

FOREWORD BY PAUL DAVID TRIPP

THE
GOOD
GIFT
OF
WEAKNESS

*God's Strength Made Perfect
in the Story of Redemption*

ERIC M. SCHUMACHER

“This book helped me see God’s good purpose in making us creatures of weakness and dependence. You will be filled with wonder that Jesus became weak, and encouraged in the weak places of life as you see that Jesus doesn’t despise weakness. Indeed, he’s drawn to it.”
—**Nancy Guthrie**, author and Bible teacher

“Eric Schumacher takes us on a tour of the entire Bible as he explores the theme of weakness, imprinting on us that without Christ we can do nothing. I am grateful for the biblical faithfulness and the honest vulnerability that characterize this wonderful book.”
—**Thomas R. Schreiner**, author, associate dean at
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Nothing feels more shameful in our culture than weakness, so we hide it and pretend we are strong. Eric Schumacher, with the insight of a trusted scholar and the grace of a trusted friend, deconstructs that self-defeating shame. This book points us to the Christ whose glory shines through our vulnerability.” —**Russell Moore**, editor in chief of *Christianity Today*

“Compelling, convicting, and comforting, this book will guide your weak and weary soul toward the true, persevering strength found only in Jesus Christ.”
—**Gretchen Saffles**, bestselling author of *The Well-Watered Woman*

“With refreshing honesty and a good dose of humor, Eric’s words remind us we’re not alone.” —**Laura Wifler**, author, podcaster, and cofounder of Risen Motherhood

“I would expect any book written by my friend Eric to be filled with deep wisdom and Biblical clarity. What I didn’t expect was the depth of his own weakness transparently put on display for us. It’s my privilege to recommend his work to you.”
—**Elyse Fitzpatrick**, author and counselor

“In *The Good Gift of Weakness*, Eric explores the implications of the dazzling reality that God’s power is made perfect in weakness.” —**Justin S. Holcomb**, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida, author, and seminary professor

“Reading Eric Schumacher’s book *The Good Gift of Weakness* was a paradigm shift for me. It challenges everything most Christians think about, well, everything. It is thoroughly Biblical, surprisingly comprehensive, and amazingly authentic.”
—**Steve Brown**, author, professor, and radio broadcaster

“God’s power is manifested precisely in the midst of our weaknesses because it’s then that we lean on his power. I’m so grateful for Eric’s work to trace for us throughout Scripture how God has always operated by this mysterious truth.”
—**Ashfin Ziafat**, lead pastor of Providence Church in Frisco, Texas

“In a world where strength is heralded, Eric gives us a sobering and yet liberating reminder that it’s not our talent or ingenuity but rather our shortcomings that God uses the most.”

—**Davey Blackburn**, author and founder of *Nothing is Wasted*

“Scripture emphasizes weakness as a path for living a life pleasing to Jesus, yet few works have been given wholly to the significance of this trait. Schumacher fills this gap with a look at how weakness is an integral part of the plan of redemption.”

—**Eric C. Redmond**, Professor of Bible, Moody Bible Institute

“Eric does a beautiful job of pointing us back to our true source of strength: Christ, and Christ alone.”

—**Jerrad Lopes**, author and founder of *Dad Tired*

“*The Good Gift of Weakness* is deeply encouraging, especially for those of us who have come to the end of our strength, cleverness, or goodness.”

—**Barnabas Piper**, pastor and author

“In a world that focuses on strength and accomplishment, *The Good Gift of Weakness* is a great reminder that weakness is a gift that draws us to God.”

—**Vaneetha Risner**, author of *Desperate for Hope* and *Walking Through Fire*

“Eric’s words bring me so much comfort and hope. He helps us understand the good gift of weakness—in God’s original design and in the (still) nail-pierced hands of our risen Savior. I think this book should be read by every Christian.”

—**Quina Aragon**, author of *Love Has a Story*

“The profound biblical wisdom I gleaned from this helpful resource will surely influence not only my ministry but also the way I personally engage my own weaknesses.”

—**Christine M. Chappell**, author of *Midnight Mercies*,
biblical counselor, and host of the *Hope + Help* podcast

“I left this book humbled, comforted, and deeply grateful for God’s perfect strength.”

