

life groups study guide

grace is bigger than my weakness



"My attitude is that if you push me towards something that you think is a weakness, then I will turn that perceived weakness into a strength."

Michael Jordan

"Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character."

Albert Einstein

In Life Groups, kids, youth and adults study God's Word together and discuss the issues and challenges of life.

Sizing up our Weaknesses

There's an old Bill Cosby comedy routine where he talks about the old driving manual maxim of what to do when you feel you're going into a skid. Bill says as soon as he felt the car go into a right skid he tried to remember the instructions from the safe driving manual: "to save your life if you go into a skid, turn in the direction of the skid". Cosby quips that this "doesn't make sense at all to me, because that's like if a guy throws a left hook at ya you lean into it."

And, almost amusingly, it's this same sort of idea that we see often played out in Scripture when it comes to the weaknesses of some of the heroes of the faith. God chooses someone for a specific task and it's almost as if He's wanting to reach over into the person's life, jerk the wheel out of their hands and turn it in the direction of the skid – which is to say, in the direction of their weakness (which often is seemingly in direct opposition to the task at hand)

We see this in Moses at the burning bush, where God wants to send him as his mouthpiece to Pharaoh and Moses brings up very specific weaknesses that he believes clearly disqualifies him from the task.

Q :: Where else do we see God operating this way in Scripture – selecting someone for a specific task that they would seem to be uniquely disqualified for because of some weakness in them?

Q :: Why do you think God would act in this way? Has He done so in your own life?

Q :: What KINDS of weaknesses can we possess?

I believe we can have real weaknesses that God can get us to turn right into the direction of, and if we're acting in obedience, He can do amazing things through them. I also believe though that we can be deceived in the area of weaknesses as well. Look at Moses' objection in Exodus 4:10. Here Moses claims to be not an eloquent man. However, this appears to be a complete untruth. Look at what Stephen says about Moses in the book of Acts (Read Acts 7:21-22). Moses does not have a speech problem, as some might suppose. Neither was he ungifted in speech. According to Stephen, Moses was eloquent. Moses is not only doing a disservice to God (by refusing to believe Him and obey in faith), but to himself by looking at what is actually a strength as a weakness.

Q :: Is it possible to have perceived weaknesses instead of real ones in our lives? Explain. How do we get those worse crossed in our minds?

Q :: Scripture tells us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Romans 12:3). We are also by Paul that he boasted in his weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). -- Is there an unhealthy extreme in either of these viewpoints? What does that look like? Are you prone to one of these more than the other?

We would readily acknowledge that Moses was not ready for leadership at age 40, but we seem to think that those 40 years Moses spent in the wilderness with Jethro's flocks must have equipped him to serve as Israel's deliverer. I do not think this is the case. The man we find described in Exodus 3 and 4 is hardly the model of leadership we would expect. Let's take a moment and look at the five excuses of Moses and how his weaknesses (real or perceived) affected his relationship with God at this crucial moment in both his and Israel's history, because I suspect we will find Moses is a great deal like us.

Moses responds to the commission of God five times in an effort to prove that he is not the man for the task which God has given him. The essence of Moses' argument is: "Here am I, send someone else!"

1. Who am I? (Exod. 3:11)

After prematurely and presumptuously asserting himself as a deliverer (Exod. 2:11-15), and being rebuffed by a fellow-Israelite ("Who made you ruler and judge over us?" Exod. 2:14), Moses was not so full of self-confidence. Moses, we are told in Scripture, was the "meekest man on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). To the degree that Moses' question reveals true humility, it is legitimate. But in this instance, I fear that his humility is out of bounds. The issue here is not who Moses is, but who God is – and Moses has either forgotten that, or chose to ignore it.

While my self-concept has a great deal to do with how I feel about myself and how I may function in life, it is not the key to Christian growth or obedience. Why? Because the orientation is wrong. Self-esteem focuses our attention selfward. God redirects Moses' attention to Himself. The burning bush is a revelation of God to Moses, not an introspective analysis of Moses himself.

Q :: For many people a lack of self-confidence is a crushing weakness that hinders their growth spiritually. How do we keep a healthy opinion of ourselves, yet not think more highly of ourselves than we ought?

