

Life Group Leaders' Guide: Strength In Weakness

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin by thanking God for bringing your group together and for His sufficient grace in every weakness. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion about weakness, shame, dependence, and the ways God displays His power through our limitations. Pray that each person feels safe being honest before God and one another, without pretending to be stronger or more put together than they are.

Ask the Lord to reveal any areas where people may be hiding weakness, carrying shame, or believing they are disqualified from being loved or used by God. Pray that God would help each person bring those places to Jesus and trust that His power is made perfect in weakness. Ask Him to shift your prayers from only asking for difficult circumstances to be removed, to also asking how He wants to reveal His strength through them.

Pray that your group would grow in true dependence on Christ, deeper community with one another, and faithfulness even in the middle of struggle. Ask God to help you remember His past faithfulness, worship Him in both the highs and lows, and live with confidence that weakness does not disqualify you because you belong to Jesus.

Worship Song Suggestions (10 minutes)

"Lord I Need You" – Matt Maher

"Abide" – The Worship Initiative / Aaron Williams

"Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me" – CityAlight

"Jireh" – Elevation Worship & Maverick City Music

Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

Question: Growing up, what was one thing you were taught — either directly or indirectly — that strong people do not show weakness? Where do you think that message came from?

Key Scripture Passages

This week's message from 2 Corinthians 12:1–10:

Boasting is necessary. It is not profitable, but I will move on to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether he was in the body or out of the body, I don't know; God knows. 3 I know that this man —whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know; God knows— 4 was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a human being is not allowed to speak. 5 I will boast about this person, but not about myself, except of my weaknesses. 6 For if I want to boast, I wouldn't be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will spare you, so that no one can credit me with something beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, 7 especially because of the extraordinary revelations. Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I

would not exalt myself. 8 Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. 10 So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Key Takeaways (5 minutes)

- Sometimes God does not remove the weakness. Paul begged God three times to remove his thorn, but God did not take it away. Instead, He promised sustaining grace. The miracle is not always removing pain. Sometimes the miracle is discovering that His grace is enough while the pain remains.
 - Your weakness does not disqualify you. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, God tells Paul that His power is made perfect in weakness, not after weakness has been overcome or cleaned up, but right in the middle of it. God is not waiting for a polished version of you before He can use you.
 - Stop hiding what God wants to use. Paul says he will boast gladly in his weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on him. The word "rest" suggests dwelling or pitching a tent. When we stop hiding our weakness and start depending on Jesus, Christ's power makes its home there.
 - Weakness teaches us dependence. The danger of strength is that it can convince us we have everything handled. The gift hidden inside weakness is that it reminds us we need God. Sometimes the very thing we want God to remove is what keeps us closest to him.
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Discussion Questions

Open up the Conversation (10–20 Minutes)

1. In the sermon, Shane opens with the idea that the enemy delights in making people feel disqualified from the mission God has called them to. Have you ever felt disqualified by your past, failures, or struggles? What did that feel like?
 2. The speaker shared that when his family left church, they essentially walked away from God for a few years. Has there been a season in your life where you pulled back from God or from community? What eventually drew you back?
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Going Deeper (15–20 Minutes)

3. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul describes a thorn in the flesh that God did not remove despite repeated prayer. What is your honest reaction when God does not answer a prayer the way you hoped? Does it shake your faith, or does it deepen it? Why?

4. In the sermon, Shane contrasts Paul's prayer for God to change his circumstances with God's promise to sustain him within them. How does that shift in perspective change the way you approach a difficult season you may be facing right now?
 5. 2 Corinthians 12:9 says that God's power is made perfect in weakness. What does it actually look like in everyday life to let God's strength work through your weakness rather than trying to overcome your weakness first?
 6. In the sermon, Shane referenced John 15:5, where Jesus says that apart from him, we can do nothing. Where in your life are you most tempted to operate as though you do not need God's help?
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Getting Personal (15–20 Minutes)

7. The speaker said, "When I hide the weakest part of myself, it leads to deep shame, which leads to isolation, which is the breeding ground for the enemy to wreak havoc on my mind." Can you identify a weakness or struggle you have been hiding, even from people close to you? What has that isolation cost you?
 8. Shane makes the point that your friends won't receive Jesus if you have to act polished and cleaned up to share him with them. How does that challenge the way you think about sharing your faith? Does it make it feel more accessible or more uncomfortable?
 9. The speaker mentioned that he is harder on himself when he fails than he is on anyone else, and that it is much easier to extend grace to others than to receive it himself. Do you relate to that? Why do you think it is so difficult to receive the same grace we freely offer to others?
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Community and Accountability (10 Minutes)

