

Satan wants us to depend on our own strength because he knows that leaves us vulnerable - Luke 11:21-23 - 21 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22 But when someone **stronger** attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils. 23 **"HE WHO IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME**, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.

Understanding true strength and true weakness

* We must understand there exist, good strength and good weakness, as well as bad strength and bad weakness

"Good weakness" is what all Christians must value - 2 Cor 11:30 If I must boast, **I will boast of the things that SHOW MY WEAKNESS.**

The "good weakness" are things that are defined weak, based on worlds standards - 1 Cor 1:26-31 - 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the WEAK THINGS OF THE WORLD to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, 29 **SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST BEFORE HIM.** 30 **IT IS BECAUSE OF HIM THAT YOU ARE IN CHRIST JESUS**, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: **"Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."**

*Dependence, asking for help, considering others, not having much, humility...

The "bad weakness" is from us giving in to the flesh - Matt 26:41 **"Watch and pray** so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the **BODY IS WEAK.**" *This includes addictions, habits, excuses...

"Bad strength" is us depending on self - 2 Cor 1:8-9 - 8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But **THIS HAPPENED THAT WE MIGHT NOT RELY ON OURSELVES BUT ON GOD, WHO RAISES THE DEAD.**

"Good strength" is being completely strengthened by God - Eph 3:16-19 - 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 **may have power, TOGETHER WITH ALL THE SAINTS,** to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you **may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.** (Col 1:9-13)

We must be like Jesus, who had both good weakness and strength by being weak in the body, but strong in God - 2 Cor 13:3-4 - 3 since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4 For to be sure, **he was crucified in weakness, YET HE LIVES BY GOD'S POWER.** Likewise, **we are weak in him, YET BY GOD'S POWER WE WILL LIVE WITH HIM TO SERVE YOU.**

Ministers should display God's power, NOT human power, which means he must have "good weakness" and "good strength" - 1 Cor 2:1-5 - When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For **I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.** 3 **I CAME TO YOU IN WEAKNESS AND FEAR, and WITH MUCH TREMBLING.** 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with **A DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT'S POWER,** 5 **SO THAT YOUR FAITH MIGHT NOT REST ON MEN'S WISDOM, BUT ON GOD'S POWER.**

God has a process for making us strong

Though boasting about human abilities and achievements may seem warranted, it will be very misleading

2 Cor 12:1-2- I must go on boasting. Although there is **nothing to be gained**, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 **I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.** Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows.

2 Cor 12:5-6 5 **I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.** 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But **I refrain, so no one will THINK MORE OF ME THAN IS WARRANTED** by what I do or say.

God's plan is to first make us weak- 2 Cor 12:7-10 - 7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a **THORN IN MY FLESH**, a messenger of Satan, ➔

→ to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "**MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR MY POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, **so that** Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for CHRIST'S SAKE, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For **when I am weak, THEN I am strong.**

*** The more "me-strength" I apply the less "God-strength" I use, therefor, the weaker I become.**

The thorn is not the problem, it is the thing that stops me from depending on what we tend to count as strength -
Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

***With the spiritual being the true battle, we have allowed ourselves to be distracted by the physical and mental meaningless battle. Something needs to be done to get our focus right.**

Hence there is The Thorn (displayed in different formats)

- Weaknesses - (as-then'-i-ah)-; feebleness (of mind or body); illness; frailty [**disease, infirmity,**].
- Insults - (hoo'-bris)- disrespect, [**Character assassination**].
- Hardships - (an-ang-kay')-constraint; distress: [**hard situation**]
- persecutions- (dee-ogue-mos')- maltreatment: - [**punished for doing what I'm supposed to**]
- difficulties- (sten-okh-o-ree'-ah)-narrowness of room, calamity - [**anguish, struggles, & complications**].

God provides "The Thorn" with the following characteristics:

- Works to keep us Grounded in God
- It causes weakness in us to enhance God's power through us.
- It is very undesirable to the flesh
- It redirects us to Grace
- At times it is a messenger of Satan (Job 1:9-22, Job 2:1-8)
- We must embrace our weaknesses to receive the full benefits of Christ power.

The thorn reveals very dangerous and deceptive strengths that all humans' posses

(Question: Why would God give us these strengths if they are bad?

Answer: Nothing God gives us is bad; however, we as humans, have the habit of using what God gives us the wrong way and for the wrong purpose.)

Human Strength	Strength Description	Incorrect usage
mind/body strength	Physical strength, intelligence, beauty, gratification, self-motivation, accomplishments, viewpoint.	We invest more to our mental and physical strength, comfort & gratification than our relationship with God. We are defined by accomplishments. We partner with the world which caters to the body.
Relationship strength	Who you connect with, avoid or communicate with. Benefiting from other's strengths and companionship. Free to be attracted and to bond.	We rely on and revere others over God and allow our feelings and personal gain to dictate our relationships. We become the standard for relationships. Ignore the Boundaries God set.
Possessions strength	Having what we NEED in order to survive. The items and the ability to get the items. This includes money, education, talents, & Possessions.	We allow our possessions to define us and to comfort us. We respect those that have more & look down on those that have less. We see our stuff as <u>the source</u> and not just <u>the resource</u> . We take credit for accomplishments.
Commended strength	Receiving compliments. Seeing desirable results. Ego and confidence building. Being encouraged by the appreciation and support shown by others.	We only serve God when we are commended for it. Become discouraged easily do to backlash or lack of praise. Allow relationship with God to be emotional not spiritual. Only do things when I see or feel benefits.
Situational strength	How I am is based on my situation. Situations can give the feeling of peace and comfort or distress and pain.	We respond based on our situation; we invest in the desirable over the Godly situations. We are to rejoice in trials, yet, we react opposite. We take the path with as many options as possible. Lean more on worldly Peace & comfort instead of Godly peace & Godly comfort.