—**Emily A. Jensen**, author of *He is Strong*

“This book will encourage you to see weakness not as a liability but as a way to glimpse the glory of God.”

—**Phyllicia Masonheimer**, founder and CEO of Every Woman a Theologian

“The Good Gift of Weakness is rich with biblical theology and practical application but is also written with a pastoral sensitivity that makes this book accessible to anyone. I recommend every pastor read this book.”

—**Brian Croft**, Founder and Executive Director, Practical Shepherding

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*For my pastor, Michael Felkins.
Stay weak, my friend.*

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FOREWORD

I sat in my chair, physically unable to move. Multiple surgeries had rendered me weaker than I'd ever been in my life, and I was in the chair for one reason: I simply didn't have the strength to get out of it. That chair was not my comfortable place to relax—no, it was my prison. I hated how weak I was. I hated my inability to do what I normally do. I hated how completely dependent I was on my dear wife, Luella, for just about everything. And my weakness made no sense to me. Here I was at the highest point of my ministry influence, yet unable to do the thing God had called and gifted me to do. I spent day after day in the chair, for two long months, before I had the strength to move around a little bit. But during those two months, a realization slowly dawned on me: I would be sick and weak for the rest of my life. The damage done to my body would not go away. There was a new normal and it was called “weak.”

What I'm about to say may surprise you. I'm very thankful for the travail that locked me into that chair. I'm very thankful that I was rendered that weak. In those two months, something wonderful and transformational took place. I began to understand that much of what I thought was faith in Jesus, in truth, wasn't. What I would have named as trust in him was actually self-reliance. I had spent my

life healthy and strong. I had enjoyed the ability to do things quickly and produce much. I was proud of both my productivity and my strength. But it was all a self-congratulatory delusion. I had no independent strength to be proud of. Everything I had ever produced was the result of the intervention of divine grace. In that chair, I began to acknowledge and confess my weakness. No, not just the present condition of weakness, but the weakness that was the story of my entire life. You see, my suffering hadn't made me something different—it exposed what I had been denying about who I really was all along.

It is embarrassing to admit that, after all my years in ministry, it was only in those months that I began to understand and experience what it really means to rest in weakness and to trust Jesus for the strength that he, and only he, can give. Because of that, if I had to go through again all the suffering that locked me in that chair, I would gladly do it, because I now know—experientially know—the grace and glory of weakness. I had to come to the place of giving up hope in my strength in order to truly experience the transforming beauty of hope in Jesus.

Perhaps it is my own story that makes me love the book you are about to read so much. We are bombarded by stories of human strength, stories of self-made people who accomplish great things. And we are tempted to buy into the fantasy that we could be one of those heroes. But it is a delusion. There is no such thing as an independent human being. God created us to be dependent on him and on one another. Even in the utter perfection of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were dependent. Yes, they were perfect people, living in a perfect relationship with God, but they were hardwired to be dependent on their Creator and one another.

So I am very thankful that my friend Eric Schumacher wrote a book, one not about the glories of human strength but about the grace and glory that is ours in our weakness. This book will confront

your delusion of independent strength, it will comfort you with the amazing things God does in and through those who are weak, and it will remind you that Jesus stepped into your weakness so that you would know the strength that comes only from him.

There is one particular element that I love about Eric Schumacher books. He doesn't just approach a topic from the perspective of the Bible. No, he unpacks the topic by giving you a tour of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. This book helps you to examine each step of the biblical narrative through the lens of weakness. And because it does this, it enables you to see things in Scripture, perhaps for the first time or in ways you have never seen them before.

You may not think that you need to read a book about weakness—but you do, and here is why. One of Satan's most powerful and deceptive tools is the delusion of independent human strength. If you buy into this delusion and think you are strong, then you won't seek God's help and strength and you won't seek and celebrate the grace that makes that help available. The enemy of your soul will gladly give you your formal religion, with its theology, Sunday service attendance, small group studies, personal Bible reading and prayer, and episodic moments of ministry, if he can keep you from being humbly and completely dependent on the Savior for everything you are and have and do. Denial of weakness always means devaluing the grace of Jesus, that grace that is meant to be our only hope in this life and the life to come.