10. In the sermon, Shane makes a strong case for the importance of being genuinely connected to community. The speaker said, "Man doesn't just fail because he's weak. He fails because he's alone." On a scale of one to ten, how connected are you right now to people who actually know the real you? What is one honest reason for that number?
 11. Who in your life currently knows your real struggles, not just the version of you that seems to have it all together, but the version that is tired, doubting, or falling short? If no one comes to mind, what is one step you could take this week to change that?
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Practical Applications (10 minutes)

This Week, Choose One or More of the Following:

- **Shift your prayer.** If there is a thorn in your life that you have been asking God to remove, add a second prayer: "God, if You do not change my circumstances yet, change me through them. Show me what You want to reveal through this."
- **Tell someone the real thing.** Identify one person in your life, whether in this group or outside of it, and share something you have kept hidden because of shame or fear of judgment. Start small if you need to, but take the first step.
- **Practice Dayenu.** The Hebrew word Dayenu means "it would have been enough." Before the end of this week, take ten minutes to write down specific ways God has carried you in the past. Let that list become a foundation for worship, especially on days when you cannot feel His presence in your current circumstances.
- **Get off the bench.** Identify one area of your life, such as your neighborhood, workplace, child's school, a team you coach, or a neglected friendship, where God may be calling you to show up as you are rather than as you wish you were. Take one concrete step toward that this week.

Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Shane closes with the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who declared that God could deliver them, but even if He did not, they would still trust Him. That kind of faith is not built overnight. It grows in small, quiet moments of dependence, in prayers that are not answered as we hoped, and in the presence of people who know us well enough to remind us of who God says we are.

Close your time together by giving each person in the group a moment to finish this sentence out loud:

"The weakness I have been hiding that I want to stop hiding is..."

If that feels like too much for where your group is, try this instead:

"One thing God has brought me through that I want to thank him for today is..."

Close in prayer. Ask God to make his power visible in the weakest places represented in the room.

Leader Notes

Leader Notes for this week's small group:

- This message touches sensitive themes: weakness, shame, guilt, sin struggles, unanswered prayer, suffering, church hurt, family history, addiction/temptation, marriage tension, finances, mental health, isolation, vulnerability, and feeling disqualified by past failure. Create a safe space where people can be honest without feeling judged, exposed, or pressured to share more than they are ready to share.
- A helpful direction for the discussion: move from hiding to honesty, from shame to grace, and from self-reliance to dependence on Christ. The goal is for people to leave encouraged that their weakness does not disqualify them from God's love, His presence, or His calling.
- Keep bringing the conversation back to the message's central truth: God's grace is sufficient, and His power is made perfect in weakness. The point is not that weakness is easy, painless, or something we should pretend to enjoy. The point is that weakness can become the place where we experience Christ's sustaining power most deeply.
- Be careful not to let the discussion turn into a debate about why God does or does not answer certain prayers. People may have real pain connected to prayers that seemed unanswered: healing that did not come, relationships that did not reconcile, jobs that were lost, loved ones who suffered, or seasons that felt unbearable. Let people name those experiences without rushing to explain them away.
- Emphasize that the message was not saying, "Stop asking God to remove the thorn." Paul asked three times. It is good and faithful to ask God for deliverance, healing, provision, and breakthrough. But the message also invited us to pray, "God, if You do not change my circumstances yet, change me through my circumstances. Reveal Your strength in this."
- Some people may carry shame because they believe their weakness, anxiety, depression, addiction, trauma, grief, or repeated struggle makes them less loved by God or less useful to Him. Be especially gentle here. Do not reduce complex struggles to simple spiritual formulas. Encourage prayer, Scripture, community, wise counsel, pastoral care, counseling, medical support, or recovery resources when appropriate.
- Avoid creating an environment where people feel spiritually "ranked" based on how vulnerable they are. Invite vulnerability; don't force it. Some people may be ready to share deeply; others may simply need to listen and receive. Both are okay.
- If people discuss struggles with sin, keep the tone grounded in grace and truth. The message did not excuse sin or suggest that growth does not matter. It emphasized that we do not become acceptable to God by performing well enough. In Christ, we are received by grace, and from that place we learn to walk worthy of the calling we have received.
- Be mindful of people who have experienced church hurt or ministry wounds. The speaker shared about walking away from church and God for a season after painful experiences. If

someone shares something similar, listen with compassion. Avoid defending the church, correcting their timeline, or trying to “fix” them quickly. Gently point them back to Jesus's kindness and the possibility of healing in a healthy community.

