit with Christian friends and share your sins and struggles. Our sins seem tame and plausible when kept in secret, but when we share them with others we begin to see how depraved they are and how needy we are. This also provides a way for us to experience the truth and grace of God as we extend grace and unconditional friendship to each other.

Seek to live in a way that requires the power of God. Seek to forgive those who have sinned against you. Seek to be pure in heart and in mind. Strive to be a servant to others. Be generous to others. Put yourself last. Be patient. Love your enemies. Surrender your future to Christ. As we seek this supernatural way of Christ, we will find obedience impossible. It is then, in our weakness, that we will turn towards Christ and find His power.

Pray that God will do whatever it takes to make you aware of your weakness. It is a scary prayer, but one God will honor. Trust that God will bring about situations in your life to remove your self-sufficiency and make you more fully aware of your desperate need for Him. Continue to pray this prayer and trust God to bring it about in your life in His way and in His time.

### **How do I start praying more?**

The best way to learn to pray is by praying. It may be that you don't feel like praying, but you really want to pray more. Once again we should remember "discipline to delight". It is the use of discipline to plan prayer as part of our day. In the beginning we may not always feel like it, but in our heart we know that is what we need to be doing. It may be that we reserve times each day to pray. Maybe in the morning before we leave home, or at night before we go to bed. Maybe we add a page to our daily planner to now list ongoing prayer requests. Maybe we make it a habit to pray before our meals or to pray with our families at bedtime. Maybe we begin to pray for the next items on our agenda each day, or put a sticker on our watch or on our phone, to remind us to pray every time we see it. We could even join a prayer group that meets in person or even by skype on a regular basis. As we discipline ourselves to pray more we will gradually find it becoming a sweeter and more essential part of our lives.

Don't worry about religious words or saying the right things. God already knows everything about your life. Just lay out your heart before Him. Long for His will to be done. And out of your weakness you will find strength in Him.

### Discussion questions:

1. When have you prayed the most and prayed the hardest? What was happening in your life at that time?
2. Why do we often pray to God as a last option, instead of a first option, when facing a difficulty?
3. Many times our inner condition of weakness is hidden by our outer situation of supposed strength. How might this affect one's prayer life?
4. Matthew 5:3, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" How would you say this in your own words?
5. What might you need to do to become more aware of your weakness?
6. What changes can you make to strengthen your prayer life?
7. What do I need to remember from this lesson?
8. How can we pray for you about that?