I am very thankful for this book. I have been convicted by its confrontation and encouraged by its comfort, and I think you will be too. It is only when we abandon our hope in our strength that we can begin to rest in the strength that is ours by means of divine grace alone.

Paul David Tripp

October 16, 2023

CHAPTER 1

WEAKNESS IN CREATION

*For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen.*

ROMANS 11:36

It was 1980-something. I was in the seventh grade, taking my spot on the field for the opening kickoff of a small-town junior high football game. I knew my assignment: I was to run directly downfield at kickoff, getting past the blockers to tackle the player with the ball. As I looked straight ahead, I saw him, the player we'd been warned about—the Man-Boy.

Legend had it the Man-Boy had repeated junior high multiple times, making him the only eighth grader in the county old enough to register for the draft. He had a visible five-o'clock shadow, bulky muscles, and forearms so hairy that his grandmother could shave them and use the hair to knit cardigans for her church's missionary society. You could picture him puffing a cigarette while lifting engines out of small cars in his father's auto shop. There he was, directly before me, the blocker assigned to stop me, with a twenty-yard running start.

The Man-Boy sprinted toward me like a semitruck barreling down on a BMX bike, a raging bull charging a scarecrow. Though he was twice my size, I determined not to flinch. I would hit him head-on,

as hard as I could. Twenty yards separated us. Then fifteen. Ten. Five. I lowered my shoulder and... I don't recall what happened next—not the impact, not a feeling, not even a sound. I don't remember anything between him being five yards away and me looking up at the blue sky.

I had zero effect on the Man-Boy. None. I hadn't slowed him down. I didn't hinder him. I didn't move him an inch. He ran through me like a locomotive passing through the fog. I was, in a word, weak. And running to the sideline, I was ashamed, wondering who had seen whatever had just happened, praying I'd never hear a word of it.

Humiliated, defeated, and wanting to hide—that's how most of us feel about weakness. We want to get as far away from it as possible. But we shouldn't feel that way. There's nothing inherently wrong about being weak. Weakness isn't a bug in the design of the universe; it's a feature. It's how God made us.

WHAT IS WEAKNESS?

At some point—after Harvest House accepted my book proposal but before I started writing this book—I realized it might be a good idea to know what I mean by *weakness*. (That's probably a good thing for you to know, too, before we get much further.) So I did what elementary kids did when stuck inside for recess in the days before the internet—I went dictionary surfing. (Online Merriam-Webster.com dictionary surfing, because there's the internet now and I don't own an actual physical dictionary.)

Merriam-Webster defines *weakness* as “the quality or state of being weak.” Thank you, Captain Obvious. What does it mean to be weak? “Lacking strength.” Well, duh. What's strength? “The quality or state of being strong.” Fine. I'll play along... What's it mean to be strong? “Having or marked by great physical power.” This is so pointless I think I'll stick a pencil in my eye (the other great pre-internet stuck-inside-at-recess pastime) because, hey, at least a pencil has a point.

What's power? The "ability to act or produce an effect." Having surfed five word-waves, I finally reached the sandy beach of understanding. Weakness is the inability to act or produce an effect. In short, a weak person is one who cannot do things or make things happen. That's us—weak.

There are three types of weakness we'll encounter in this book (and in the Bible): natural, consequential, and relative. By natural weakness, I mean our inherent inability as created beings. This is a good weakness—a gift—which we'll cover in chapter 1 (creation). By consequential weakness, I mean weaknesses introduced or magnified by the entrance of sin, which we'll cover in chapter 2 (the Fall). A derivative of consequential weakness is moral weakness, our moral depravity resulting from the Fall. By relative weakness, I mean our inability in comparison to others (for example, people, animals, or forces of nature). Relative weakness will pop up throughout the Bible as we think about "the weak" in contrast to "the strong" in human terms.

ONLY GOD IS NOT WEAK

The opening line of the Bible impresses upon us the fact that God—and God alone—is not weak. In the beginning, God existed. He did not begin; he always was. No one created God. His existence—past, present, and future—owes itself to nothing. He depends on nothing. Nothing started him. Nothing sustains him. He has no need, weakness, or vulnerability. Nothing can end him. He simply is. That's not true of anyone or anything else. Any semblance of power in a creature is a derived and dependent strength: It comes from God and depends on him to sustain it. Therefore, every created thing has an inescapable weakness: It cannot exist or continue existing apart from God's will. Every creature is inherently vulnerable: It could cease to exist at any moment if God so willed, and it can do nothing to prevent it.