- When discussing community, avoid shaming people who feel disconnected. Isolation is often connected to pain, fear, depression, shame, or past betrayal. Instead of saying, “You just need to get connected,” invite people to take one small step toward being known: attend group consistently, ask for prayer, meet with a trusted friend, or reach out to a leader.
 - If the conversation turns toward family, marriage, parenting, or finances, keep the focus on dependence on God rather than comparison. Some may feel discouraged when they hear about healthy family rhythms or answered prayers. Remind the group that faithfulness is not perfection. God meets us in the process.
 - Be careful with phrases like “God gave me this weakness” or “God caused this suffering.” Paul says his thorn was a messenger of Satan, but God used it to produce dependence and display grace. We do not need to over-explain the source of someone’s pain. We can affirm that God is present, God is able to redeem, and God’s grace is sufficient even when the thorn remains.
 - A key Scripture to keep central is 2 Corinthians 12:9–10: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness... For when I am weak, then I am strong.” Help the group sit with that promise slowly. This is not a call to pretend weakness feels strong. It is an invitation to trust that Christ’s strength meets us where our strength ends.
 - Encourage the group to shift their prayers this week. Instead of only praying, “God, remove this,” they can also pray:
 - “God, reveal Your strength through this.”
 - “God, sustain me by Your grace.”
 - “God, help me stop hiding.”
 - “God, show me who I can walk with.”
 - “God, use even this part of my story for Your glory.”
 - End with hope. The gospel is not the story of weak people becoming strong enough to save themselves. It is the story of weak people being rescued, sustained, and used by a strong Savior. In Christ, weakness is not wasted. God can meet us there, dwell with us there, and display His power there.
 - Keep the focus on the gospel's hope. Shane emphasizes that Jesus not only demolishes what the enemy has built; He also redeems and repurposes what was once used for bondage. Encourage people to believe that God can redeem their story, their family, their thoughts, and their past for His glory.
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Additional Discussion Questions to Choose From

Paul describes boasting in his weaknesses rather than his accomplishments. In what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to stop performing strength and instead acknowledge your dependence on God?

The speaker shares that seasons of financial comfort created distance between him and God, while seasons of scarcity drew him closer. How has your relationship with comfort or security shaped the depth of your dependence on Christ?

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul pleaded three times for God to remove his thorn, and God refused, offering grace instead. Have you ever experienced a moment where God sustained you through a trial rather than removing it, and what did that reveal about his character?

The speaker distinguishes between praying, “God, get me out of this,” and praying, “God, what are you trying to show me through this.” Which prayer posture tends to dominate your life, and what might it cost you to shift toward the second?

The sermon suggests that the place you are most embarrassed about or feel most inadequate may be the very place where Christ’s power rests most powerfully. What would it look like for you to stop hiding that place and bring it openly before God and a trusted community?

The speaker warns that isolation is the enemy’s breeding ground and asks how connected you truly are to people who know the real you. What is one specific barrier that keeps you from that level of vulnerability in community?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego declared faith in God’s deliverance but added, “but even if he does not.” How does that kind of unconditional trust challenge or reshape the way you currently approach unanswered prayer?

The speaker observes that it is often easier to extend grace to others in their failures than to receive it for ourselves. Why do you think we hold ourselves to a standard of perfection that we would never apply to someone we love?

The sermon distinguishes between living well so God will accept you and living well because God has already accepted you in Christ. How does that shift in motivation change the way you approach obedience, spiritual disciplines, or serving others?

The Hebrew concept of Dayenu invites us to pause and declare that what God has already done would be enough. What is one specific thing God has brought you through that, if you sat with it honestly, would be enough to anchor your worship even in your current struggle?

