

## WEAKNESS, A PORTAL FOR GOD'S POWER

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Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Two of my favorite songs, and I need to stop here and say that I have many favorite songs. Each time I say favorite song, I come up with a different list. The truth is that I love music. I love hymns, I love the songs. And so, they are favorite in terms of context. And in today's context, the two songs that come to the fore are, the one written by John Newton, 'Amazing Grace'.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come.  
'twas grace that brought us safe thus far,  
And grace will lead us home.

Beautiful, isn't it? The way that grace is caught up in all of this. Wonderful, unmerited favor of God that draws us from places where we ought not to be, where we couldn't help being, into a place of living again, a place that heads towards eternity with Him.

Then Phil Wickham's song that just asks the question:

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness?  
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger?  
The King of glory, the King above all kings.  
Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder?  
Who leaves us breathless in awe and wonder?  
The King of glory, the King above all kings.

This is amazing grace; this is unfailing love.  
That You would take my place  
That You would bear my cross.  
You lay down Your life that I would be set free.  
Oh Jesus, I sing for all that You've done for me.

I we were in church today, I would have called the worship team and asked them to sing us this song. Let's all join in this beautiful song of One who breaks the power of sin and darkness, and about this amazing grace. Well, all of us, each and every one of us needs His grace to overcome life's hurdles.

Maybe you are going through a difficult marriage. Maybe it's a frustrating time with your children, or maybe it's colleagues who are talking behind your back, or who don't have your back. Or maybe it's a boss who is giving you an extremely hard time. Or maybe it's money that just isn't stretching to the end of the month, or a chronic illness that threatens to steal your peace and joy, or has already stolen your peace and joy. Or maybe, you're living in physical pain that leaves you in tears very often. All of us need grace for these situations and circumstances that we cannot handle. All the resources that we have are not enough and God's grace then, is required to somehow navigate through this difficult period.

Many of you know the story of Annie Johnson Flint. Rowland Bingham chronicles her in a book titled 'Annie's Story.' It's a sad story. Orphaned at a young age as her mom died giving birth to her sister, and a dad who died later as well. but in the interim, he got married to somebody else and these two girls were not welcomed in that home because they already had children. So they lived in an unloved, difficult situation. Then they were given to the Flints who brought them up with love. In fact, she took Flint as her surname. They lived with them for a long time till they both passed away. Then Annie Flint developed arthritis throughout her whole body – fingers that were bent, swollen knuckles. It was so difficult to do anything. She found herself in the Clifton Springs Sanitarium. But during that difficult time, with fingers bent out of shape, she forced a pen through and began to write beautiful poems that have been around for so long. I was reading one of her poems; it's the shortest stanza that she had written on the verse 2 Corinthians 1:20

“For all the promises of God in Him are yea & in Him Amen”  
‘Is God-?’ ‘Does God-?’  
Man’s ‘Why?’ & ‘How?’  
In ceaseless iteration storm the sky.  
‘I AM’; ‘I WILL’; ‘I DO’ – sure Word of God,  
Yea & Amen, Christ answers each cry;  
To all our anguished questionings & doubts  
Eternal affirmation & reply.

So beautiful! The questions we ask: Is God here? Does God know? Why is this happening? How can this happen to me? And it comes as a ceaseless iteration across the sky, and from the heavens comes God's reply – “I am, I will, I do.” The sure, sure Word of God comes through the writings of one who was broken in body, in such pain; and yet, a faith so strong. But the poem that she is most remembered for is the one she wrote on grace.

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,  
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;  
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,  
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure;  
His power no boundary known unto men;

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus  
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

On her death bed, when the physician realized that there was nothing that could be done, he asked her, “Is there anybody you want to call, or anything you want to say?” Her last words were, “I have nothing to say. It’s alright.”

What happens in these kinds of situations, when we go through such trying circumstances? Maybe I’m talking to some of you who can understand Annie Johnson Flint. Maybe I’m talking to some of you who have trouble with your own body, some kind of disease, some chronic pain. Maybe it’s something that’s going on in your life that brings pain and suffering. You can resonate with those words: Lord, where? How? Why? Because in times like these, our faith takes a beating. And when that happens, what we need is for others to come alongside and encourage and believe for us, as Annie Flint has done. How many times have believers been strengthened by the words of her poems, in the midst of what she went through, when was able to encourage others?

Peter was mandated by Jesus to do just this.

*Luke 22:31-32, Jesus says to Peter – “Peter, my dear friend, listen to what I am about to tell you. Satan has demanded permission to come and sift you like wheat and test your faith; but I have prayed for you, Peter, that you would stay faithful to me, no matter what comes. Remember this, after you have turned back to me and have been restored, make it your life mission to strengthen the faith of your brothers.*

Peter received grace through that restoration on the shores of Galilee, a breakfast with Jesus.