Those are staggering thoughts, impossible for us to fathom because

we're not God. We can't begin to imagine what it is to be uncreated, unsustained, entirely independent, all-powerful, and eternal. But these are the first truths of the Bible, nonnegotiable and foundational to everything that follows. Understanding the storyline of the Bible—and, therefore, the storyline of each of our lives—is impossible apart from grappling with the colossal distinction between Creator and creature. We are weak; he is strong.

WE ARE WEAK

We are weak. That is good. God made us weak—and everything that God made was good. Before sin and death entered the world, weakness existed. It's not a result of the Fall. The creation story drives this point home as it highlights the creation of human beings. We depend entirely upon God for our place, presence, purpose, provision, protection, and partners.

We depend entirely upon God for our place.

“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Theologians and scholars have debated what's going on in this verse for centuries. We may not know every detail of the earth's condition before God created life, but we know that these conditions aren't conducive to life. (How's that for weakness? We're so weak that we have needs before we even exist!) In what follows, God brings about an environment in which life not only exists but can thrive as a testament to his glory. He speaks light into darkness, binds the waters, fashions the sky, brings forth dry land, calls forth vegetation, and orders celestial lights to rule the night and day. After the place is ready, God fills it with blessed living creatures.

The Lord provided the first humans with a particular place, a home. “The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and

there he placed the man he had formed” (Genesis 2:8). And what a place it is! A garden of gorgeous trees bearing good fruit, watered by a river that flowed down into the surrounding lands filled with gold and precious stones. But as lavish as this place is, there is something even better: God was there, walking with his people.¹ Isn’t that incredible? God doesn’t just give us a place to live; he provides us with a place to live with him.

Life with God is neither a luxury nor a bonus. It’s a rock-bottom, nonnegotiable need. God is life—“the Father has life in himself” (John 5:26). As we’ve seen, God doesn’t get life from anywhere. He *is* life—and he alone gives life. Apart from him, we have no life. To be banished from his presence is to die forever.

Life with God is a need, and it’s also a gift. Unless God gives us himself, we can’t have him. We didn’t earn life with God in the beginning. He gave it to us. We don’t earn it now. He comes down to us in free grace. We won’t deserve it in the end—it will be given to us without cost. Every grace from creation to new creation is nothing short of God living with us so that we might live in him—“for in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

We depend entirely upon God for our presence.

Who are we apart from God? Simply put, we aren’t. Humanity didn’t exist. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man’” (Genesis 1:26). At his word, we existed “remarkably and wondrously made” (Psalm 139:14). Our presence in creation begins and continues only through God’s will and work. “The life of every living thing is in his hand, as well as the breath of all humanity” (Job 12:10).

We exist, but what are we exactly? Remarkably weak stuff, it turns out. “Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the

1. See Genesis 3:8.

ground” (Genesis 2:7). Go run your hand across the top of your refrigerator and look at your fingers. Now take that dust and make a fully functional human body. You didn’t try it, did you? No worries, I didn’t either. I can’t make a fully functioning human being out of dust, and neither can you. But God can. That’s the point. No matter how we may feature in God’s plan, our usefulness and accomplishments don’t rest in what we are. We’re dust.

Why dust? In Scripture, dust represents a lowly status: “I raised you up from the dust and made you ruler over my people Israel” (1 Kings 16:2). Dust signifies poverty and humiliation: “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the trash heap” (1 Samuel 2:8). Dust is death: “Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust!” (Isaiah 26:19). God made us from dust to teach us to walk with him in humility.²

How can dust come to life? When God formed the first man out of dust, he was only a “lifeless corpse.”³ But then God “breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Isn’t that a strange yet wonderful image? The all-powerful God of the universe stooping to put his lips to the face of a dead body, gently and lovingly filling it with new life. This isn’t the last time God will draw near to the dead with tender, life-giving love. The Bible is the story of God raising the dead from creation to new creation.