5-Day Devotional: Strength Made Perfect in Weakness

Day 1: When God Does Not Remove the Thorn

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

Devotional:

Sometimes we bring our pain to God with full faith and full desperation, and the answer we receive is not removal but sustaining grace. Paul begged three times. God said no, but He did say nothing. He said, "My grace is sufficient for you."

This is not a cold dismissal. It is a promise that His presence in the middle of your trial is greater than any relief you could feel outside of it. The miracle is not always the storm ending. Sometimes the miracle is discovering that He is enough while the storm still rages. Stop measuring God's faithfulness only by what He takes away. Begin measuring it by what He provides in the waiting.

Reflection:

What thorn have you been asking God to remove? Have you also asked Him what He wants to reveal through it?

Prayer:

Write down one difficult circumstance you are currently facing. Beneath it, write the question: "God, what are you trying to show me through this?" Sit with that question in prayer today.

Day 2: Qualified by Grace, Not by Worthiness

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:8–9

Devotional:

One of the most crippling lies the enemy tells believers is that their sin count determines their standing before God. It does not. The righteousness that qualifies you before God is not your own. It belongs to Jesus Christ, and it was credited to you the moment you placed your faith in Him.

You do not earn your way into usefulness, and you do not lose your place through failure. God does not look at someone who belongs to Christ and see their worst moments. He sees the finished work of His Son. This is not a license to remain unchanged. It is the foundation from which real change actually begins. Shame drives you away from God. Grace drives you toward Him.

Reflection: Do you live as though your acceptance before God is based on your performance? Where does shame most often keep you from approaching Him?

Prayer: Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:21 in whatever translation you use. Recite it aloud each morning this week as a declaration of your identity in Christ.

Day 3: Stop Hiding What God Wants to Use

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:9, Proverbs 24:16

Devotional:

Paul made a stunning declaration. He said he would boast in his weaknesses so that Christ's power could rest on him. The word rest carries the image of a tent being pitched, of something dwelling in a place. When you stop hiding your weakness and begin bringing it openly before God and a trusted community, you create space for the power of Christ to take up residence there.

The world will tell you to project strength and conceal your cracks. God says the cracks are exactly where His light gets in. The place you are most embarrassed about is not off-limits to God. It may be the very address where He chooses to display His glory most clearly.

Reflection:

What weakness or struggle have you been hiding out of shame or fear of judgment? Who in your life could you trust with the real version of your story?

Prayer:

Identify one person in your life who is safe and trustworthy. This week, take one step toward genuine vulnerability with them. You do not have to share everything at once. Simply begin.

Day 4: The Danger of Strength and the Gift of Dependence

Reading: John 15:5, Proverbs 3:5–6

Devotional: Strength is not inherently a problem. The problem is what strength can quietly convince you of over time. When life is comfortable, and resources are available, and things are going well, it becomes dangerously easy to stop asking God for anything because you feel capable of handling it yourself.

Jesus said that apart from Him we can do nothing. Not a little. Nothing. Dependence is not a character weakness. It is the design of the relationship God intends to have with you. The seasons of life that have stripped away your self-sufficiency have not been punishments. They have been invitations to experience the kind of reliance on God that produces a faith no comfortable season could have built.

Reflection:

In what areas of your life have you been operating in your own strength without inviting God into the process? Where has comfort created distance between you and God?

Prayer:

Choose one area of your life where you have been self-reliant. Begin each morning this week by surrendering that specific area to God in prayer before you take any action in it.

Day 5: Do Not Waste Your Weakness

Reading: Daniel 3:17–18, Romans 8:28

Devotional:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood before a furnace and declared their faith in a God who could deliver them. Then they said something that should mark every believer's life: but even if He does not, we will not bow. That is not passive resignation. That is the highest form of active faith. It says that God's goodness is not contingent on the outcome I am hoping for.

Your weakness, your unanswered prayer, your unresolved pain, none of it is wasted in the hands of God. He is not scrambling to make something good out of your mess. He already sees the end of the story. Your only assignment is faithfulness, not perfection, not strength, not having it all together. Just faithfulness, one day at a time, in full dependence on the God who calls you His own.

Reflection:

Can you say, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, "but even if He does not"? What would it look like to worship God this week regardless of whether your circumstances change?

Prayer:

Practice the Hebrew concept of Dayenu today. Make a list of things God has already done in your life, and after each one, write: "If you never did another thing, this would be enough." Let that list become your act of worship today.