***Pay close attention to your life and you will realize these false strengths are what we waste most of our prayers on.**

Understanding Grace is all we need, the question is...WHAT IS GRACE?

Grace is a gift of salvation from death, and a cleansing and empowerment to live a God purposed and God dependent life - Titus 3:3-8 - 3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, **not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.** He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 **so that, having been JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.** 8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be CAREFUL TO DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO DOING WHAT IS GOOD. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Grace saves us from the hold of our sinful nature - Eph 2:3-5 - 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — **IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED**

How do we access Grace?

We access Grace through faith - Eph 2:8-10 - 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, **THROUGH FAITH** — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Through the receiving of God's Word of Grace- Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of HIS GRACE, which **CAN** build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Christ gives just the right amount of grace we each needs for our walk - Eph 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as CHRIST APPORTIONED IT.

Responsibility in God's Grace

We have to make sure the teaching of God's grace is clearly presented and that no false teaching exist that can defile - Heb 12:15 **SEE TO IT** that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

We need to grow in Grace - 2 Peter 3:17-18 - 17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. 18 But **GROW IN THE GRACE and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

We must make Grace our "life focus" - 1 Peter 1:13-16 - 13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; SET YOUR HOPE FULLY ON THE GRACE to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so **BE HOLY IN ALL YOU DO;** 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

We need to stand in God's Grace - 1 Peter 5:12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

The benefits of God's Grace

Grace teaches us to live Godly - Titus 2:11-14 - 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 **IT TEACHES US** to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

IT strengthens in the right purpose - Heb 13:9-10 - 9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. 10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

So we must "Be" strong in grace - 2 Tim 2:1 - You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

God's grace fully provides us with all we need when we totally depend on it - 1 Cor 1:4-7 - 4 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For **IN HIM** you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— 6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7 **Therefore** you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

Grace gives us access to the only real help in our time of need - Heb 4:15-16 - 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and FIND GRACE TO HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED.

*** Once we are in Grace, we deal with human strength correctly**

Human Strength	Using them in Grace	Supporting Scripture
Mind/body strength	Deny self, live Self-controlled, beauty from Christ within, not living for desires, separate from the world which caters to the body. Not following thoughts & desires of the sinful nature, offer body to God, Completely Trusting in God not on self. Know the Body is God's temple.	Luke 9:23-25, Titus 2:4-7, 1 Peter 3:1-6, James 1:13-15, James 4:4, Rom 12:1-2, Prov 3:5-8, 1 Cor 6:18-20
Relationship strength	Do nothing out of selfish ambition, love enemy, bear with one another, patience, no one before God, we love based on God despite how we feel, surround/ partner yourself with Godly people, & only have relationships based on God.	Phil 2:3-4, Matt 5:44-45, 2Tim 4:2-3, Matt 10:37-38, 2Cor 6:14-16, Matt 19:4-12
Possessions strength	Godliness & contentment, satisfied with pay, generous, don't worry but seek first God's kingdom & righteousness, treasure is in God, invest in God. Not defined by your possessions. Know the true strength of the poor & weakness of the rich.	1Tim 6:6-10, Luke 3:14, Heb 13:5, Matt 6:25-34, 2Cor 9:6-9, Matt 6:19-21, Luke 12:15, Jas 1:1-11
Commended strength	Actions for God not for men, trying to please God instead of men, teach sound doctrine and avoid itching ears, expect the world to hate you, persevere no matter the outlook	Matt 6:1-6, Gal 1:10, Titus 2:1, 2Tim 4:1-5, 1John 3:13-15, James 1:12
Situational strength	Seems right ends bad, walk with correct perception, trials, suffering & hardship good, I take the only true path though the options are few. We follow God no matter what we've been through and we represent God no matter the situation we are in.	Prov 16:25, 2Cor 5:7, Heb 12:7-11, James 1:2-4, Luke 13:23-24, 1 Cor 7:17-24

***All of these display that the usage of all these strengths must be based on God**

All we do should be from HIM as the source - 1 Peter 4:10-11 - 10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone **speaks**, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone **serves**, he should do it with the strength God provides, **SO THAT in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ**. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1. What is the one thing in us that we are to boast about?
2. Explain what “bad weakness” is -
3. What is “good weakness” is -
4. What does the thorn represent?
5. Give an example of one of your “human strengths” you tend to depend on.
6. Before Grace what did we live for?
7. What is the only way to access Grace?
8. Does Grace teach us anything?
9. Give a personal example where you denied your own strength the rely on God’s Grace.