We are fragile earthen vessels that God filled with life. The apostle Paul meditates on this in the New Testament: “Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The treasure Paul refers to is the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and raised from the dead. We’ll dig deeper into that in a few chapters.

2. Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 158.

3. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 159.

For now, notice this: God ordained that the message of his saving glory would be transported in ordinary, fragile containers—clay jars (that’s us!). That’s not a new idea. We didn’t become clay jars when we received the gospel. No, we were already clay pots, ordinary and fragile vessels from the beginning. Before sin and death entered the world, God chose to display his life-giving glory to the world through fragile earthen vessels.

We depend entirely upon God for our purpose.

We do not determine or create our purpose; the meaning of life doesn’t come from us. Rather, God gives us our purpose. That’s good news because his purpose for us is better than anything we could imagine. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26). Did you catch that? God created us to rule “the whole earth”! If you ask a college graduate what she plans to do with her life and she replies, “I want to rule the world,” don’t laugh. Congratulate her—she’s on the right path. (How she gets there is another matter entirely!)

God made human beings to rule the earth: “They will rule...the whole earth.” So we read, “God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female” (Genesis 1:27). What does that mean? In the ancient Near East (the context in which Moses wrote Genesis), an image represented a god; “the image functions in the place of the deity.”⁴ A king was also considered to be the image of a god, “ruling on the god’s behalf.”⁵ The Lord forbade his people from making an image of him, not because

4. Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 65–66.

5. I. Hart, as quoted in Waltke, *Genesis*, 66.

he was against images of himself but because he had already made them—human beings. In God’s plan, his image wasn’t a carved statue. Nor was it limited to a singular king. The image of God was “democratized to all humanity.”⁶ God designed humans to cooperate in exercising his royal authority on the earth. That’s amazing, but it doesn’t end there.

Genesis 2 zooms in on the creation of humans. After the Lord formed the first man and breathed life into him, “the LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it” (verse 15). There’s another specific assignment—to work and watch over God’s garden. There’s more going on here than horticulture. There are only two other places where Moses uses *work* and *watch over* as a pair—Numbers 3:7-8 and 8:25-26, where they refer to priestly service in the tabernacle sanctuary. That leads us to understand that humans were to serve as priests to God in the garden sanctuary in Eden.

Rulers of the whole earth and priestly servants of God. That’s a high calling. But notice that—it’s a calling. It’s not something we won in battle, purchased with wealth, earned with service, or obtained through a popular vote. It’s a purpose bestowed upon us by God. Apart from his declaration, we have no purpose. Our purpose, like our existence, comes from outside us, from God. God alone possesses ruling authority in himself. Any we have comes from him. God alone determines who serves in his presence. If we find ourselves there, it is a gracious gift.

We depend entirely upon God for our provision.

One of my sons enjoys watching survivalist shows, particularly those about people living off the grid in the Alaskan wilderness. It’s not uncommon to hear them talk about being self-sufficient, depending

6. Waltke, *Genesis*, 66.

only on themselves for their livelihood. But even if we hunt, gather, and grow everything we eat, sew our clothes, and build our own shelters, self-sufficiency is always an illusion. We hunt and gather what already exists. We grow crops from seeds that are already there. We sew and build with preexisting materials. We do it all with bodies that God formed and sustains with life. We depend on him for all we need all the time.

Human beings love food. We love to talk about it, prepare it, buy it, and post pictures of it online. Most of all, we love to eat it! So it should not surprise us that the first subject God speaks to after creating humans is food:

Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it—I have given every green plant for food (Genesis 1:29-30).

The need for food isn't discussed; it's just assumed. To live, we need to eat. To eat, we need food. To have food, we need God.

We need food. We derive strength from food. Without food, our power fades, and ultimately, we die. The need for food isn't a product of the Fall; it's a product of design. God didn't have to make us this way, but he did. In doing so, he reminds us daily that we're not self-sustaining. The living God does not eat. So, when we eat, we remember that we're not God. We repeatedly eat throughout life to remember that we always have needs that God alone can provide. Food helps us recognize that life comes from and is sustained by God. "He gives food to every creature" (Psalm 136:25).