Q :: I heard a wonderful quote from Joyce Meyer about how we talk to ourselves about ourselves. Joyce said "You are never going to progress beyond your own opinion of yourself." While it's certainly true that our focus needs to be on God and not ourselves, the truth is that we all do have opinions about ourselves. How does a negative inner dialogue hinder either our obedience or God's work in our life?

2. Who are you? (Exod. 3:13)

Moses does not seek this knowledge for himself; he seeks it because he fears that the Israelites will reject his authority. In other words, this is really a reflection of the same fears of Moses which were more openly admitted in the first question. God's answer to the first question was not sufficient for Moses, so he asked it again, in different terms. Moses still expects to be rejected by the Israelites, as he was 40 years before.

Q :: Can we have a perceived weakness that we don't have enough knowledge about God? How can this hinder us? How do we overcome it?

3. What if they don't believe me or listen to me? (Exod. 4:1)

Moses is asking the same question of God for the third time. This time, it is even more inappropriate. No – this time, the question is sinful. In the past, Moses doubted his calling; now he is doubting the Word of God, for the Lord has just told him, "The elders of Israel will listen to you" (Exod. 3:18). Moses therefore is guilty of unbelief, pure and simple. By now it is becoming clear that Moses' weaknesses aren't really what he claimed they were. They are not physical in nature, but spiritual; and evidenced by his unbelief and reluctance to do what God wanted.

Q :: Can some of the things we perceive as our weaknesses be more spiritual in nature than we realize? Can you think of examples?

Q :: How can a potentially negative or undesirable outcome hinder us from obedience?

4. But I am not eloquent! (Exod. 4:10)

Moses is no longer asking questions. He's moved to flat-out objecting to God's call. The Lord's response reveals His displeasure and has the tone of rebuke. Little wonder! Moses is talking to His creator. He is saying, in effect, "God, I can't do what you ask because you did not make me well enough." God reminds Moses that, as his Creator, He fashioned him precisely as He intended, and he was therefore fully able to carry out his commission. The problem of what to say is one that the Lord will handle in due time. He will teach him what to say (Exod. 4:12). While Moses is worrying about what he will say when he gets to Egypt, God is spurring him to get going. Moses is looking too far down the path. His immediate task is to get going.

Q :: Can we be guilty, like Moses, of looking too far down the path at the expense of simple obedience? Examples...

Q :: Also seen in this refusal is a focus on his own abilities to accomplish the task. As mentioned earlier, this is really a false humility on the part of Moses, but the focus is still on what he can do instead of what God can do. What makes it so hard to get our minds off our own ability to accomplish what God wants us to do and onto His ability to accomplish anything?

5. Please send somebody else (Exod. 4:13)

Here is the bottom line. Moses does not want to go. It is not that he lacks the assurance or the authority; he simply lacks the courage to act. No reason is stated here as to why God should send someone else, because Moses is all out of excuses. And so Moses pleads with God for someone else to go.

God is long-suffering and patient, but now He is angry. God's anger must have been reflected in some very clear or visible way (Moses KNOWS that God is angry – I mean, he wrote that He was, right? – so God's anger must have been very **obvious** to Moses at this point).

Q :: It's almost impossible to imagine that in all of these arguments back to God that Moses wasn't expressing feelings of inadequacy that were born out of his past failures. How can past failures negatively influence us in the here and now?

Q :: Why do we, like Moses, have a need to feel capable, or adequate to the task, before obeying.

Conclusion

I have long believed that it's a strong man who knows his own weakness. I find it very interesting that Moses wrote the Exodus account of his own lack of faith and obedience at the burning bush in such open, transparent detail. He makes no attempt to gloss over his failures (both past and present).

What about us?

What do we do with our own weaknesses, whether real or merely perceived?

Do they give a humble perspective - one that doesn't morph into some sort of self-loathing or self-abasement?

Can we boast about them - in a way that doesn't glamorize sinful habits, but shines a spotlight on God's grace which covers them?

Do we run from them? Deny them? Blame them on someone else? See them as bigger than the God we serve and who calls us to trust and obedience?

I think we must be real about them. Know what they are – the big ones and the small ones. Embrace them as a part of us that can become a conduit through which God can flow a completely ridiculous amount of grace into our lives.

And when God calls us to something that our weaknesses seem to disqualify us for

Lean into it!