Then, in his own letter, Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:5-7 *Through our faith, the mighty power of God constantly guards us until our full salvation is ready to be revealed in the last time. May the thought of this cause you to jump for joy, even though lately you’ve had to put up with the grief of many trials. But these only reveal the sterling core of your faith, which is far more valuable than gold that perishes, for even gold is refined by fire. Your authentic faith will result in even more praise, glory, and honor when Jesus the Anointed One is revealed.*

‘Strengthening grace and triumphant hope’ are the themes in the letter. That he writes. As The Passion Translation puts it in its introduction to 1 Peter – “Strengthening Grace and Triumphant Hope.” All of us need grace in these situations. But what is grace? What would be a working definition for us as we look at our own situations and say, “O, I need that grace in my life right now.”

Let’s look at Paul. Paul encountered a situation where he talked about grace being given to him and being sufficient for him.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (TPT)

*The extraordinary level of the revelations I’ve received is no reason for anyone to exalt me. For this is why a thorn in my flesh was given to me, the Adversary’s messenger sent to harass me, keeping me from becoming arrogant. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to relieve me of this. But He answered me, “My grace is always more than enough for you, and my power finds its full expression through your weakness.” So I will celebrate my weaknesses, for when I’m weak I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me. So I’m not defeated by my weakness, but delighted! For when I feel my weakness and endure mistreatment – when*

*I'm surrounded with troubles on every side and face persecution because of my love for Christ – I am made yet stronger. For my weakness becomes a portal to God's power.*

Did you get that? “My weakness becomes a portal for God’s power.” So what is he saying? He’s saying that God gave him extraordinary revelation and then, lest he become proud, that Satan was allowed to harass him. We don’t know what that harassment was but suffice it to know that when he pleaded and asked God to take it away. Three times, in fact, he says, “I asked God and God said, ‘No. my grace would always be more than enough for you.’” Why? Because God’s power finds its full expression through his weakness.

Beloved, while we are going through this, to even begin to start pulling your own weakness into this situation. As you hear these words and think about grace being given to you, I want you to think about your weakness and think about how you can bring God’s power to bear on this weakness of yours, so that you too can delight rather than succumb to your weakness. Don’t give in to your weakness. Be encouraged as we go through this situation.

“Three times,” he says, “I have prayed.” And you think to yourself – do I pray three times and then stop? No. Paul prayed three times and stopped because God gave him a definite answer. If you don’t hear from God definitively, continue to pray. The old acronym is still there – P.U.S.H – Pray Until Something Happens. We keep on going to the Lord in prayer. But in this case, God clearly told Paul, “No, I am not going to take this away from you.” So, Paul says, “I accept my weakness and allow His power to flow through me.”

Can you wrap your mind around that? When you don’t have the physical, mental, intellectual, emotional capabilities and resources to go through this particular area of weakness, the only thing left for you is the spiritual resource that you have. When you have nothing to go through, God’s Word reminds you that it is He who can make a difference in this world that you are in, that is so full of your weakness.

Are you with me, beloved? Are you thinking of your weakness right now? Are you thinking: O Lord, how I would love to, like Paul, delight in this area, to not let it work its way in me so that I have lost my peace and joy? Could I really be able to overcome and celebrate this weakness? How does Your power work that enables me to carry on with life? Well, let’s see! How did Paul go through? If this is now his accepted state, that he is going to have to live with this particular thorn in the flesh, this weakness, how did he live? Let’s look at his life. He didn’t hold on or obsess over his weakness. Instead here are a few things that continue to happen in his life.

### **1. He continued to have a productive life.**

That weakness didn’t stop him from producing all that God wanted to produce in him and through him. It didn’t stop him. That weakness, under the power and the anointing and the strength of God, created things through him that touched the world, are touching you and me today. Remember, he wrote Romans, Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, the letters to Timothy and Titus, went on his fourth and fifth missionary journeys. – none of these were stopped by that thorn in his flesh. The power of God continued to pour into him and make his weakness a source of strength.

### **2. He continued to be joyful.**

Remember Philippians? He is writing Philippians in prison, shackled hand and foot, and connected to Roman guards. And in the midst of that, he says, “Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice.”

### **3. He encouraged others.**

In the midst of his weakness, he was able to be an encourager to others. Timothy and Titus received such wonderful letters of encouragement, as also the believers in Thessalonica. If you read those letters, you will see encouragement all the way through.

### **4. He accepted the cost of following Jesus.**

He was a man who enjoyed a great prominence among the Jewish elite, but forsook all for the love of Christ. Paul declared, “What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.” He accepted the cost of following Jesus. He says, “What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed, I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

### **5. He still followed hard after God**

In the midst of his weakness, he was still able to follow Jesus. He accepted the cost of following Jesus. He followed hard after God. What did he say? He says, “Whatever gain I had, I count it as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” He still followed hard after God.