When I was a child, our school cafeteria offered only one meal

option each day. If you didn't like it, you didn't eat (except you had to because the teachers made you). But God isn't like the grumpy lunch lady slapping mystery meat onto your tray with a "you're gonna eat it, and you're gonna like it" look in her eye. "The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the man he had formed. The LORD God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:8-9). Did you catch the description of the trees in God's orchard? "Every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food." God could have whipped up some bland, gelatinous all-in-one food source, something straight out of a dystopian sci-fi flick. But he didn't. He gave us variety, beauty, and nutrition! God's provision is like the charcuterie boards so popular these days—an assortment of meats and cheeses, breads and crackers, fruits and nuts, vegetables and chocolates offered in abundance and displayed with beauty.

Why is God's provision so lavish? Because food exists to give us something more than physical strength (Psalm 104:14-15):

He causes grass to grow for the livestock
and provides crops for man to cultivate,
producing food from the earth,
wine that makes human hearts glad—
making his face shine with oil—
and bread that sustains human hearts.

Why does God cause grass and crops to grow? Why does he produce food from the earth? So that wine can make our hearts happy. So that oil can make our skin shine. So that bread can sustain not merely our bodies but our hearts.

God's provision isn't utilitarian. It's designed to function and to

please, to go beyond our needs so that we remember “life is more than food and the body more than clothing” (Luke 12:23). God provides in pleasing ways so that we won’t forget he’s the source of all our happiness.

We depend entirely upon God for our protection.

When we bought our first house, my wife discovered a plant with poisonous berries growing in the fence around our garden. When our young son became mobile, the presence of those berries posed a dangerous threat. Seeing us eat the fruit in the garden, he’d assume he could eat the berries on the fence. Unable to discern safe fruit from toxic fruit, he could make a lethal mistake. So we took pains to remove the plant and guard against its return. We also taught our son, as he grew, not to eat berries and plants unless we’d given our permission. Our son depended on us not only for provision but for protection.

So far, we’ve seen that the Lord provided the first man with a lavish, appetizing orchard. What we haven’t seen is that eating from one of those trees would result in death. So the Lord gave the man both permission and a prohibition: “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:16-17). Not a few scholars have debated the exact meaning of “the knowledge of good and evil.” For our purposes, it’s important to notice that (1) the man was able to die and (2) eating from this tree would result in death.

We were created mortal—we can die. Only God is immortal (see 1 Timothy 6:16). It’s always true that life is a gift from God to us, as is the ongoing preservation of life. (Genesis 3:22 seems to imply that living forever depends on taking from the tree of life, something God provides or withholds.) The first man, like our son, had no way of knowing which plants were safe and which one was life-threatening unless his parent told him.

Here's our weakness: We're incapable of discerning what is safe and what is deadly, what is good and what is evil, unless the Lord tells us. This is one more way we're incapable of living and being without God's gracious gift. That gift, in this situation and throughout the Scripture, is his Word. We're not wise in ourselves; we're born lacking wisdom. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). From the very beginning, we're taught not to lean on our own understanding but to live by faith, trusting God for protection.

We depend entirely upon God for our partners.

"Can you help me?" That's a question we learn to avoid from an early age. If you've been around children, you know that point in development where they insist, "Me do it!" Unfortunately, that stubborn independence rarely fades with age. Asking for help is a confession of weakness, an acknowledgment that we can't do something alone. It's a humbling truth to admit. Perhaps that's why the Lord chose to end the creation story with a slow, extended observation of our need for help.

Throughout Genesis 1, we read a repeated refrain: God saw that it was good.⁷ That refrain culminates with the announcement "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed" (Genesis 1:31). So, in Genesis 2, it's shocking to read, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him" (verse 18). "It is not good"—that's no soft statement of disappointment; it's "highly emphatic."⁸ God's stressing the point: This is really bad.

Why is it not good for the man to be alone? Is it because he's lonely? No, it can't be that, because he has God. Is it because there's safety in numbers? No, he has the Lord as his protector and provider. God's remedy reveals the answer: "I will make a helper corresponding

7. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25.

8. Waltke, *Genesis*, 88.

to him.” It’s not good for the man to be alone, because he needs a human helper. A helper comes alongside another to lend strength and assistance in a task.⁹ The man needs a helper because he needs help. He’s incapable of ruling the earth or serving in the garden alone. God designed the first human being with a deficiency, a weakness. Before the Fall, sin, and death, God made us weak.

Weakness itself is not what the Lord declares not good. It’s not wrong that the man needs help. If that were the case, the Lord would have altered him so he could fulfill his calling alone. But the Lord doesn’t do that. Instead, he makes another human (the woman) so that they can accomplish their purpose together, her adding her strength to his. No man or woman can independently fulfill God’s purpose on the earth; rather, “both sexes are mutually dependent on each other.”¹⁰

The Lord really, really wants us to see this weakness. That’s why he saved this bit for the end. Among God’s last recorded words in the creation story are “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). It is as though God shouts, “Humans. Are. Weak!” The sentence that follows in the same verse is just as important: “I will make a helper corresponding to him.” The woman is God’s solution—but she’s *God’s* solution. The remedy isn’t provided by the man or the woman. The help only arrives because the Lord supplies it. God’s the one who delivers strength for our every weakness. The Lord alone enables us to do the work he gave us. “It is not good for the man to be alone” isn’t an assessment limited to the creation of the first man. It’s an ongoing, by-design, good reality that continues today.

9. The word translated as “helper” (*ēzer*) is most frequently used to describe the Lord’s relationship to Israel. See, for example, Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalms 33:20; 115:9-11; 124:8; 146:5.

10. Waltke, *Genesis*, 88.

WHY WEAKNESS?

I hope you've begun to see why we're studying weakness. Weakness matters because it's the backdrop against which God displays his strength. "Weakness is a prominent image in the Bible, for weakness stands in contrast with the surpassing strength of the principal character of the biblical story, God."¹¹ When we deny our weakness, we reject God's power. When we boast in ourselves, we deny God's provision. Weakness exists to display God's glory in everything.

Weakness is God's good gift because it's the context in which he gives us himself. If we weren't weak, we wouldn't need God—we would rival him. "What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Embracing our weakness trains us to humble ourselves and to boast in God. Such weakness is good news because God loves the weak, and only the weak can genuinely love God. "Weakness is a holy invitation to allow grace to do its work."¹²

God loves the weak. As we've seen in this chapter, all creation is ultimately weak—especially us. But God isn't looking down his nose, despising his creatures for needing him. No, he approves of it! "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed" (Genesis 1:31). God loves his weak creation! He enjoys supplying us with good things from his hand to give us strength and gladden our hearts. God's love for the weak doesn't change when sin enters the picture. He continues to love the humble, the lowly, the poor, and the downcast. He satisfies the hungry with good things.¹³ "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the trash heap" (Psalm 113:7).

11. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., "Weak, Weakness," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 932–934.

12. Alia Joy, *Glorious Weakness: Discovering God in All We Lack* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 163.

13. Luke 1:53.

Only the weak can genuinely love God. “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). God resists the proud because they resist him. The proud person cannot admit he’s weak; he can’t accept that he has needs only God can supply. Therefore, he cannot trust God. But the humble know who they are before the Lord; apart from him, they are and have nothing. Consequently, they seek him and trust him to provide.

Weakness reminds us that God designed all of life to be lived by faith. He didn’t create us to live by our own power, only introducing the need for faith once we needed to be saved from sin and death. Life, liberty, and happiness aren’t found in our independence. They’re rooted entirely in our dependence on the Lord. From the beginning, God made us look to him for all we are and all we need. Weakness is the soil in which faith grows—and faith is where life flourishes.

So, friend, don’t be ashamed of your weakness. Don’t hide it. Don’t think it makes you unable to approach God. Don’t despair, thinking it means that true strength is not available. Let’s embrace and celebrate weakness so we can embrace and celebrate all that God is for us and gives to us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus loves me—this I know,
For the Bible tells me so:
Little ones to him belong—
They are weak, but he is strong.¹⁴

14. Anna Bartlett Warner, “Jesus Loves Me,” originally published as a song in *Bradbury’s Golden Shower of S.S. Melodies: A New Collection of Hymns and Tunes for the Sabbath School*, ed. William B. Bradbury (New York, 1862).