### **6. He did what was best for the people around him and for generations after.**

Remember what he wrote in Philippians chapter 1? “*For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.*” Then you see the kind of dilemma that he is wrestling with – “*But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don’t know which is better. I’m torn between two desires. I long to go and be with Christ which would be far better for me. But for your sake it is better that I continue to live. Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith.*” He continued to live through his weakness, and yet live for people; kept them in the forefront, not only around him at that time, but for generations to come.

### **7. He didn’t stop praying.**

1 Thessalonians 5:17, he exhorts the believers: *Never stop praying.*

Philippians 4:6 *Don’t be pulled in different directions or worried about a thing. Be saturated in prayer throughout each day, offering your faith-filled requests before God with overflowing gratitude. Tell Him every detail of your life.*

How wonderful! A man who cried out to the Lord and said, “Please take away this thorn in the flesh,” and God said, “No, My grace will be sufficient for you Paul, and My strength will pour through this area of your weakness.” He said Amen to that and continued on with life. It didn’t crush his spirit. It didn’t hijack his agenda. It didn’t silence his voice. It didn’t stop him

from fulfilling his purpose. It didn't steal his joy. It didn't stop his prayer life. He thrived in spite of it. He used his situation as an avenue for God to showcase His power. That's why he says, "I will celebrate my weaknesses; for when I am weak, I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me. So I am not defeated by my weaknesses, but I am delighted by them, because through them, God's power gets to be showcased. For my weakness becomes a portal for God's power.

So, I ask you today: How are you dealing with your weakness? What is the thorn in your flesh? What is that thing that you are crying about to the Lord? Have you dealt with it in the way Paul dealt with his thorn? Or, have you allowed it to derail your purpose, steal your joy and stop your prayer life, tune out from the needs around you, crawl into a hole or just cover yourself and say, "I'm going to come out when things get better"? Or maybe you have begun to rebel, to do everything that you know would go against what God wants. You hurt people around you, you mock and criticize Christians. You deliberately embrace an addictive lifestyle or a spite. Or even worse, you mistreat your body knowing that it is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Beloved, how have you responded to this. O Holy Spirit, would You come, even now as we have listened to this message. Lord, would You come into hearts and homes of these dear ones who are struggling with a debilitating weakness, and hold them, soften their hearts and fill the room with holiness. Knock incessantly on hearts' doors, Lord. O Holy Spirit, would You come now?

Loved one, wherever you are, listen to me. If you are feeling the tug of the Spirit of God, or hearing Him call your name, or maybe you can see His warm embracing arms reaching out to you like the father of the prodigal son, saying, "Come on home, I'm waiting for you," would you reach back into those arms. Open your heart and your mind, allow Him to speak to you. Reach back to Him and let Him embrace you, maybe dry those tears that are streaming down your cheeks. Would you let your comfort be poured back to you? O Lord God, would You do this thing Master?

Wherever you are, if you need to reach out to Him and say, "Lord, would You take my weakness." If you need to kneel on the floor and say, "Lord Jesus, help me." Or if you just need to stand, do whatever you need to do. But would you respond to the Holy Spirit as He probes and pushes you and says, "You don't need to be staying this area of weakness." Let God take control. Let His strength pour into you. Would you do that this morning? would you give it to Him, hand it over? Beloved, wherever you are, let go; let God. Would you receive from Him during this time? Let Him show you how to allow His strength to pour into your life and make the weaknesses a place of delight and victory.

Shall we pray together?

O Almighty God, Father, take these areas of weaknesses that have limited us, that have demoralized us, stressed us, dehumanized and devalued us. Restore each one to their rightful place as. Joyful, purposeful children of the Most High God. Master, whatever the devil has stolen, I ask that You would restore, whatever he has killed, I pray that You would resurrect, whatever he has destroyed, Lord, rebuild. On each one of us, pour out Your love and Your joy and Your peace. Fire up the gifts that have lain dormant within us and may the evidence of the fruit of Your Spirit be in alluring display. We ask Lord Jesus, in Your name. and all God's people said "Amen".

We have to close with this song. It's such a beautiful song, and it allows us a place to say, "Yes, this is what I have embraced today, and this is the song that is going to be on my heart."

Bigger than all my problems, bigger than all my fears;  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see.  
Bigger than all my questions, bigger than anything;  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see. (2)

Bigger than all the shadows that fall across my path,  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see.  
He's bigger than all the confusion, bigger than anything;  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see.

Bigger than all my problems, bigger than all my fears;  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see.  
Bigger than all my questions, bigger than anything;  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see. (2)

Bigger than all the giants of fear and unbelief,  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see.  
Bigger than any hang-ups, bigger than anything;  
My God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see.

Bigger than all my problems, bigger than all my fears;  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see.  
Bigger than all my questions, bigger than anything;  
God is bigger than any mountain that I can or cannot see. (2)

Would you receive this benediction?

Dearly beloved, know that He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to its completion until the day of Christ Jesus. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.